HMCA Activities Update

by Diana Todd

for sharing at the May 9, 2016 meeting of the HPC

A summary of what HMCA has been doing in the interval since the last HPC meeting in early March.

1. MES Day (Marlboro Elementary School day of fun & learning on the mountain) has been scheduled for May 24 with a rain date of June 1. HMCA Director Carol Berner, with input from the HMCA Education Committee, is the primary organizer of the event on the HMCA side.
2. The Trail Committee met and planned spring work days to clean up and improve the existing trails. Bob Anderson has purchased the tools approved in this year’s budget (McCleod rake, Fiskars loppers, and Pullerbear for pulling small stumps). They are stored in the Anderson garage along with the HMCA brush cutter.
3. Marlboro teacher Tim Hayes asked for permission for his students to use saplings that had been cut on Great White Way as part of the ESH (Early Successional Habitat) project for the school’s annual woodworking/bench building project. Tim & Diana Todd scouted the slope and verified that the material was suitable for use. Tim will use the harvesting trip as a chance to educate the students about 1) always getting permission to harvest/use resources on public land, and 2) the goals of the ESH project.
4. The ESH committee led a tour of the Practice Slope, which will be Phase 3 of the project (2017-2018). Diana Todd, Amanda Whiting, Mike Purcell, Bob Anderson, and Nancy Anderson participated. Ed Metcalf joined the group for the first part of the tour and discussion, reviewing the location of the boundary between the two properties and his plans for the lower part of the slope, which he owns. Ed plans to maintain the flatter part of the ski slope, nearest the parking area, in a meadow-like condition, mowed once or twice a year. Where the slope steepens, he will let the young trees continue to grow. The group agreed that this band of young trees will provide a helpful visual screen between the parking lot and the planned ESH cut further up the slope. The group concluded that the ESH cut should be uphill of the Tower Trail, extending to the blackberry patch at the top of the former ski slope.
5. Two grant requests for funding the ESH project’s use of the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps are still pending. The funding organizations (New England Grassroots Environmental Fund and the Windham Foundation) have not yet made decisions.
6. Tom Groves, a Marlboro resident, contacted HMCA via the link on the web site, to indicate that his firm, Long View Forest, is interested in learning more about the Biodiversity Inventory. Tom is a botanist with Long View and has experience performing conservation surveys. He learned of the Biodiversity Inventory plans from the HPC minutes on the town web site. Diana forwarded a copy of his email to the HPC and the HMCA Board.
7. Several HMCA Directors had concerns about the HPC vote to have the Castle stabilized. After an email discussion among the HMCA Directors, the subject was raised with Mike Purcell, HPC Chairman, at the Trail Committee meeting. It was agreed that comments from the HMCA would be shared at the next HPC meeting. See three attachments, appended below. The main points raised were:
   1. Lack of an overall plan that considers all the buildings.
   2. Potential for vandalism.
   3. Need for ongoing maintenance.
   4. Lack of a clear use for the structure.

See three attachments, below.

Attachment 1

excerpt from HMCA Board of Directors Sept. 24, 2015 meeting minutes

“The board discussed whether to budget funds to preserve “The Castle” building at the top of the T-bar, once serving as a warming hut for the ski patrol. Severe deterioration of key roof beams and floor joists have occurred since Staley did a complete analysis of it last year, and a substantial rebuild would now be needed rather than the repairs he first envisioned. Vandalism continues to be a problem, and temporary repairs done last fall have been damaged. Given that we have no expressed purpose for the building and no way to monitor and protect it, the board decided not to seek funds for this project.”

Attachment 2

comments from Nancy Anderson

“Having read the minutes of the HPC meeting of March 14, 2016, I am disappointed that the HPC board has decided to move ahead with repairs to the warming hut/aka Castle at this time.

“I had assumed that, once all rough estimates were in on all the Hogback buildings, a fuller discussion would ensue between HPC and HMCA that would incorporate potential costs, pros and cons of any action, and potential/proposed uses of the buildings, as well as the financing and timing of any actions. (I had envisioned a long range plan.) I don’t recall this detailed level of discussion in the earlier HPC meeting that decided to investigate potential costs of repairing/demolishing buildings. And the most recent HPC meeting considered only “initial conclusions” that were lacking costs for the First Aid building, the Benedict Cottage, and the Quonsut Hut. I’d also like to know if the aim is to restore the building in a historically accurate way.

“While I don’t believe that HMCA ever took a formal vote on the status of the buildings, there have certainly been many discussions among the board members and trail committee members that it would be too hard to maintain and manage them, and they would be subject to too much vandalism and misuse. Their current state of deterioration is not solely due to age and neglect. And take a look around at the nearby somewhat remote buildings for signs of vandalism. Even the Town House in the center of Marlboro village has been broken into. Some HMCA members have felt that repairs would not be lasting and thus have been considering an alternate way to present the role of the buildings in the history of the ski area, which is to post to the buildings pictures and a description of their former use.

“HMCA is the boots on the ground when it comes to any work on the mountain and of course would want to be involved in discussions about the buildings since it feels responsible for ongoing maintenance work there.

In conclusion, I’d like to see HMCA request that HPC reconsider its vote and delay requesting a budget amendment until all facts are in. And I hope that HMCA would be included in the subsequent discussions and have an opportunity to provide input, in keeping with our desire to work together with HPC.”

Attachment 3

comments from Staley McDermet

“HMCA discussed the issue of the Warming Hut at a past meeting, and felt the costs (and not just the financial costs) to repair the Warming Hut far exceeded the benefits, and we then dropped the subject.

“I have two concerns: The lack of a real need for the building, and the problem of maintenance.

“I don't believe the need is there.  This is not a stop on the Appalachian Trail or Long Trail where hikers or skiers need to get out of a sudden storm or stay overnight.  It would be a nice place to get out of the rain or cold, but one is only 15 minutes from Route 9.  Also, it's not a "destination."  I don't know of anyone wanting to hike up to see the Warming Hut.  Finally, it's not on the main Tower Trail, and is almost invisible in the summer.  (Unless one takes the less-used branch of the Tower Trail.)

“Then there's the problem of future upkeep.  Over the years, I have been involved with many potential "grants" to communities.  The reaction from a community is usually that it's looking at free money, a free or low-cost project, so why not.  However, once completed, many of these "free" projects literally disintegrate once completed.  Municipalities simply refuse to maintain things (that's a subject for a whole other discussion).  While this comment is not completely analogous to Marlboro and the Warming Hut, the fact is that it won't cost the Town anything to fix it (the money will simply come out of the "endowment").  The big question is who will be responsible for on-going maintenance: Clearing around it, normal repairs, periodic painting, trash removal.  I fear that responsibility will be asked of HMCA, and I don't feel we want to do it.  Finally, the potential for vandalism is high, since the building is somewhat isolated and out-of-sight yet very convenient to the highway.

“So I am not in favor of repairing the Warming Hut, and would suggest a joint meeting with the HPC to review all the buildings.  Personally, I favor the policy of benign neglect, and let the buildings return to nature.”