HMCA Activities Update

by Diana Todd

for sharing at the July 2018 meeting of the HPC

A summary of what HMCA has been doing in the interval since the last submission in early May, 2018.

* Biodiversity Inventory - HMCA signed a contract with Charley Eiseman on May 8, and he started work that day, combing the conservation area for vernal pools, finding over 20 of them. The project will take about a year, including summer identification of natural communities and winter tracking to estimate wildlife use of the area.
* Bob Anderson created a small metal donation box, and a group of HMCA Directors installed it on May 10 next to the bench on the Tower Trail near one of the views. As of June 30, $43.50 had been donated to HMCA via the donation box.
* The vernal pool training workshop led by Liza Morse of the Vermont Center for Ecology on May 13 was well attended. Originally scheduled for early April, the event had to be postponed to May because the pools were still frozen in April.
* On May 19, Cherie Corey led a bird walk on Hogback. Cherie, a former student of Bob Engel at Marlboro College, did a great job leading the type of event that Bob has led so often for us in the past. She hopes to lead more hikes in the future.
* MES Day - Another highly successful day on the mountain for the students of Marlboro Elementary School was held on May 25. HMCA recruits event leaders for small group morning activities, and pays $75 stipends to some leaders. (Other leaders choose to forego the offered stipend.) Perhaps the most exciting part of the day was when the animal tracking group led by George Leoniak found winter ice still present in a “cave” between some of the boulders that support the edges of the big parking lot.
* The Trail Committee organized a trail clearing day for the north side trails on May 26. There were quite a few blowdowns due to the dramatic April windstorm as well as typical winter windfall. Bob & Nancy Anderson repainted the White’s Loop blazes. North side trails are now clear of debris and well marked.
* In early June, the Andersons reported that the kiosk on the Mt Olga summit was leaning and the roof was deteriorating. This kiosk is in Molly Stark State Park, not the conservation area. Several years ago the park built it, but HMCA installed it, as a good will gesture of cooperation. Bob offered to devise a fix for the lean, which was likely due to high winds this winter/spring combined with the shallow soils at the summit, and to organize a crew of HMCA volunteers to repair and reinstall the kiosk, if the park would provide the materials. The park gratefully accepted the offer. The repair will take place sometime this summer.
* On June 14, Diana Todd gave an illustrated talk about the ESH project to the Brattleboro Rotary.
* Bishop Site - Bob Anderson, the Pope of the Bishop Site, organized a work day on June 16. The overall goal of the work is to expose more of the stone foundations without disturbing the historic features. An improved display on the Grant Road kiosk about the Bishop site is planned.
* In late June, Charley Eiseman notified us that while tramping around the conservation area for the Biodiversity Inventory work, he came across a trail in the northwest corner that didn’t appear on our trail map. At about the same time, we were notified by Alan Baker of the Wilmington Trails Committee that someone had posted a “Dead End” sign at the three-way VAST/hiking trail intersection near the northern edge of the conservation area, where none of the trails is actually a dead end! HMCA contacted the snowmobile club about the sign; it wasn’t one of theirs. They were as mystified as us. They verified that all the VAST trails marked on our Hogback hiking map are still formally authorized and in use. Trail Committee members, joined by Alan Baker, took a hike up to the northwest corner on June 30 to take a look at both of these concerns. They concluded that the hiking/biking trail is part of a network of trails on the adjoining private land in Wilmington that has existed for a long time, well before the conservation area was formed. The boundary in that area is minimally marked. Likely the trail was not intentionally routed onto the former Hogback Enterprises land, but ended up there because boundaries weren’t clear. We propose putting up a modest sign where the trail enters and leaves the conservation area, to let users know they are crossing onto public land. As for the “Dead End” sign, we took it down and left a note asking the person who installed the sign to contact HMCA.