

Meeting Minutes: Dummerston Conservation Commission

December 8, 2016, 7:00pm

Dummerston Town Office

Members Present: Ed Anthes, Mary Ellen Copeland, Bill Johnson, Bill Schmidt, John Anderson, Jonathan, Deborah Ayer

Dummerston School & Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center (“BEEC”):

Joan Cary of BEEC presenting: Joan works at BEEC, coordinating with school principal JoCarol Ratti to bring environmental education into Dummerston School. New Generation Science standards (“NGS”) are now supposed to be fully integrated in Vermont classrooms, though few schools around the country have fully met this deadline. Joan Cary spent a year at UC Berkley, as part of a team developing NGS, and is supporting teachers in the Windham South East Supervisory Union (“WSESU”) in implementing them.

Joan works flexibly, meeting classes where they're at. Focus is always on local ecology and the town's local habitats are used as a living classroom. Engagement from students is always high. For instance, one Dummerston class said their favorite field trip of the year was a BEEC-guided investigation of a vernal pool, winning over a trip to 6 Flags. Classroom teachers also benefit from BEEC staff who act as a bridge to curriculum from grade to grade. The assurance of incorporating local ecology into the curriculum, and accessing educators with strong science backgrounds, is a significant benefit of teaming with BEEC.

The only WSESU school BEEC isn't supporting with curriculum across the grades is Dummerston School. There are currently discussions ongoing regarding funding, with support from the Dummerston Conservation Commission, to provide for 5 hours per classroom per year, across the grades. BEEC's rates are \$85 per hour for individual classrooms, although if a whole school signs up, the rate drops to \$65 per hour. This discount is given because the educational benefit is significant, building knowledge upon past sessions, year by year as students advance in their science curriculum. Estimated cost for the whole school, with 5 hours per grade, is \$3,000 per year.

There is an upcoming Dummerston School staff meeting on Tuesday, at which Betsy Levine, Mary Ellen Copeland, and Joan Cary will present to teachers how BEEC can support them, and receive teacher feedback. Principal JoCarol Ratti is enthusiastic about committing to incorporating BEEC's services into Dummerston School.

Invasive Pest Monitoring:

On 12/12/16, there is an emerald ash boarer mitigation presentation at Keene State College, focusing on trees in Keene, NH. Jonathan will be attending and will report back.

Land Conservation:

DCC supports ongoing efforts to conserve local farmland.

West River Trail Association:

Rare plant locations have been fenced or roped off for protection, and their locations now appear on reference maps for trail workers.

Educational Programs:

December 14 is a Dummerston Conservation Committee/BEEC sponsored public talk on eastern wolf

and coyote populations, at the Learning Collaborative. Presenter Chris Schadler is a stellar presenter with 20+ years experience in the field. January is scheduled for a presentation on astronomy by Besty Whitaker and Claudio Varese, at the Learning Collaborative. February 1 Roger Haydock will present on geology, February 8 Tom Wessels will present, February 15 Patti Smith will present on local wildlife, and Bob Engle will present on plants and pollinators. This series will be \$15 each or \$50 for the whole series. February 18 Lynn Levine is scheduled to do a tree and tracking program. A wetland series is also being planned.

Regional Conservation Commissions:

The next meeting of regional commissions will be hosted by us (DCC) – the target date is 3/16/17. The preferred venue is Dummerston Church. At this event, we will propose a separate meeting of local commissions to hear from Harvard Forest, who has a report coming out on the status and health of our northern forests.

Sightings:

Fox and skunk spotted walking and sniffing/investigating together. John was emailed a photo of an all-white red-tailed hawk up in Athens. An all white goldfinch was spotted at a bird-feeder. A black-capped chickadee with a white head was spotted at a feeder. Coyote group was heard near a Dummerston house, with 3 sets of tracks found latter. A bald eagle was spotted by the Marina in Brattleboro, and along the CT river. Peregrine falcons were nesting at Townshend Dam earlier this fall. Turkey's have been seen drifting down into area valleys, showing up near bird feeders to eat fallen seed. A group of 24 turkeys spent this past summer/fall near a Dummerston home.