

Notes from:
NEW MEADOWS LAKE TIDAL RESTORATION FEASIBILITY STUDY
PUBLIC FORUM #1
JUNE 27, 2005

(This forum is sponsored by Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and New Meadows River Watershed Project Steering Committee)

PRESENT: Steve Walker, Karen Young, Stephanie Lindloff, Michael Chelminski, Matt Craig, Laurie Doran, Dennis Ring, Bruce and Carol London, Albert & Regina Schmitt, Ed Benedikt, Steve Kalisz, Jon Kachmar, Jim Grocholl, Diane Gould, Todd Janeski, Chris Heinig.

Agenda

Welcome/Introductions – Karen Young, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

Steve Walker opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. and welcomed the public to the public forum. He then introduced Karen Young of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership. Karen made welcoming remarks to the public and asked the public to sign the sign-in sheet. She stated that they have been working closely with the New Meadows Watershed Project for a number of years. Karen then gave a brief overview of the agenda for the forum.

Karen stated that this project is one recommendation from the New Meadows River Management Plan that was put together by the New Meadows River Watershed Project Steering Committee. She advised the public that there was another meeting held on April 21, 2004 which looked at historical information on New Meadows Lake and looking at obstructions to circulation in the New Meadows Lake. Karen explained that this project is very similar to the meeting that was held on April 21, 2004 with the Army Corps of Engineers in West Bath. She then introduced consultants, staff and other expert people that were present in the audience this evening. She then introduced Stephanie Lindloff from Woodlot Alternatives.

Overview of Study Goals & Objectives; Public Involvement – Stephanie Lindloff, Woodlot Alternatives

Stephanie stated that the study goal is to develop and evaluate the feasibility of alternatives for improving water quality and enhancing ecological resources in New Meadows Lake. This study will compile new and existing data from previous studies, obtain additional data as needed, develop restoration alternatives for achieving the study goal, and evaluate the feasibility of each alternative. Work to be performed will include site surveying, engineering analyses of the hydrodynamic factors affecting water quality in New Meadows Lake, and modeling of the likely response to potential restoration alternatives. A variety of technical alternatives will be analyzed.

Stephanie stated that there are three public forums that will be held. She gave a brief summary of these forums and stated that they would like to have written public comment

which should be submitted to Steve Walker by July 12th, in addition to any public comment that may be given this evening.

Steve Walker stated that tonight's meeting is in Brunswick and the next one would be in West Bath. He said that they will alternate the forum locations. Steve explained that there will be a large format session with a Question and Answer Period and there will then be a breakout into poster groups.

Historical Context/Need Addressed – Michael Chelminski, Woodlot Alternatives

Michael Chelminski of Woodlot Alternatives addressed the group and said that he would give a brief overview of the historical context. He stated that the causeway was put in in 1937, which created New Meadows Lake as it is known now. In 1967, the causeway was bisected by Route 1, which created some water quality issues which now plague the Lake. He stated that the Lake is currently used for aquaculture.

He then gave a summary of previous studies, which he gave a brief overview of for the public. This included various MDOT studies, Wright-Pierce study of New Meadows Lake, NMR Watershed and Shoreline Surveys, State of the New Meadows River, NMR Lower Watershed Survey and others.

Mike Chelminski gave a definition of the study limits which are defined by the project goals. The study will consider tidal conditions south of Bath Road, and consideration of New Meadows Lake as a stratified system. The study limits are defined by the project goals and the formal study area is New Meadows Lake.

The study methodology includes data acquisition and numerical hydrodynamic modeling. The initial phase of hydrodynamic modeling will use a one-dimensional, transient numerical model to evaluate changes in tidal exchange and water levels associated with conceptual restoration alternatives.

The second phase of hydrodynamic modeling will evaluate tidal exchange, water levels and water quality benefits associated with primary restoration alternatives.

Development and analysis of restoration alternatives will review existing studies relevant to study goals, obtain necessary additional information, including bathymetric and topographic data, develop preliminary hydrodynamic model including developing and evaluating conceptual restoration alternatives, and evaluating potential benefits of conceptual restoration alternatives. The goal of the second phase of modeling will be to evaluate potential improvements in water quality associated with restoration alternatives.

Karen Young said that the plan for this study is to take the recommendations to the public and the New Meadows Watershed Project for discussion, where recommendations will then be evaluated and a determination made if it makes sense to move forward. This would then go to Brunswick Town Council and West Bath Selectman for decisions. She then opened the meeting to the public for questions.

A member of the public asked if restoration alternatives will be prioritized and values assigned to them. He was told that conceptual alternatives will be discussed at the second meeting and dollar values will be placed on them at the cost to implant. The most feasible and practical alternatives will be considered.

Ed Benedikt asked how restoration objectives are defined. Karen responded that the study goal addresses water quality conditions, which is the first goal of restoration. She said that numerical targets have not been identified yet. Steve Walker said they need to determine what best fits everyone's interests and will come up with different options with different pros and cons, which the two municipalities will have final say on. He said that the upper Lake is now prohibited for shellfishing and questioned how these trends can be reversed.

Ed Benedikt said that he is suspicious of municipal involvement rather than public involvement. He said that he is confused because he has heard previous discussions about the targeted area and questioned if it is a natural setting or a balanced eco-system.

Bruce London stated that he lives on the New Meadows Lake and asked if the Lake is a health hazard to people that live there. He observed that he hasn't seen any results from the studies that have been done and reiterated that he would like to know if it is a health hazard. Steve Walker confirmed that the Lake is safe to swim in, but said that it may not be the case for fish and other life in the Lake. Mr. London applauded people for wanting to improve the quality of the water, but said he would like to see results of studies.

Another member of the public asked if water quality is bad, why doesn't the Lake smell? He noted that people are swimming, that the water is clear, and that the lake seems ok. He asked who is behind making the changes and what is the desired end result. Steve Walker said that no one is interested in a set result. He said that one option is doing nothing. He agreed that there has been a decline of water quality and said it is still a poor situation, and is part of Casco Bay. Karen Young used drinking water as an example to illustrate the point that water may look crystal clear, but that does not tell you if it is a healthy, natural ecosystem.

Ed Benedikt said he observes a pre-conceived concept that may not be valid, and said the recently conducted nutrient study did not address inflow of nutrients. He reviewed several other studies that have been done and pointed out that upflow is never mentioned. He felt that inflow of tide needs to be evaluated and suggested that PAH's and PCB's may have entered from down river.

Stephanie Lindloff said that it is common to find PAHs downstream from railroad trestles.

Steve Kalisz from West Bath, said that the Town of West Bath did not sign off on this project and said that no one is going to Bath for input. Mr. Kalisz requested information and wanted to see the project proposal. He referred to a portion of the upper watershed

which is in Bath and said Bath residents have come to the West Bath selectmen for help. He said West Bath has no problem with signing off on studies as long as all the issues are addressed and said they are willing to sign off, but want the knowledge that they will be complete.

He then referred to several of the crossings and said people want to know how these are being looked at. He stated that the issue with the citizens in West Bath is the economics and the issue surrounding shellfish among others. He said there are 20+ homes that will be affected and the New Meadows Racing Association want to know how they will be affected. He reiterated that the study needs to look at the economics of everything involved, not just water quality.

Mr. Kalisz stated that another issue is if this gets funded quasi-independently and something goes wrong, who is responsible for the cost? He stated that the Town of West Bath cannot afford to fix any problems related to this. He then asked when the Town will be asked to sign off.

Karen Young responded that this study is just one piece of the bigger picture and said a lot more information will be gathered, including economic information.

Steve Walker disagreed that no one in West Bath knew about this and highlighted a number of people who have been involved with the project. He explained that in terms of the financial obligations, this study does not have match obligations like the other studies have had and observed that this is a better deal.

Stephanie Lindloff referred to a number of items that were missing that are now being shown in this study and said it is important that everyone bring up the list of issues that they feel should be included.

Another member of the public pointed out that this is a technical study and said additional studies will be done to answer these questions. He asked if there is a bigger picture approach to address non-technical issues. Karen Young responded that this study is a first step and the outcomes of the study will shed light on the broader overall picture. The observation was made that rather than identifying a quantitative water quality goal, a better approach would be to look at the various alternatives and look at where we are now and to what degree each of these alternatives would improve the current situation. He asked Mike Chelminski if the various models would answer these types of questions. Mike responded that the first model will analyze a limited set of parameters and said that the first model is not applicable for a broader analysis. The second phase of modeling would evaluate potential benefits to water quality in the Lake.

Albert Schmitt observed that there is a lot of theorizing going on without looking at some of the practical problems. He noted that the main obstruction is U.S. 1 and said something needs to be done about that obstruction or there will not be any change. He was informed that this is what is going to be modeled. Another citizen stated that there had been great clamming in the area prior to the Rt. 1 causeway.

Another citizen stated that there used to be a trickle down the middle and said there was a tidal smell there in the summer from the flats. He said the spillway was put in and the Lake was there. He then stated that in 1967, West Bath directed the selectmen to go to Augusta to discuss this with the DEP. He pointed out that this study will get into money and cited some figures from past studies from 1967. He reiterated that the economics will be a big issue. Steve Walker responded that this is a key piece of information that all these studies have led up to and said this study would be a starting point.

One of the funders of the project said he is more concerned with what the real issues are with the Lake and asked them to reach consensus on what is acceptable. He explained that this study received an \$80,000 grant with no federal match requirement and said additional federal funding for implementation is possible down the road because this is a strong project. He said that the study's outcome will not mean that the Town automatically has to come up with the cash for implementation. He reiterated that the issues about the Lake are of much more relevant significance, adding that salinity is another water quality issue, and pointed out that this can be healthy, productive habitat. He concluded that they want to provide a better ecosystem with a healthy habitat.

Another resident felt that most of the residents would say that it is not bad right now and would say leave it alone and spend the money elsewhere. Steve Walker said the two communities would have to take formal political action if any change to the causeway was considered.

A citizen noted that there weren't enough residents in attendance, and expressed concern that residents of the Lake area were not notified of the forum and it was felt that these people should be notified by mail of these meetings. Another citizen suggested posting fliers at town offices. It was noted that there is still plenty of opportunity for comments.

Ed Benedikt stated that people from West Bath want *Phragmites* and said that these people came to some core meetings and said they want to leave the *Phragmites* as is. It was noted that Bath residents along the River feel excluded and that this is going on at the homeowner/abutter level. Karen Young agreed that the people from Bath should be included more.

Ed Benedikt said that the judgment about what is good and bad is judgmental and that his focus would be getting the estuary back to its natural condition. He referred to the picture that showed the railroad and reiterated that he would like to see this go back to a natural setting and felt this should be on the agenda.

Karen Young responded that this study will be the first step in a larger process that may or may not go anywhere. Steve Walker said a lot of comments about extremes have been brought up tonight and didn't feel that the Lake is a lost cause. He said that things like *Phragmites* are symptomatic of a larger problem and said that warning signs are coming forth.

Hearing no more questions, Karen Young broke the large session into smaller poster groups at 8:25 p.m.

Attest:

Pamela J. Gray
Recording Secretary

Study Scope & Methodology – Michael Chelminski

- a. Summary of previous studies**
- b. Definition of study limits**
- c. Study methodology**
- d. Development & analysis of restoration alternatives**

Questions & Answers – Panel

Breakout Poster Session – One-on-one Questions & Answers