

Natural Environment and Lake Stewardship Committee

Tuesday, September 13, 2022

written by Claire Huene, Co-chair / Secretary

Committee Members Present:

Claire Huene (Co-chair / Secretary); Connie Beaton; Ade MacDonald-Smith; Sharon Cockx
By phone: Karen Laustsen (Chair); Karen Foudy (Council Rep)

Public Attendees:

Tooney Fink (Committee Volunteer); Warren Wilson

Regrets:

Debbie Brotzel

Meeting called to order by C. Huene at 6:30 p.m.

1. Agenda – Regular meeting of the NELS Committee

2. Approval of Prior Minutes

- The Minutes of the June 19, 2022 meeting were approved June 24, 2022.

3. Future meeting schedule

- Because of deciding to maintain the NELS Bylaw 217 as currently written, regular NELS meetings will occur bi-monthly (not quarterly) on the second Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Hall.
- Upcoming meeting dates: *November 09/22; January 11/23; March 08/23; May 10/23*. No regular meeting in July/August unless necessary.
- Connie or Claire will post written notice on the village bulletin board at least 24 hours before each meeting.
- Meetings may be scheduled on Zoom or other platform when the weather is bad for driving. **CLAIRE** will determine a date / time for Zoom training.

4. Compost pile research

- In preparation for NELS to make recommendations to council about the village compost pile, Connie researched what Gull Lake and Waiparous do with village yard waste / compost (report attached).
 - **CONNIE** is waiting to hear from Gordie on hauling quote.
 - **ADE** is waiting to hear from Lenny Gibson on hauling quote. (September 19/22 - Ade reported back that he has no suggestions for us.)
 - Karen F clarified that Kevin did not spray the poison ivy but that a golf course worker dug / turned the poison ivy under into the pile.

- Claire checked with Mustafa / Hassan about whether there is currently any written policy or bylaw related to use / maintenance of village compost area – NO, NONE.
- **Discussion:**
 - Everyone likes having a place to deposit their yard waste, but opinions were mixed about the idea of keeping it as some form of compost pile.
 - A couple of people use the more-or-less-composted soil at the north end of the pile (after screening to remove rocks and weeds), and would like to see the pile maintained / occasionally turned as a compost pile.
 - Several said they would not use that more-or-less-composted soil because of possible herbicide residues and weeds, and suggested that for a variety of reasons true composting is not practical in our situation.
 - **THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT:**
 - (1) If the cost is reasonable, council should have the existing pile hauled away, and (2) start over with an unfenced yard waste collection point (rather than calling it a compost pile).
 - (3) Periodically, the pile of yard waste should be hauled away so that it (a) doesn't become unmanageably large, and (b) doesn't have a chance to become so weedy that weeds start escaping to nearby properties and natural spaces.
 - (4) Content should be restricted to green/brown yard waste, i.e. grass clippings, leaves, dead bedding plants, and other garden waste. Definitely no kitchen waste or other food scraps (bear attractants), and no sticks or branches.

5. Recommendations RE: location of proposed Alberta Forestry weather station on GLV lands

- Based on informal discussions before this meeting, most on the committee are in favour of allowing installation, although some have concerns about aesthetics and height, and some have concerns about people being drawn into the village if it is visible from the highway.
- After this meeting, Karen F provided NELS with a copy of the original letter from Alberta Forestry so that we have appropriate background information (including photos and videos) to make recommendations. Further discussion occurred by email after receipt of the letter from AB Forestry.
- Connie, Claire, and Karen L walked the areas around the main entrance and west-end emergency access road to scout for suitable locations and to observe the condition of the native flora.
- **Recommendations:**
 - The native flora is relatively consistent throughout the entire area. NELS recognizes that installation of a weather station will damage the native flora, but that the damage would be "light" and hopefully not permanent.
 - **It is imperative that any location for the weather station equipment take into account the realignment of Highway 1A, to ensure that the equipment does not have to be moved at the time of the realignment.**
 - NELS' first choice for location would be somewhere near the west-end emergency access road, where will be located at the time of the realignment of Highway 1A (in theory, it will line up with Keller's entrance road?).
 - Compared to locating the station near the main gate, this location would provide access for maintenance (via the [relocated] emergency access road), but not for curious passers-by.

- Visibility of the equipment at this location might be less than at the main gate, as it could be located behind the large evergreens. There is no tree cover near the main gate.
- NELS recommends that Alberta Forestry vehicles **not** be allowed to drive on the native grasses. Vehicle(s) must stay on the access road.
- The letter from AB Forestry indicates that the grass within the enclosure would typically be cut once per year to ensure that it does not interfere with the rain gauge. NELS recommends that the native grasses within the fenced enclosure **not** be cut or mowed, except immediately around the concrete block on which the rain gauge is located (refer to the video clip of the Kananaskis weather station). The native grasses are not particularly tall or dense, and should not create any problems with accessing the equipment. NELS would be fine with AB Forestry clipping the grasses around the edges of the concrete block to a **minimum height of 5"** (which would protect the growth crowns of the grasses and other plants and would maintain sufficient plant cover over the soil to prevent erosion). NELS recommends that the grasses only be clipped to a distance of 8-12" around the edges of the block on which the rain gauge is located to minimize disturbance and damage to the local flora.

6. Disc golf course – process for monitoring and assessing potential damage to native grassland area

- Claire and Karen L have both sent email to council to ask where the compiled feedback about disc golf is (from the July 23/22 open house) and why it has not been circulated as promised. Claire also asked why the discussion about (a) writing a letter to AB Transportation about locating a disc golf course near 1A highway, and (b) involving NELS in developing a monitoring and impact assessment process related to installation and use of the disc golf course was not included in the council meeting minutes from July 26/22, since both were discussed at that meeting (which was dedicated to disc golf related matters).
- **CLAIRE** and **KAREN L** are currently compiling information from experts and organizations that are trying to protect natural grassland ecosystems and are attempting to balance recreational uses with conservation / protection. Also from other existing disc golf courses. We are interested in recommendations around manageable use, types of use, seasonal use, use of motorized vehicles, recommendations around cutting / mowing, etc. Also information about existing disc golf courses as related to use and environmental impact from that use.
- (Forgot to include this at the meeting)... NELS members have taken photos before installation of the disc golf course, and at several intervals since, to record and be able to compare photos as use continues in different seasons. The most significant damage recorded at this time appears to be from driving a quad around the course, and from mowing with a tractor mower. In many areas, the tires have damaged the plant cover to the point that there is exposed soil, and the mower blades (which have been set low to cut the grass very short) have completely scalped the plant cover down to bare soil. This kind of damage may be permanent and will be carefully monitored.
- **CLAIRE** will eventually sort and archive the photos.

- **CLAIRE** will write up some preliminary recommendations for the Sept. 26 council meeting. There is no real rush at this point, as we have all winter to establish a monitoring and impact assessment process.

7. West-end spring project

- Karen L sent a written update of her recent activities, since she was unable to attend the meeting in person. It was read aloud at the meeting.
- Tooney provided a brief update on his investigations and findings.
- **KAREN F** has been asked to investigate ways to coordinate NELS efforts with those of council on this project, including finding out if there is any possible funding to put towards related research.
- When she returns from vacation, **KAREN L** will research costs related to conducting a species inventory.
- When she returns from vacation, **KAREN L** will research costs related to building a boardwalk at south end of the Fairy Trail.

8. NELS Bylaw and NELS Three-year Plan

- It was decided to leave NELS Bylaw 217 as written, and to create a three-year plan and estimated budget in accordance with the bylaw. (General agreement established at working meeting August 31/22.)
- **CLAIRE** and **KAREN L** will work the current projects and tasks into a draft 3-year plan, with a written draft to be ready to submit to council by the September 30 deadline.
- Connie suggested an inventory and mapping of springs within the boundaries of the village as a future priority.
- Committee members can email further ideas to Claire.

9. Educational events / activities

- Quick discussion of the Bats event on July 23/22. Well attended (20-30 people). Bat walk using echo-location devices was very neat; evidence of four or five kinds of bats, based on their calls. Could ask Susan Holroyd to come again for a different kind of bat event in the future.
- Connie took the initiative to summarize information about SVGL bear activity this year and to make recommendations about reducing the presence of bears in the village in the future (report attached).
- Based on Connie's report (and some additional research by Claire), NELS will make several recommendations to council related to concerns about recent bear activity in the village. In particular, the purchase of bear-proof garbage bins, possibly funded with climate change grant money.
- **WARREN W** was present as an observer for the last half of the meeting, and later told Claire that he was interested in researching costs for bear-proof bins and would send the information to Claire.
- There was general agreement that it would be a good idea for NELS to arrange a bear awareness education event in SGLV. Connie mentioned that Sarah Elmeligi (NDP candidate for Banff/Kananaskis) might be a good person to contact for such

an event. Karen L also knows someone to contact. Perhaps **KAREN L** and **CONNIE** could confer to investigate options for a weekend bear awareness presentation in September or early October?

- It might be a good idea to **repeat this presentation again next spring** when the summer villagers return, possibly in combination with a moderated “village round-table” to answer questions and discuss mitigation of issues related to bear activity.
- We didn’t have time to discuss this at the meeting, but it might also be feasible to hold another educational event this fall if Jeff Z is available to present (Astronomy / Star Gazing). **KAREN L** will check with Jeff on possible dates and bad weather contingency dates.

10. Adjournment

- Meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Certified by the Secretary of the NELS Committee this 23 day of September 2022.

Claire Huene