Re: A summary of the situation surrounding the January 11, 2011 Town Board resolution to hire a forester to perform tree clearing in the wooded area near the soccer fields on the Comeau property.

From: Woodstock Land Conservancy Executive Director John Winter

WLC was informed about the draft resolution by Angela Sweet via email on January 7, 2011 a few days in advance of the vote, and has been in dialogue with town boardmember Jay Wenk as the originator of the project since about that time. On January 13, WLC representatives Hank Starr and Rosalind Dickinson met with Jay to walk the proposed tree clearing site and learn more about the work contemplated there. Jim Hanson of the Comeau Trails Task Force attended at Jay's invitation as did community members Robin Segal, Pat Jackson, and Mike Platsky.

The January 11, 2011 resolution passed by the Town Board indicated that the tree removal was needed to address a potentially dangerous situation. Discussion with Jay indicated that another purpose of the tree removal project was to reduce standing water (i.e. “dewater”) in the area by removing downed trees which were thought to be obstructing flow away from the site.

Examination of the site and discussion of the proposed remedy (led by Jim and agreed to by Hank and Rosalind) suggested that the tree removal would likely not accomplish the goal of dewatering the area and that the dead and dying trees posed limited concern because people did not walk in the wet area. Further, deciduous trees that grow well in wet soil, like soft maple are replacing the dying pines that do not fare well in moist soil and will eventually take up additional water. In addition, removing the trees would increase water flow bringing negative consequences elsewhere on the Comeau, including the newly improved walking trails south of the wet area.

As a result of the site visit, Jay chose to cancel the tree removal project and explore other options. Jay confirmed with WLC that he would advise his fellow boardmembers that the Town should stop work on the project and consult with experts from the state and county on how to address the water in the area.

Further, Jay said that the Town will discuss any new approaches with WLC in advance of their implementation and that WLC would be invited to meet with experts chosen by the Town Board to design and implement them prior to any work being done.

Lastly, WLC reminded Jay that under the easement (section 4.07) that this project requires notification to WLC in writing, according to the established protocol, along with written plans including proof that adequate measures regarding limiting ecological impact of the work have been designed. This protocol was not followed prior to the January 11 resolution vote to hire the forester. Jay agreed and said the Town will follow the established notification and documentation protocol agreed to by the Town Board and WLC in the event a new strategy for dewatering is identified in the future.