

Amherst Mountains Community Forest
Meeting with Amherst Committee
June 3, 2010 10:00 a.m.
Amherst Town Hall and 9-25 Road

BPL staff met with the Amherst Community Forest Committee (the local advisory committee). The meeting was requested by the Committee to discuss their comments on the First Draft of the Management Plan and other management issues.

Attendees: Chuck Simpson, BPL Eastern Region Lands Manager; Misha Mytar, BPL Senior Planner; Tom Charles, BPL Chief of Silviculture; Steve Shepard, Chair, Amherst Community Forest Committee; Neil Butler, Vice- Chair, Amherst Community Forest Committee; Aram Calhoun, Amherst Community Forest Committee; Mike Pomroy, Selectman, Town of Amherst; Marilyn and Louis Peterson, Amherst residents; Alan Hutchinson, FSM Executive Director; Kris Hoffman, FSM Forestland Steward. Phil Deckers, Selectman, Town of Amherst, joined us near the end of the field trip.

Introductions and welcome

The group went around the room with introductions. Steve Shepard thanked everyone for coming and gave a brief summary of the Committee's reasons for requesting the meeting.

The meeting covered four topics:

- The Town's expectations of the community forest agreement.
- BPL timber management practices– including how Visual and Wildlife Allocations affect yields and revenue.
- The draft boundaries of the Backcountry Recreation Area - especially near Bald Mountain and the 9-25 Road.
- Management of the 9-25 road.

The Town's expectations of the community forest agreement.

Neil Butler explained that many residents see the inclusion of the area between Bald Mtn and Haynes Brook in the Non-mechanized Backcountry Recreation allocation as part of a steady depletion of land allocated for timber management. At early stages in the pre-acquisition planning, there were discussions of allocating 1,200 acres as reserve. Later in the process, maps were circulated which proposed an estimated 1,600 acre reserve. The First Draft of the Management Plan proposes that timber management be disallowed on over 1,800 acres. Timber revenue to offset lack of tax revenue is a critical goal for Amherst residents and this committee.

Misha Mytar reminded the group that the Concept Plan agreement describes that roughly 2,000 acres would be managed for ecological protection and backcountry recreation and roughly 3,000 acres will remain as managed forest. The First Draft of Management Plan meets these guidelines.

Neil acknowledged the 2,000 acre guideline but explained that many people in Amherst understood that the reserve might *grow* to reach 2,000 acres with potential addition of nearby conservation projects.

Alan Hutchinson provided some additional perspective on this issue – explaining that, although FSM's map was not part of the official agreement, it was the “map on the wall” at community

meetings with an explanation about how the boundaries were not finalized and the acreages were only estimates.

BPL timber management practices– including how Visual and Wildlife Allocations affect yields and revenue.

Committee members raised questions about how Wildlife and Visual allocations would impact potential revenues from timber harvests. Tom Charles gave some background information on the Bureau's IRP, explaining the principle of dominant and secondary uses. He explained that it makes sense to think of the Wildlife management as dominant to timber management and it does often change the management practices. However, under the Visual allocations, Timber Management is still the dominant use, it is simply implemented with visual considerations. He explained that the Committee could expect harvest levels and revenues under both these allocations types similar to BPL harvests in Timber dominant areas. Tom and Chuck Simpson gave several examples from other Units, explaining that the main impact of visual considerations is how roads and plots are designed to blend in the landscape.

The draft boundaries of the Backcountry Recreation Area - especially near Bald Mountain and the 9-25 Road.

Several members of the group requested more information about how the Non-mechanized Backcountry Recreation boundaries were designed.

Misha explained the boundaries were designed to: 1) encompass sensitive natural features, 2) encompass watershed areas, 3) minimize the edge to core ratio, and 4) follow natural features or straight lines when possible to facilitate translation on the ground. The red-pine woodland, wetlands around Haynes Brook and the edge/interior considerations are what led the Bureau to include this area in the Backcountry Recreation allocation.

The group acknowledged the importance of these features but urged the Bureau to consider whether careful timber management practices could offer adequate protection. The group agreed that it would be help to be able to see all these features overlaid with allocation boundaries in the next iteration of the plan.

Chuck encouraged the committee to consider not only the potential revenues but also the costs of managing timber on this approximately 100-acre area. The additional length of management road would typically require grading every three years and occasional larger repairs. The Bureau and the Town may find that the potential harvest revenue may not be worth the expense over a typical 20 year cycle

Management of the 9-25 road.

Misha explained that the management plan would not prescribe exactly how access would be managed on the 9-25 might be blocked. Instead, the management plan would identify the issues for Chuck and his staff to monitor and react appropriately to.

Several members of the Committee explained that locals value the access this road provides to the interior of the parcel. Although the Committee agrees that the 9-25 road should be designated as a Management Road rather than a Public Use Road, they would like to see shared use by vehicles and ATVs continue as long as the roads remain passable.

Alan reminded the group that a Concept Plan Map was also presented to Amherst residents that suggested which roads might be managed for motorized uses. Those maps marked the entire 9-25 road as “potential non-motorized access”.

Chuck explained that the Bureau is committed to exemplary management practices on its Public Lands. There are areas where this road presents significant management concerns that could lead to unauthorized access to non-motorized areas, environmental violations and costly maintenance.

The meeting moved outside to the 9-25 Road to look at some of these areas. The group took a rainy tour of both forks of the 9-25 road. Misha took GPS points and photographs. Discussions focused on access to specific portions of the 9-25 road. There was agreement in principal that the east fork of the 9-25 road may need to be closed to vehicle traffic to protect the sensitive natural community on Bald Mountain. In addition to the Y, an area along the east fork where the road quality changes was identified as a potential turn-around/stopping point. On the west fork, the group looked at two specific areas– a steep section just before a log yard that could make a good turnaround spot and a further potential turnaround area flagged by the planning board. There was general agreement that the western fork should be ditched and graded to allow for access beyond the Y. The final management plan allocations and more detailed cost information are needed to inform how far this road should be improved and maintained.

Wrap-up

Misha gave a summary of next steps for the management planning timeline.

- The Final Draft will be available in mid-June.
- A Public Meeting on the Final Draft will be held in early July followed by a two-week comment period.
- The Final Plan will be drafted and adopted in July.

Chuck reminded the Committee that the Bureau has been awarded LMF access funds to address some of the road management issues and he expects to have some road work completed this season.

Meeting notes compiled by Misha Mytar.