

WEST TISBURY
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
July 27, 2021

Present: Whit Griswold, Angela Luckey, Donna Paulnock, Peter Rodegast, and Michael Turnell

Absent: John Brannon and Geraldine Brooks

Staff Present: Maria McFarland

Also present for all or part of the meeting: Simon Athearn

Whit Griswold called the meeting to order at 5:05 P.M. The meeting was held via Zoom in accordance with the Governor's order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A sec.20.

Minutes: The minutes of the July 13, 2021 were tabled to the next meeting.

Map 25 Lot 5/ 830 State Road/Athearn: Simon Athearn of Morning Glory Farm met with the board to discuss his request to pump water from a side channel of the Mill Brook for the irrigation of 6 acres of his sweet corn crop at the Square Field owned by Thomas Hickie. Two additional crops irrigated last year have a cover crop and do not need irrigation.

Using Simon's 2020 estimate of the volume of water needed to irrigate 8 acres at 393,120 gallons, he doesn't expect an increase because of the reduction in acreage in production. This year they have a more efficient sprinkler system which should have less leaks. Simon said they currently pump out of a side channel of the Mill Brook with an 18hp engine. They have a 3-inch intake pipe with a 2-screen manifold over it to keep out fish and vegetation. They need to pump up to an acre inch of water between July 28 and September 15.

Simon explained that he applied for a grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for a submerged well in 2020, but they did not receive one. Initially, the grant was denied because the Morning Glory farm ID number was outdated and the farm needed to be remapped. Once that was done, they submitted the application, but the funding for this type of project was no longer available.

NRCS staff have been on site and according to Simon, provided positive feedback. There is an existing NRCS management plan on this property but it doesn't cover water withdrawal pumping. Simon has completed the design work and done test holes for the location of the well. The board will write a letter in support the 2022 grant application. The next grant round begins January 1, 2022 and it is a rolling acceptance after that.

Commissioners Comments/ Questions:

Whit said he talked with Kent Healy and based on his calculations the requested withdrawal represents less than 1% of the flow in Mill Brook. According his math, he is fine with the withdrawal.

Simon said he could lose his crop if we were in a designated drought and the town didn't let him pump from the stream.

Angela asked Simon if the 393,120 gallons was the total amount of water or a per week estimate. It is the total based on the estimate from 2020 when they were irrigating 8 acres instead of 6. This year his system should work more efficiently. She also asked if Simon could keep track of the use and document it. Simon said he could.

Members briefly discussed the recent lack of rain and whether the island was in a true drought (one declared by DEP).

Peter said he would like to take a look at the site to see where the intake is. Simon gave directions. Peter said we should have the ability to revisit the approval if there is an official drought. Simon agreed.

Michael made a motion, seconded by Peter to approve the request of Morning Glory Farm to pump water from the Mill Brook for the purpose of irrigating 6 acres of sweet corn growing at Square Field. Roll Call Vote: Whit -aye, Donna- aye, Peter-aye and Michael -aye.

After the vote Angela said she spoke with Bill Wilcox who sits with Angela and Donna on the Mill Brook Watershed Management Committee. Angela said that according to Bill, they haven't collected enough flow data to know if the withdrawal has any impact.

New Business: None

Old Business:

Blackwater Brook/ Sampling for bacteria levels: Whit updated the board. He and Omar went out on July 19 and took water samples from 4 locations; just below Stone Bridge Road, Longview Road, Blackwater Hollow Road and the Lambert's Cove Road bridge. Members reviewed the results from the Aquinnah lab.

Whit said he thought the results were mildly useful information about what is going on. Bill Wilcox's review of the data showed it was too soon for a definitive pattern to show itself. In an email Bill wrote that, "There is a sensible change in the Enterococcus bacterial counts. Lowest at Stonebridge, furthest upstream. Reaching a peak at Blackwater Hollow below Runamuck (I believe) and declining somewhat to Longview and quite a bit lower at the Beach. Unfortunately, the E. coli breaks that pattern with the highest value being at Longview. Explanation of that ranges from a "pulse" of higher-level concentration moving downstream to a dead animal or fecal material entering the stream between Blackwater Hollow and Longview. That's just speculation".

Peter asked if this type of testing is the same as what is done at the outlet at Lambert's Cove Beach. Maria said she didn't know if the standards for fresh water quality in a stream are different than for a public swimming beach but the sampling method is the same.

Peter asked if we could ask Bill Wilcox to provide a more detailed review of the data. Maria will ask him.

The board discussed a second round of sampling and testing and whether to do the next round after a storm event. The first round was not done after a rain event so for consistency sake the second round will not be done after a rain event. It was agreed that a second round of samples will be done on Monday August 2. The board is hopeful that between the MVC, Omar, Bill Wilcox, Kent Healy and the Aquinnah Lab, we can get an informal consensus about the source and what the next steps should be.

Map 7 Lot 28 /Cottles/Blackwater Brook Farm: No update

Map 7 Lot 28.2/ Johnson/driveway: No update

Map 3 Lot 72/ Cottle's Lumberyard: No update

Parrot Feather infestation removal: Maria told the board she hasn't gotten any response from Keith Gazaille regarding an updated contract and arrangements to schedule this project. She also told the board about the email from Greg Palermo informing the board that he and Margaret Curtin found a stand of Parrot Feather in Town Cove. Maria will ask the Town Accountant if there is any money available to cover the cost of additional removal.

Administrative:

There being no further business to conduct, the meeting adjourned at 6:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Maria McFarland
Board Administrator
APPROVED
AUGUST 10, 2021