



## **Randolph Conservation Commission**

**Tuesday, January 2, 2024 at 6:00pm**

**Conference Room B at Town Hall**

**In attendance:** Jeff Thayer, Rachel Westbrook, Brendan Barden, Ian Blackmer, Emily Lewis, Chandler Engel, Jessamyn West

Meeting called to order 6:05

December minutes approved unanimously.

### **Sayward Update**

Neighbors in abutting land by Sayward Forest received letters explaining the logging operation

AJ sent out a proposal to do some tree planting "assisted migration" getting tree species which would thrive here taking climate change into account. He has four different proposals for the CC and once we approve he can order trees (working with UVM/Parks/Rec) to do the planting. Some of this has to do with whether logging happens this winter. CC would pay for trees and planting would happen with (civic groups). Trees would be low-cost (seedlings) and possibility to plant a certain number of the plots available. Rachel outlined the options for the RCC for us to select one planting option. Hickory trees (shag bark and pignut) would be included to take the place of the beech nut trees that won't be doing as well as the climate warms.

Discussion about what will happen if logging doesn't happen this winter, in terms of purchasing seedlings (looks like AJ will only order them once we know when logging is going to happen or can place the order but not pick up until we know we can plant).

Discussion of what conditions need to happen to make it suitable for logging. The water table is highish which means a lot of moisture in the ground.

Emily said updated USDA hardiness zones have been updated just recently, the zones have changed a LOT and people should taking a look at it.

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>

Approval of a tree-buying plan in partnership with UVM to buy seedlings and Rachel will follow up with AJ on next steps. Emily forwarded a motion. Motion approved.

### **Ellis Update**

In terms of doing a management plan, Emily said that over 10K contracts need to go out for competitive bidding. We haven't scoped out what it would cost (less than this? more than this?) to get this sort of thing put together. Emily will put together a rough estimate. Discussion of whether this is a requirement for Vermont Land Trust (yes) and what's the timeframe for putting it together (unclear). Probably worth it to hire someone to get it taken care of. We do have a forest management part of the plan in place. Emily will look into what Community Forestry has on offer to see what parts of it we really need to assemble from paid professionals. Emily says the time frame from putting out and RFP and having someone actually start looking at the project is about 3-4 months.

Construction in terms of the reservoir has paused for winter and will resume in April depending on whether the water tank is ready or not and what needs to happen in terms of demolishing/removing the old tank. We should refer to the maps which have the plan of how it's going and build in the buffer for whatever the town infrastructure is going to wind up being. We will also want to make sure that whatever happens when the reservoir is demolished will try to take into effect invasive management.

Emily will look into the RFP process by the next meeting.

Discussion of whether we've heard from Ridgeline about putting part of the VELOMONT trail through Ellis property and how we should touch base to make sure we're all on the same page on how it's going to work and have it in our management plan. Brendan says there may be a VELOMONT hut in the Randolph downtown area near the gear house.

### **Emerald Ash Borer Update**

Jeff asked if the EAB Plan has gone before the Selectboard and whether anything specific happened with it like was it formally adopted or not. Brendan looked at the woods behind the Braintree Meeting House to see if there's EAB activity there. There are definitely some unhealthy ash trees up there, not clear if it's EAB-affected. Jeff is leaving town on the 12th, he and Brendan will see if they can find EAB activity to try to motivate the local Selectboard to take action.

Vermont Roadside Ash Inventory

<https://geodata.vermont.gov/datasets/ec37a94978d341e5997c381e69021392/about>

<https://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/anra5/> (has an "ash" layer that can be turned on)

Plainfield appears to be the local epicenter. Rochester is remarkably untouched for now.

One of the early suggestions in the EAB report is setting up "trap trees" to see if we find EAB in locations (a way to stress trees out which attract EAB and then you can point out where it is). Might be a way to convince the Selectboard to take action? Maybe a tree ordinance?

This would outline how the town could go to homeowners who have dangerous ash trees but which are in the public right of way to offer to take the trees down. Discussion of how to make this something that is palatable to the Selectboard. Maybe bundle grant possibilities to pay for it along with an ordinance. We'll look into it starting late-March

### **Old Business**

Still looking for a new member, looking for someone on the other side of Route 89. Will post to FPF and Randolph Facebook pages.

Meeting adjourned 7:09