

Forester presents 10-year plan for Bearsden conservation area
By Brian Gelinis, Athol Daily News Staff Reporter
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ATHOL -- The North Quabbin Trails Association held its monthly meeting and potluck supper at the Millers River Environmental Center on Monday, with guest speaker and forester Michael Mauri providing a presentation on the 10-year forest management/stewardship plan he developed for the town's Conservation Commission.

The plan, for the period 2012 to 2022, is for the Bearsden Conservation area.

The Commission finalized the forest plan last May. It offers several recommendations for managing sections of the area to, in part, reduce fire danger and promote healthy forest growth and the creation of successional habitats. Fire road improvements are also recommended.

Mauri told the Commission that about 700,000 board feet (or 1,000 cords) could be harvested, depending on which recommendations the Commission chooses to move forward with. The gross in timber sales would be about \$70,000. After forester expenses are deducted, the money realized could be used to cover the cost for improvements to fire roads.

As a part of the state-approved plan, the Commission must conduct "outreach" and educate the public with regard to the plan and the conservation area.

On Monday, Mauri's presentation to the NQTA also included general information about trees, forest growth, and area wildlife. He also assured those in attendance that the "slash" left over after an area is logged might not look appealing, but it is vital for to support forest re-growth and provide wildlife habitat.

Trails Update

NQTA board member Bob Curley provided an update on recent trail work conducted by the NQTA and members of other area environmental organizations.

Curley noted that a location on the Millers River-Baquag Trail, which runs between Athol and South Royalston along Millers River and in the area of the Pan Am railway, was previously blocked by discarded railroad ties, following nearby railroad work. That location has since be opened by a group of volunteers who used the ties to build a trail boardwalk to allow hikers to traverse the area.

Curley said the NQTA is awaiting a signed letter from the railway approving of the work. However, he said the railway, in general, has no issues with such work as it directs hikers away from the tracks.

The construction of the boardwalk and its associated trail work completes the connection

of a larger 160-mile trail loop system that connects the Mount Monadnock region in New Hampshire with the Quabbin Reservoir and other wildlife areas of the North Quabbin region, including Bearsden Conservation Area, said Curley.

Grant Received

A \$50,000 grant has been received to undertake trail development on the former Davenport property and at the New England Equestrian Center on New Sherborn Road. Funding will also be used to develop trail guides and maps for the area, said Curley.

Working Together

Speaking to the Athol Daily News recently, outside of the context of Monday's meeting, Curley said part of the NQTA's mission is to bring together area environmental organizations to work together to preserve the many unique environmental qualities of the area, connect various trail systems, and to promote the region's outdoor recreational opportunities.

Such opportunities include the group hike held for senior citizens last October. The trip included a visit to the Skyfields Arboretum at the Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust, and a walk along the limited mobility access trail that abuts the property owned by Paul and Paulette Rezendez.

Among the organizations working with the NQTA are the Millers River Fishermen's Association, the Millers River Watershed Council, the Millers River Environmental Center, the Athol Bird & Nature Club and Trout Unlimited.

Members of many of these groups assisted with the trail clearing and boardwalk construction.

The Trustees of Reservations and the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation are also involved in other work, as the trail systems cross properties that fall under the ownership of various entities.

Headquarters

At Monday's meeting, Curley noted that the Millers River Environmental Center is offering two rooms to the NQTA so the organization can have a physical location for a headquarters.

Upcoming Event

The NQTA will hold a work session at the Red Apple Farm in Phillipston on Saturday, Jan. 19, at 10 a.m.

At that time, an existing partially-constructed Adirondack shelter will be completed, brook crossings will be established, and a fire pit will be constructed.

Volunteers are needed to assist.

Meetings

The NQTA meets the second Monday of each month, at 6 p.m., at the MREC. Non-profit status is being sought for the group, which was incorporated last May. In addition, new members are being sought.

A website is also under development, and additional information can be obtained from Curley by calling 978-549-1747 or sending an email to him at atphocon@yahoo.com.