

**Guests:** Wayne Parks, Bonnie Holbrook, John Hanchett, Mary Dan Pomeroy, Mike Pomeroy, Bob Watson, Terry Longo, Rhett Scruggs, Mark McMahon

**Members:** Eric Pyle, Heather Carlos, Amy McElroy, Stephanie Carter, Ann Lavanway, Connie Snyder, Li Shen, Skip Sturman, Bob Pulaski

**Guests:** Lowell Barrows and Janos and Marcia Groszek

Li Shen welcomed everyone and introduced TCC members.

Skip Sturman, facilitator, explained the plan for the day and the guests introduced themselves.

### Crown Jewels

**Wayne** – Houghton Hill, the mountaintop itself. Has enjoyed climbing up there with kids for many years. The entire ridgeline, High Peak and ridge towards Ely Mountain. Over the years has hiked through there, hunted there. Likes the public access, scenic views. Conservation can encourage limiting access to land.

**Rhett** – generally in Thetford as a whole values the open (access) land (for hunters and other enjoyment). But his crown jewel is his property, he has 70 acres that adjoin Thetford Town Forest. Has a sugarbush, enjoys working the sugarbush. Also enjoys harvesting firewood and wood for building materials. Went to Audubon workshop on assessing a woodlot and has more work than can be accomplished in his son's lifetime. Audubon did a bird habitat assessment on his property. He is using this report together with what they would like to do with the property, ponds etc. to guide the management of the property.

**Bonnie** – first thought was ancient roads and trails, very important to not have towns throw them up as the roads and trails give access for multiuse – snowmobile, walking, hunting, trapping, walking, birdwatching (and many other uses). Can get out and see the views, the ridgelines. Doesn't know specific ancient roads and trails that aren't on the snowmobile trails, but has heard of ones on Pero lands, on Hanchett land.

**John** – agricultural fields, pretty hard to feed a community on bark. Values local food. The Palmer property bordering the Connecticut River (Rte. 5 and Clay Rd), needs diking to stop silt/top soil runoff, but great for planting. Also, where he lived on Clay Rd. Most people can come up with money for seeds, and you can feed a lot of people with seeds.

**Bob** – (Didn't come prepared) but Lake Fairlee – the milfoil issue. Great for fishing, 5 years ago easy to fish, but now milfoil is near the top. He has a bass boat which may be part of the problem. Mainly bass fishing, mainly catch and release, though if he kills it, he keeps it, so a bit worried about chemicals that may be used to control the milfoil. Has a hard time telling folks what to do

with their land, doesn't think we should do that (Skip clarified that wasn't what the Conservation Commission does). Also wants Thetford to be careful with development - first every street corner gets lights and suddenly we are Holyoke Mass.

**Terry** – two parts. 1) Collection of trails and dirt roads give people an opportunity to be out and close to nature. Houghton Hill Road, Mimi's Trail, along the dam. He is a runner, these are essential. 2) Some of the views – the Pomeroy's new field, off Academy Road, top of Gove Hill. Bird Habitat is important; he may follow up on an Audubon survey. His real crown jewel is his front yard which, his wife has landscaped beautifully.

**Mark** – East Thetford Community Business District. Also Post Mills, Thetford Center and perhaps Thetford Hill (though it is a bit different). Need to continue to develop businesses in villages, allow people like Bob Watson and the Pomeroy's to make a living in town. The areas were bigger at one time and have been reduced, perhaps should be enlarged to give opportunities to others. Prime location to continue small business growth (or small commerce). Would love to see the business opportunities people have grow in the community and be successful. Commerce is the crown jewel.

**Mary Dan** – doesn't have a particular crown jewel, but values the diversity of recreation opportunities that are available in Thetford. One thing that scares her about conservation is that it can limit the diversity that we offer – the wise use as opposed to the non-use. Values how people can use the land for a variety of uses – snowmobiling or wood turtles, something for everyone, passive and active. Flag trails if need be. Would love to see feeder trails and connector trails to see people able to bike, ski, and walk through to the villages to buy their soda.

**Mike** – Started looking at what he knew was already conserved and that bothered him. Properties that are already conserved do not allow for multiple recreational uses. Not a turtle fan, not interested in farm fields growing up into weeds, which is what two of our management plans say. If we conserve land, that takes it out of a use and puts it into another use. Need to have checks and balances, maybe a wetland is important and should be put aside and something else is developed. His crown jewel is dirt roads. Tear up Academy Road and make it dirt. Dirt roads keep traffic speeds down, give you more diversity, and help you get to know your neighbors. Likes the open land (open as accessible to others). Doesn't like current use land that is posted. Would love to see a farmer using PMNA. Cut 10 acres on his property, but still has 40 acres of trees. Big old maple trees on the side of road are crown jewels.

**Discussion** – Terry asked what conservation means, what is the guiding principle. Very concerned about use versus non-use.

Mark discussed management plans and how these guide the use of properties.

Mary Dan thinks we should use our conservation funds for people who want to use their land for mixed use and not into a restricted box.

Bonnie thinks town funds should not be used for restricted access; the benefit should come back to all of us. Hates to see Posted signs. Won't post her property, doesn't hunt herself but respects people's right to do that.

Bob asked about where the Conservation Fund came from. Li explained that we receive a few thousand dollars annually from the town. Heather explained that we used \$2500 for the Palmer's property.

John asked what happens when the Palmers don't want to hay anymore. Can the condition of the easement be that it is open for public use or public gardening/farming? In California a group of kids took over a vacant lot and created a garden. When people talk about conservation, he cringes because people think that it means big trees, he asks people what lives in a mature forest. The basic living line is 100 yards in a mature forest.

Terry agrees that he doesn't like to be told to what to do with his land, perhaps it is a role of the Conservation Commission to be advisory and explain to people about best practices for perpetual enjoyment for using the land.

Wayne clarified that he isn't looking for his crown jewel to be conserved, but wants public access. In his experience, once people start invading, the posted signs go up. So what is needed is a balance.

Overall, several people expressed concern about use versus non-use, public access and having a diversity/multiuse of properties.

### Criteria - dots

Ridgeline/High Peak

Working/Multi-Purpose Lands - 3

Recreational/Multi Purpose Lands/Diversity - 7

Public Access - 4

Ancient Roads/ Trails - 3

Access to the backwoods

Agricultural Lands - 2

Food Sources

Fishing/Boating

Community Business District - 4

Ancient Roads/Trails

Dirt Roads

Connector Trails

Balance of Purpose Lands

Scenic Views – 1

Mike talked about 3000 cars which travel daily on Route 113. He explained that the more green that we put on the map, the more cars we put on the road as people need to travel farther to work. We can gain by not conserving land.

John suggests that as parcels come up, we need to think about where businesses would flourish and cause the least environmental damage. An oil canning business wouldn't work well on Lake Fairlee, but may work better on an area of sandy soil.

Terry suggested we should ask what people really want to preserve – not just keeping the parcel the same.

### Linking Lands Alliance

Amy introduced LLA, 10 town effort with a main goal to establish important wildlife corridors and to look beyond the borders of the towns to and focus on the needs of animals. Everyone participated in a mapping project.

9:15 pm adjourned.

### Addendum

Peter Blodgett was unable to attend the meeting, but submitted the following comments:

A Crown Jewel property worthy of conservation in Thetford would include Connecticut River farmland and rise above the floodplain into forested elevations that pass over some of the highest elevations in town before descending to the East Branch of the Ompompanoosuc River or to the shores of Lake Fairlee. Such a property could be used through school curriculums to lead students through the development of Thetford's history from the Native American presence to Quail John's first cabin and then explore the development of mills, farms, and villages. A large property could be used to monitor wildlife migrations and the seasonal emergence of flora and fauna. Perhaps some of the property owned by Fred Howard could be connected to form an

extensive corridor or cross section through the biome of the township. Certainly having a farm in operation for more than 200 years would provide a wonderful anchor linking history and heritage together for future generations. Another idea beyond a single crown jewel property would be to think of the villages of Thetford as a necklace of distinctive and rich cultural nodes that might be connected via a system of trails that would allow residents greater access to the wonders of our natural environment.

There are three major valleys that run roughly north to south through Thetford starting at the west with the West Branch of the Pompy, then the East Branch of the Pompy and finally the Connecticut River valley. Because paddling the West Branch of the Pompy is rarely possible a trail along that stream could highlight the dilemmas of Copperas Brook flowing from the Elizabeth Mine and inform folks of the air shafts that still exist to galleries that run east of Route 132. Such a trail might join with trails in the Union Village Dam park and unite with another trail following the East Branch from Post Mills.

Canoe and kayak passage along the East Branch could be improved with minimal clearing of snags along the river. Boat passage via the Connecticut has been greatly improved with the camping areas located along the Thetford shore.

The VAST trails through town provide great access to wonderful areas of the ridges and forests of the town. What about linking more cross-country ski trails so a loop might be made through all the villages encouraging families to string a series of outings together from one village to the next until all have been approached on snowshoe or skis?