

Skaneateles Conservation Area Advisory Committee meeting minutes

Monday, September 21, 2015, 7:30 PM

Attendees: Bob Sykes, Tom Brooks, Dave Laxton, Fred Scholl, John Underhill, Ken Kaufman, Randy Nonenmacher, Nancy Murray

- The Guppy Falls railing project is done. Matt, and the rest of Troop 66 did a very impressive job. Thanks to Bob Sykes for providing the (heavy) black locust lumber that the troop carried up the hill by hand (along with many buckets of gravel to set the posts into).
 - Ken showed a photo of the finished railing and all of us were duly impressed.
 - Bob suggested that the ends of the rails and cap boards be treated to prevent further checking. (The first cap board developed a check soon after installation.)
 - Progress on the project can be seen at <http://skaak.org/the-areas/federal-farm/the-guppy-farm/guppy-falls/>
- It was noted that Troop 66 will also be providing a Scout to make GPS updates for our maps, including accurate distances and corrections for trails that have drifted.
 - This of course resurrected the discussion of a need for a consistent trail numbering, naming, and/or color-coding of all of our trails for safety, mapping, planning and maintenance purposes.
 - It was suggested that all members gather their thoughts on the subject for discussion at the next meeting.
- Members of the ESF faculty have shown interest in providing some students from their Conservation Biology Senior Synthesis class to work on a management plan project for the Skaneateles Conservation Area during the Winter/Spring 2016 semester.
 - There were questions about what kind of management plan this would be, as well as a question about how they could see the site during the winter.
 - It was surmised that this would depend largely on what goals we provide, be they timber production, habitat preservation, general recreation, or whatever.
 - To get an idea about the background of the students, the webpage for ESF's Conservation Biology major is <http://www.esf.edu/efb/consbio/>
 - Fred mentioned that he would like to see more habitat for game birds being planted.
 - Bob commented about the corn fields that the Cargile family plants between the transfer station and the eastern Federal Farm part of the conservation area. Several of us agreed that it would be great to have a windbreak/hedgerow planted on the western edge of that field to block both the wind and (as Tom mentioned) the plastic bags blowing in from the transfer station. Extending the wind break out to

Old Seneca Turnpike would also conceivably help control snow-drifting into the parking lot.

- Brush hogging of the trails was cancelled for the season due to the maturity of swallowwort along the trails. It was thought that mowing at this point might spread the seeds all over the area.
 - Tom noted that some of the trails really are in need of mowing. Goldenrod and other tall plants tend to bend into the trails this time of year, requiring that trails be widened somewhat to cut those plants off at the base.
 - Randy brought up the need for a narrow walk-behind brush cutter that we and other volunteers could use to selectively mow trails, openings, and young tree plantations whenever they are in the need of it. Different areas require different schedules, which can also vary from year-to-year based on weather and tree canopy development or decline. Some invasive plant infestations can be controlled by intensive mowing, but mowing some native plants like goldenrod too often will also kill it and allow exotic invasive plants like knapweed and sweetclover to take its place. This needs to be taken into account when deciding when and where to mow.
- Contacted DEC about pesticide guidance for invasive species problems. They passed our information on to the Finger Lakes PRISM, who have yet to respond. They should be contacted at this point.
 - Randy agreed to contact the Finger Lakes PRISM for more guidance about invasive plant management.
 - Ken is specifically concerned with controlling the pale swallowwort that is really getting to be noticeable. See https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Skanateles_Conservation_Area_flora#Pale_swallowwort for some photos of swallowwort infestations on the Federal Farm and Guppy Farm.
 - Note that we should probably try to ensure that adequate invasive species guidelines go into the management plan discussed above.
- Ash-seed-collection training will continue at Green Lakes on Sep. 29. Seed collection should take place soon thereafter.
 - There are a few nice ash trees on the Federal Farm with seeds that should be fairly easy to access. But completion of the training is required for seeds to be accepted by the seed bank.
 - This could be the last mast-year before we lose our ash trees in this area.
 - Seeds collected will go a cryogenic seed-storage facility (seed bank) in Colorado. Seeds will be returned to the same areas from which they were collected once the emerald ash borer problem is under control.
- Nancy asked what our plans were for future fishing derbies, and we again replied that we wouldn't mind continuing to help out, but none of us felt willing or able to provide the kind of organizational skills and devotion necessary to plan and prepare for an event like

that. Nancy wanted to keep alive the legacy of the conservation area committee as a co-organizer of the event.

- Randy agreed to inventory our current equipment and supplies which are in storage at the old water department building.
 - An item will be added to next month's agenda to discuss trying to get a small space at the transfer station in which to store our equipment. The prospect of a trip to the other side of town means that most of our tools never get used – it's too easy to just use our own.
- An item that didn't make it onto the agenda was communicated to the committee via email after the meeting. Just before the meeting, Randy got an email from Justin Woford, a Life Scout from Troop 61 in Skaneateles, saying that he was interested in a stair-building project at the Conservation Area. The committee has previously discussed the desirability of having steps on the path up to the observation platform at that Federal Farm, as well as some design preferences for steps. Further discussion of step/stair philosophy may be appropriate.
- Next meeting Oct. 19 at 7:00.