



RIVERS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
NH Rivers Management and Protection Program



New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services
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DRAFT

RMAC MEETING MINUTES

August 10, 2023, 9:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Exeter Town Offices - Novak Room, 10 Front Street, Exeter, NH

Members Present

Michele L. Tremblay, Chair
Larry Spencer, Vice Chair
Peter Bowman
Christopher Hodgdon
John Magee
Frederick McNeill
Cory Ritz (*online*)
Mitchell Thayer
Donald Ware

Representing

Conservation Community
NH Association of Conservation Comm.
Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources
NH Fish & Game Commission
Executive Director, Fish & Game Dept.
Municipal Government
Local River Management Advisory Comm.
Business and Industry Association
Public Water Suppliers

Term

Dec. 28, 2023 V
Oct. 12, 2025 V
Indefinite NV
Sept. 28, 2024 V
Indefinite NV
Nov. 16, 2023 V
Sept. 5, 2025 V
Sept. 28, 2025 V
Sept. 28, 2025 V

Members Absent

Austin Brown
Jennifer Gilbert
Mark Hemmerlein
Madeleine Mineau
Robert Roseen
Allen Wyman
Vacant
Vacant

Department of Safety
Director, Office of Strategic Initiatives
Commissioner, NHDOT
Granite State Hydropower Assoc.
Recreational Interests
Dept. of Agr, Markets, & Food
Historical and Archeological Interests
Agricultural Community

Indefinite NV
Indefinite NV
Indefinite NV
Jan. 5, 2024 V
Dec. 28, 2023 V
Indefinite NV
June 15, 2025 V
March 22, 2021 V

NHDES Staff Present

Amanda Barker-Jobin
Tracie Sales

Rivers and Lakes Management and Protection Programs
Rivers and Lakes Management and Protection Programs

Guests

Shane Bradt
Doug Eastman
Eric Hutchins
John Mullen Jr.
Kristen Murphy
Conor O'Donnell
Therese Thompson

UNH Cooperative Extension
Town of Exeter
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Cocheco River Local Advisory Committee
Town of Exeter
NH Fish & Game Department
Lamprey River Local Advisory Committee

I. Introductions and Agenda Overview

Chair Michele L. Tremblay called the meeting to order for informational purposes at 9:07 AM. Michele asked RMAC representatives, staff, and guests to introduce themselves. Michele officially called the meeting to order for business at 9:11 AM upon confirmation of a quorum of voting members.

II. Review Decisions and Action Items from April 10, 2023, Meeting

Michele reviewed action items from the April meeting, most of which were completed. The outstanding items included membership renewals for Michele L. Tremblay and Fred McNeill and posting of Jennifer Gilbert's NH Floodplain Management Program presentation on the RMAC website.

III. Acceptance of the Consent Agenda

- ***Fred McNeill made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda, consisting of the April 10, 2023, Draft RMAC Meeting Minutes, the 2023 DOT SLR North Conway Housing proposal, and the 2023 DOT SLR Conway Housing proposal. The motion was seconded by Larry Spencer and passed unanimously by roll call vote.***

IV. RMAC/LMAC State Lands Mapper

Michele introduced Shane Bradt of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and former representative on the Lakes Management Advisory Committee. Michele described the three main purposes of this project as: 1) To have a complete list of the state-owned lands within RMAC jurisdiction, prioritized with dispositions so that the RMAC can approach Governor and Council to have action taken on them; 2) To be able to respond quickly if the RMAC is asked to respond to a proposed land disposal between meetings; 3) To have detailed information available, in addition to the packages provided, when reviewing surplus land disposals, allowing the RMAC to be proactive, rather than reactive.

Michele thanked the joint subcommittee members Cory Ritz, Chris Hodgdon, John Magee, Mark Hemmerlein, Shane and Larry for their work. She identified the goals of the presentation as: to show the pilot program results, see how the mapper works, and vote on the joint subcommittee's recommendations for Sullivan County. Michele referenced the spreadsheet with the scoring and recommendations for state owned properties in Sullivan County.

To create the state-owned lands mapper tool, Shane worked with the committees to identify the information that the RMAC and LMAC would need to make their determinations. Mark compiled the parcels relevant to the committees and developed the scoring mechanism for each of the ten evaluation criteria for the individual parcels. Shane designed the mapper interface to allow individuals with limited GIS experience to navigate to different parcels and look at their characteristics.

Mark is currently the only one with edit access for the data, but discussions are ongoing about who will have edit access and be responsible for maintenance. Fred asked how the data will be updated as new information becomes available. Cory said the three things needed for updates to occur are time, access, and assigned responsibility. Larry suggested that the joint subcommittee could be responsible for identifying when data needs to be updated. Shane noted that there is a disclaimer on the map, but we need to define where the data came from and when it was last updated.

Chris asked about showing contiguous stated owned land that is not within RMAC/LMAC jurisdiction for determining the value of adjacent land for the purposes of wildlife management. Shane said the data is available but would need to be added and it would not have the scoring information of the parcels near rivers and lakes.

- ***Don Ware made a motion that there is consensus on the process and to allow the joint subcommittee to continue the process. Fred McNeill seconded the motion and it was passed with a unanimous roll call vote.***
- ***Larry Spencer made a motion to accept the recommendations of the subcommittee for Sullivan County. Don Ware seconded and the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.***

V. Surplus Land Disposals

2023 DOT SLR Milford

Tracie presented a proposal for NHDOT to grant a 0.65-acre easement for a pump station and access road for Milford's town water supply. The parcel is located at the intersection of Route 101 and Route 101A. The scrub grass property is adjacent to a shopping area and is separated from the Souhegan River by an active railroad. Souhegan River LAC (SoRLAC) stated that the proposed project will have a relatively low impact and they are fine with the easement. They pointed out that the area is polluted with trash so they are hopeful that the proposed project might help mitigate that. SoRLAC requested that best management practices be used to address stormwater runoff during and after construction.

- ***Larry Spencer made a motion to recommend disposal of the parcel. Motion was seconded by Chris Hodgdon and passed unanimously by roll call vote, with Don Ware abstaining due to his involvement with the project.***

2023 DOT SLR Conway Trail Easement

Amanda Barker-Jobin presented the proposal for NHDOT to grant an easement to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) near the Saco River in Conway. The easement will provide DNCR with long-term access to maintain the existing snowmobile trail. It will measure approximately 30 feet wide and runs approximately five miles. The easement will run through several state-owned parcels acquired by DOT for the Conway By-Pass project, which was not constructed.

The current trail system has several existing stream and wetland crossings and proposes crossing the Saco River with a new bridge. Several RMAC members expressed concern regarding the construction methods and condition of the existing crossings and would like to see them improved, especially with a likely increase in use. Chris discussed the need to maintain stream habitat connectivity at crossing locations, especially in watersheds that are conducive to the reproduction of cold-water fish species.

- ***Chris Hodgdon made a motion to recommend disposal with the condition that all stream crossings use best practices for stream conductivity, erosion control, and aquatic organism passage. Larry Spencer seconded the motion.***

The committee discussed the definition of best management practices and how it varies depending on the agency and use (NHDOT, agriculture, forestry). John explained that the specificity of the motion was important to make sure that the RMAC's concerns for stream conductivity and aquatic organism passage are maintained.

- ***Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.***

VI. 2023 River-related Legislation Results

Larry, Chair of the RMAC Policy and Legislation Subcommittee, presented a summary of the 2023 river-related legislation. There were twenty-four bills that were listed on the spreadsheet, including those pertinent to the LMAC. Out of the six bills where the RMAC expressed their support, five passed and one was retained in committee. The RMAC opposed five bills, none of which passed. Ten additional bills were tracked by the committee.

Tracie stated that two of the bills that passed were of particular interest to the RMAC. HB2 passed, providing funds for the PCB, PFAS, and cyanobacteria programs. The RMAC opposed requiring licensing for wetland scientists and that was stricken from the bill prior to approval. HB308, relative to quorums, has been signed by the governor and will take effect on October 3, 2023. This specifies that one-third of the body are required to be attending the meeting in person.

Michele thanked Larry, Fred, John, Don, and Madeleine Mineau for their work as part of the subcommittee. Larry expressed his gratitude for the support of NHDES Rivers and Lakes Programs staff, Nisa Marks.

VII. Exeter Great Dam Removal

Eric Hutchins, Habitat Restoration Biologist, of National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration described the lessons learned during the Exeter Great Dam removal process. He sends people interested in dam removals to Exeter to view because the site is in such a prominent location and involved so many stakeholders. Eric emphasized three main points: community support, infrastructure constraints and cultural resources.

According to Eric, this project is one of the best municipally led dam removal projects because of extensive education and outreach effort and the volunteer commitment. Challenges that needed to be addressed included Exeter's water supply intake, stormwater discharge pipes, an elderly housing building using river water for cooling, and the historical significance of the dam.

Conor O'Donnell, Marine Fisheries Biologist from New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, noted that diadromous fish such as river herring (especially alewives), sea lamprey, and American eels are found in this area but the Exeter Great Dam fish ladder was not very efficient in allowing fish to migrate past the dam.

Fish returns are monitored using timed fish counts during high tides. Recent counts have shown that the Exeter River now accounts for most of the river herring returns in New Hampshire. This is due to the removal of the dam, improvements made in fish counting methods, and the improved ability to make observations at the site.

Kristen Murphy, Conservation Sustainability Planner, of the Town of Exeter described the Great Dam removal from the perspective of the Town of Exeter. NHDES issued a Letter of Deficiency to the town regarding the Great Dam in 2000. This led to the establishment of a volunteer River Study Committee which Kristen cites it as a key part of the success of this project.

After initially being rejected by the Select Board, the proposal to remove the dam was brought before the town by a citizen's petition warrant article. It passed overwhelmingly. The time during construction was challenging because the project was loud, messy, and concerning since the river was dry due to drought. When the removal was complete and the rain finally came, people celebrated. The Alewife Festival has been reinvigorated and the alewife, the symbol on the town seal, return in great numbers to the freed river.

Michele thanked the three presenters. Fred asked about contractors involved, cost for removal and funding. The contractor was a Massachusetts firm that specializes in habitat restoration and the cost was estimated to be around \$2 million. Funding was comprised of NOAA funds, an ARM grant, a Section 106 grant, Hurricane Sandy grant money, and funds from the Town of Exeter. Eric said there are even more grants available for this type of project now.

VIII. Action Item Review

Michele reviewed the action items identified during the meeting:

1. Mapping Joint Subcommittee will incorporate comments from the RMAC and choose the next county to start working on.
2. SLR letters with RMAC's recommendations will be drafted by NHDES Rivers and Lakes Programs staff and sent to DOT.
3. Next meeting will be determined by legislative activity and will likely be in January.
 - ***Chris Hodgdon made a motion to adjourn the business meeting and proceed to the dam removal site. Fred McNeill seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.***

Chair Michele L. Tremblay adjourned the meeting at 11:45 AM.

Meeting summary prepared by Rivers Program staff.