

NH Coverts Project Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes, April 3, 2015 – NH Fish & Game, Concord, NH

Members Present:

Peter Beblowski, Antrim
Cynthia Bruss, Springfield
Malin Clyde, UNH Coop. Extension
Angela Ficco, Somersworth
Ben Haubrich, Frankestown
Ian McSweeney, Weare
Andy Powell, Merrimack
Bruce Schwaegler, Orford
Haley Andreozzi, UNH Coop. Extension

Karen Bennett, UNH Coop. Extension
Emma Carcagno, UNH Coop. Extension
Nik Coates, Belmont
Betsy Hardwick, Frankestown
Mimi Jost, Strafford
Martha Pinello, Antrim
Jeff Schloss, UNH Coop. Extension
Norman Spicher, Keene

Project Updates: Review of Annual Report

Haley reviewed highlights and statistics from the 2014 Annual Report, and the cumulative impacts since the beginning of the program. This is the 20th year of the Coverts Project (started in 1995). Currently, the large majority of funding comes from primary sponsor NH Fish & Game. Staffing changes since 2013 have included Haley starting as Program Coordinator, and Malin moving to a new role with UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) as a Volunteer Specialist and Project Leader for The Stewardship Network: New England.

Haley mentioned the combination of the annual survey effort with other UNHCE volunteer groups to be able to ask some common questions of all volunteers.

- Ben suggested sending out a reminder at the beginning of the reporting period to let people know they should start keeping track of their hours.
- Nik & Ian mentioned integrating wildlife-friendly agriculture into the list of 'land management' options.

Upcoming 2015 Workshop

Haley provided information on plans for the upcoming 2015 NH Coverts Project Workshop, to be held May 6-9 at the Barbara C. Harris Center in Greenfield, NH. Will continue to hold the workshop in the spring, as it worked well last year. Haley and Emma are working on a 'Coverts Bioblitz' to introduce volunteers to *iNaturalist* and as a fun way to inventory plant and wildlife sightings during the training. Haley asked the group for ideas for an evening presentation during this year's workshop:

- Bruce suggested something on the 'State of the Plants' report just put out by New England Wildflower Society. They have an active volunteer program, and the content is quite relevant.
- Peter suggested looking into talks given as part of the Cottrell-Baldwin Environmental Lecture Series at Fox State Forest. The one of the Weeks Act ["Forests for the People" What's Next for America's Eastern National Forests? By Dave Govatski] was quite good and relevant.
- Martha mentioned Rebecca More's presentation on the Weeks Act is a great talk on the intersection of wildlife and history

- Cynthia pointed out the need for a presentation in the state on reptiles (particularly, snakes); Haley mentioned there are currently discussions to potentially develop one through the Speaking for Wildlife program.
- Emma pointed out that John Litvaitis has given recent talks on the bobcat population in New Hampshire and the research out of UNH
- Ben said Tom Tynning from Massachusetts does presentations on herps and vernal pools, and is really engaging. Others agreed!
- Norman pointed out Brett Thelen could potentially discuss reptiles and amphibians, as well as volunteer opportunities. Peter mentioned that Brett also does trainings on bats and vernal pools.
- Emily said she is doing a talk with Brett on Citizen Science Projects at Saving Special Places, which could double as an evening presentation.

The Stewardship Network: New England

Malin presented on the growth of The Stewardship Network: New England (Network), since its launch in April 2014. NH Coverts and the Network are very closely linked; Haley works on both projects, and Malin is still involved in helping with Coverts. She considers Coverts Cooperators the backbone of the Network. Malin provided updates on the online hub, trainings, projects, and tool sharing. Malin introduced the new workshops/trainings being developed through a grant with NH Charitable Foundation [Easement Monitoring with Volunteers (May 16), Invasives ID & Workday 101 (Fall), Field Trip: 101 (Winter) Trails (2016)].

- Cynthia suggested holding the easement monitoring workshop further north at some point; Emma noted that we plan to hold it again sometime in the near future and will look into locations.
- Peter and Norman pointed out that Monadnock has an annual training coming up for easement monitoring, and they will be offering it as a webcast.
- Emma pointed out how the existence of the Network has helped open doors between groups and individuals for things that are already happening.

Malin explained the Network's internship program, and identified barriers to partners having their own intern. Sharing one that is employed by the Network is great for partners and the student.

- Cynthia spoke about her experience developing Project Serve, and offered help and resources.
- Martha pointed out the great thing about Project Serve was that It allowed for career exploration through short-term experiences; these experiences for young people are more and more rare.
- Peter noted the success of TNC's internship program, where 4-5 students from the inner city work on a variety of projects around the state

Speaking for Wildlife

Haley quickly reviewed the highlights and statistics for the Speaking for Wildlife program. It's been incredibly successful, and over 150 volunteers are currently trained to give walks and talks around New Hampshire. There's a bit of a discrepancy between the demand for

the program and the volunteers' ability/willingness/interest to deliver presentations and lead field walks.

- Emily suggested changing the timing of the trainings; hold a training for inside talks in September and hold field walks training in the summertime, so people are able to immediately put their skills to use.
- Martha asked if there is a way to define/categorize the groups who are requesting talks, and organize the requests and volunteers in that way
- Bruce suggested development of a Speaking for Wildlife steering committee. It seems that the staff time Haley is able to dedicate to the program can't keep up with the volunteer recruitment and training effort necessary to meet the demand for the program. Key volunteers could provide structure to the program.
- Karen suggested looking to other groups (outside of Covers and NR Stewards) to recruit new volunteers
- Angela noted that if she could co-present, she would be more likely to volunteer for talks. It makes it easier for people to do the job, because they only have to be responsible for half of the material/duties. She also pointed out that volunteers might want to hear the talk before they give it.
- Emma suggested coordinating the training so people could attend the talks shortly after, but noted that might not be possible.
- Angela suggested a webinar, where either Haley or a volunteer could deliver the talk and answer questions for volunteers

Roundtable Discussion

Nik Coates (CC2012), Executive Director of the NH Association of Conservation Commissions, pointed out the demographic status of New Hampshire and the problem that conservation commission face. There's no 'next generation of conservation commissions' – commissions are aging, and lack young people initiating involvement. He noted that conservation commissions around the state are facing the challenge of recruiting and engaging young people. How can Coverts help? Any suggestions in general?

- Emma said she has noticed the same trend in her work on the board of a local land trust. She has seen a couple of models used to approach the idea, and wonders how they work and if they're effective – (1) a youth board of high school students, and (2) a 'millennial board' that works together on short-term projects.
- Emily pointed out that a lot of people aren't included because of their age; commissions don't necessarily do a good job of recognizing young people as being valuable. She noted that there are young people on boards around the state, but many are related to sustainability, energy, local agriculture, etc.
- Betsy pointed out that often people don't have time to serve on a board until they're older, which contributes to the average age of boards around NH.
- Ian said that commissions should be flexible in their format, and allow people to call in. We need to meet people where their passions are – how do we make CC's relevant for young people?
- Those who would like to discuss further or anyone who has suggestions should e-mail Nik at nicholas.coates@gmail.com.

Ian McSweeney (CC2010), Executive Director of the Russell Farm and Forest Conservation Foundation, discussed the potential for NH Coverts training including information on agriculture and farmland. There are a lot of habitat options for wildlife on farmlands. Some ideas – food buffers, pollinator habitat. These topics could be presented in partnership with NRCS, since EQIP funding is available for many projects.

- Bruce thought this was a good idea, and suggested getting in touch with NRCS in Durham; the point-person on the Conservation Stewardship Program might be helpful.
- Malin pointed out that she used to have a huge file on farmland as habitat, but that UNHCE had trouble finding a counterpart to work with in presenting the information.
- Emma said it may be a matter of connecting with the right farmer; if farmers themselves can talk about how they're improving habitat, it's beneficial.
- Emily pointed out that the topic of pollinators is a good entry topic to begin discussing wildlife and habitat with owners of farmland. Farmers can see the direct connection between their land and the benefits of habitat.
- Peter pointed out that conservation easement documents generally include agriculture as a part of accepted practices, so it's very much a part of conservation in New Hampshire.
- Martha pointed out the integration of wildlife and farmland in the topic of releasing orchards; could also incorporate landscape history into the story.
- Ian brought up the concept of municipally owned farmland leased out to the farmer, with the conservation goal of wildlife habitat; there's a way to accomplish multiple goals, and they're trying things!
- To get in touch with Ian to discuss further, e-mail him at ian@russellfound.org