**STEERING COMMITTEE MINUTES | Tuesday, September 21, 2021**

**CREATED BY ROBYN SAUNDERS**

**EDITED BY EMILY GREENE**

ATTENDEES (20)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **In Person** | **Via Zoom** |
| Brian Johnston – US Forest Service (USFS) (**speaker**) | David Plavin – Save Our Shores, Saco Bay (SOS) |
| Karl Honkonen – US Forest Service | Pete Hanrahan – Hanrahan Environmental, LLC |
| Cristin Bailey – USFS (**field tour guide**) | Pam Morgan – UNE |
| Sarah Nelson – Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) (**speaker**) | Charles Tilburg – UNE |
| Addie Halligan – ME Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) | Matt Leblanc – Brookfield Renewable |
| Chris Feurt – Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) | Kevin Roche – SOS |
| Emily Greene – University of New England (UNE) & WNERR | Ashley Hodge – ME Drinking Water Program, DHHS |
| Robyn Saunders – Attaining | Bonnie Pothier – US Senator King’s Office |
|  | Luis Aponte – ME Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) |
|  | MJ Dillingham – Maine Water Company (MWC) |
|  | Martha Shiels – New England Finance Center |
|  | Miranda Kessel – Brookfield Renewable |

[JAMBOARD](https://jamboard.google.com/d/11DgbKvSSHjr8-SCuq8_W6nfZjD41e3KoyUjOcvQ4etc/edit?usp=sharing) – how can we connect more as a Collaborative in uncertain/unpredictable times? (please feel free to continue adding to this document)

1. Schedule a monthly webinar highlighting work of an organization sustaining the Saco.
   1. 30 minutes for presentation
   2. 30 minutes for discussion
   3. Virtual or in-person (lunch n learn)
   4. Podcast featuring collaborators + short training segments
      1. AMC started a new podcast (Sarah N)
   5. Topic idea – technology + BMPs for making long term improvements in WQ
   6. Choose a partner (randomly) every month to provide a presentation with cool photos + illustrations
2. Interactive map of some places, places we work, places with issues
   1. Include cool nature preserves
3. Disseminate info about federal funding opportunities + how SWC can take advantage of these solutions/sources

SARAH NELSON, Director of Research at AMC

* Most AMC research is at Pinkham Notch (a few miles down the road)
* Director of Research: Alpine + botany ecology, air + WQ, cartography
  + Previously at UMaine Director of Environmental Science
* AMC locations throughout regional – regional assessments
* AMC Mission to foster protection, enjoyment, understanding of outdoors
  + NEED HELP: How do we help visitors + guests know that it’s all connected within the watershed?
* What we do?
  + Maintain trails (1800 miles)
  + Advocacy (working closely with policy dept with a focus on conservation, climate change, clear air/water/forests)
  + Land protection + management
  + Science
* Where are we? About 90 miles to the ocean = source for watershed
* Research priorities
  + Climate change – it threatens resources AMC is trying to protect and continue to share recreational experiences that are changing across the Northern forest
    - In the NE (ME + NH), lost 3 wks of temps below freeze,19 lost snow cover days, winter 3 weeks shorter
    - Climate trends on Mt Washington analyzed (accelerating climate trends) – paper being published by G. Murray
    - Interactive web mapper in high elevation areas + forest/alpine implications – paper forthcoming
    - Aquatic systems papers include:
      * Mountain ponds (changing chemistry, integrate other metrics – like food web + zooplankton implications)
      * Ensemble modeling with UNH with snow cover days + GHG emissions correlation
    - Take photos + contribute to science!!
  + Net Zero Emission (GOAL by 2050)
  + Maine Woods Initiative
    - 100,000acres owned/managed by AMC in 100-mile wilderness area
    - Dark Sky Park designation
    - Carbon projects
    - Sustainable forests
    - Eco-reserves
    - Fish passage work + large wood additions
    - Characterizing lakes + ponds in 2021
  + Mountain env research
  + Advocacy
    - “Canned” action alerts
    - Interactive story map
* COMMENT From Brian Johnston – USFS runs Mt Washington avalanche center nearby for data purposes, if AMC needs
  + Sarah's students are working across all three climate zones that the Saco Watershed spans in ME + NH
* KARL H QUESTION: How do we let visitors know that they are in the headwaters of the Saco River?

BRIAN JOHNSTON, USFS UPDATES

* White Mtn National Forest
* Broad perspective of Forestry Service; 3 branches of USFS
  + Nation Forest System – land based
  + State + Private Forestry
  + Research
* Weeks Act of 1911 allowed land to be purchased for the public
  + Maintain wild habitat
  + Forests divided into 3 geographic areas (by watershed)
    - Saco District (Conway) – 300,000 acres
      * Brian manages **wilderness recreation program** (many seasonal employees + volunteers actively working on the ground)
        + Recreation = people management
        + Restoration = land management
      * Counterparts include a **wildlife biologist** + **forester** (timber sales to open market)
    - Androscoggin (Gorham)
    - Pemigewasset (??)
* Karl – State + Private Forestry Program to manage State land + private landowners
  + 6 New England States – how to manage forests for water quality + quantity
  + Grant program – Landscape-scale Restoration Grant (LSR) tied to Farm Bill
    - Every state has state forest action plan with A number of objectives with some links to WQ on objectives
    - If a project can achieve one of the action plan strategies, that project is eligible for grant funding
    - Each state can submit up to 5 applications per year must be approved by the State forester
    - Deadline for 2021 = Nov 5
      * 50:50 match requirement
      * 3-yr max duration
      * Starting at $50K
    - Example project recently funded: how do we manage timber sales with changing climates?
      * What can you do is a large rain event is coming but your landscape is cleared?
      * What are the quick response actions/BMPs that can be implemented immediately before the rain event?
* Cristin Bailey = trail manager for USFS
  + Hot spot for Conway scenic railway notch train
  + Trail is a horseshoe, but trying to make it a loop (fully accessible trail requires a lot of money)
  + Immediate need = design/build proposal for trail (needs bridges + boardwalk, address exposed roots, interpretation around lake)
* How visitor use changed during the pandemic for USFS?
  + Overwhelming number of visitors
    - 2020:
      * such a high use of resources that many visitors overflowed to low use areas
      * regional experience is demonstrative of national experience by USFS
    - 2021:
      * this past year was “normal” in numbers
      * new demographics of visitors
        + evident by trash + graffiti experienced in 2020, new “overflow” trails
        + QUESTION: Any issues stemming from racism? Hard for minorities to get out in nature with social + racial tensions

ANSWER: No formal complaints made to address = direct observation

KARL: Great American Outdoor Act provides agencies with resources to help correct backlog of deferred maintenance that needs to be done.

Help is on the way = capital maintenance/improvements nationwide

Maintaining trails + snowmobile bridges, replace toilets + facilities….the list is long

* + Provided x-country ski areas for visitors when ski resorts shut down
* Do we have more law enforcement presence to help educate visitors?
  + Yes, but may have been a secondary effect – not primary
* With changes in climate + snow conditions, has there been an increase in safety issues with people experience with snow sports?
  + USFS hopes to address

LUIS APONTE – NRCS Update

* Maine was working on a list of practices that will be set as priority practices for Source Water Protection for fiscal year 2022 and will receive a higher cost share rate. There is not a final list as of yet, but below are the ones for consideration:
* Waste storage structure
* Roof runoff structure
* Heavy use area
* Roofs and covers
* Ag chemical handling facility
* Animal mortality facility
* Lined waterway
* Grass waterway
* Cover crop
* Nutrient management
* Vegetated treatment area
* Riparian buffer
* Stream crossing

ASHLEY HODGE – DHHS Maine Drinking Water Program (DWP)

* Community Water Systems already have SWPP (source water protection programs) in place, they are required when they go through a new well approval to create/implement one. However, we could see if systems would like to update older SWPPs. Smaller systems (like mobile home parks for example) may or may not have one. We could see about them developing or updating those SWPP. The DWP can ask Maine Rural Water Association for technical assistance for creating/implementing these. We meet every February with our contact and ask for things to be put onto their to-do list. We could certainly see about getting this sort of task onto their radar.
* If there are big issues out there, anyone can reach out to DWP for next steps and aid.
* The DWP also has grants/loans that developing SWPP could fall under, as long as the PWS is an eligible system (depends on the type of system applying). The only thing with that is the system cannot do its own work, they would need to use grant money to hire local soil & conservation district or other consultants to develop a plan.
* Also, for activity #2, Action Strategy 3: the DWP does have available GIS data that can be accessed online here: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/dwp/pws/maps.shtml>
* Like MJ was saying, you can access travel times and approximate locations of public water systems. We are not able to give out lats-longs for systems because it is a security risk, but layers available are a great resource. Users must download google earth pro directly to their computer, information will not load in just the google earth web browser.

MARTHA SHEILS – NEW ENGLAND FINANCE CENTER (NEFC)

* Here is a fact sheet on source water protection that the SWC and NEFC developed with a link to the protection/GIS areas <https://neefc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EFC-Collaboration.png>
* TNC also has critical habitat GIS layers for Action Strategy #3

KIRA JACOBS – EPA, REGION 1

* The FEMA BRIC program would be a good source
  + It used to be the non-disaster mitigation grant program, but has re-branded: <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/building-resilient-infrastructure-communities>