



## WOODSTOCK LAND CONSERVANCY

April 2, 2010

To: David Corbett, Chair, Comeau Trails Task Force  
Woodstock Town Board  
From: Woodstock Land Conservancy

Dear David, Supervisor Moran, and Town Board members Magarelli, McKenna, Rosenblum and Wenk,

### Introduction

The Woodstock Land Conservancy (WLC) received the Comeau Trails Task Force Implementation Proposal via US mail on February 18, 2010. It was sent by Angela Stockwell-Sweet, the Woodstock Town Supervisor's secretary, on behalf of the Woodstock Town Board and David Corbett, chairman of the Comeau Trails Task Force (CTTF). The proposal was sent to WLC for review pursuant to Sections 4.07 and 7.04 of the Deed of Conservation Easement dated November 16, 2009, for which WLC is the grantee.

The CTTF and Chair David Corbett serve as the representative of the Grantor, the Town of Woodstock, in this matter. WLC has communicated and met with Mr. Corbett in reviewing this proposal, as well as with Town Board member and "Comeau Representative", Terrie Rosenblum. We are submitting this letter with our comments to Mr. Corbett and all Town Board members. WLC very much appreciates the efforts of Mr. Corbett, the Comeau Trails Task Force and the Town Board in their efforts.

### Review Process

Our review of the CTTF proposal involved multiple conversations, site visits with Mr. Corbett and other CTTF members, CTTF advisors and consultants, and the reading of the following documents: Comeau Trails Task Force Implementation Proposal (dated February 2010); Comeau Trails Task Force Recommendations (dated October 2009); and Comeau Trails Task Force Presentation to Town Board (dated April 14, 2009).

After an initial review, WLC submitted a preliminary list of questions and requests for further detail and clarification. This list served as the basis for both written responses by Chair David Corbett and further conversations between Mr. Corbett; John Winter, WLC Executive Director; and Kevin Smith, WLC Board President. This dialogue served to identify specific details that WLC requires for its review and that CTTF either provided in response or acknowledged that it will need to provide for WLC's review regarding design of structures, staging areas for materials, marking of proposed paths, flagging plant species to be avoided and protected, etc.

As indicated on page 12 of the CTTF Implementation Report (and further clarified in conversations with Chair David Corbett) WLC has learned that the intention and likely reality of the Comeau trails work is a series of trail improvement activities to be undertaken

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by CTFE over the next two to three years or more. Implementation of these activities will occur as resources such as labor (volunteer, town-provided, and contracted), financial support, and professional expertise, become available to CTFE. As such, and in agreement with CTFE Chair David Corbett, WLC has limited the scope of the present review, described hereunder, to plans for activities that the CTFE has identified as likely to occur in calendar year 2010. These are activities for which resources have been obtained or are likely to be obtained shortly and for which written documentation including any required mitigation efforts, have been duly prepared, if required.

### **Outline of 2010 CTFE Work Plan & WLC Review**

Mr. Corbett has communicated that CTFE intends for 2010 trail work to commence with less complex activities and move progressively into more complex ones as volunteer experience and expertise are gained. WLC and CTFE have agreed that WLC will inform CTFE about the level of review and related documentation needed for each activity and will communicate regularly as the work continues. As activities increase in complexity, more documentation will likely be required. Both parties agree that this process will allow for the required review by WLC under the terms of the easement, while enabling CTFE to plan and conduct its work in a timely and effective fashion. For activities where documentation is deemed necessary by WLC, CTFE will provide such documentation as it becomes available. WLC will endeavor to review such documentation promptly but reserves the right to a 45-day review period under the terms of the easement (see Article 4.07 Notice).

### **2010 CTFE Activities and WLC Review**

For 2010, CTFE has planned the activities immediately below (refer to Comeau Trails Task Force Recommendations document for activity numbers and map stop numbers therein). WLC and CTFE agree that for these activities, which by their nature are not complex, best practices in environmental protection will be applied by CTFE. WLC may opt to not require documentation about the work to be done and methods to be used, or oversight beyond a visit to the activity site before work commences and a discussion with CTFE about the work to be done.

**Map Stop #1)** Create a new entrance for the walking trail near the Shakespeare stage, close and remove the existing entrance behind the stage. The new trail entrance will be cut through the brush about 20 feet from the stone wall at the northern edge of the stage lawn and proceed in a northeasterly direction, joining up with an existing trail from the lower corner of the parking lot and continuing to where it meets the main trail, about 50 feet from the present entrance. The trail is eroded at the current entrance and exposed tree roots may be compromising the health of the trees there. To accomplish this task, WLC understands that low brush is to be removed and only plants with calipers less than three inches will be removed.

**Map Stop #2)** Removal of narrow logs to mark the edges of the trails. These logs contribute to water channeling on the trails, adding to surface erosion. WLC understands that these logs will be removed.

**Map Stop #3)** Two broken trees are suspended on adjacent trees above the trail. WLC understands these will be removed.

**Map Stop #4)** A turn in the trail at map stop 4 is sharp, narrow, and steep. WLC understands that CTFE will move the trail fifteen feet east, and widen the radius making it less steep and less prone to erosion.

**Map Stop #5)** Removal of a berm on the Sawkill Stream-side edge of the trail. The edge will be graded to become more level with the surface profile so as to limit the current channeling of water directly down the trail.

**Map Stop #10)** Reroute the trail to either side of the power pole, a current impediment.

**Map Stop #13)** Fallen timbers on the trail will be cut and removed and the trail surface near them smoothed.

### **2010 Potential Work Requiring Additional Documentation & WLC Review**

The following activities have been agreed by the parties to require an additional level of review before work may proceed. These activities are more complex, may require the addition of structures and other improvements, and will by their nature require more documentation and/or possible monitoring by WLC while the work is done. CTFE will inform WLC when each activity is planned for implementation, will invite WLC to visit the intended worksite prior to commencement, and will provide documentation to WLC as it becomes available. WLC will then conduct its review under the terms of the easement. These activities include:

**Map Stop #9)** Installation of a walking bridge near the edge of a cliff face or re-routing of the trail away from the cliff area.

**Map Stop #11)** Creating a single access/egress trail at the most visited waypoint on the Comeau trails. Currently, both the existing trails are very degraded by traffic. The existing trails may be closed off by structure and signage.

**Map Stop #12)** Constructing a new bridge across a very active seep.

### **Possible Additional Stream Bank Work**

WLC was made aware in recent days that CTFE's work plan for 2010 may include an additional plan to remediate ongoing erosion ("head cuts") along the stream bank portions of the trail, as the current trail may be compounding erosion at those points where drainage from the soccer fields makes its way over the bank (see CTFE Advisor on Stream Management Elizabeth Reicheld's letter of March 26, 2010). Kevin Smith walked the relevant trail sections at the invitation of CTFE Chair Corbett, with Mr. Corbett, CTFE member Jim Hansen and Ms. Reicheld on April 1, 2010.

WLC supports CTFE and the Town's efforts to gain a fuller understanding of what is occurring along the affected portions of the stream bank, including potential remediation options where "head cuts" may be causing or contributing to progressive erosion and fragmentation of the bank and riparian buffer. WLC will provide review of any proposed

plans. (Note: Though not germane either to CTTF's specific purview or to WLC's review of CTTF's plans, we make the following comment with respect to the core conservation purposes of the conservation easement:

The larger wetland dynamics, water drainage and any observed and potential relationships to stream bank erosion indicate a need for a more comprehensive mapping and understanding of the hydrology of the soils, water drainage, and wetlands at Comeau. Due diligence by the Town in this matter is called for in order to facilitate sound planning in protecting stream bank stability and the extensive riparian buffer along the Sawkill, especially as it might relate to expanded uses and new proposals.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, WLC fully endorses the need to mitigate damage to the walking trails at Comeau – and in so doing, the remediation of the environmental damage the current trails may be either causing or compounding with increased use. We support CTTF's and the Town's efforts in their goal of realizing a safe and sustainable trail system, while taking care "to ensure the preservation of the natural beauty of the wild areas through which the trails extend" (CTTF Recommendations Report, [page 6](#)). We look forward to continuing to review planned CTTF activities as they are added to the workplan and we remain available to dialogue as needed and requested.

We request that written responses and questions to this letter from CTTF and Town Board members be coordinated and made through Mr. Corbett or Town Board Land Use-Comeau chair Terrie Rosenblum, as the Town Board designate so as to help ensure that our communications are as efficient and productive as possible.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to review this proposal.

Sincerely Yours,

John Winter  
Executive Director

Kevin Smith  
President

