

Cornwall Conservation Commission Meeting Agenda
Friday April 26, 2024 (1:00-2:00 pm)
Cornwall Town Hall

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85032451903?pwd=WW9EQmJrK3VZZjJXZlBFV1RRM2tidz09>

Meeting ID: 850 3245 1903 Passcode: 125461

CCC Members: Don Burns, Mary Dodge, Andrea Landsberg, Kristina Sargent, and Michael Sheridan (all attending)

Meeting Chair: Kristina Sargent. Meeting called to order at 1PM

Recording Secretary: Andrea Landsberg

Quorum check

Approval of Minutes from March 22, 2024

Mary moved to approve; Don seconded. Unanimous approval.

Guests Jim Andrews (herpetologist, member of Salisbury CC) and Chris Slesar (VTrans Environmental Resource Coordinator; prior member of Monkton CC) came to discuss their experience with wildlife crossings.

Don explained why we asked them to speak to us. Given the new Town Plan Goals regarding habitat connectivity, we would like to understand their experience regarding towns working with VTrans on highway modifications for wildlife, and how that might differ when working on town roads with a modest road crew.

Jim explained that in Salisbury the effort began with getting good tracking data on all their roads to identify mammal crossings to provide baseline and understand key areas of movement. This provides the data (eg: sightings, roadkill numbers, what species, etc) to support priority ranking of roads.

For Monkton project, Jim and Chris came up with a model to predict where amphibian crossings were likely (Steve Peron was monitoring site for 10 years) – that was needed to support the high cost of retrofitting underpasses. It was helpful that Chris knew about the resources and funding available for this type of road work. Transportation alternative program grants that municipalities can tap into – usually street-scaping, bike paths, but also environmental issues such as habitat connectivity. They had to apply a number of times; need to do more than just submit application, need some lobbying of key decision makers (ACRPC, F&W, etc). This funding covered scoping/feasibility, conceptual plans – too much to do all road – honed in on hot spots. Then got some construction funds from Fed govt that are administered by VTrans – not enough but ~\$100k; fund raising continued for another 5 yrs. It was a long and involved process. Human safety concerns regarding collision potential with large mammals (moose, bear, deer) can be good data to build a case.. In Monkton it was an important amphibian crossing so road-kill data was also used. Species rarity can also weigh in.

Idea mentioned that instead of ‘helping amphibians to cross the roads’ it would be more effective to try to have road closings on key nights with detours around the crossing area.

When road activity occurring for other reasons (ie: “VTrans tearing up road anyway”) there is legal requirement to mitigate road issues and up to 10% of budget can be used for enhancements). Even if less than 10% applied in the future that could pay for culvert work as these are big budget projects. Mike Winslow at ACRPC reg planning is good contact for state projects. For town road projects need to work with Road Commissioner.

When culverts up for replacement this is a good time to try to get wildlife enhancement and keep riparian areas for crossing. Benefit of culvert approach – cheapest option to have an impact by just widening them (“upsized or oversized”).

Should we have ‘walls like Monkton’ project? These are not needed for mammals – they follow riparian area already. But good to have a surface that mammals will walk on. (ie: not big stones). Can use wood or shrubs near a corridor to direct wildlife travel to the safe crossing.

West St amphibian numbers crossing is ~ 200-300 and this data might justify extra funds for walls – but not a state road, so wouldn’t qualify for State or Federal dollars. Could try to at least get oversized culverts justified for flooding reasons and this would also help amphibians. Want to aim for 1.5 x bank width (ie: have land on either side for wildlife (mention that “bank full width” is what is measured in high water times.)

Can check Federal Highway Website for transportation alternatives grants as some do have environmental criteria.

How effective is signage, ie: wildlife crossing signs? Some can work but tend to be ignored over time. Temporary “Road Work Ahead” signs seasonally might help. Static signs less useful – periodic ones and handmade ones catch attention.

State may incorporate stewardship into criteria for funding; nothing from ANR yet regarding 30x30 implementation.

Advice: Need to focus on one or few sites and justify high budgets for these projects with data. Influencing what type of culvert being put in to mitigate funding (get them upgraded to best type for wildlife). Put into town plan – min culvert sizing when they are replaced (“capable of handling 200 yr flood” or such). Work to identify culverts in areas of wildlife movement. Also want to have land on either side of crossing/culvert ‘protected’ from development that would make the work done irrelevant at a later date.

Are performance criteria required for grants? Not for Monkton grant but they did do post-project surveillance to confirm reduced mortality.

Use of rip rap does impact hooved animals so avoid if they use crossing. Fences can act as a barrier; bear don’t go over guardrails and also concrete middle of the road barrier on interstate does cause mortality. Also, moose are reluctant to leap over fences, unlike deer.

CC reached conclusion that we should learn more about culverts so we can appropriately advise Road Commissioner.

We offered Jim and Chris a big THANK YOU for all of the information they provided.

Other agenda items will be handled via email or tabled until the next meeting.

Kristina motioned, and Mike seconded to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 1:59PM

Next Meeting: May 24th, Mike: Meeting Chair, Kristina: Recording Secretary

Newsletter: April '24 (March-Mary), July '24 (June-Kristina), October '24 (September TBD), January '25 (December-TBD)

Will continue with assigning alphabetically by last name with substitutions made as needed.

June 28: Chair Don, Sec Kristina

July 26: Chair Mary, Sec Don

August 16: Chair Andrea, Sec Mary

September 20: Chair Kristina, Sec Andrea