

COOS COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
Berlin, NH
April 13, 2011

Present from the Board: John Scarinza – Chair; Fred King – Vice Chair; Sue Collins – Clerk; Ed Mellett, Rick Tillotson, Jonathan Frizzell, Commissioner Burnham “Bing” Judd, Mike Waddell; alternates Scott Rineer, Lindsey Gray and Jim Brady.

Present from the Public: Commissioner Tom Brady; Julie Renaud Evans, Sustainable Forest Futures; J.T. Horn, Trust for Public Land; Rodger Krussman, Trust for Public Land; Marcy Lyman, Community Forest Collaborative; David Publicover, AMC; Brian Gagnon, The Wilderness Society; David DeGruttola, LandVest, Inc.; Paul Casey, US Fish & Wildlife Service; Susan Francher, NH Division of Forests and Lands; Will Abbott, Society for the Protection of NH Forests; Tom Wagner, White Mountain National Forest; Brendan Prusik, UNH Cooperative Extension; George Pozzuto, Milan Selectman; Mark Peabody, Mahoosuc Inn Milan; Larry Ely, Shelburne Landowner; Pip Decker, Brookfield Power; Dan Hendley and Ed Butauski, RMT, Inc.; Claire Lynch, *News & Sentinel*; Donna Jordan, *Colebrook Chronicle*; Edith Tucker, *Coös County Democrat/Berlin Reporter*; Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun* and other members of the public.

John Scarinza, Chair, opened the regular meeting of the Board at 6:00 PM.

NEW BUSINESS:

John opened the meeting by explaining the reason for the presentation by the Community Forest Collaborative. John stated that discussion started last August when a subdivision proposal came before the County Planning Board to add approximately 7,000 acres to the Lake Umbagog Wildlife Refuge. Also heard during that proposal was that additional lands in the unincorporated areas were also under consideration for future possible ownership changes. As a result of that and possible future projects that were in the news not only in the region surrounding Lake Umbagog but in other parts of the county, the question arose as to the future of the working forest in Coös County and its relationship to the economic health of those businesses and residents who rely on a vibrant and accessible timber base for wood fiber in order to make a living and continue to live in the North Country.

At that point in time, it was suggested that the Planning Board perhaps make a policy decision as to whether or not to support current and future subdivision proposals based upon the impact those proposals may have in potentially removing traditionally commercial and harvestable timber land from the region’s wood basket. John continued that after having some time to think about this, it was his feeling that policy decisions as to what projects should be supported or not were the venue of the County Commissioners when projects are brought forward in the Unincorporated Places of the county. The Commissioners have the authority and duty to oversee these places. With that thought in

mind, John met with the Commissioners to ask for their thoughts. He asked the Commissioners if the Planning Board could assist the Commissioners in gathering information to assist them in making their decisions as they relate to future land conservation projects.

John stated that he learned that the County Commissioners wanted to be as well informed as possible as to what was occurring in and on the lands of the Unincorporated Places and that they wished to have a greater role in the public discussion of those projects due to the growing concern that at some point in time land use changes to the County's working forest may proceed to an extent that those forests will no longer support an economically viable and healthy timber industry as well as support the traditional recreational uses such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, public access, and back country experiences.

John defined an economically viable timber industry as being a significant part of the county's economy sustained by the harvesting of trees for the purposes of providing wood fiber in the form of wood chips, wood pulp and saw logs. John stated that the County Commissioners and members of the Planning Board certainly understand that land ownership changes are occurring and transactions require a willing seller/willing buyer relationship. John continued the County Planning Board has a duty to continuously monitor changes to land ownerships and make recommendations for the adoption of reasonable land use policies.

John explained that during his meetings with the County Commissioners, the concept of a county forest or forests which would provide for local ownership, local control and open access were discussed and the Commissioners were very interested in exploring the opportunities that a county forest might provide in helping assure that the wood basket of the North Country remained in place for the local jobs and security it would provide, and that public access and traditional recreational uses were allowed to continue into the future. John explained that tonight's presentation is a kick-off of the discussion to look at whether the community forest model might be used in Coös County's Unincorporated Places. He urged that the assembly look at two topics and keep them distinct. First is the broader topic of land use changes in the recent past and how to use this information as a model for a county forest; and second the work of the Trust for Public Land.

Julie Renaud Evans explained that in her position with Sustainable Forest Futures, a part of the Northern Forest Center, she assists communities in acquiring a community forest. Julie provided an historical perspective on the vertically integrated paper companies' pre-1980 when paper companies actually owned all their forest lands and managed them for current and future timber production. They wanted and needed a sustainable forest. The situation changed in 1988 with the sale of the Diamond International lands. For the first time lands were not tied to the mills. Investors became purchasers of large forest tracts. This this not only happened locally but also on a national scale. By 2007, there were no more large industrial ownerships. Lands were owned by Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMO) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT). Additionally there has been a lot of fragmentation of the original large holdings. Heavier cutting has occurred in order for these organizations to produce a return on investment.

Julie explained that the TIMO model is not intended to be land acquisition for long term ownership.

Julie explained that Coös County needs a healthy forest, a scenic forest and the County's Master Plan for the Unincorporated Places addresses that.

The shift in ownership patterns has brought new opportunities:

- Since there is no local control and the forests are not necessarily being managed for sustainability as before, conservation organizations have partnered with local landowners to help manage forests responsibly;
- Towns have stepped into the game where they own and maintain a forest as part of the municipality's economic base; and
- Conservation easements help owners keep their land holdings as working forests rather than for development.

Julie continued that a community forest is either owned by a community or on behalf of a community (owned by a land trust). Coös County has 3 nice models – Errol, Randolph and Gorham. She spoke about each of these forests.

Selectman George Pozzuto of Milan stated that Milan created a town forest exploratory committee at Town Meeting this year. He asked the presenters for a prognosis on the availability of federal grant funds with the current administration in Washington. Rodger Krussman replied that he has no idea how funding in DC will come out. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has been successful in the past in obtaining funding for towns where forest ownership produces economic, social and conservation benefits.

Julie stated that community forest projects typically take 3-5 years. Rodger stated that the best funding opportunities have come from the Forest Legacy Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund. This funding stream was created by payments from oil companies for off shore exploration activities. The program is not fully funded at the federal level as some money gets diverted to other uses much like in this State where the legislature diverts funds collected at the Registries of Deeds for the NH Land Conservation Investment Program (LCIP). There is also a Community Forest Program that was funded in the 2008 Farm Bill. US Department of Agriculture administers the program and agencies like his hope that there will be an appropriation in the 2012 federal budget for fee simple purchases.

Mr. Pozzuto asked how the Unincorporated Places could partner with towns on the community forest issue. John Scarinza replied that the County's Master Plan speaks about the importance of the forest. What is missing is a county-wide discussion – towns and unincorporated places – on what we want our county and forests to be in 20 years. If we say we want a forest based economy, how do we get there together? Mr. Pozzuto added that if we have a county-wide goal, it might be easier to get federal funds. J.T. Horn added that if TPL can help with facilitating the establishment of a vision for the future, then that goal and related information can be used as part of the application

process for funding. Rick Tillotson added that currently we have some really good stewards of the land; the question before the Planning Board is not who owns or manages the land today but who will be the owner 20 years from now. He wondered if we can put something in place for future ownership that keeps local ownership supporting current goals. John Scarinza added that as we express our concerns about land ownership in the long term, who will be buying this land in the short term?

Mike Waddell cautioned that any opportunity that will come before the county will not be a pristine forest; it more likely will be a nasty cut off tract of land. So there is a choice, do we want the federal government to buy it and manage it their way or are we interested in buying/managing it for future timber harvesting and other traditional uses? Mike suggested that we tell Washington to give us the money to buy lands; we will provide open access and Washington will not have to pay substantial management costs as the federal government currently does with the White Mountain National Forest.

Fred King stated that originally this discussion was initiated because members of the Planning Board and the Commissioners thought we ought to notify our Congressional Delegation that there should be a moratorium on any further federal land purchases in Coös County until we discussed this issue locally. If Washington has money to buy more land, then perhaps we should be at the table to get this money. Locally, we could manage the money and the forest a lot more efficiently. John agreed and stated that if we do not like what is coming along or what has happened, what we do to prevent more happening.

Jonathan Frizzell stated that it would be interesting to review the total forest acres in the Unincorporated Places and determine how many acres are removed annually from harvesting; when a parcel is sold, is land being shifted to non-production? He spoke of a numerator – denominator factor where removal of lands from the numerator may affect the economy.

It was suggested that ownership transition maps for Coös County might be a useful tool for the Commissioners and Planning Board to consider.

Tom Wagner, White Mountain National Forest Manager, stated that currently 40M board feet of timber are under contract. The WMNF focus is necessarily within the Proclamation Boundary and locals are part of the planning process and decision making for the national forest. He stated that 26% of the WMNF is in Coös County and over 90% of that land is managed for timber.

David Publicover, AMC, stated that prior to the 1988 Diamond land sale, 22% of the land in Coös County was conservation land. He presented percentages on changes in conservation lands since that time. He stated that the actual amount of good timber land taken out of harvesting since 1988 is very small. *(Note: Mr. Publicover subsequently provided revised data which is available attached to these minutes.)*

Paul Casey, Refuge Manager, Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge, stated that the refuge has a 15 year plan and harvesting will occur. It is important for the public to remember

that much of the refuge is wetland and that the land is necessarily managed for the species.

Commissioner Bing Judd summed up his thoughts by stating that both the state and federal governments own all the lands they need in Coös County. He favors local control and supports the County and/or communities obtaining grants to purchase land and manage it locally for timber and recreation.

Commissioner Tom Brady stated that as a Board, the Commissioners are in favor of the community and county forest approach and we should continue to move in that direction.

Sue Collins asked what the county needs to do in order to be informed of either federal funding availability and/or land available for sale. Rodger Krussman, TPL, stated that tonight's discussion has put him on notice that Coös County is interested. Mike Waddell warned that the force is not with us when decisions are made in Washington. Rick Tillotson stated that public land ownership need not be adversarial. The Planning Board would like to see those in the room tonight, including the federal agency representatives, help Coös County look attractive to federal funding agencies.

John Scarinza summed up the discussion of the previous two hours by stating that he understands that we want to march forward looking into the feasibility of a county forest. Paul Casey urged him to keep the federal managers involved.

The following documents were distributed to Planning Board members and the public:

1. The Story of the Randolph Community Forest: Building on Stewardship;
2. A Community Investment Strategy: Community Forests;
3. Forestland for Sale: Open Space Institute; and
4. The Economic Importance of New Hampshire's Forest Based Economy, NH Division of Forests and Lands.

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 18, 2010:

Fred King made a motion to approve the minutes of November 18, 2010 as distributed. Jonathan Frizzell seconded the motion. The Chairman called for a vote to accept the minutes and all voted in favor of approval.

LETTERS/CORRESPONDENCE TO THE BOARD:

Sue Collins reported on the e-mail correspondence that she and John Scarinza had exchanged with Chris Thayer, Appalachian Mountain Club. Mr. Thayer has indicated that the Madison Hut renovation in Low and Burbank's Grant would include the same wind generating facility as previously existed so there would be no need for the AMC to file an application for small wind project.

OLD BUSINESS:

Granite Reliable Wind Park Update: Pip Decker, now representing Brookfield Power (who purchased the Granite Reliable Windpark from Noble Environmental Power) and two associates from general contractor RMT, Inc. Dan Hendley and Ed Butauski, attended the meeting to thank the Planning Board for its support of the wind project during the application phase. Pip reported that construction has begun and two goals set for the project are being addressed:

1. **Hire Local:** All land clearing was done in February and March by local contractors AB Logging of Lancaster and Hicks of Jefferson. Pip introduced Dan Hendley who serves as project manager. Dan has experience doing wind park ridgeline construction in Pennsylvania. Pip reported that RMT is currently meeting with local contractors for some of the future work. Isaacson Steel will be fabricating steel needed for the project and AJ Coleman of Conway will be pouring the foundations.
2. **Assure Safety:** RMT has prepared a safety plan and has met with local EMT personnel. For the public's safety, Dummer Pond Road will be open at times and closed at times depending on project construction. There will be a website and an 800 number that the public can access to get information about road closings.

BUILDING PERMITS:

1. **Millsfield: Granite Reliable Power, LLC Application for Owl Head Meteorological Tower.** Pip Decker explained that the previous 6 temporary towers will be taken down. This permanent tower off Phillips Brook Road will be constructed after the wind turbines are installed. It is a self-supporting tower on Owl Head with no guy wires. John Scarinza asked for the height of the tower and Pip replied 260' and that it is part of the footprint of the project site. Fred King stated that he understood that ISO New England asked for this tower to be erected so that it could transmit wind velocity data. Pip explained that they need information both an hour ahead and a day ahead.

Fred King made a motion to approve the building permit. Bing Judd seconded the motion. With no further discussion, all voted in favor of the application with the exception of Rick Tillotson who abstained.

Fred King asked the RMT representatives to rate this project on a scale of 1-10. Mr. Hendley replied that he would rate project difficulty at an 8. He added that Ed Butauski has ridgeline construction experience in Utah and that the RMT rule is to "stay safe". He also remarked that the quality of labor up here is super. The biggest challenge they have is to blast a lot of boulders. There will be 6 drilling rigs on site and a tight schedule.

Jonathan Frizzell noted that the Planning Board does not have much say in the permitting process but wondered if there were any complaints from state agencies with regard to the land clearing operation. Pip replied that there had been no complaints.

2. **Cambridge: William W. Bonney – 50' x 40' two story garage.** Board members had reviewed the completed application in advance of the meeting. Bing Judd made a motion to approve the building permit. Rick Tillotson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

HEARING OF THE PUBLIC:

Edith Tucker, *Coös County Democrat*, stated that she appreciated the seating arrangement for Board members at this meeting as no one's back was to the public and it was much easier to hear the discussion.

TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The Board did not schedule another meeting. A meeting will be convened when there is business to come before the Board.

ADJOURNMENT:

Bing Judd made a motion to adjourn. Mike Waddell seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne L. Collins, Clerk

Attachments: David Publicover, AMC Memo on Land Conservation in Coös County
Thomas Wagner, White Mountain National Forest Letter