

Town of Randolph

Planning Board Minutes

April 11, 2024 - draft

Members Present: June Hammond Rowan, Robert Ross, Tim Mather, Michele Cormier, William Demers, and Kevin Rousseau

Members Excused: None

Public Present: Kathleen Kelley, Mark Kelley, Paul Jadis, Barbara Arnold, Bill Arnold, David DeGruttola, Richard Umiker, Ginny Umiker, Paul Cormier, Toni Koval, Maggie Baker, Jeremiah Hawkins, Gary Newfield, David Willcox, Chris Hawkins, Tami Hartley, Regina Ferreira, John Phinney, Steve Logue, Dennis Pednault, Philip Guiser, Susan Turner, Sam Trombley, Alexandra Roberts, Stu Hickey, Colin Higdon, Drew Zimmer, Jennifer Scarinza, Sue Wemyss, Howard Wemyss, Jason Hunter, David Willcox, and Shelli Fortin, Minutes Taker

1. Call to Order

June Hammond Rowan called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

2. Roll Call

3. Review of Minutes

On a motion by Robert Ross, seconded by Tim Mather, the Board voted to accept the minutes of the March 7, 2024, meeting as presented. Cormier - abstain

4. Communications to the Board

Several communications were received in reference to the public hearing on the glades and will be shared at that time.

5. Report of Officers and Committees

a. Selectboard

Paul Jadis noted that they have met with Gorham in reference to the communications tower, and that a clear line of boundaries and responsibilities will be defined for both the work and the cost for the repeater.

b. Randolph Forest Commission

Tim Mather advised that the Stewardship Plan is completed. Mather noted that they have been struggling with a timber harvest due to the mild winters, and this area still needs to be finished. They may choose a smaller area next year and finish this area when the winter allows.

6. Applications

There were no new applications.

7. Public Hearings

a. Use of the Randolph Community Forest for glade skiing and Granite State Backcountry Alliance's role in managing this use

June Hammond Rowan noted that the Planning Board has the role of approving Activity Manager agreements in the Community Forest, along with the Stewardship Plan, and the Community Forest budget.

Hammond Rowan reviewed the timeline of glade skiing in the Community Forest, which goes back to 2011 when several local people began cutting an area for glade skiing. An amendment to the Stewardship Plan was approved by the Planning Board in 2017 formalizing backcountry glade skiing as an allowed use. The Planning Board also approved an Activity Manager Agreement with Granite Backcountry Alliance (GBA) allowing them to manage ~75 acres on south-facing slopes between and below Mounts Crescent and Randolph for backcountry skiing in winter months. The Activity Manager agreement, which is available on the Forest Commission's website, lists the town's responsibilities to make the area available by allowing parking and plowing the parking lot. Hammond Rowan noted that the town has paid \$430 per winter over six winters for plowing from the Highway budget. The goal of GBA is to maintain the area and work with the Town Forester on placing trails. GBA is also responsible for monitoring the use, publishing rules, using restraint in publicizing, and reporting activities to the town.

June Hammond Rowan opened the Public Hearing at 7:11 pm.

Hammond Rowan asked GBA members in attendance about membership and costs, and was advised they have about 2,000 members and an annual membership costs \$35. GBA maintains 17 glade sites. GBA does not have paid staff, but does contract with Backyard Concepts, LLC for administrative and other tasks such as membership, fundraising, marketing, and communications. However, the lion share of the work is done by volunteers.

GBA had submitted a letter to the Planning Board that summarizes what they have done to meet the requirements of the agreement. (See Attached Letter) Drew Zimmer advised that their objective is to listen to concerns and explore options to improve conditions. Zimmer advised that they have brought on local members to help actively manage the zone. Zimmer stated that speeding and parking have been concerns, and noted that it seems someone is trying to actively subvert their work to address the problems by removing signs, which has been a challenge for them. Zimmer noted that in their letter they offer solutions including better communication, a local management team, and a remedy for the parking situation. Zimmer noted that GBA is committed and prepared to come up with solutions to the problems. Zimmer stated that severing the agreement may make the situation worse, as people will not forget about the skiing.

When asked about the number of people who use the area, GBA advised that they do have a trail counter, but they have not collected the data from 2023 or 2024. Hammond Rowan

noted that a graphic on GBA's website states there were 1,706 visitors from December 1 through April 30 in 2019. Hammond Rowan noted that if there were 25 good ski days, this is approximately 68 people per day. GBA said they would get data for the past two seasons and send to the Planning Board.

Sam Trombley, the Marketing Manager for GBA, noted that they communicate to members how to use the glades and practice stewardship. Trombley noted that they do not post specific pictures of areas, however members have access to a forum in which glade users can comment. Ski ambassadors do post about conditions and parking.

GBA noted that in the fall, they promote glade days to cut and maintain trails. Next year they plan to have new tools to divert traffic and let skiers know when the area is full.

Hammond Rowan asked how often GBA has worked with the Town Forester. GBA advised they have not in recent years, and believe the last time was 2022. GBA noted that they are not actively cutting or affecting the ecology. Town Forester, David DeGruttola, noted that from a natural resource management perspective, there are no threatened species and users seem to be sticking to established trails. DeGruttola noted that he has not seen any degradation of the site and nothing of value has been removed. DeGruttola stated that there is not a call for active forest management in that resource area.

Tim Mather stated that GBA knew of these concerns in the fall. Zimmer noted that they did take action then to bring in local residents to manage the glade as volunteers. Zimmer stated that GBA is prepared to make this area a priority moving forward.

June Hammond Rowan advised that letters concerning the glades were received from Ben Phinney, Gary Newfield, Harriet Phinney, Jeremiah Hawkins, The Randolph Society for the Advancement of Backcountry Skiing, Jeremy Sherman, Nathan Howells, Claude Muff, Kyle Huston, Doug Mayer, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs, and USFS Saco Ranger District. (See Attached Letters)

Barbara Arnold noted that when this began it was a nightmare, but the last year or two it has been better. There was an incident with rescuing an injured snowmobiler and skier's cars presented problems for the ambulance and other rescuers accessing the end of Randolph Hill Road. Ms. Arnold noted that the cars are not equipped for backcountry areas, most are from out-of-state, and locals do not go on weekends anymore as it is too crowded. Ms. Arnold also noted concerns about guides making money by using public land.

Bill Arnold noted that he has been skiing here since the 1980's. It has become a developed ski area. Mr. Arnold noted that the signs that were installed with GBA on them were stolen, but the new ones without the name have not been. Mr. Arnold noted that a lot of people have been upset about the amount of people using the area.

Regina Ferreira stated that she feels it has gotten worse. Ms. Ferreira asked if other glade areas were located on a dead end, and GBA advised they are. Ms. Ferreira stated that this is not what they had in mind when the parking lot was constructed by the Town for outdoor recreation, and it is not working.

Chris Hawkins read a prepared letter:

Many years ago, a ragtag group of area skiers invested countless hours establishing premier glade skiing on the south facing slopes of Mt. Crescent and Randolph (The Glades). This low-key group, along with many volunteers, worked diligently. The Planning Board chose not to work with the pioneer group as the activity manager for The Glades. Instead, a Cooperative Agreement with the Planning Board and Granite Backcountry Alliance was signed. Since then, skiing on The Glade has exploded. Many unforeseen issues have cropped up, such as inadequate parking, vehicles traveling on Randolph Hill Road at excessive speeds, and indirect monetizing activities drawing many skiers here. One key paragraph contained in the Cooperative Agreement is: "To recommend that groups of skiers be limited to ten persons and to use restraint in publicizing the opportunity offered by the Glade with the aim of preventing overuse." The Glades and supporting infrastructure have an overuse problem. A rethinking of The Glade management is needed. I propose the termination clause be invoked: "Either party may terminate the CA for any reason with six month's written notice to the other...". AND the Planning Board bring back management of The Glades to local control and pursue a Cooperative Agreement with the original pioneers. Take Back the Glades! The Planning Board may also want to consider additional steps, such as closing The Glades for the upcoming ski season and ask the Town not to plow the parking lot. Thank you for allowing me to comment.

John Phinney noted that he recently had an experience with unkind skiers in the parking lot. Overuse has been rampant, publicity is all over the internet, and the infrastructure cannot handle it.

Gary Newfield stated that he understood the complaints of the residents of Randolph Hill Road, however the use is for a short period of time when they have storms. Newfield noted that local businesses would not survive without tourists. Newfield stated that a cooling off period will not stop some skiers, as the cat is out of the bag, and we need to find a way to deal with it. Newfield noted that this area needs to welcome people that will keep businesses, such as Big Day and The Bear in Gorham, open.

Jeremiah Hawkins noted that GBA started out as a non-profit to help with the glades, and became a non-profit managed by a for-profit company. Hawkins noted that he is trying to get a small group retake the management of the glades. Hawkins noted that there has been a lot of time to address the issues, since 2018, and nothing has happened. Hawkins noted the local volunteer group is willing and able to manage the glades, and has some good ideas for signage to help with the problems.

Paul Cormier stated that the town has no obligation to plow or have the ski area, it is a nice amenity. Cormier noted that he can see the advantages of having visitors to the area, but it is overused.

Paul Jadis asked what difference there is between hikers in the summer and backcountry skiers in the winter. It was noted that there are more hiking trails available, as well as parking. There are also no plowing issues. It was noted that there are parking issues at Appalachia. June Hammond Rowan noted that hiking is managed by the White Mountain National Forest, who have staff and resources that Randolph does not.

Bill Arnold noted that the parking area for the glades has barrier rocks in the lower section, as it was not originally planned to be plowed. Mr. Arnold asked where the money was going for GBA, and was advised the IRS form 990 is available online as public information.

Drew Zimmer stated that GBA has a lot of glade zones, and their membership model is similar to other non-profit organizations. Zimmer noted that GBA does donate to other charities, does plow some areas, and provides portable restrooms at some locations. Zimmer noted that they will increase transparency of how the money is spent, but it is line with other non-profits. Zimmer noted that they do have locals involved, are willing to look at signage, can help to divert skiers to other glades, and look at other parking options. They are also willing to invest by helping to pay for plowing. Zimmer noted that GBA has the resources to address the problems. Zimmer noted that they can find reasonable solutions, and still help to power the local economy.

Bill Arnold stated that they need to look at helping to undo what has been done.

Tim Mather noted that they cannot handle any more traffic that they already have, as the area is stressed.

When asked about the numbers of the Visitor Spending Profile that was provided, Zimmer noted that they hired a consulting firm, SE Group, that came up with the numbers. Hammond Rowan requested a copy of the study. The Visitor Spending Profile suggests that the Crescent Ridge Zone helps to support 2.8 full-time jobs, \$95,000 in sales, and \$21,300 in tax revenues annually in the area.

Stu Hickey noted that he would love to figure out a solution. Hickey stated that nobody was prepared for the overuse, as the pandemic added to the issue with skiers finding other outlets for activity. Hickey stated that they would like to pull parking off of Randolph Hill Road entirely.

June Hammond Rowan noted that the GBA letter lists solutions such as communication, a facilitator, management rules, developing a new parking area on Durand Road, applying for grants for funding to improve infrastructure, a glade management team, and a fee for guides.

John Phinney noted that all of the solutions require resources. He asked if GBA would fund tow trucks and law enforcement for the parking and speeding issues.

Drew Zimmer noted that GBA could not afford police services, but could possibly help with towing charges.

Jeremiah Hawkins stated that the solution is putting the management of the glade in local hands.

Howard Wemyss noted that there is emotion based on the last two storms, but there have been years of cooperation between the Forest Commission and GBA. Wemyss stated that he hopes they are not seriously considering terminating the agreement, as he has not heard anything that cannot be fixed. They need to discuss ideas.

Kevin Rousseau advised that he used to be the Road Agent for the town and has spoken with the Selectmen's office about the parking area. Rousseau noted that a tow truck will not remove a vehicle without law enforcement to approve it, and they do not currently have a police department.

GBA noted that they are a well-intentioned organization, and understand it has not turned out the way residents hoped. They noted that their mission is to try to do good for the ski community and the local community and would like to have a year to try to fix the problems. GBA noted there will be no hard feelings if the Board chooses to terminate the agreement.

Two other problems, human waste and dogs, were noted.

With no further comments, Hammond Rowan closed the public hearing at 8:21 pm.

b. A Cooperative Forest Road Agreement between the Town of Randolph and the USDA, Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest

June Hammond Rowan opened the public hearing at 8:21 pm.

Hammond Rowan advised the agreement is for the Pond of Safety Road for the Forest Service to access WMNF land. The agreement lists the Randolph Town Hall, as that is the name used on the SAM.

With no further comments, Hammond Rowan closed the public hearing at 8:22 pm.

On a motion by Tim Mather, seconded by Michele Cormier, the Board voted unanimously to approve the Cooperative Forest Road Agreement between the Town of Randolph and the USDA, Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest as presented and to approve June Hammond Rowan signing on behalf of the Planning Board.

c. Stewardship Plan for the Randolph Community Forest

June Hammond Rowan opened the public hearing at 8:24 pm.

Hammond Rowan noted there have been some discrepancies in the number of acres. The number is now 11,247 +/- acres.

The Stewardship Plan was compiled by David DeGruttola of LandVest and will cover the years 2023-2033. The Forest Commission is responsible to the State of NH, who holds a conservation easement on the original land in the Community Forest. The new lands that have been added are not under the same easement, but should be managed as if they were. Hammond Rowan noted that items addressed in the plan since the draft were more information on revenues and lease terms for the maple taps, recreation information, and new maps, including maps on forestation and soils. David DeGruttola advised that the maps will delineate the non-eased parcels, except the Potter piece which has a Fish and Game easement. DeGruttola advised that Potter easement is not as in-depth as the one for the Community Forest.

Mr. DeGruttola noted that the Stewardship Plan is a living document, and it can be amended as conditions change.

It was noted that the Stewardship Plan will also need to be approved by the State of NH Division of Forests and Lands.

Mark Kelley noted that the Stewardship Plan will be posted on the Forest Commission website.

There being no further comments, the public hearing was closed at 8:34 pm.

On a motion by Kevin Rousseau, seconded by Tim Mather, the Board voted unanimously to approve the 2023-2033 Stewardship Plan for the Randolph Community Forest and to allow Mark Kelley and June Hammond Rowan to sign.

8. Other Business

a. Selection of Officers

On a motion by Kevin Rousseau, seconded by Tim Mather, the Board voted unanimously to appoint June Hammond Rowan as Chair and Robert Ross as Vice Chair.

b. 2024 Land Use Ordinance

June Hammond Rowan distributed copies of the revised Land Use Ordinance.

Votes for the removal of kennels as a use allowed by special exception were 48 for and 28 against. Votes for solar being an allowed use were 71 for and 9 against.

c. Planning Board Alternate Members

The Board discussed alternate members, and June Hammond Rowan will reach out to see if there is interest.

d. Other

June Hammond Rowan advised that she did reach out to the Town Attorney to attend the May meeting to review updates to the law. Hammond Rowan also suggested that they review the Planning Board's role with the Community Forest. Tim Mather also suggested reviewing short-term rentals. It was also suggested that Activity Manager agreements be reviewed by the Town Attorney, as liability could be an issue and the Town cannot insure private property that they do not own.

Robert Ross asked about road bans and when they will be lifted. Michele Cormier advised it is 60 days from posting, unless extended by the Town. Cormier advised the ban should be lifted around May 1, and the Town may decide to open paved roads at that time and not dirt roads. This will depend on conditions.

9. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

10. Adjournment

On a motion by Tim Mather, seconded by Robert Ross, the Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelli Fortin

April 13, 2024