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MEMORANDUM

To: Galen Guerrero-Murphy
From: Art Gilman
Date: 19 November 2014
Re: NEPCL Project Survey — Temporary Off-ROW Work Areas

This memorandum recaps surveys for rare, threatened or endangered species, significant natural areas, non-native invasive plant species and necessary wildlife habitat undertaken at seven locations: I inspected parcels 1 and 2 on 18 November 2014, and parcels 3 – 7 on 31 October 2014, at the end of the growing season. On both dates, weather was dry and cold/seasonable, with no unusual conditions. Therefore, although late in the season, I was able to identify all plants observed and believe that the searches were thorough. Lists of plants observed at each location were taken and are available upon request.

No rare species, rare species habitat, significant natural areas, or necessary wildlife habitat were observed on any parcel. Non-native invasive species (NNIS) were observed on two parcels. Criteria applied were as follows:

Rare species: Rare species are those ranked by the Vermont Natural Heritage Inventory as S1 (very rare, generally 1–5 sites in Vermont) or S2 (rare, generally 5–20 sites in Vermont). Threatened or endangered species are those listed as such in Vermont’s endangered species statute or by the US Fish and Wildlife Service under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Natural Communities: Significant natural communities are communities that might be considered “rare and irreplaceable areas” as defined in Vermont’s Act 250. They vary by nature, but are generally characterized by an unusual association of plant species and community structure (e.g., forest, swamp, marsh, etc.). As generally considered, they are either rare on a statewide basis, or if not rare, then outstanding examples by virtue of their size, quality, and state of naturalness.

Necessary wildlife habitat: Necessary wildlife habitat is habitat critical to the survival of the species at any stage in its life cycle (e.g., deer wintering areas, bat roosting trees or hibernacula, et cetera).

Non-native invasive species (NNIS): These species are quarantined by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets and are listed as Class A or Class B noxious weeds.

Additional information about each site is given here:

- 1) A proposed laydown/storage area on the west side of Mill Pond Road in Benson (near MP 103.1). This area is a mowed hayfield, with upland conditions dominant in the study polygon. No rare plants were observed, and none likely to occur in this field. The town of Benson is within the summer breeding range of Indiana bat, a protected species, but I observed no trees suitable for roost trees within the study area, the only trees being small ashes and maples along Mill Pond Road. A few non-native invasive species, primarily purple loosestrife and common buckthorn were mapped around the perimeter of the field and at the existing field entrance.
- 2) Additional areas for jack-and-bore pits near Vt. Rte. 22 at MP 103.2. These two sites, on opposite sides of the road, are cornfields, with no plants observed other than corn stubble.
- 3) Along a section of proposed conduit corridor adjacent to the right-of-way of the Green Mountain Railroad (VTrans) in the town of Shrewsbury, just east of Vt. Rte.103 at MP 134.1 –134.5. This land is mostly forested, with a typical “northern hardwoods – mixed conifer association, and is used in part as a sugaring operation; a portion of it is wetland. There is a deeply incised stream valley with some rock outcrops in the forested area, but the outcrops are not large enough to be considered significant natural communities. Another portion of this site is an old field with numerous wildlife plantings (e.g. apple trees).

In regard to rare species, I did not observe any rare plants. This (and the remainder of the other sites) are located in towns outside the breeding range of Indiana bat. It would be unlikely to find that species or other species of bats at these sites other than as transients. In particular, I did not observe any large, decaying or dead trees with shedding bark, nor any shagbark hickories, common locust, or other trees noted for having crevices or crannies that bats might use for day roosts.

In regard to wildlife issues the non-field portion of the site is mapped by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Service as deer wintering area. As currently managed, the amount of coniferous cover did not appear adequate for winter shelter, however.

Two NNIS species were observed: Morrow’s Asian honeysuckle and common barberry. The infestation of Morrow’s Asian honeysuckle is extensive but not dense and is only scattered in the shaded forest understory.

- 4) Slightly south of the previous site, also adjacent to the railroad in the town of Shrewsbury at MP 134.7. This site is forested with mixed forest. This site is also within the polygon of mapped deer wintering area, but the land is quite steep and is not topographically sheltered, so it is not likely used by wintering deer.
- 5) Slightly south of this location, also adjacent to the railroad in the Wallingford, at MP 136.9. This site is a mowed lawn.

- 6) Near the railroad and also adjacent to Vt. Rte. 103 near MP137.3. This site is a deciduous forest with a northern hardwood association.

- 7) At the site of a proposed laydown/storage area on the south side of Vt. Rte. 103 in the town of Mount Holly at MP 145.8. This site is a mowed field and parking area.