

February 11, 2019

Town of Woodford

Planning Commission

“DRAFT”

Present: Susan Wright, Ed Shea, John Dovitski, Betty Charette, Chuck Suss, Jim Sullivan

Absent: Chuck Suss

Public: Attached is a list of the Public

Susan called the meeting to order at 5:09 pm.

Susan moved to approve the January minutes, Betty seconded; ALL voted to approve the Minutes.

AGENDA ADJUSTMENT: Susan stated that a “permit approval” for a septic, in the name of Patrick Cooper, had come into the office but that Mr. Cooper had not yet gone into the office to “record” it.

Susan informed the Commission that a \$14,000 estimate had been given for the Mapping Program. She further stated, that since the estimate was rather steep for Woodford’s budget, the Select Board had budgeted \$2,500.00 for paper maps. She went on further to say that the State had completed their project and that no corrections could be done at this point.

Ed suggested that the Commission address Carol Swanson’s written concerns with the Bylaws, as they pertained to WLE.....Woodford Lake Estate.

1. 10.2.2number of residential parking.....minimum of 4
Jim will remove the number of residential parking minimum and will revisit the rest of similar language within the Bylaws.
2. 11.5.1accessory dwelling.....where did it come from?

The Commission agreed to change the language to something similar to.....
“adequate space for parking of resident’s vehicles” and to eliminate the
accessory dwelling.....with further simplification of this language.
Jim noted that “accessory dwelling” was a State Statute.

3. 10.3.3 “lot coverage” and “impervious surface”

The Commission and Jim had a lengthy conversation, and all agreed that
the language needed to be made more consistent throughout the Bylaws.
It was agreed that while WLE needs to satisfy their community’s needs, the
State does allow holding tanks on a quarter acre and WLE would have no
say.

The Commission moved the meeting to the Meeting Room in the Town Office for
the “DEERFIELD WIND BLACK BEAR STUDY: Evaluating the Impacts of Industrial
Wind on Black Bears”.

Jaclyn Comeau from the Fish and Wildlife of Vermont informed the Public that the
study was 4-pronged.

1. age & sex
2. conflict prevention between the public and bear
3. manage the habitat for bear to avoid negative development of their
feeding grounds
4. research to understand the bear, it’s habitat, and the impact of
development

Jaclyn explained that the bear habitat tends to be an “umbrella” for other wildlife
species, such as birds, frogs, rabbits, deer, moose, and many others. She
explained that the wetlands offered vegetation.....shrub berries, while the young
forest offered other berries. In a mature forest, it offers nuts.

Jaclyn pointed out that “bear scarred” beech trees are a “critical” bear habitat,
since their nuts are an important food source of high calorie fat content.

A Maine study is starting to believe that their bear are synchronizing their births with beech bearing trees. Years that produce an abundance of nuts, seems to indicate more births.

The Deerfield Wind Project spans four (4) miles with 15 wind turbines in the Green Mountain National Forest.

The Public Service of Vermont worked with the company who proposed the Deerfield Project and required them to do a bear study in the “bear scarred” beech tree areas. Other requirements are to present habitat mitigation by conserving the “bear scarred” areas and the berries as much as possible.

The Project removed many beech trees on the west ridge, but many still stand. The same happened on the east ridge, except, fewer trees were removed.

Jaclyn showed slides of several different “collared” bear’s travel patterns after the wind turbines had been installed. They show that the bear traveled the same path, however, they tended to not stay in the area. It is not understood why. It could be that they have been displaced and gone to alternative food sources in the area, such as corn fields.....research is on going.

In 2011 and 2012 satellite collars were placed on some bears.

The Wind Project construction began in 2016 and it began operating in the spring of 2018.....The study is expected to end in 2021.

The years of 2013 and 2015 were good years for beech nut production.

In 2017 the VT Fish and Wildlife interacted with the bear within the “study” areas to begin recording their findings.

2019 has been another productive beech nut year, so another interactive study will be done in the “study” areas.

There were 41 “collared” bears between 2011 and 2018. Only eight (8) to fourteen are ever collared within a year. There is a virtual fence which is recording one (1) location about every 10 minutes.

Some bear have been recorded to be traveling from Searsburg and Readsboro along the RT 9 North boundary and South of RT 9, with the majority of travel lying South of RT 9. They do not seem to appear to cross RT 2 very much. They travel to Harriman Reservoir, East of the Deerfield River, towards Bennington and Pownal, heading towards the Hoosicks in NY.

Between July 2014 and 2016 a female collared bear showed that she traveled North and South from Whitingham (home) in the fall and spring.....2015 she traveled North for two (2) months, as the beech nut production was good.....later she traveled home; spring....April, she traveled North again for three (3) weeks to feed on Mountain Ash and Beech.

2014 the South side had no beech nuts and it was before the wind Project.

Mid-August, the bear traveled to the Massachusetts border for two (2) months, where there is an oak forest. She later traveled home to den in November.

Chuck inquired about the “beech disease”.....Jacyn stated that it began in the 60’s or 70’s and that the stage of the disease remained about the same as today. She states that the trees seem to have a natural resistance, but that they still seem to be producing nuts and reproducing. The tree roots sprout and cause disease in many of the beech.

Another female, collared bear was recorded traveling from Lee, MA, to the North West side of Harriman Reservoir and back to MA.....Rowe, MA provided acorns, and then she traveled through Heath, MA, along RT 8A and home. This bear traveled 65 kilometers with a cub between August 9, 2014 to October 30, 2014.

A collared male bear was recorded in the fall of 2017, when there were a lot of beech nuts and the Wind Project construction was going on. The bear's home was located near Mount Anthony. It traveled East to Searsburg, West to Pownal and Bennington in less than 24 hours.....Maybe the construction disturbance moved him away?.....maybe September was too early for the nuts? Mid October it moved to Mount Snowe, Somerset, Kelly Stand, Arlington, Sunderland, Sushan, NY, Cambridge, Shaftsbury, and Bennington.

Jacyln stated that a four (4) year old male would be considered a "sub-adult" and that access to breeding was around 5-6 years of age.

A second mature, 11- year old male was recorded traveling between June 2013 and 2018. Fall 2017 the "Wind Project" construction was going on and October 11, 2017 the bear did not stay in the area. It went to Harriman Reservoir, East, then North to Brattleboro and returned to Stamford, MA, near the "Florida, MA Wind Project" and back up to Woodford.

A 2015 collared, 4-5 year old female was recorded as being right in the "Deerfield Wind Project" between June and December of 2017.....another one that was 5-7 years old barely used the area for two (2) years.

June 2013-2015 a male bear was recorded traveling from Readsboro to RT 9, and to Massachusetts RT 8. It was later shot by a hunter in some corn fields in Pownal.

Unfortunately, things can turn out badly for bear that seek alternative food sources. It is important for the public to keep pet food and human food sources away from the bear, so that they do not become comfortable and start to impose dangers to humans.

The Fish and Wildlife will do "den visits" during the spring, around April. They will check on the health of the population, number of cubs, and will replace any collars that may need to be replaced.....Males over 250 pounds are difficult to collar.

The bears are usually captured for collaring in June and they are watched with cameras in the fall.

The camera study of the bears, studies their behavior, socializing, the number traveling outside of the beech tree stands, and the number passing through study areas.

Jacyln thinks that the sub-adult bears may be traveling in groups outside of the beech stands, where a mature male may be eating.

The camera study has also shed a light on the “umbrella-effect” of the beech tree areas. It has shown many other species of wildlife feeding in the same area..... deer, moose, turkey, coyote, fox, bobcat, etc.

Jacyln asks that the public, please not feed the bear and to report any nuisance bear. She also stated that the final report will be posted online and that the video recording of this presentation will be posted as well.

The Fish and Wildlife supports the VERMONT HABITAT STAMP, as well as the NONGAME WILDLIFE FUND. Donations may be made at.....

<http://vtfishandwildlife.com/donate>

There being no further business, John moved to adjourn, Betty seconded, ALL in favor: YES.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

The next regular meeting will be March 11, 2019 at 5 pm.

Acting Secretary,

Betty Charette