

Groton Invasive Species Committee Meeting Minutes

6 Nov 2017

Legion Hall

Committee Members Present:

Brian Bettencourt

Adam Burnett

Olin Lathrop

Greta Marks-Strouble

Attendee: Richard Hewitt

Agenda:

- 1) Review of minutes from October meeting
- 2) Report on Phragmites control efforts on Eliades land
- 3) Report on Chestnut plantation discussions with Conservation Commission
- 4) Discussion on Japanese knotweed / potential for Highway Dept. involvement
- 5) Any Other Business

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.

The Committee discussed the fact that Richard Hewitt needed to fill out the Committee Interest Form (Volunteer Interest Form).

- Brian Bettencourt emailed town clerk now to see if PDF could be sent to RH.

The 1st order of business was review of the October meeting minutes.

- The minutes were reviewed live on screen.
- Greta Marks-Strouble moved to accept.
 - Olin Lathrop seconded.
 - The motion to accept passed via unanimous voice vote.

The 2nd order of business was Phragmites control efforts at the Eliades conservation land.

- Brian Bettencourt stated that he thought the effort went well, but took a lot of time.
 - Three people were there.
 - Brian Bettencourt used a machete to cut the bundles.
 - Olin Lathrop said that he'd returned the following day and finished the job (almost) with a gas powered hedge trimmer.
 - He thought a looser bundle was better than tighter.
 - He thought a lower bundle was better than higher (where it was tied off).

- Brian Bettencourt noted that the stems were still alive when treated with herbicide.
- Richard Hewitt asked what kind of spray was used.
 - Olin Lathrop replied: surfactant-free Roundup.
 - Richard Hewitt asked whether the Committee had tried vinegar.
 - Adam Burnett replied that vinegar was not sufficient to get the root system.
- Brian Bettencourt asked what followup steps were needed.
 - Adam Burnett replied that no followup was necessary or feasible till spring.
- Olin Lathrop indicated that he tried spraying some bundles that weren't cut, to see if the herbicide would get into the plants regardless.
- Adam Burnett mentioned that he is currently working on a Phragmites site in Everett for the Army Corps of Engineers.
 - The Army Corps starts Phragmites control in the spring. They mow it in fall, then as young shoots come up in spring, spray as they're sprouting. The plants are very vulnerable then.
 - Olin Lathrop indicated that the Committee could similarly try next spring.
 - Adam Burnett said he will research this method further; spring application as above, then follow up with bundle cut and spray in fall.
 - Olin Lathrop replied: Get details, that'd be great.
 - Adam Burnett took an Action Item to research these Phragmites control methods.
- Brian Bettencourt said the Committee will sit tight for now, and asked whether any followup was needed with Conservation Commission and/or abutters?
 - Olin Lathrop said No, not this year.
- Brian Bettencourt said that he thought the take home message is that bundle cut and spray is probably effective, but impractical for large areas without a big volunteer force.
 - Olin Lathrop agreed, and said that for example Broadmeadow would be way too much.
 - Adam Burnett said that you're really saving the amount of glyphosate you need to apply, and minimizing collateral damage.
 - He thought that perhaps the Committee could bundle just on the edges, broadcast in the midst where the stand is dense.
 - Olin Lathrop agreed but said remember, the Committee couldn't do big broadcasts with backpack sprayer.
 - He asked the Committee to remember the pictures Tim Simmons showed – a swamp buggy with a boom sprayer for use in large Phragmites stands.

The 3rd order of business was the Chestnut plantation.

- Olin Lathrop reported that he still hadn't talked formally with Conservation Commission.
 - He felt that the Conservation Commission is super swamped: Lots of special meetings, 2 extra long meetings over past 1.5 months.
 - The next meeting looks to have more space – Chestnut proposal would likely be on the agenda, Tuesday 14Oct.
 - Olin Lathrop will report after that.
- Adam Burnett asked: Will there be opportunity to discuss at that meeting?

- Olin Lathrop replied Yes.
- Richard Hewitt asked to review the proposal.
- Olin Lathrop reviewed the history of the effort – Committee members found chestnut trees in Groton, and put forward a proposal to the Conservation Commission to reserve an area in Farmers/Mechanics (where some chestnuts were found) for chestnut seedlings.
- Adam Burnett said the area is 50% open canopy right now since logging, a nice area for chestnut growth.
 - He found some potential sunburn on one of the trees.
- Richard Hewitt asked - what happened to the nuts?
 - Adam Burnett said the Committee should plant them!
- Adam Burnett said he'd gotten some info from his brother in CT. Apparently, squirrels love the nuts. Any planting effort requires beating the squirrels to the nuts!
 - So, it requires getting up on ladders to get the burrs.
 - Greta Marks-Strouble indicated that one method involves putting little bags on the burrs.
- Richard Hewitt said the next step would be to cross them with other local trees.
 - Olin Lathrop replied – Correct.
- Olin Lathrop reported that the previous Saturday at a conference, he'd talked with Fish&Wildlife people – and received a name of someone who's working on Chestnuts.
- Olin Lathrop reviewed the proposal for Richard Hewitt; he felt basically it stipulated a change in forest management (planning) for that area.

The 4th order of business was Japanese knotweed and the Highway Dept.

- Olin Lathrop reported that he'd emailed and called (left voicemails for) Tom Delaney, but had never heard back.
 - Adam Burnett said Tom Delaney starts work very early – the best time to reach him on the phone is very early.
- Brian Bettencourt asked: Who's Tom Delaney's supervisor?
 - Olin Lathrop replied: Mark Haddad; Don't want to talk to him yet.
- Olin Lathrop said he was confident that one of these days, Tom Delaney will answer.
 - Adam Burnett said you need to catch him live.
- Brian Bettencourt reported that he'd found another good candidate patch of Japanese knotweed for control – Townsend Rd. and St. James Ave.
- Olin Lathrop said, regarding the Hayden Rd. extension knotweed patch – Nikolas at the Conservation Commission acknowledged receipt of his query; they will address the obligations (conservation restrictions, etc.) in due time.
- The committee next had a discussion regarding rights of way on private land, public land.
 - Brian Bettencourt said he had been working with a private landowner who had a Japanese knotweed infestation on Hayden Rd.
- Olin Lathrop said that he wanted to ask Tom Delaney regarding the knotweed patch at Rt. 40 and Lost Lake – it appeared that the Highway Dept. mowed that area.
 - Brian Bettencourt said that he'd recently observed a similar cut of Phragmites and cattail on Broadmeadow Rd.

The 5th order of business was Any Other Business

- The Committee discussed various items, including their Action Items from the previous meeting.
- Adam Burnett said he had talked with his brother in CT regarding several items.
 - He mentioned one Chestnut tree that forms tons of burrs. They'd received the tree 20+ years ago as part of a CT Extension program.
 - Brian Bettencourt asked – it's likely a hybrid right?
 - Adam Burnett replied it could be he doesn't know yet.
 - Adam Burnett said the tree is not completely resistant; blight affects the branches but not the stem(s). It's up to 20 inches around now.
 - Adam Burnett also said that he wasn't sure how it's getting pollinated; some seedlings are showing up on the property.
 - The Committee discussed the genetics of blight resistance. Brian Bettencourt said that the odds of success in a casual/nonprofessional breeding effort were low.
 - Greta Marks-Strouble said the goal was blight resistant, not blight-proof.
 - Adam Burnett said another goal is to help out the wildlife that eat the nuts.
 - Olin Lathrop agreed that breeding will require multiple generations.
 - Adam Burnett said – it'd mainly just be fun to plant some and see what happens.
 - Brian Bettencourt asked - how many years till a tree is large enough to bear fruit?
 - Greta Marks-Strouble and Adam Burnett replied: 3-7 years after planting.
 - Olin Lathrop said that in essence, the Committee was seeking to get permission from the Conservation Commission to change the forest management in the area where the tree was observed.
 - This engendered more discussion.
 - Greta Marks-Strouble said that she'd also read about a technique of cleaning up blight-ruined trees and getting them to fruit.
 - The committee reviewed the history of cutting down chestnut trees for the blight "firebreak".
 - Olin Lathrop said there are still many stumps out there that are sprouting – tons of genetic diversity.
- Adam Burnett reported on red mulberries in CT.
 - There are a huge number in certain areas down there, that are in old fields. The mulberries get "crowned out" by larger trees and are dying off.
 - There are lots of seedlings around; however, it's not apparent if all are pure Red. The area of CT under discussion is a central area for the species. Some of the older trees might be pure.
 - Adam Burnett asked - When did White mulberry become invasive?
 - Greta Marks-Strouble replied – the 1700s perhaps?
 - Adam Burnett asked – the fruit is not diagnostic, right?
 - Greta Marks-Strouble replied: No. Genetic testing is required. The only restoration project she'd found was in Ontario; they'd found ~600 pure trees in the whole province.

- Adam Burnett asked: Is it too far gone for the Committee to work on? Does it really matter if Red or White trees are predominant, in terms of wildlife and aesthetic value?
 - Greta Marks-Strouble replied that native species in general are better for wildlife since they're the original co-evolved species.
 - She also reported that ArcheWild are breeding pure Reds.
- The Committee had a discussion regarding how to tell the species apart based on genetics, including:
 - Multiple vs. single genetic markers
 - Writing to the Ontario group
- Greta Marks-Strouble reported that her plant is still doing well (the one cloned from the Arnold Arboretum tree).
 - Greta Marks-Strouble took an Action Item to send Brian Bettencourt the link to the Ontario project, such that Brian Bettencourt can ask them regarding their genotyping methods.
- Adam Burnett said his brother indicated he would will dig up and give us some seedling(s) of both mulberry and/or chestnuts.
- Adam Burnett reported that he was still working on Phragmites brochure material.
- Olin Lathrop said that at last week's Conservation Commission meeting, he'd talked with someone who did Japanese knotweed removal with glyphosate. This gentlemen used a much stronger concentrate than the Committee had tried at Eliades. It would be good to compare notes on efficacy.
- Olin Lathrop said he would like to try different plots in a large Japanese knotweed infestation; try some different methods, write it up as a paper.
 - He found that knotweed is susceptible to triclopyr.

Olin Lathrop moved to Adjourn.

- Adam Burnett seconded.
- The meeting adjourned at 8:01 PM.