

Randolph Forest Commission

Minutes

September 4, 2024

Members Present: Mark Kelley, Walter Graff, Laura Brockett, Tim Mather, Nate Reid

Alternates Present: David Willcox

Others Present: Eric LaRoche, President, Presidential Gem & Mineral Society (PGMS); Kathy Lovell, PGMS; David DeGruttola, LandVest; Michele Cormier; Jeremiah Hawkins

The chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. He asked if anyone had any changes to recommend for the minutes of the August meeting. No one had and Laura moved that the minutes be adopted as written. Walter seconded the motion and it was carried.

The Commission received an invoice from LandVest for \$ 2,038.08 for miscellaneous work. It was considered and approved for payment.

The representatives of the PGMS were welcomed to speak. Eric thanked the Commission for facilitating the club's use of the crystal mine on the RCF. He explained that the PGMS had been founded in 1991. It had started small, but had grown in recent years both in size and activity levels. It now numbered 250 members and undertook many fieldtrips each year to locations in the region which were of interest to rockhounds. The members of the organization greatly valued their ability to access the Randolph quartz location. It was particularly useful to them as an educational resource, used to introduce the younger generation to the hobby.

Eric emphasized that the PGMS would cooperate with the Commission in any way they could to protect the crystal mine against vandalism.

David circulated copies of a draft statement the Commission proposes to post at one or more spots around the mine noting that the location had been designated by the Town as a “natural area” in accordance with state law, meaning that anyone vandalizing the site would be guilty of a misdemeanor and might face the legal consequences thereof. Eric and Kathy agreed with the language of the notice and said that their organization would be glad to help produce it in a weatherproof format and that its members would be glad to install the signs and see that they remained in place and in good condition. Eric suggested that a boundary around the site be marked and the sign state that digging beyond that boundary was forbidden. The Commission agreed to consider his suggestion.

Meanwhile, the Commission approved a warrant article for the 2015 Town Meeting which would formally declare the crystal mine a “natural area.” This was passed on the selectmen.

The Commission turned to the question of winter skiing at the upper end of Randolph Hill Road. Several months ago, June Hammond Rowan, as chair of the Planning Board, had sent a letter to The Back Country Alliance, terminating the contract between it and the Town. The business model promoted by Back Country Alliance encouraged maximum participation on the slopes it had under contract. While that might be appropriate in some locations, it has proven to be unacceptable in Randolph, because the local road to our skiing hill passes through a residential area and the heavy traffic generated by Back Country Alliance’s advertisements interferes with the residents’ quiet enjoyment of their property.

Jeremiah represents a group of local skiers who are willing to manage the slopes as a purely local enterprise, and the Commission is interested in seeing if his group could take the place of the Back Country Alliance going forward. But the big unknown is how many skiers from outside the region will come to Randolph this winter on the assumption that it will be open as it was last year, and what can be done to discourage them

from coming in future. Jeremiah put forth three alternative courses of action: (1) open, as usual, but under new, local, management; (2) keep the slopes closed temporarily at the beginning of the season, with the possibility of opening later, if the situation permits; or (3) keep it closed throughout the season. There was a good deal of discussion as to what “closed” would mean. The consensus was that it would involve not plowing out some portions of the access road and it was agreed to consult the road agent as to the most effective option in that regard. It was also agreed that a lot of signs posted along Randolph Hill Road would be needed. Further consideration of the issue is required.

Meanwhile, Jeremiah asked permission to do some light clearance work on the slopes, in case it is decided to open at some point during the winter. The Commission gave its permission.

The next item on the agenda was the Forestry report. Mark noted that the Commission had budgeted \$25,000 for roadwork this year. JML has been engaged to repair the damage wrought by the recent storm to the Pond of Safety Road. Its’ bid for the job came to \$23,000, but there are still a few jobs needing to be done which will probably account for the balance. David DeGrutolla said that work was underway on both the Pond of Safety Road and the Jimtown Road. On the western end of the Jimtown Road there were some snowmobile bridges in bad repair and he would be contacting Clint Savage, of the state trails bureau, to see what was to be done to fix them. Laura asked about the damage done to the Pond of Safety Road in the recent storm. David said that the repair work had started at the eastern end of the road and was working west. The good news was that the new bridges had performed perfectly; the damage was at other points along the road. It was probable that in future, new, larger, culverts might be needed at critical stream crossings, and an additional bridge or two might be required, but right now the emphasis was on making the road passable.

The next subject for discussion was the maple tapping lease arrangement with Dave Fuller, of Lancaster. The lease agreement has been amended twice, in response to damage caused by caterpillar infestation to the originally defined sugarbush; new areas of maple trees needed to be added to replace those that were damaged. A new grouping of maples to the east of the original location was defined in the first amendment and in the second amendment the new area was in the Farrar Farm. The second amendment also specified that Fuller could have the use of the one-car garage on the Farrar Farm for collection and temporary storage of sap on the condition that he maintained the garage in a safe and workplace suitable condition. The second addendum needs signing, so Laura moved that the Commission authorize Mark to sign on its behalf. Walter seconded the motion and it was passed.

David also reported that he had engaged Leon Wentworth to undertake a salvage cut on the small tract of land identified as the site for an emergency communications tower.

Finally, Mark explained the negotiations which had taken place between the FC and the Town regarding the payment to the Town of an annual payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) based on current use rates as required by the Town Forest ordinance. He had worked with David DeGruttola to create a model formula for determining what is owed, a formula that can be used every year going forward. Since the FC was two years in arrears, it was agreed that in September a payment of \$5191.49 would be made representing what was owed for 2022; in October a payment of \$5681.76 would be made for the year 2023; and in December the payment of \$6561.56 would represent what was owed to the Town for the current year. The commission members approved these payments and signed a memorandum authorizing payment.

The Meeting was adjourned by general consent at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted

David Willcox
Acting Secretary