

TOWN OF WATERVILLE VALLEY CONSERVATION COMMISSION
SITE VISIT – SNOWS BROOK
JANUARY 19, 2024, 9 AM

Attendees: Irit Levy, chair; Jennie Lucas, member; Rebecca & Charles Hastings, members; Patrick Marr, alternate; Rick Van de Poll, consultant; Brooke Brown, USFS Pemigewasset District Ranger; Mark Prout, USFS.

The purpose of this site visit was to walk through the gist of the proposed Snows Brook mitigation project with Brooke Brown.

Rick led us first to the bridge by the Waterville Place condominiums. The project to divert some high-water flow out of the brook and into the former flood plain would hopefully mitigate some of the risk that these condos face from the proximity of Snows Brook during large storms, but there is no guarantee. This potential benefit is secondary to the main purpose of the project, which is to reduce the amount of sediment that Snows Brook delivers into Corcoran Pond. Diverting flood waters into the former flood plain will allow some sediment to settle there, rather than it all being carried by Snows Brook straight into Corcoran Pond.

From there we turned into the woods.

In order to facilitate the diversion of floodwaters out of Snows Brook and into the flood plain on USFS land, two former channels will be dug down to nearly brook level. The longer, upper of these will require a substantial excavation, as the brook bed has been incised well below its bank. A number of trees will have to be cut, and these can be used to help slow and divert future flood waters. Rick estimates the larger channel will need to be about 325-330 ft. long, becoming shallower as it nears the flood plain. A crucial part of the project is to slow the flow of floodwaters by piling logs and brush across the brook and certain tributaries in several places well upstream from any trench excavation.

Two existing culverts beneath the Pond Loop XC trail will need to be replaced to expedite the flow of diverted floodwaters from the USFS portion of the floodplain to the Green Belt area. One culvert is on USFS land, and one is on Town land. Rick would prefer that at least one of these culverts be replaced by box culverts 4x4' or perhaps 4x3', to be determined later.

It is expected that once floodwater has crossed to the west side of (and hopefully beneath) the Pond Loop trail (i.e., from USFS land to the Green Belt parcel), it will curve around to the southwest and back into the brook before passing beneath the bridge/roadway into Corcoran Pond. Rick doesn't think a second existing culvert (beneath the roadway to the north and parallel to the brook) would carry much of the runoff from the Green Belt.

This project will likely be applied for during the USFS Small Projects window this fall. The 2024 spring window just closed. It would hopefully qualify for a categorical exclusion (CE) which

would eliminate the need for a full environmental assessment (EA). However, this project would require a biological assessment/biological evaluation (BABE).

The Forest Service's Construction and Maintenance (C+M) teams have such an enormous backlog, this project would have to be a collaboration between the Town, Forest Service, and Rick's workforce, with Rick essentially acting as the general contractor and overseer. Rick will do the upstream woody additions, and the Town will be responsible for the major work of digging the channel under Rick's guidance.

Brook said there is a lot of paperwork to get through before this can move forward. The Forest Service will need specifications indicating how this project will be engineered and implemented for their specialists to review. She also made it clear that even though money will be spent during this planning process, there is no guarantee that the project will be a 'go' until her signature is on the page. She also explained that the FS legal department (Office of the General Counsel or OGC) will have to draw up documents between all the various parties, including the Town and the Waterville Place Condominium Association, shielding the FS from liability. The FS has to determine that this project will cause 'no harm'. In addition, FS approval does not in any way guarantee that this proposed mitigation will work.

Mark Prout is very enthusiastic about this project, including the idea that this might be a prototype for future partnership solutions to problems in many National Forest regions.

Next steps: Brooke will initiate the legal paperwork and Rick and Brooke will work together, with the Town, to make sure the Small Projects Grant application paperwork is completed.