

Shelburne Working Group on Human-Wildlife Interactions Meeting Minutes – January 16, 2020

Next Meeting: not later than three weeks

Present: Don Rendall, Jerry Storey, Sharon McNair, Michael Ashooh, Jan Lawson, Mike Fortuna, Susan Moegenburg, Jim White and Hinesburg guest Kate Kelly.

Facilitator: Don Rendall

Notes: Jim White

1. Motion to approve agenda approved.
2. Motion to accept minutes of meeting on Nov 23 approved.
3. Slide presentation by Kate Kelly who is a wildlife biologist specializing in herpetology. Kate is affiliated with the VT Reptile and Amphibian Atlas and the Lewis Creek Association. The presentation focused on reptiles and amphibians in the Shelburne Pond area. Shelburne Pond unique. Few VT towns have a similar terrain. Lots of vernal pools along Pond Rd that stand on the edge of the pond are breeding spots. Edge polls are prime for this. Forest across the road is where many species winter. Pond Rd is a crossing site.

Talked about characteristics of common watersnakes, which are not common. Ranked as S3 and are medium priority SGCN (Species of Greatest Conservation Need) in the VT Wildlife Action Plan. About 3 feet long. Has seen lots of dead snakes in the road. Difficult for them to cross safely. Like the warmth. Also, amphibians. Blue Salamander is another S3 species. Have spring and fall migration. Dispersed over Oct-Nov, but more time concentrated in the spring (May -June). Especially likely to move on rainy spring nights, and especially the rainy nights at the beginning of their season, but can move throughout the day. First rainy night above 32 and especially if temp over 40. Jim Andrews of Atlas announces big migration nights which have been predictable, although that is being influenced by climate changes impact on spring weather.

Highly vulnerable as roadkill. Kate said 10 cars passing through could kill hundreds of creatures. Their recommendations:

- Occasional road closures (of east end?)
- Temporary signs warning drivers
- Outreach to residents
- Do not pave (this will increase traffic and speed. If pave, it will become a cut-through)

Summary of Shelburne Pond: lots of species diversity and abundance, few towns have anything comparable, road cause mortality.

Discussed culverts under roads that act as passageways for species. Can be very effective but costly. Cost roughly the same as paving Pond Rd. Other wildlife like bobcats use them too.

Other water bodies in Shelburne that are home to amphibians? Kate said they can breed in puddles.

1. There is a pond and ditch near the intersection of Dorset St. and Irish Hill Rd that's another prime

site.

2. Turn on Harbor Rd. On the way to Shelburne Farms

3. Rt 7 at north end of village at bridge is a crossing for wildlife following the river, Rivers are wildlife corridors.

Suggested that we consider protocols for the cleaning, emptying and filling of ditches and other highway work along roads.

4. Public Comment. Jan came to the meeting to talk about dog issues. Felt she was at the wrong meeting, but was assured that we were working on a policy for all animals in Shelburne. She focused on need for more receptacles at trailheads in town where dog waste could be deposited. Also, few existing receptacles don't get emptied often enough. She wished for a really large dog park, although current one is not bad.

5, Editing of Draft Policy. Sharon began by asking for public friendly language. Mike sent note to VT Legislative Resource Center about other VT towns working on a policy. They would need a year to do the research. Mike commented -- it is interesting to see what's possible from town plans we've collected. Jerry checked with VT League of Cities and Towns. They know of no VT towns with such a policy and are interested in what we are doing. Susan looked for academic articles and found several.

Jerry and Jim expressed admiration for Jackson Hole (JH) town plan that Jon Cocina uncovered. Succinct, well-organized, visual. Jerry had an epiphany he wanted to share after reading the JH plan. Our approach to creating a plan has been to focus on what humans can do about conflicts with wildlife. Should we begin by asking what wildlife need? How we can preserve and enhance wildlife culture? Follow this sequence:

1. What's important for wildlife? What to do to preserve this resource?
2. Then what needs to be done (what should be policy and what aspirational?)
3. Then address conflict, etc.

Susan wondered whether we should be inviting other voices to the discussion. Sharon pointed out that the meeting is open to anyone and has been posted twice on FPF by Don. Jerry said there will be lots of opportunity for public discussion over time. Mike Fortuna (MF) wondered how the beaver policy led to this discussion, which Jerry reviewed. MF observed that the touchy nerve will be any impact on private property. Jerry said there won't be laws affecting that. Said assumption is that the community will be supportive and it will be up to the Select Board to finalize any policy. Jim pointed to research indicating Vermonters lead all states in their support for wildlife.

Jerry said we could start plan with some conflict events OR codify our wildlife culture which is supportive of wildlife and "drop down" to what we should be doing, whether ordinance or policy or budgetary. Where is the greater value? -- is the question the community will have to take up. Pond Rd issue won't be about Pond Rd anymore, but about how to approach any road from the point of view of preserving our wildlife resource.

Susan said this will be a work in process for a long-standing committee because we can't predict what will come up.

Jim said it's not too early to think about the forms of our final product. If the key pieces are policy and education. Policy will be mostly a text doc that only motivated individuals will read. Education whether website or brochures or whatever must reach many people and have great accessibility. The

education piece is essential because that's what ongoing dialogue will evolve around. Could invite Kate back to do a public presentation. Don said the NR Committee is arranging presentations on water quality. Sharon mentioned the coyote presentations as an example of what's possible.

Mike asked - how will we be integrating the lake? That's our version of Jackson Hole's Grand Tetons, noting that the Teton environment gave rise to the JH valuing of their wildlife and ecology. Lake Champlain is the basis of our culture appealing to residents and out of state visitors.

What five things should we be doing? Focus on corridors, etc. Jerry and Jim will do a draft borrowing from JH's approach. Get a draft out to the committee, get comments, then meet. No longer than 3 weeks from now.

How do people who attend this meeting enter the core group? Mike said they send a letter to Don expressing interest.