

Natural Environment – Working Landscapes Subcommittee Notes of January 31, 2008, 8:30 A.M., MVC Offices

Present: Dick Johnson, Tim Boland, Jim Athearn, Bob Woodruff and Andrew Woodruff

Present – MVC Staff: Mark London, Jo-Ann Taylor, Chris Seidel

The Natural Environment Work Group is working on a series of maps to be incorporated into the Natural Environment mapping portion for the Development and Growth identification and evaluation of existing and future growth scenarios. Several farmers and others gathered to work on the draft Working Landscapes map, as well as to discuss related issues.

- The reasons we want to maintain and expand farming on the Island include:
 - To produce local food, which is fresher, healthier, etc. It would be useful to estimate how much we'd like to and would be able to grow locally. To have a local food supply in case of a disaster.
 - To reduce the carbon footprint related to importing food, e.g. trucking produce from places like California.
 - To enhance cultural values such as keeping the farming lifestyle and scenic vistas of farm fields prominent in Vineyard life.
 - To provide employment in farming.
- The highest priority should be to keep existing working farmland, which might otherwise disappear with the next generation.
 - The map should highlight existing working farms as a priority.
 - One strategy could be to review the MVC's DRI checklist to be sure that the existing farms are well protected from development in that regard.
 - APR protection is not enough.
 - The definition of land protected for farming should specify that it be used for food production.
- Other important choices for priorities include:
 - Class I and II soils, as well as class III and IV soils. The better the soil, the more productive the farm; so good land is important, although other flat land that can be improved could also make good farmland.
 - Farms that were worked in '71 and are still open land (undeveloped). It would be useful to keep them open with regular brush cutting.
 - Size is most important for hayfields, which should be at least 5 acres; so size is probably most important in nitrogen-sensitive watersheds where row crops would not be the best land use choice. On good soil, even a half acre is useful, say for growing lettuce.
- Another approach would be to set a target population (e.g. 18-20,000) and set a target goal of providing a target percentage (perhaps 50%?) of food from local sources, then figure how much acreage (based on soils or other factors) would be needed and where. This could use

national estimates of food consumption and land needed to grow it. This agricultural sustainability project could possibly be done by a summer intern, if funding could be secured. It may be possible to be up to 75-80% self-sufficient in summer, but maybe only about 10% in January and February. We could survey food importers to get an idea of how much is brought in. Greenhouse growing is something that could extend the growing season, but is presently economically marginal, and consumes considerable labor and energy.

- Grains like wheat and barley have been grown on the Vineyard in the past, and could possibly be grown again. The records of the Ag Society might yield information on yields and locations.
- Aquaculture should also be investigated. For mapping purposes, it is the access points that are important to note.
- Most participants felt that there is no need for mapping land to promote for forestry since we don't anticipate that there would be any land set aside as a permanent monoculture for harvesting trees. Forestry should be encouraged, but would focus on selective harvesting in a wide variety of areas throughout the Island. The western moraine is better for growing hardwoods, but there is otherwise no land that is particularly better than another. It would be useful to look at the possibility of having harvestable trees grow in areas where the priority is promoting native habitat; the trees might pose problems in terms of shading and affecting the soils. They would have to be harvested using better practices than are often used on the Island. It might be worth setting aside a few hundred acres, say in the State Forest, for forestry; it could serve as the home base and basic supply of trees to sustain a team that would mainly do selective harvesting elsewhere. White pine stands presently constitute approximately 5% of the State Forest's 5,000 +/- acreage. White pine stands in the State Forest should be retained as a long range local source of lumber. There could be provisions to require that trees in an area being cleared, say with a diameter of more than 10", are used for firewood or lumber, and not chipped.

Next Session

No next session was scheduled. Prior to meeting again, the draft Synthesis Document will be revised to incorporate today's notes and will be distributed along with notes from previous sessions.

Notes prepared by Jo-Ann Taylor