

DCR Middlesex Fells Reservation - Resource Management Plan

Education and Interpretation Workshop – March 16, 2011

Notes from Presentation Question and Answer, Public Comment Session

Comments on Efforts/Support in Regards to Education & Interpretation

- I've been involved for 40 years with Winchester Trails, which was founded by the school superintendent when asked to take a trail walk with students. We lead walks in the Fells and in Winchester. Students in town get at least one walk in the Fells at some point in time. I talk about life and geology in the Fells. Also talk about Louis Agassiz, who first showed that there had been glaciers in the Fells – you can see the glacial marks. We have published a lot over the years – pamphlets, booklets to train guides. Boy Scouts have put up interpretive signs, and we have a publication to lead walkers on the trails which ties into the signs. In fall or spring the children go out – we explain to them the history as well as the plants and animals. I just wanted you to know that this has been going on for 40 years – we are completely independent, and maybe we should invite the rangers to come join us – I hadn't thought of that.
- I'm part of the Friends of the Fells, Harvard, and the New England Botanical Club. In terms of education – there are many things happening. Invasive hike- pointing out the invasive species and how to remove them. Working on a publication about vascular (higher) plants and next will be non-vascular (lower). Harvard has a grant to pull out old specimens and information linked to them and put the collection all together on the web. Nature trail for Dark Hollow- outlines the habitats along this trail – working on this for more trails.
- I have been involved in geology in the Fells for 20 years. Just this past summer I took a brownie troop out on a hike due to my connections.
- A lot of people are doing educational things in the Fells and we don't know about it or don't ask. A lot of colleges and universities are doing research in the Fells. There is a lot going on but I am unsure if we all know everything that is going on. New England Botanical Society very much a stakeholder – it formed in the 1800's. It does hikes in the Fells. Friends of the Fells runs interpretive/education hikes all the time – I think there are 32 thing spring. Boot Boutwell gives lectures geared towards kids on the equinox and others, and is great at taking it to their level. My experience is with adults and high school kids – but I want to teach small kids. There are a lot of desires from elementary schools and high schools. With more demand from the public on education – we need to talk more about how we address that.
- I am a mountain biker – and I didn't realize that what we've been doing is interpretation. We try to introduce people to the Fells via bike – but didn't think about how we're also teaching about landscape and the history of the Fells. Man is a part of the history and of the future of the Fells. We all bring everyone into the Fells with a greater appreciation and awareness of the Fells.

- NEMBA (New England Mountain Bike Association) runs programs such as “Opening Day” and teaches responsibility and how to and how not to ride in the Fells. We take kids to the Fells and teach them about nature – it might be good to have Bryan (Hamlin) join and teach. There are also other things NEMBA does to teach.
- So many here have contributed. Mike Nelson puts together many programs – night hikes, vernal pool exploration. Lawrence Brooks created the first iteration of the Friends of the Fells – it has been around almost 40 years. What hasn’t happened is to knit it all together, and that’s really what we need to do. There have been previous efforts and opportunities – I don’t know where that’s gone. Contributions of the Fells to start of the MPC – Friends of the Fells has books and documentation to support that. There is a keen interest on building on the bits and pieces we have, without the fear that the nature of the Fells is at risk.
- Birding in the Fells – Audubon lists the Fells as an Important Birding Area (IBA). I belong to several groups. The Friends of the Fells put out a birding list – 180 species of birds documented as being seen in the Fells, and there is probably more too. With access to Spot Pond there have been some interesting findings. Many species of birds nest in the Fells from year to year.

General Comments, Question & Answer Session

- Q: What component of the interpretive plan are you hoping to have completed for the Resource Management Plan?

A: The RMP will have a small piece on interpretation in the Fells, survey information. The Interpretation Plan is being done in tandem with, but not contingent upon the RMP. This is a chance to look ahead and prioritize together, given the caveat of limited resources and time, and identify where to provide opportunities for kids and adults, and collectively design and prioritize by working together. The survey results are interesting – I see interpretation that is essential – but others have ideas I wouldn’t have thought of. We don’t want a long process. A comprehensive plan will follow the RMP.

It can be anticipated that the Comprehensive Interpretation Plan (CIP) will be a separate plan consistent with the RMP.

- I am a resident of Medford and a member of Friends of the Fells – I am a lay person in terms of this, but I come as a person with a career in nonprofits and I understand working with reduced resources and getting needs met. There is a powerful opportunity with the great resources of many here that are disconnected. We could build a coalition to help compile these efforts – all organizations could say – “yes, we can take a piece.” Each organization takes a piece and is responsible for it. There might be opportunities to partner with graduate schools, by having a way for grad students to get credit for leading walks. What’s missing is information for a lay person to know why the Fells is so

important, why things in it are important, and why the rules exist. Include information on how someone can help – volunteer, join. Perhaps we can update trail markers and increase access to maps – maybe even providing opportunity to download maps to smart phones. Should be reaching out to others doing educational programs too.

- Q: I can imagine going to every sector with this – but all we hear is there are limited resources. I am concerned with raising our expectations. Some of this takes real commitment from the agency – but what is realistic? You (DCR) need the coordination and staff to do it.

A: In the absence of planning, interpretation is random. The CIP model brings people together – coalition is a good term for it – not to discount anyone, but to note for all the importance in helping. Caveat in foundation section is the cognition of resources so in discussing what we want to offer we can be practical and realistic. Many tools may already fit what we want. Also, to recognize what has been done and in content – maybe tweaks can help support something all think is important. This is a chance to come together and put it all together in a plan. We can vet things collectively, and can help those wanting to invest to determine the best investments of time, money – identify what we next need to tackle.

- I am excited about the possibilities, opportunities. I want to speak to another opportunity – for users to know what is expected of them and what experiences they can expect to have. It is important to consider and address this.

This showed in the survey and is important for us to know what needs there are. Want great exercises with a great product. Don't think that basic things are lost – in many parks many basic interpretive tools to be considered.

1,200 responses to the survey monkey send out – impressive.

- Right now the woodcocks are courting at 90 mm field.
- For 30 years I have had an association with the Fells – 28 years ago I would go to the Sheepfold on a late afternoon and watch the tractor mow the field – I was the only person sitting there. That's not going to happen now. Go slow and careful now – with more people coming in it means more impact on the Fells. Need to consider how to live in close proximity and protect it. Education is not promotion. Without enforcement of the regulations, the Fells is jeopardized. The Fells is a series of neighborhoods – look at habitats, how to visit them safely, when not to go there in order to protect

them. Because we are in a high population area – there are particularly unique needs and we need to protect.

- We need to protect the Fells and not “love it to death” – but discouraging use is not going to help. Through education we can teach everyone about the Fells, encourage stewardship of the Fells. We know if we discourage what kinds of users come in, e.g. parties. We need to come in and engage thoughtfully in the Fells and drive those users out.
- Purpose of designating land is for appreciation. Shutting down is not in the RMP guiding principles. I am concerned that this might be considered.
- I heard comments I disagreed with. I heard the trail net work needs to be reduced – I don’t feel this should happen – it should even be increased. Feel sense of others thinking, “We have the right perspective.” Coalitions can’t exist if some can’t tolerate others in the group. Friends of the Fells gives the impression/perspective of calamities that might ensue – be careful with that. I get the impression that they desire a “Zen” experience in the Fells.
- Were you here for the flora and fauna workshop? I heard very good information for why we should limit the trail system.
- There are people from all sides here. Today I turned 73 – I can think back 50, 60 years – this used to be the sticks! You are talking about a 5, 10 year plan – think 50 years. The Population has doubled since I was in high school – consider that.
- Tonight is about gathering information – what all are doing is fabulous – want to remain positive.
- This population needs to use green spaces to understand and appreciate them so we don’t destroy them. I don’t think the Friends of the Fells are the only ones that see the need to reduce the trail inventory. This does not mean restricting usage on the remaining trails. The original trail system was not designed with either recreation or conservation in mind. These trails just came to be. And now they need to be rationalized with recreation and conservation in mind. The Trails Plan, with its consideration of habitat, nature studies, and recreation, is an important first step toward that.

- Q: Is it true that the trails plan suggests some reduction?

A: Yes, the plan does recommend some reduction of trails.

- One thing I have heard from talking with others makes me think we're closer than it sounds right now.

- Q: What's the job and responsibility of a ranger?

A: Rangers provide light enforcement and some interpretation. I spend too much time in the office here. We have four full-time rangers working for me – two in the Charles River area, one on the beaches, and one covering the Fells, Breakheart, and the northern area.

- Q: I saw a photo in the presentation of Park Serve Day – will there be one this year?

A: The date is April 16th this year for all parks – I just got word that staff will not be here that day, but if there is a volunteer effort here, we can help provide bags and be responsible for picking those up following the event.

This came up at the last workshop as well – would be interesting in discussing this more.

- Q: In terms of funding, can you raise money from private sources or is it dependent on outside entities?

A: We are restricted in the use of outside funds. There are more opportunities and we do seek federal funds. Conservation Trust – persons/organizations can make donations, and park administration can submit proposals to get things done – agency decides which proposals can get done.

- Q: Individual organization could come and say they want to raise funds for hiring another ranger – could DCR approve that?

A: Yes, it is possible to do that.

- Q: On an individual level, can't individuals make a donation in the Iron Ranger to keep the funds here?

A: Iron Ranger is here and goes into the Urban Parks Trust. The funds stay at the park where the money is donated. There are some restrictions on how the money can be spent, but there is no limit on how much the park can take in.

- Q: Given the limited capacity, what is the process for incident reports?

A: They are records for significant or major incidents. We enter the report like a police report, in a small narrative. It is kept in our system and the State Police has access to this, as well as some in DCR hierarchy.

- Q: Was the Boy Scout's signage coordinated with DCR?

A: Yes – the Boy Scout was working with DCR on that.

- Thanks for the emails – keeping us posted is great. In terms of fundraising, Friends of the Fells is able to take donations as well. Years ago, I met a supervisor in the Sheepfold and I asked for a map – he said they had one, but there were no funds to print it. Because of another organization's existence, they could make it happen, and many donations of time and resources went into making it happen.
- I want to invite you in continuing to participate in developing the CIP. Those interested in participating in future meetings around this can star their names on the sign-in sheet and DCR will contact you about this. Also will be information on how to join this effort in an update email.