

LINCOLN CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING

January 10, 2022, 5pm at the Town Office and zoom

Present: Sandra, Jan, Katie, Tina, Charlie, Judy

Minutes approved from last meeting

Urz Land

- Tina researched with the town office and figured out that a section on the river on the east bank belongs to the town. Across the river is land owned by the Roods; it is conserved.
- Susan Tucker asked if she could walk the property boundary with a CC member. Her property borders the Urz on the south side

Town properties

- We worked together to edit the town descriptions written by Tina. These will be added to these meeting notes, below.
- New names discussed: Wild Woods for the Ripton Lot and River Bend Woods for the Urz land. We will all keep thinking about the Urz new name to recognize the river and the forest.
- Katie expressed concern about drawing attention to the Colby Hill trail system with a forum or other type of public event. The situation there is sensitive, with trails crossing onto private property, and hand built trails not able to handle heavy use.

MALT camp

Proposed camp at Willard's woods. LCC had questions. Katie checked with Lincoln Sports. They are hoping not to overlap in weeks with the MALT camp and will be deciding on dates at their next meeting

Miscellaneous

FYI Jo Jackson is the new Tree Warden

Sandra is working on contacting VYCC

Here is the current DRAFT:

Short descriptions of the four Town properties in Lincoln, VT

The "Ripton Lot":

The forest on this property is well on its way to becoming old-growth. There are many large-diameter trees, especially sugar maple and white ash. There is excellent understory structure. There are some unique features, such as yellow lady slippers and possibly the state-record largest diameter black cherry. There is also abundant wetland, adding to wildlife habitat diversity.

The main hardwood stand is beginning to develop structural features characteristic of old growth forests, including large trees, large standing snags and downed logs, canopy gaps, and vertical layers of foliage resulting from a variety of age/size classes of living trees. Such conditions dominated the landscape in pre-colonial times, and native plants and animals evolved to thrive in them. Today, old forest is vastly underrepresented at local, state and regional scales due to our land use history. Protecting old forests is an important component of biodiversity

conservation. Old forests also do the heavy lifting of storing and sequestering more carbon, compared with younger forests.

Maybe add something about rich soil...

The LCC feels that this land is best kept in its pristine condition, without any wood harvesting or trail development, for wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, water quality, hunting and fishing. Our suggested new name for this town forest is “Wild Woods” (in alliteration with “Willard’s Woods”)

The “Urz lot”:

This lot was bought by the town for the express purpose of relocating the Town Shed. In this regard, the property’s purpose has been achieved. However, there are several acres of field, which are quite scenic. The slope of this field would make for good sledding. Originally the Urz property was going to be used by the school for outdoor recreation and education. However, it turned out that access to the wooded portion of the property is difficult. There are a couple of short tote roads at the top of the field, but the great majority of the woodland is coniferous—with dense undergrowth and much downed woody debris. Willards Woods offers much more accessible opportunities for outdoor recreation and education.

The wooded section is identified by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department as a Deer Wintering Area (DWA). It is somewhat unique in that most of the conifers are red spruce, a species that has become rather rare at mid-altitudes. Much of the land is quite wet, and the streams that flow through the land drain directly into the New Haven River. Given the difficulty of building trails here, the presence of the deer yard, the unusual character of the woodland, and the addition of the nearby Willard’s Woods as a recreation/education site, the LCC feels that this forest is best left undeveloped, for wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, water quality, hunting, and fishing.

There may be a time when we would like to see a short trail to a knob on the north side of the property, which has a view to Mount Abe. But given the wet soils and the frequency of blow-downs throughout the forest, building and maintaining a trail here would be a high-energy endeavor.

The wetland/riverside portion of the property by the South Lincoln Road lends itself well to a short trail, perhaps with educational signs about riparian ecology and stream resilience.

Our suggested new name for this town forest is “Riverbend Woods.”

Other ideas to ponder...blowdowns, tip-ups, deer, conifers, reserve, river...

“Willard’s Woods”

There has already been quite a bit of discussion about this wonderful property. We know that the Town wants to maintain the beautiful trails that Willard Jackson and Dave Wetmore created. The school, the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT), and other organizations, like Lincoln Sports, will use the property for outdoor education. We plan to have both trail maps, markers, and someday a kiosk with educational signage about the history of the land and its attributes. This property is much better suited to public use than the Urz lot, with good trails, diverse woodlands and proximity to the school and town center.

“Colby Hill”

The Colby Hill Town Forest was originally designated as prime wildlife habitat by the townspeople at one of the LCC’s “chili forums” in the early 2000s. Accordingly, the LCC did two NRCS WHIP Program wildlife enhancement projects on the land. One released the apple trees at the bottom of the slope. The other was putting tree tubes around small red oak seedlings at the height of the land to protect them from deer. The former worked out well, although many forest trees have grown back and the apples are once again shaded. The oak seedling project was not so successful. Deer are quite numerous on this property, and they are putting pressure on young seedlings and saplings and are, to a degree, suppressing forest regrowth. We may address this again in the future.

In subsequent years the Colby Hill lot has become quite popular for walking, skiing, and mountain biking. A few folks have done some trail cutting. Since both the Ripton lot and the Urz lot are not well-suited to trail development or concentrated (as opposed to dispersed) use, the LCC feels that Colby Hill is fine as a recreational resource. However, we would like to address the trail cutting activity by engaging those involved in a workshop/meeting to assure best practices. We may also like to improve the trail routing and trail and road (ROW to the Turner property) surfaces to reduce erosion. These improvements are still being discussed. The work could be done by the people who are using the trails, possibly by the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, or both. We would like to hold a community forum to more clearly define the community’s goals for this land and discuss best practices for trail construction. We would like to keep this property accessible for varied recreation, while anticipating and avoiding potential issues related to overuse.

We like the current name of “Colby Hill Town Forest” for this land.

Respectfully submitted, Members of the Lincoln Conservation Commission