



REPORT for Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Call to Order: The meeting was held at CFPA, Middletown

The meeting called to order at 6:33 pm by Diane

Attendance: CHC: Ruth Strontzer, Danielle Borelli, Diane Ciano, Vevette Greenberg , Meg Sautter

DEEP: Laurie Giannotti CFPA: Eric Hammerling

Guests: 0

Excused: Ron Hocutt

Review Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes of September 16th, 2020 were reviewed. .

Motion to accept with changes discussed by Eric, 2nd Vevette

State Park & Forest Updates:

Natchaug State Forest: Lost Silver Mine Horse Camp Update:

Previously, CHC discussed utilizing the other side of the back road entrance where the trees were just dropped. We proposed to have these logs moved over to the sides in sections as to create a wood corral type area that could be used by campers for their horses.

Diane reports that DEEP Matt Quinn reported that the Forestry & Wildlife Division did not want to sign off on that project. He said by Memorial Day of 2022, all pull through sites will be done, there will be chemical toilets again, the picnic tables that are usable will be put back out, fire rings will be installed on the pull through sites, and the back gate to the pull through sites will be up.

Bissell Trail – Windsor: Diane left message for Stepheny Dumond (Penwood Area) regarding Bissell Trail regarding the Riverfront Recapture on the CT River in Windsor 860.242.1158 stepheny.dumond@ct.gov Laurie said a good person to talk to is Mark Nichol of the Riverfront Recapture. Laurie mentioned we should contact Mark Nichol of the Riverfront Recapture Committee.

Cockaponset State Forest & Chatfield Hollow State Park:

Ruth's letter to Alex Sokolow regarding washed out trails and roads was unanswered. Diane contacted him on 12/13/2021. He apologized for the delay. Alex noted that he will be retiring in June 2022. Discussion was that there was not enough help to get things done. His staff was reduced down to 3. The pandemic guidelines also affected seasonal workers. The Passport to the Parks money is there, but is not being released as the OPM administration is not on the same page for DEEP to get the monies. Also, normally the DEEP has 3-5 million dollars for infrastructure for repairs of buildings. This past year there was none. Regarding washed out roads, that is the department of Forestry which normally takes care of forest roads. He said if there are issues on trails, he would try to get help, but needs better information than a description of location of the downed trees. He cannot send someone out on a trail that is 3-4 miles long without any explicit position of where it is – Using a map to mark the area rather than describing a trail is what he would need to address any issue.

Larkin Bridle Trail: Diane & Meg met with DEEP Tammy Talbot & Nathan Hale on 10/26/2021 regarding previous funding for trail improvements and parking.

Parking for Horse Trailers:

There are no parking areas for horse trailers except for Rte. 63 in Naugatuck. This is the only parking area on the entire trail that has accommodated horse trailers in the past which it was originally designed for. The Larkin Trail has become more popular, the parking lot fills up and most times trailers no longer have the space to park there. Discussion was to possibly expand the parking area to accommodate more parking. Nathan will check with DOT in utilizing the property on Rte. 63.

Discussion on establishing a parking area on South Street. CHC proposed this is an ideal location to create a large turn around area for horse trailers. This can be done because there is a large amount of land that can easily create an ideal parking area and installing a gate up further where the trail narrows. Nathan said that both sides of the trail are not owned by DEEP, so a parking lot could not be established there. He mentioned a possible parking area near a dump at the end of the trail on Kettle town Road.

Trail Improvements: Some of the entrances and exit crossings need improvements.

Discussion on two very dangerous crossings where fill is needed and possible signage:

Towantic Hill Rd. crossing is steep and treacherous and dumps you immediately onto the street at a curve with very poor sight lines for oncoming vehicle traffic. Crossing the street and heading down to the trail is narrow, rocky and treacherous. From either direction, the sight line is poor and you are immediately in the roadway. With fill on either side of Towantic Hill, you would be able to pause at the top of the hill without being in the roadway, and could then access the possibility of crossing the street safely.

The second dangerous crossing is Southford Rd (Rte. 67). Heading south from Strongtown Rd to Southford Rd, requires another treacherous climb ending again in a very busy, heavily trafficked, roadway. Some fill here, and perhaps a small clearing at the top, would ensure a much safer crossing.

Gates: The CHC continues to get reports of illegal use on the trails, especially since last year. Most of our CHC Volunteer Horse Patrol reports of illegal activity were in the Naugatuck and Middlebury areas, where rampant use, motorcycles and ATVs flying past people, breaking down stone walls to access private property, etc. The boulders do not stop vehicles from entering. The boulders are small and are easily moved by 4-wheel drive vehicles.

Update: Tammy applied for \$300,000.00 for funding to do trail improvements and purchase Bollards for crossings on crossings of the trail where the boulders are either missing or do not deter motorized vehicles. These will provide will provide emergency access vehicles” to get on the trail when there is a need to. Possible parking at the end of Jeremy Swamp Rd.

Legislation:

Continued discussion on the DEEP losing its full-time employees due to all the retirements that will be happening from April-June 2022. The priority of the DEEP agency with state parks is very low and we need to address the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) advocating for additional funding to replace these positions along with additional staff that has been depleted through the years for "Public Health & Safety"

Eric shared the article on the CFPA website along a recent letter from CFPA sent to the OPM Secretary, Melissa McCaw requesting that this issue be addressed. the OPM:

<https://www.ctwoodlands.org/public-policy/2022-retirements-loom-large-for-deep>

Two key notes:

- Almost 45% of DEEP's Environmental Protection employees are eligible for retirement and most will be leaving before July 1, 2022. It is important **DEEP must be allowed to increase the hourly pay for seasonal workers** who are such a critical part of the DEEP workforce on state lands during the field season. At current hourly rates, DEEP is unable to recruit effectively for young talent at the front end, and is struggling to retain more experienced seasonal workers at the back end; and **DEEP must do more to retain younger employees** with fewer than five years of experience. This suggests that DEEP has inadequate pathways for career growth, pay scales that don't compete well with the private sector
- **The DEEP needs** 4-500 seasonal workers. DEEP has only 83 full time employees to take care of 110 State Parks and 32 State Forests
- Asking that \$20 million for projects should be a dedicated fund every year. Only \$3 million is given and has to be authorized every year by the governor and Bond Commission.
- **The DEEP needs** 500+ seasonal workers to maintain State Parks every year. DEEP has only 83 full time employees in the Parks division to take care of 110 State Parks
- The Recreational Trails & Greenways Program gave \$3 million in available grant funding to several projects. However, there was over \$22 million in requests for funding, and at least \$7 million in quality projects were unable to be supported. CFPA is asking that \$3 million in state bonding be available every year for recreational trail and greenway grants. This takes both legislation to authorize the \$3 million/year AND a meeting of the bond commission (convened by the Governor) to ask for \$3 million/year to be released to DEEP for its matching grants program.
- **Keep Passport to the Parks intact.** CFPA has opposed proposals every year since the Passport was established in 2018 to either divert funding, earmark funding, or exempt various groups from having to pay the \$5/year/vehicle fee which generates ~\$20 million/year for State Park operations and maintenance.

Old Business:

Follow up:

Devil's Hop Yard: Meg's report from last meeting to be followed up on with DEEP Supervisor, Jack Hines: *I have not been back to this area. My last complaint concerned the boulders that block what could be a nice trailer parking area. We have been parking down by the barn, which is wet and narrow. The top spot (where the house once stood and is across from the trail entrance) is dry and partly graveled. Hikers park at a smaller spot up the road. This parking spot gets so crowded the vehicle partially block the road causing difficulties for horse trailer passing.*

Goodwin State Forest – Goodwin Visitor Center Area: *Previous discussion was that Eric will contact DEEP Supervisor Matt Quinn to apply for the grant.*

Higganum Meadows Wildlife Management Area:

Previous discussion from June: The Higganum Meadows are overgrown with invasive species that have changed the entire meadows. We discussed getting a report together to propose that the DEEP get these fields mowed back to their original way and/or suggest using sheep or goats to help get with rid of the invasive plants.

The report was sent to Laurie Fortin of the Wildlife Division. There was no response back. Diane called and left message and emailed on 12/13 for a response to Danielle's report:
laurie.fortin@ct.gov 860.424.3963

New Business:

Trails Greenways Coordinator: Paperwork is underway to refill Laurie's position after her retirement

DEEP No Child Left Inside: CHC-Volunteer Horse Patrol was asked to participate at the Winter Festival at Burr Pond State Park in Torrington on Saturday February 5, 2022 from 10 am to 3pm.

SCORP – Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Eric said the state will be doing the 2022 plan.

EAC Website:

We need an updated picture.

Meeting notes of December 2020, June 2021 & September 2021 need to be up on website

Note: there was no meeting in March 2021

2022 Meeting Dates: March 24th, June 16th, September 15th, December 15th

Adjournment: Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:42 pm by Meg, 2nd Danielle