HMCA Activities Update

by Diana Todd

for sharing at the January 11, 2016 meeting of the HPC

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

1. HMCA had a booth at the BUHS Volunteer Fair to recruit students interested in earning their Community Service hours by doing trail work or ESH work on Hogback. The booth was staffed by Diana Todd and Andy Healey. About a dozen students signed up to get email announcements about volunteer work opportunities. One student (Daniel Carpenter, who is a former MES student) has already been working on the mountain, helping on the backcountry ski runs cleanup day.
2. On Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, 18 people joined the work party to clear blowdowns and woody growth from the backcountry ski runs.
3. HMCA has submitted a grant proposal to the VT Fish & Wildlife Watershed Grants program seeking funding to hire the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to help with the ESH project in fall 2016. This is a long shot, since the tie between the ESH project and Watershed enhancement is tenuous at best. A handful of other suitable grant-giving programs have been identified, and applications will be sent to those organizations this winter or spring.
4. HMCA received a phone call from Virginia Fisher, commenting that the big red warning sign at the Grant Road entrance detracted from the peaceful rural atmosphere and asked if it could be moved so that it wasn’t visible from the road. The sign was installed by the Stump Jumpers snowmobile club in response to HMCA/HPC concerns about off-trail use. HMCA Board members discussed Fisher’s concerns and the background of the sign and its placement. Don Yanke, President of Stump Jumpers, had commented at the HPC meeting he attended that the best placement for a sign is at a road crossing, since drivers must slow down and look around at those spots. Signs placed along a trail are easy to ignore. The HMCA Board recommends that the sign be left in place for the winter. It would seem churlish to complain to the Stump Jumpers, since they made and installed the sign as a response to our requests for more stringent enforcement on their part. HMCA suggests that we informally monitor snowmobile use on the mountain this winter to assess whether the sign is effective, and in spring examine whether a different placement for the sign is possible. We included Mike Purcell, Chair of the HPC, in the email discussion of this issue. We have responded to Virginia Fisher that we are recommending that the sign be left in place for the winter, to be followed by re-evaluation, and she seemed content with that proposal.
5. Virginia Fisher also commented that her family used to tap the maples on Grant Road, but that when the property was turned over to the town, she had been told that she could no longer do that. Apparently she wasn’t asking for formal permission to start tapping again – it merely came up in the conversation. But that led to a short discussion among the HMCA Board about whether there should be a policy about using the fruits of nature from the mountain. Should maple tapping be allowed? Collecting firewood? Cutting a wild Christmas tree? Picking mushrooms? Picking berries? Would it make a difference if the culling were for personal use as opposed to reselling the items? A quick glance in the Management Plan didn’t turn up a policy recommendation on these issues.
6. Diana Todd and Mike Purcell have discussed the idea of having a joint informal HPC/HMCA meeting in early winter about the proposed Biodiversity Inventory. The meeting would be informational only, with no formal HPC decisions made. There would be two aspects:
   1. What have other towns done? What models for this kind of study exist?
   2. What information/studies/maps do we already have for Hogback?
7. A slate of on-mountain hikes and other activities has been scheduled for the early part of the winter, and plans are evolving for additional events in mid-to-late winter.