

Austin Invasives Control Demonstration Project

Select Board Packet – June 9, 2017

Action Item

The Conservation Commission is seeking authority to proceed with an invasives control demonstration project on the Austin parcel.

Background

The Commission is seeking to address several near-term Management Objectives and Actions found in the draft *Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan* dated May 29, 2014. Specifically, the Commission hopes to address items a, b, and d of the Objective: *V.2 Enhance Mad River floodplain and riparian natural communities*.

In consultation with the Commission, The Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and Friends of the Mad River have prepared a report summarizing current conditions and offering guidance for managing the invasives on site. This report titled *Invasive Plant Management Plan for the Town of Waitsfield Austin and Tardy Properties* (the Report) provides a prioritized plan for achieving the land management goals identified in the *Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan*.

Informed by the VLT plan, as well as the *Town of Waitsfield, Austin Parcel Floodplain restoration plan* developed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Commission generated a Request for Proposals (RFP) (attached) to identify a contractor to work toward the objective of restoring the floodplain forest through active control, and ultimately elimination of, invasives on the parcel interior. The commission has received several bids and settled on a preferred contractor.

Justification

The Waitsfield Town Plan recognizes that exotic species pose a number of environmental, economic, and human health threats. As noted in the *Waitsfield Town Plan 2012-2017*:

While some species like knotweed are already widespread, the good news is that many are not yet prolific locally and so offer an opportunity for effective management to prevent or limit their spread. Before the threat and impacts of existing and new exotic invasive species intensify, the Town should do whatever it can independently and in collaboration with others (e.g., the other Mad River Valley towns, appropriate state agencies, nonprofit organizations like the Friends of the Mad River and the Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy) to develop and implement an effective prevention and management regime.

As the invasives are aggressively propagating, the Commission is eager to rapidly respond to ensure the Waitsfield Town Plan management objectives are still feasible given limited resources.

Objectives and Goals

The *Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan* outlines near term, mid-term, and mid- to long term management objectives. The goals of these objectives are to enhance the Mad River floodplain and

riparian natural communities. To do this the Commission, through this project, seeks to control infestation and promote desirable species and systems to resist further infestation through a site-led environmentally sustainable approach to invasive species control and removal. Invasives control will promote a healthier wildlife habitat, enhanced recreation access, and an overall increase in downstream flood resiliency.

Solicitation Methodology

The Commission solicited proposals from five contractors on April 6, 2017 based on local presence and reputation. With revised proposal requirements (attached as Waitsfield Austin Parcel Invasives Control - Request for Proposals - 04-08-17 - Amendment 1.doc), the Commission sent out four additional RFPs around April 28 to increase the response pool.

Of the nine contractors contacted two were not interested, one did not respond, one claimed to have insufficient references. Of the remaining five, two did not follow up with requests for further clarification of their respective RFPs and were deemed unresponsive. This resulted in three quality proposals received by the May 3, 2017 deadline.

After an objective review (attached as Response Evaluation - Objective - 05-13-17.pdf) for responsiveness to the RFP requirements, the proposals were subjectively reviewed (attached as Response Evaluation - Subjective - 05-13-17.pdf) by an Invasives Working Group consisting of three Commission members. This Working Group then presented the results to the full Commission for a final discussion and decision. Discussions covered a wide range of issues related to resource availability, feasibility, public buy-in, affordability, goals, objectives, experience, and more. As outlined in the RFP, the Commission evaluated proposals based on:

- ✓ Cost
- ✓ Experience
- ✓ References
- ✓ Past performance
- ✓ Efficacy of methodology

Ultimately the Commission reserved the right to select the contractor that it feels provided the best value to the Town. In the end, the proposal (attached as Redstart_Proposal_Austin_Invasives_5.5.2017.pdf) submitted by Redstart stood out for the thoroughness, professionalism, completeness, and excellent references - in addition to the items noted above.

Treatment Methodology Summary

Redstart proposes to conduct a two-year herbicide (Roundup® and Polaris®) and cutting methodology to achieve the objectives with two visits each year to conduct treatment activities. This would be coupled with creating and maintaining a mow strip buffer between the river's edge and the parcel interior. Additionally, in year two the treatment plan would be coupled with a subsidized planting effort to re-establish the floodplain forest. It is recognized that this effort is a long term (5-10) year commitment.