

Mount Toby Meeting Land Committee Annual Report – June 2018

We continued our focus on bringing opportunities for the Mount Toby community to experience the land, and on strengthening connections with neighbors and the larger community. We also resolved issue of the trees along the boundary with our neighbors and developed an updated Handbook description that we propose as an official charge for this committee.

1. Activities

We made progress on the goals we outlined in our report from September 2017:

Goal: Continue to discern the long-term goals for the land. Part of this is to encourage the Meeting community to engage with the query, ‘How is Mount Toby’s spiritual life enriched by its forest land?’ Another part of this is to explore alternatives to ownership such as selling or giving the land to a conservation or public organization with a conservation restriction.

We are developing a relationship with Rattlesnake Gutter Land Trust (RGT, based in Leverett, with Mount Toby connections). If the Meeting were to strongly wish to divest of its land, this trust seems like a good partner. However, we are not actively pursuing land transfer. At this time, we are working with RGT to better document our trails, and to add our main walking trails to the RGT maps of trails in Leverett, with public parking designated at the Meetinghouse rather the trailhead, which requires driving on a narrow dirt road and across a wooden bridge.

Goal: Continue to organize varied opportunities for Meeting members to engage with the land. In addition to hikes, we are contemplating offering other experiences such as a scavenger hunt or an accessible short walk to a place to sit in the forest.

We led a varied series of 5 hikes this past year

- September 17 after Fellowship Lunch about 30 people & 5 dogs hiked to the overlook and shared poetry
- November 24 a group of 9 humans & 5 dogs hiked from Mount Toby Meetinghouse to the summit of Mount Toby, partaking in a picnic lunch at the top.
- January 1 a small, hardy crew braved the frigid weather to hike along the frozen swamp and then up the powerline.
- April 22 a large, multi-generational group walked to a small bog near the Meetinghouse to view marsh marigolds, skunk cabbage, and larch trees.
- June 24 we took a morning marinade walk to explore a shallow cave and brook.

Goal: Continue to encourage ease of navigation by adding more trail markers, signs, and a kiosk with trail and natural history information about the land.

David Scott constructed a deluxe kiosk and it proudly stands near the back gate behind the Meetinghouse. We are working on getting content on the kiosk.

We are working toward implementing a plan to construct a new bridge across the stream, because it is enjoyable and so that long-term, access to the woods from the Meetinghouse will not need to traverse Brad Archer’s land.

Goal: Resolve the neighbor/tree issue. Problems associated with trees falling onto the property and driveway of our neighbors Bob Strong and Micha Archer have been a recurring issue.

Following approval by MfB in July 2017, we contracted with The Whole Tree to bring down 3 large pine trees along the boundary that could endanger our neighbors’ structures if they fell. This work was done on 1 February 2018, and the total cost was \$750.

Other land-related neighbor interactions over the year:

- National Grid utilized its right-of-way to cross Meeting land to repair a tower. This included a large, temporary bridge, minor grading of the woods road, and felling 2-3 small trees.
- A local timber harvester contracted by Cowl's utilized a small portion of the powerline on the Meeting land as a landing for a firewood thinning harvest on Cowl's land. The timber harvester's equipment was limited to a truck. We noted no impact to the landing area.

Goal: Develop a 'land improvements wish list' so that when enthusiasm arises for a land-based activity/project, we can be ready with a list of excellent options.

Here is such a list

- Add trail markers to the 'red' trail
- Add signs at trail junctions
- Build a bridge
- Develop seating & a 4-season vista at the overlook
- Revive trail connecting overlook and Rabbit Hollow Trail
- Naming special places on the land

2. Land Committee Charge and Revised Handbook Description

At long last, we are responding to the minute of 1972.11.08.11 in which the newly formed Land-use Committee was asked to develop its charge. We seek Meeting approval to adopt the following as our official charge, and also serve as an updated Committee description for the Handbook.

Land Committee

Created 11/72 when the Meeting acquired 119 acres of land in Leverett and Sunderland as the Land-Use Committee; name changed in 9/17. Broadly, the Land Committee is the steward of questions about the Meeting's relationship to its land. Specifically, the Land Committee's duties include:

- Encourage and facilitate a physical and spiritual relationship with the land among members of the Mt. Toby community
- Serve as point of contact for questions regarding the Meeting's land outside of the fenced areas (these are the purview of the Grounds and Burial committees)
- Liaison with abutting land owners and parties who have a right-of-way on Meeting lands
- Advise the Meeting on potential activities and uses of the land
- Manage the Meeting's forest and farmland. From 1987 through 2024, approximately 1/3 of the Meeting's forest land has been designated for timber management, whereas the other 2/3 has been designated for non-extractive uses.
- Assist the Treasurer to prepare current-use (Chapter 61/61B) tax documents for the towns of Leverett and Sunderland, due each September.

One or two members should have experience in conservation and/or forest management.

See also **Land History and Uses** (page 59).

Revised by the Land Committee, April 2018.

3. Goals for the coming year

- Continue to discern the long-term goals for the land. Part of this is to encourage the Meeting community to engage with the query, 'How is Mount Toby's spiritual life enriched by its forest land?' Continue to explore alternatives to ownership such as selling or giving the land to a conservation or public organization with a conservation restriction (the idea of a conservation easement first appeared in Meeting minute 1974.06.09.15).
- Continue to organize varied opportunities for Meeting members to engage with the land.
- Build a new bridge
- Continue to consider ways to engage the wider community by working with Rattlesnake Gutter Land Trust to add our trails to town-wide trail maps.
- Populate the kiosk with trail and natural history information about the land.

Committee Members: Ken Hoffman, Roger Conant, Will Snyder, Audrey Barker-Plotkin (clerk)