APPROVED Minutes, Orford Conservation Commission March 1, 2018

Present: Ted Cooley, Chair, Harry Pease, Carl Schmidt, Emily Bryant, Craig Putnam, Paul Goundrey, Select Board representative.

Chair Ted Cooley opened the meeting at 7:00 PM in the office of the Select Board.

Ted Cooley suggested a “Snowshoe by the Light of the Moon” event, possibly coordinating with the Upper Valley Land Trust if they’re interested. The date suggested is Saturday, 3/31, the date of the full moon. Harry Pease offered his farm sugarhouse as the meeting point. Later in the meeting Harry shared the news that he and Linda are working with the Upper Valley Land Trust to conserve their farm (Brackett Brook Farm) through a program of the NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service).

Carl Schmidt shared that there will be a program at the Town Hall Heritage Center April 10 at 7:00 PM sharing portions of a video interview with David Bischoff in which David shares his extensive knowledge about Billy Brown’s life on Mountain View Farm.

Ted Cooley invited submission of photos of natural scenes in Orford for the Orford Conservation Commission table at Town Meeting. Of particular interest might be photos of the extensive damage caused by severe rain events this past year.

Turning to the matter that occasioned this extra meeting, the Warrant Article for Town Meeting attempting to redirect funds from the Land Use Change Tax, Paul agreed to get the records accounting for the expenditures that have been made in recent years from the Conservation Fund, while Emily will get the records of what monies have come into the Fund in the same period.

Carl emphasized the importance of having approximately 6 sharply defined Talking Points that individuals might deliver at Town Meeting in defense of the current arrangement of the LUCT funds being deposited in the Conservation Fund. Following are the key points raised:

1) Need to explain the Land Use Change Tax – the fact that the Legislature specifically intended this as a penalty for reversing the intent of Current Use (preserving open space).

2) Open space saves money for the Town because open space demands far fewer services than developed land demands (schools, roads, police etc.).

3) The receipts from LUCT are historically small and completely irregular, relative to the scale of the Town budget.

4) LUCT funds are disproportionately powerful in the Conservation Fund by leveraging contributions from individuals and non-profits: the Mountain View Farm conservation effort, while “costing” $340,000, was enabled by spending $60,000 from the Fund.

5) OCC plans to focus efforts on pre-emptive conservation strategies to limit damages incurred from severe storm events such as happened July 1 and Oct 30, 2017. Relatively large grants can be leveraged with relatively small contributions from the Town Conservation Fund.

6) The Orford Conservation Commission has already benefitted the Town through several projects using Conservation Fund money:

- helped conserve shoreline of Upper Baker Pond

- purchased and distributed Garicella insects that feed on and destroy the wildly expanding invasive, Purple Loosestrife

- contributed to Connecticut River bank stabilization by planting trees and shrubs that thrive in that zone

- enabled the permanent conservation of the stunningly beautiful and ecologically important Mountain View Farm

Agreed upon action:

As mentioned above, Paul and Emily will gather budget figures regarding contributions to, and expenditures from the Conservation Fund. Craig agreed to speak to the intention of the Commission to use money from the fund to help minimize damages from severe weather events. Carl offered to encourage an Orford resident not on the Commission to speak in support of the current funding arrangement of the Conservation fund. Carl also spoke of the importance of speaking to the popular benefits of open space, such as public access through trails; Emily may be able to support that effort.

The meeting closed at approximately 8:30 when the Selectboard Office needed to be vacated.

Respectfully submitted by Craig Putnam