CVRPC Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC)
Meeting Minutes – 9 November 2023

CWAC Members:

Commissioner Representatives	
√	John Brabant
	Royal DeLegge
√	Ron Krauth
√	Rich Turner

Municipal Representatives	
√	John Hoogenboom
√	Joyce Manchester
	Emily Ruff
√	Jeff Schulz
√	Joseph Whelan

CVRPC Staff: Brian Voigt, Lincoln Frasca

Other Attendees: Keith Fritschie, Department of Environmental Conservation; Erin De Vries, Vermont River Conservancy; Curt Lindberg, Waitsfield Conservation Commission; Adelaide Dumm, Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District; Will Eldridge, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department; Alice Peal, Waitsfield representative.

4:00: Call to Order & Roll Call
J. Schulz called the meeting to order at 4:06 PM.

4:05: Approval of September minutes (action)
R. Turner moved to approve the minutes of the 14 September 2023 meeting. J. Hoogenboom seconded. No discussion. The motion carried unanimously.

4:10: Updates to agenda: None

4:15: Public Comment: None

4:20: Riparian Buffers/ Invasive Species Panel (discussion)
C. Lindberg representing the Waitsfield Conservation Commission, presented first on their work to control Japanese Knotweed (see presentation). Waitsfield has several Priority Knotweed Management Sites that include plantings at the Austin Parcel and Lareau swimming hole. Weekly community volunteer work events are driven by UVM interns from the Rubenstein School of Natural Resources. The Valley has launched an

"Adopt Some Knot" strategy with sites managed by local volunteers on their own time. Three main techniques for knotweed mitigation include; cutting, covering with black plastic, and replanting native grasses with regular mowing. Knotweed moves up the valley on vehicles and back down the valley via the river. Knotweed tends to spread during road work. In one case roadworkers used their grader to remove and bury knotweed. The Waitsfield Conservation Commission has managed up to 80 knotweed sites at a time. They track their visits and time spent at each site. Trends show that knotweed is weakening and outbreaks are shrinking in size. Measurement plots throughout the valley have been installed to take a more scientific approach. 85% of managed sites have shown significant weakening. That means less time for monitoring and mitigation. The ultimate goal is restoring native habitat. Mechanical removal is not adequate for larger scale knotweed removal. It is up to towns to find the resources and capacity to address invasive species. Overall, C. Lindberg is disappointed with the lack of prioritization of invasive management on the state level.

A. Dumm presented second and announced her recent promotion to District Manager of the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District (WNRCD). She explained the role conservation districts play statewide and the WNRCD mission, "to promote the wise use, sustainable development, and conservation of our District's natural resources (see presentation)." They partner with local and state agencies as well as the UVM Forestry club and Friends of the Winooski River. Trees for Streams is their program that promotes plantings in riparian areas. It is driven by a volunteer taskforce with co-benefits such as phosphorus reductions. Their website contains resources for landowners including opportunities for site visits and technical assistance. They recommend landowners focus on spread prevention and controlling small patches of invasives. At this time WNRCD does not have a big taskforce for large scale removal projects. A. Dumm shared the 2020 project at the Shady Rill Recreation Area Stream Bank Restoration on Martins Brook. This is a popular swimming area with bad erosion and lack of buffer from parking area. Funding came from a Department of Environmental Conservation block grant amongst other sources for riparian buffer plantings, increased accessibility, and improved aesthetics of the area. R. Turner is on the WNRCD board and mentioned how helpful this project has been in keeping cars away from stream bank and increasing accessibility. Invasives were not the primary focus of the project but R. Turner mentioned there was Knotweed present and possibly other species. Project design and implementation was completed by Watershed Consulting Associates LLC. Native plantings and new stone steps were contributed by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. Other partners included; Middlesex Conservation Commission, Vermont Youth Conservation Corp, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

E. De Vries from the Vermont River Conservancy (VRC) presented third on their work securing river corridor easements statewide (see presentation). VRC holds over 100 easements throughout the state to protect buffers and create new riparian buffers. They work with individuals and communities to protect and restore wetlands and assist with flood recovery efforts. She explained the fundamentals of river science and how river corridors allow our rivers to move naturally. The Department of Environmental Conservation and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board both work with VRC to hold easements and therefore the future potential for stewardship. E. De Vries emphasized the importance of conservation first and stewardship second. W. Eldridge described how river easements allow rivers to do what they want, while providing many ecosystem services including flood water storage. Mowing is prohibited on VRC easements providing bank stabilization and wildlife habitat enhancement. VRC has worked with the Intervale to manage invasives and provide native plantings. Partners are essential to get plantings done and survivability is a big part of buffer planting. Funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service allowed for planting along the Nulhegan River Confluence. The Winhall River plantings site was an example of an area damaged from the July 2023 flood. The River Conservancy staff quickly responded to help assess the property and make the landowners comfortable in moving forward with an easement. Fostering strong relationships id a big part of VRC's work. Landowners who chose not to do an easement can still leave a wide buffer and plant trees. VRC also collaborates with the Lewis Creek Association, Conservation Districts, and utilizes watershed grants throughout the state. Regional Planning Commission and Conservation Commission's also play a role in conserving first and restoring second. The Tactical Basin Plan can be used to identify stream reaches that are priorities. Municipal and regional commissions should collaborate with professional watershed partners to get projects done.

W. Eldridge with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department spoke last (see presentation). He acknowledged coordination for invasive management happens locally. We are at the beginning of the 30 x 30 conservation initiative and easements are essential in meeting that goal. Supportive legislation is what we need but the reality is that small groups are putting this work together on their own with volunteers and small pots of money. Invasive species are a need that are not being met. We won't be able to plant our way into forested riparian buffers. The tree stock shortage combined with unsuitability of some sites means planting is not a good fit for every site. Natural regeneration strategies are what he has been focusing on. Natural regeneration can be done in combination with plantings. The goal is to restore structure, function, and then process. He noted how disturbance, such as flooding, facilitates regeneration. Invasive species prevent natural regeneration and these sites require active restoration with removal and planting. Other sites with a lot of exposed

soils, sometimes caused by dam removals, also require active restoration. W. Eldridge is experimenting with hydroseeding, mixing tree and grass seeds, and increasing planting density. He is monitoring different methods to accelerate natural regeneration.

5:20: Panelist Q & A (discussion)

J. Brabant noted that in his farming experience the invasive Buttercup is a result of overgrazing and acidic soils. Maybe lime or wood ash would level the acidity and avoid the need for pesticides?

A. Peal asked when a 100-foot buffer is appropriate vs. 50 feet? E. De Vries would like to see 100+ ft of buffer on all rivers. A larger buffer allows for more protection and the Vermont River Conservancy has 150+ foot buffers on some easements. W. Eldridge noted buffers capture nutrients like Phosphorus and Nitrogen. The wider the buffer the more nutrients captured. The River Continuum concept was referred to in regards to buffer width. Land use in riparian areas near the headwaters has a potentially larger impact on the watershed than what happens downstream. Buffers on smaller streams in the headwaters could be more important than buffers downstream. K. Fritschie shared the following 2014 study on the benefits of buffer: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262842955_Streamside_Forest_Buffer_Width_Needed_to_Protect_Stream_Water_Quality_Habitat_and_Organisms_A_Literature_Review
J. Brabant formerly worked with Department of Environmental Conservation and has found that it has become the norm that the minimum buffer width is used as a default maximum rather than evaluating case by case. He encourages the Agency of Natural Resources to consider policy to expand the minimum buffer width. E. De Vries mentioned a buffer policy is coming to the legislative session this year.
K. Fritschie really appreciates C. Lindberg's work in Waitsfield and echoes the need for more state focus on invasives. Other towns have the same interests in identifying invasives but don't have the volunteer base. C. Lindberg credited high levels of community involvement, workshops, webinars, and relationships with landowners. Their conservation commission uses a cocreation philosophy to build ideas together vs. coming up with the final plan and telling people what to do. People will come out to build community and meet people. The UVM volunteers have been essential. Local paper helps get the word out along with residents from surrounding towns who visit the valley.

5:40: Draft Tactical Basin debrief (discussion)

B. Voigt presented on the current status and next steps for commenting on the conformance of the 2023 Draft Tactical Basin Plan with the 2016 CVRPC Regional Plan. He shared the conformance matrix created by staff (see meeting materials).
J. Brabant: Discussed Maine's work in identifying where PFAS/PFOAS are located and the spread via wastewater. Exposure can happen through dust. His concern is wastewater treatment plants were not designed to handle PFAS. He will be submitting a letter expressing his concern that the Tactical Basin Plan does not address the spreading of septic sludge and wastewater. Sludge has been spread on Vermont fields and is at risk of leaching into the Winooski. This is a concern for wildlife and fish habitat which have become contaminated with PFAS.
A. Peal asked about the land behind the Waitsfield elementary school where manure was spread. Seems like a concern for children's health. J. Hoogenboom would like to spend more time talking about this issue. J. Brabant will share his recording of the Maine Farm Association conference once it is available. The lack of response in Vermont compared to Maine is troubling. This could have huge repercussions on the dairy community. PFAS has been detected in milk in Maine. Maine is looking to fund a larger effort to address PFAS.

J. Brabant made a motion to approve conformance, and J. Schulz seconded. All were in favor with none opposed

6:00: Adjourn
J Brabant moved to adjourn the meeting at 6: 04 PM. J Hoogenboom seconded.