

## **Regional Trail Meeting Minutes June 2, 2008**

Present: Topsham - Carla Rensenbrink, Steve Chandler, Rod Melanson (Topsham Planner); Gardiner - Jason Simcock (Gardiner Planning & Development Director), Tom Reeves; Bowdoinham - Brook Cox (Bowdoinham Recreation Director), Tony Cox (Bowdoinham Economic & Community Development Director), Lynn Sanford, Linda Christie, Ben Long, Nicole Briand (Bowdoinham Planner); and Guest - Burnham Martin from the National Park Service.

Burnham Martin explains the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program:

- The assistance program is an outreach of the National Park Service.
- The assistance program does not provide money, it only provides staff support.
- The staff can: act as a coach/advisor, help organize the group, provide guidance, and work on small portions of a project, such as trail signage, kios, bringing in Maine Conservation Corps, landowner contacts (how-to). They work with the group to carry out the project, they don't just do the work like a consultant.
- The assistance program can help with a trail management plan, the development of the work plan, community involvement and landowner contacts and ghost write grant applications.
- The assistance is typically for 2 years, but sometimes only one year. There are two staff people, so the program typically has 6 projects running per year.
- The program has two goals:
  - Strengthen the group so they can move forward successfully.
  - Achieve on the ground results.

Discussed the assistance program for our project:

- We're not ready yet, maybe next year.
- At this point we are gathering information and learning from other regional trail projects.
- We don't have an organization structure yet.

Discussed need for an economic analysis if we want to pursue the rail-to-trail option. It was suggested that we do the inventory and analysis of our options, first. Then if we want to pursue the rail to trail option we can discuss how we will go about the economic analysis study and the funding needed for the study. We may decide to pursue other options before attempting to tackle the study.

Burnham provided us with some example work plans, including an outline of one for us to look at and work from. Discussed Work Plans:

- Inventory of existing trails, rights of ways and conservation/public lands. – discussion -
  - Tom's rediscovering forgotten assets project does this for Gardiner, Richmond & Bowdoinham. Rod said that he has this information for Topsham.
- Develop a vision or dream for the trail system. – discussion -
  - We don't see this being a built trail as the Kennebec River Rail Trail. The cost of a trail to that scale would be too much. We are looking at a 30 mile trail through a

rural area, lots of terrain and wet areas. We are thinking of a rural nature trail with a cut opening and a stone dust trail at the most and no winter maintain, for use by hikers, mountain bikers, cross country skiers and maybe horses and snowmobiles . We could however, build a higher grade trail through our village areas. Cross-country (road) bikes can travel Route 24 and maybe someday the trail could be upgraded.

- Develop rough specifications for the trail system based on the vision. – discussion –
  - Will do once we discuss vision further and have an agreement to move forward.
- Group's organization structure. – discussion –
  - Trail group like a utility district
  - Eastern trail management district
  - Alliance
  - Coalition
  - Interlocal agreement like Kennebec River Rail Trail
  - Legislative form like Saco River Corridor Commission
- We should look into going a memorandum of agreement between the municipalities for the short-term until we have the time to do the research and talk with our selectboards/councils about the organization structure we want to use to move this project forward.

Discussed other resources and potential players:

- Maine Conservation Corps – provides on the ground trail work
- NPS Assistance Program – provides guidance, acts as advisor
- Lester Canway – lays out trails and provides cost estimate
- MDOT: Transportation Enhance Grant – possible funding source for trail construction
- Maine Department of Conservation: grant program - possible funding source for trail construction
- Nature Conservancy
- Friends of Merrymeeting Bay
- Kennebec Conservation Collaboration
- Healthy Maine Partnerships
- LL Bean
- Robertwood Johnson – funding source?
- Bingham – Betterman Fund – funding source?
- Soil Conservation Service – Josh Plante

We asked Burnham, “what do you see that makes a trail project successful?”

- Public Support
- Project Champion(s) – to keep project moving

All projects seem to have a non-profit involved.... We discussed possible non-profits in the area, but none of the existing groups seem to service the four municipalities....

6/2/08 nb