**TOWN OF  HARWICH**

***732 Main Street***

***Harwich, MA 02645***

**HARWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION - MINUTES**

**PHONE (508)-430-7538 FAX (508)430-7531**

**FRIDAY JANUARY 27, 2023 – 2:00 PM**

**TOWN HALL – SMALL HEARING ROOM**

**Commissioners and Staff Present:** Chairman John Ketchum, Jim Atkinson, Mark Coleman, Alan Hall, Brad Chase, Wayne Coulson, Stanley Pastuszak, Associate Member Sophia Pilling, Assistant Conservation Agent Melyssa Millett and Conservation Administrator Amy Usowski

**Call to Order**

Chairman John Ketchum called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM, explaining that the Commission was meeting to discuss potential revisions to the Bells Neck Land Management Plan (BNLMP). Mr. Ketchum stated that he would like to use this meeting to establish the goals that the Commission had for the BNLMP moving forward, and a timeline for revising the BNLMP. Ms. Usowski stated that she had put together a document of proposed changes that had been discussed since the initial BNLMP was approved in 2012, and that there had been three main management topics discussed, including trail maintenance, management of the bogs, and fish way management.

Mr. Ketchum stated that he would like to start with a discussion of the 2020 decision to allow the bogs to naturalize. Mr. Chase responded that he would like to focus more on the land management portions since that decision had already been made by the Commission, and referenced a draft revision of the BNLMP that he had put together. Mr. Ketchum stated that they would look at the entire BNLMP, but that he would like the 2020 bog decision included in the BNLMP formally.

Mr. Ketchum asked what other topics the Commission would like to focus on. Commissioners suggested changes to the Herring River culvert north of West Reservoir, changes to the North Rd pedestrian bridge, changes to access points, and potential changes to the naturalization method for the bogs. Discussion ensued about the possibility for ADA-accessible landings and/or parking areas and other potential changes to the access points between and along East and West Reservoir. The Commission discussed funding sources and what other resources would be needed for these changes, including the hiring of outside consultants and/or engineers to draw up plans or complete studies as needed. Mr. Hall stated that he would like to focus on one issue at a time, and Mr. Atkinson and Mr. Coleman agreed. Ms. Usowski explained that these changes would need to be included in the revised BNLMP in order to secure funding and put out a request for proposals to hire the consultants or engineers necessary to investigate and plan the proposed changes, but that once the BNLMP was revised the Commission could prioritize the management efforts by project.

Mr. Chase led the Commission through his proposed revisions, which he had drafted in December of 2022. The draft revisions included language changes, suggestions for updates on management efforts, the addition of language regarding the Sustainable Fishery Management Plan which was approved by the DMF and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in 2022, and the addition of information regarding the 2020 bog management decision. Mr. Ketchum asked that each Commission member go through the draft revisions for the next work session meeting, and that they draft their own changes for their specific priorities. Mr. Ketchum also requested that they each come up with a defined list of objectives so that they could include a comprehensive list in the revised BNLMP.

Ms. Usowski gave information on the management efforts that the Conservation Department had focused on in recent years, including improving signage, managing of social and formal trails, adding barriers to prevent motor vehicles from encroaching on the resource areas, restoring the area directly surrounding the herring run, removing invasive species, and repairing areas that had become unsafe due to erosion. Ms. Usowski added that the Department had been looking into potential treatment of Phragmites in the bogs, installation of a raised boardwalk over the eroding area on either side of the North Rd pedestrian bridge, and installation of an automatic gate at the Depot Street entrance to the herring run. Finally, Ms. Usowski mentioned that there had been a citizen’s petition to ban hunting in Bells Neck Conservation Area, but that the petition had not passed at Town Meeting, and ultimately the decision on whether or not to ban hunting in Bells Neck would fall on the Commission.

Mr. Ketchum asked if the Commission should review the species inventories included in the 2012 BNLMP, and Ms. Usowski replied that she would review them, and that she had also been researching why NHESP mapped habitats were receding in recent years. Mr. Chase suggested that each Commissioner should also review the species to make sure that the lists were correct.

After discussion of possible dates, the Commission settled on Friday, February 24, 2023 at 2:00PM for the next work session. Mr. Ketchum called for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Coulson moved to adjourn at 4:03 PM. Seconded by Mr. Coleman. Motion carried, 7-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melyssa Millett

Approved: 2/15/2023