

Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization
2016 Annual General Meeting
March 31, 2016
Halifax Central Library, 2nd floor, BMO Community Room, 6:00pm to 8:00pm

Present: 41 people in attendance (list available upon request)

Agenda:

1. Recognition of unceded and unsurrendered Mi'kmaw Territory
2. Welcome & Introductions
3. Approval of Minutes from 2015 AGM (April 1, 2015)
4. Approval of Reports
 - a. Chairs report
 - b. Treasurer's report
5. Election of new board members
6. Presentation by Heather Davis and Wade Mclsaac
7. Overview of issues and group discussion
8. Thanks to outgoing board members
9. Close of meeting & networking/refreshments

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm.

1. Recognition of unceded and unsurrendered Mi'kmaw Territory – Kimberly

2. Welcome & Introductions – Kimberly

Welcome to Heather Olivella, Catherine Klefenz, Tom Muisal, Iain Rankin MLA for Timberlea, Councilor Whitman, Peter Lund FBWHT, Mike Lancaster of St Margarets Bay Stewardship Association, and other friends and allies.

3. Approval of Minutes – Paul

Moved by Catherine Klefenz, seconded by Rich Campbell, no discussion. CARRIED.

4. Approval of Reports

a. Co-Chair Report – Nanci

- i. Overview – volunteers do much work on the trail – Janice Teale, Jinbok and Lee Park, David Johnson, and Kim and Paul who have done tremendous work on parking issues – reminder to park perpendicular when visiting the trail.
- ii. Internal governance – Kimberly and volunteers – 20 years of archive material
- iii. Website – Ben has taken over maintenance of the website
- iv. Sector work and collaboration – Paul is representative at HRTA, David at Our HRM Alliance, David has written letters on various issues
- v. Murals painted on overpass by the Blackbook Collective
- vi. Jim moved acceptance of the co-chair report, Richmond seconded, CARRIED.

b. Treasurer Report – Paul

- i. Rich pointed out a typo in the report, left column should be 2015 – Paul fixed it right away.
- ii. Question by Catherine – how much does it cost to clean parking lot – about \$80 per instance of snowfall.
- iii. Ben moved acceptance of the treasurer report, Barbara seconded, CARRIED.

5. **Election of new Board of Directors** – Richmond Campbell, call for nominations:

- a. Paul nominated **Kim Berry** for chair, Hildi seconded
- b. Kim nominated **Paul Berry** for treasurer
- c. **Diana Jeliaskova** – secretary – nominated by Paul
- d. **Ben Armstrong** – nominated
- e. **Dave Johnson** – nominated himself
- f. **David Patriquin** – nominated himself
- g. **Tim McGee** – nominated himself
- h. **Rob Williams** – nominated himself
- i. Kimberly gave an overview of what's involved in being on the board
- j. Paul declared the 8 nominees as accepted.

New Item – Greenbelt – David Patriquin – there are some critical meetings for the Greenbelt happening now. First meeting took place last night in Fall River. Another meeting is happening right now. Another meeting takes place tomorrow in Lewis Lake. Other meeting dates are on WRWEO and HRM websites. The only method of contributing feedback is by attending meetings, so it's crucial to attend. Richmond added that the meetings start at 5 and last until 8, can attend at any time during the meeting. Catherine stressed the importance to make suggestions during the meetings.

6. **Presentation** – Heather Davis & Wade Mclsaac

- a. Have hiked in eastern Canada and US and noticed growing impacts by humans on the Bluff Trail
- b. Baxter state park and White mountain park – both are much more resourced and also have much fewer impacts even though they are more heavily traveled
- c. Visible human impacts:
 - i. Fire pits – there are many fire pits along the trail, though there are no authorized fire pits – all of the ones that exist are unauthorized. Some volunteers dismantle them.
 - ii. Campsites – right on the trail, and many have food waste, plastic waste, burned garbage, burned trees, trees being sawed and limbed, also large built campsites which are very disruptive
 - iii. Trail widening – the Bluff trail used to be a single track footpath – trail hardening has been done on many sites but many more areas are widening now
 - iv. Garbage – doggie bags, orange peels, banana peels, nut shells, toilet paper, dog grooming leftovers
- d. What can we do differently?
 - i. Education – signs – instead of large static signs use kiosks with interchangeable signs
 - ii. Remediation – dismantling camp sites and fire pits to discourage others from continuing to use them
 - iii. Minimizing impact – there are other ways to camp to minimize impact, if you have knowledge to do so, to camp in ways that leave the trail looking no different after you leave; other ways to use and enjoy the trail can allow it to remain open

7. **Overview of Issues & Group Discussion** – Nanci & Kimberly

- a. Thank you to Heather and Wade – first discussion on these issues took place in November and since then have had many discussions with board members and allies at Protected Areas branch of NS Environment.
- b. Question by new member – is the area around the trail under any protection other than Crown Land? Yes, it's a Wilderness Protected Land. Suggestion to have signs to say no fires allowed. Make

clear the distinction between crown land that is accessible vs protected wilderness area where fires are permitted under very specific circumstances (existing fire pits only, or a fire bowl) – more signs are needed about protected area status and what rules apply.

- c. Rich – what are the rules for protected area regarding fire? Heather – you can have a fire under certain circumstances – either an existing fire ring (none of these exist on the Bluff Trail) or a fire in a bowl or a fire in another container.
- d. What is the definition of an existing fire ring – the fire rings that are there now are easily mistaken for official fire rings.
- e. Heather – vast majority of people are simply unaware of the rules, or believe what they are doing is not a problem.
- f. Peter – has there been any consideration to create education days or pamphlets to welcome people to the trail and educate them, to give do's and don'ts, and present the implications of doing certain things incorrectly – i.e. fires lit improperly; or doggie bag containers along the trail (but these would require maintenance).
- g. Nanci – where we are at the moment is considering establishing 3 to 5 educational camp sites to emphasize learning and practicing proper techniques.
- h. Jim – the trail is growing in popularity – original users of trail were well educated but now the group of users has grown – not sure passive educational campaign will be successful because there is momentum of people doing what they see other people doing. So Bluff Trail has matured to another level of trail, like other more mature more-used trails, and so it is time to think about how to manage that level of use – one option is trail wardens, monitors, which is expensive. Mechanism in the Bay – 50-50 draw – is WRWEO interested in participating in this draw to fund some trail maintenance? Another option is to use drones to monitor and make note of issues along trail – i.e. massive problem will require massive action.
- i. Rob – discovered trail as Duke of Edinburg leader – needed a trail to camp that is as wild as possible but also accessible (one can take a bus to the Bluff Trail). Night before camping trip saw the website and information posted there about no fires and smearing waste on rocks (Ben – is this currently on website?) so instead brought metal bowl to the camping trip and everyone loved it – success! Success can be achieved through more education. Is it time for permanent outhouses?
- j. Idea for a photo contest of fire bowls – or no trace camping contest.
- k. Tom – it's correct to assume it is a matter of education, like the idea of educational centers, in Florida saw mailboxes with covers containing flyers and information – can we have these stations with information along the trail without over-cluttering the trail? Surprising that people don't even know that the area is protected. Passive approach is not enough, need to be active about education. Pitch about warden program. Some people have gone to warden training. It is a role of being an ambassador of the trail, offering education and advice rather than policing. Also can have good videos on website – what you need to know before hiking or camping on the Bluff Trail.
- l. Oliver – trail has become a victim of its own success – it's on a bus route and there is a hunger for that kind of experience. As an example, the Keji backcountry gets booked immediately, months in advance. But people love fires. So we are at a crossroads, do we explicitly prohibit camping and fires, which we can do under the designation of Wilderness Protection, or do we choose where people can do these things and under what conditions? The latter takes efforts and resources, so what should it look like? Are there other ways to generate revenue? 50-50 draw is generating about \$6,000 a week for non-profits. One idea is to develop an app where people can make a donation on their phone. Another idea is to charge for parking – the parking lot fills up and can generate significant revenue.
- m. Another idea – send a message to phone with rules as people enter the trail.

- n. Mark – education is great but examples are more important – people do what they see. So you have to take down fire pits and camp sites to discourage these practices. Letting them stay gives hikers the impression that they are permitted. Do not pass a fire pit without destroying it. Also, off leash pets contribute to trail expansion – example of this is Long Lake which has no underbrush left.
- o. Nanci – can have a campaign on remediation – if people remediate a site, they can send a photo to Facebook to continue education. Dal Youth Society has adventures by bus – will do no trace camping and video to model this.
- p. Paul – Kim and Paul have spent lots of time to get parking sign to change people’s parking behavior – has been an exercise in frustration – installed large sign, distributed fake “parking tickets” to cars in the parking lot. Even though things take money, what we really need are people and time – time to organize volunteers, to advertise on social media, etc. The board is shrinking and members are at capacity to keep things going as they are now, we don’t have the people to do any more without more people. So although we need resources, we also need people.
- q. Wade – as of last night on the Bluff trail there is no fire pit on first loop right now. Let’s see what will happen in the summer. Volunteers – can draw from Citadel High and other high schools – look to people who are required to volunteer to graduate. NS Environment has a brochure called “Keep It Wild” which is available online and has great information.
- r. Dan Connelin – while exploring some of the subtle side trails, have discovered that some of the lakes have well established fishing camps with lawn furniture, old boats, etc. NS Environment – a number of legal / authorized fishing sites exist in NS, but also many unauthorized sites as well. If you see any unauthorized – call Heather Olivella and report them. There are no authorized sites near the Bluff trail. All authorized sites in NS are historic – people pay leases to use them – those sites are honored when crown land turns to protected land. But people also build unauthorized sites – sites on Upper Five Bridges Lake and Middle Five Bridges Lake – 8 sites or so with old boats etc. No legitimate leases near the Bluff, so if you find camps please report them.
- s. Rich – WRWEO entered into contract with the provincial government when it built the trail – 30 clauses or so – which means that essentially the trail can be closed. WRWEO can withdraw from the trail with no obligation, can walk away by removing all signs etc. Trail was built to bring the public out and help lobby the government to protect the land, and that worked. The land is now protected. So WRWEO has met its original goal and can now withdraw. That would be a last resort but it is an option. Another option is to have designated camp sites – Keji was opened in the early 1970’s and thousands of people have gone through and yet it all looks almost as it always did. How?? By providing outhouses and supplied wood for fires and firepits which has kept it from being damaged. Even if we had the money for this, it would be an enormous undertaking to manage – supplying wood and privy’s and toilet paper. What can we do to protect the land without having these? If we allow fires, we will lose the woods. How do we have a fire and not have that happen? By using bowls? So designated sites with signs about what is allowed and what is not (including fire bowls) and on top of that volunteers or paid staff to talk to people who are camping (4 pairs to go out 3 times each during the summer would cover the summer). Volunteers can model good behavior. Can be done with designated campsites but would require a lot of effort.
- t. Hildi – why not have a pilot project by government to train young wardens to work for reasonable wage – an innovative pilot program in the wilderness.
- u. Scott – Halifax Outdoor Adventurers meetup group has 3,400 members – target people who are currently using the trail and they will educate each other. Another example is McNabs Island which has issues with camping, so you have to book a site and preregister in order to camp. Rules are posted on website. Trail warden monitors camp sites.
- v. Peter – need education with marketing – make it cool and engaging rather than simply based on rules. Focus on wording to encourage behavior change.

- w. Mike – he looks after Sheep Island and Micou Island in St Margaret’s Bay – there are lots of issues – but once you get a community growing and behind the issues, it will be successful in changing behavior. Will take a lot of effort and constant effort to change. For example the past year was the first time on Micou Island when they provided wood for fire and only had one incident with fire – it took lots of effort but saw immediate results.
- x. Another idea – take a pledge online to practice LNT and with an associated reward/recognition (maybe a bowl?) to encourage behavior.

8. **Thanks to outgoing Board Members:** Hildi Konok, Linda Moxsom-Skinner, Nanci Lee, Moe Abdo, Jessi Fillmore

9. **Close Meeting** – Kimberly