

**McLean Land Management Committee  
Conservation-focus meeting  
March 18, 2008**

LMC members attending: Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Martha Moore, Carla Moynihan, Richard Pichette, Michele Gougeon, Steve Kidder, Andy Healy, Wes Ward

Chairman Ellen O'Brien Cushman convened the meeting at 7:07 pm. Ellen then provided a brief introduction including background, rules, where reports and info are found and thanked residents who have participated so far, even providing additional conservation experts for this evening.

**Conservation Professionals - Participants:**

Gary Claiborne – Pressley Associates

Richard Kirby – LEC Environmental Consultant, Inc

Jeff Collins – Massachusetts Audubon Extension Service

Roger Wrubel - Massachusetts Audubon at Habitat

Mary Rimmer – Rimmer Environmental Consulting (REC)

Gregory Mertz, DVM – Director of the New England Wildlife Center

**Each of the consultants above spoke for 5 minutes for overall comment about the trails plans developed by Pressley & LEC:**

Rich Kirby – Goal was to limit habitat fragmentation, maximize habitat cohesiveness. Specific example of this was closing trail #2.

Jeff Collins – Trying to transfer the extensive knowledge Audubon has acquired to other properties. Pressley did a great job. Agrees with the 2 goals stated by Rich Kirby but he's concerned about : spur trails that deadend near the wetland, like trail E, concerned about existing trails that cross areas that are seasonally wet (Jeff recommends boardwalk and structure to allow the flow of both water and wildlife) and Trail 1 erosion and drainage. The parking lot above Trail 1 is contributing a lot of water draining channeling down the trail and robs the downslope forest from water. Want to push the water across the trails to feed the downslope. Changes to A,B and C for leveling are okay but watch for potential less-common botanicals to be present in those types of soils. Finally, reducing fragmentation conflicts with the creation of trail 12A and could cause negative impact.

Roger Wrubel – His neighbor/expertise in small open space management with issues of dogs, bikes, etc. Human influences have existed for more than 100 years on this property and it's part of the Western Greenway. These issues can be controlled to minimize impact.

Mary Rimmer – Concur with all the things said so far. We need to value the connections as well as showing the areas as stand alones. There is a huge diversity of wildlife and plant life there. Lots of trails now. Should limit access by reducing the number of trail heads. Start with a smaller number of trails and can add later. Review the conditions and impact yearly and make changes right away if warranted. Trail proposal 12A is a fragmenter .. construction of this trail will create disturbance. Improve the vista/view, don't detract from it by placing 12A. Consider moving that proposed trail to the back of the great meadow near the vernal pool woodland/meadow border. Boardwalks (fibergrate) are an alternative to turnpiking as Jeff suggested.

Greg Mertz – three items : Woodlands are important for wildlife, right now they're balanced but there is virtually no understory. Local management is the best way to watch for indicators of change. McLean open space is key for health of all Belmont neighborhoods and beyond. Collectively interactive food web is moderately balanced. Bat houses are on the property right now. We look for healthy environments to have three horizontal layer (groundcover, understory and overstory). Width of the trails are based upon historic and current use, back to the 1800s. Noted Olmstead's design influences of path system, roads. Overall, a pretty healthy habitat now. [Corrected later by Wes, Rich, Ruth Foster and McLean officials that Olmstead influenced but did not design McLean]

#### General property/trails comments:

Bob Delise – Bob is a forecaster. He believes that the number of abutters actually drives the demand and will do so in the future. The current demand is not indicative of the future. There are 100 + direct abutters currently. Construction adds Freedom commons (400 units), Woodlands (121 units) total comes close to 1000 people. Usage will go up, perhaps 6 fold. [ Ellen later noted that the current abutters shown does not yet include the Kendall Gardens neighborhood, McLean Hospital staff and the Audubon Road, lower Concord Ave/Mill Street neighborhoods that abut. That raises the baseline significantly]

Mary Rimmer and Greg Mertz – lots of dead trees around the forest. Leave them as habitat for the understory creatures and plant life.

Neighbors – should not have bikes, have erosion problems and safety conflicts all the time.

Harlan Carere – Doesn't allowing biking on the property automatically conflict with conservation values and degrade the environment, particularly?

Jeff Collins – actually the erosion is mostly from water running down the trails, not bikes. There aren't brake markings and don't see additional side trails as a result. No real "proof" that responsible biking degrades trails and environment any more than just pedestrians.

Mary Rimmer – agrees with Jeff – if you take precautions and mark trails, both bikes and pedestrians can co-exist on the property/trails. Watch for a demographic shift and constantly monitor the property though so prepared to change if necessary.

Nanny Almquist – should do a current user survey. She never really sees anyone up there

Ellen Cushman – We had planned to do a user survey, with TTOR's expertise and advice. Combined with a demand forecast and the external information Carla has been collecting, we should be able to get our arms around it.

Carla Moynihan – Have gathered info from 10 properties and will be prepared to share with the LMC to help in decision making about specifics. Gave some examples

Gret Mertz – As interest in the property increases, the damage could happen. Saw some tracks in the wet areas. If it's a destination for bikes, he believes they could damage the property. If it's more of a pass-through, less impact.

Mr. Dreier – Some of the smaller trails are nice. Prefer to keep Lone Tree Hill trails for pedestrians only.

Graham Allison – Using Jim Wilson’s graffiti metaphor. How can we screw this up? By fragmentation of habitat, noise, trash and compromised safety. How will we prevent this from happening and who will do it? Need simple rules with strong enforcement

Liz Allison - Suggest Carla talk to Paul Sutton of Boston Parks and Recreation about “Urban Wilds”. They have seven standard plans for maintenance they use. Also: concerned that if bikes are officially permitted, we need to be careful about not allowing that designation to get on public maps. Once it’s on the public map/websites, the use will increase.

Tom Grimble – Impact of mountain bikes on ecology. Cited a couple of studies from 1995, Science Research. Showing off-road impacts. Also, Environmental Management in 2001. Will make them available if requested. Enforcement will be an enormous burden should LMC decide to close all the trails to bikes, as they’ve been using them unfettered for decades now. Overall, seeing a decline in mountain biking popularity.

Sergio Brosio – His children and neighbors share the opinion that conservation land is not for bikes.

**Specific Trail Comments – By area: - All areas were open for discussion, only those shown had specific comments :**

**Eastern Woods**

Harlan Carere – Wants to understand why trail A and trail B exist?

Gary Claiborne – they already exist, they’re very pleasant and offer a better reroute for erosion problems

Roger Wrubel – speaking purely ecologically, would abandon those trails. Must balance the values for adaptive management by monitoring and making changes.

**Pine Allee**

Jeff Collins - need an improved connection from the Pine Allee to trail 10 near the tower.

Remove the dead pine trees and consider the long term evolution of the pines and effect of the dense shade.

Tom Grimble – Do not do trail 12 A., agrees entirely with Jeff Collins. But still need a multi-use connection to trail 11.

Jeff Collins – maybe a little cure behind the bench, not near the vernal pool and woods.

Dix Campbell – should forego trail 12A *alternate route proposed.*

Graham Allison – conflicts of pedestrians and bikes are bad, should minimize

Harlan Carere – Limit impact of bikes should you choose to allow them at all

Jeff Collins – Can control the impacts by looking at carrying capacity. There definitely is excess capacity now. No increase in negative impact to environment by bikes is proven.

Roger Wrubel – accepts multi-use trails now, have a historical basis for continuing multi-use, act cooperatively

Mary Rimmer – certain parts are okay. Use rules and enforcement

Greg Mertz – Any use at all has an impact on the environment. If no trails, that’s’ the least impact. More trails, more people, more impact.

Nanny Almquist. – leave things as they are and start to monitor regularly before doing anything

Anne Paulsen – Ongoing maintenance, evaluation and care are critical.

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