



BALA Board Zoom Meeting Minutes

1/28/25

Start time: 7:05 pm Adjourn time: 8:15 pm

Attending: All Board members except Jeff Buchanan and Jennifer Bailey

This evening's AD HOC Board meeting was convened specifically to discuss issues related to past and future aquatic weed treatments for Big Alum.

Environmental Committee Chairman Chuck Roy gave a brief history of weed treatments over the last few years. Solitude applied diquat for many years, but it's now clear that the timing of their applications was not ideal, resulting in disappointing results. Last year, Carl Neilson was hired as lake manager. In addition to conducting pre and post application mapping, BALA's expectation was that Carl would oversee the expensive application of Sonar by Ponds and Lakes. The results appear to be quite disappointing, although Chuck did speak with Little Alum's association president, who reported that Sonar had positive results the year after their application. So, while there is a chance we will have fewer weeds this coming year than at the end of the 2024 season, there certainly are no guarantees.

While conducting research, Chuck was referred to Joe Onorato of Water and Wetland, an aquatic treatment firm out of South Grafton, MA. Chuck and Mark met with Joe at length in early December, and thoroughly interviewed him. They were both very impressed by his breadth of knowledge and professional demeanor. Joe contends that if diquat is properly applied, especially regarding timing, it should be highly effective on Big Alum, and will significantly reduce both curly leaf and clasping leaf pondweeds. Joe's firm would handle all application and mapping details, and the cost compared to last year's application would be significantly less. The precise date of application would be dependent upon weather and weed growth, but would likely be sometime in June. If the first application by Water and Wetland does not yield satisfactory results, there would be no additional set-up charge for a second application during the same season.

Chuck asked Joe for customer references, and received many names of lake owners and lake associations in New England. Chuck contacted these references, and the customers all expressed satisfaction with their results from Water and Wetland's treatments.

Several Board members asked Chuck questions, and a discussion ensued. A motion was made to sign a contract with Water and Wetland soon, since it is important to obtain a preferred spot on their application calendar. After discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Mark made a motion to schedule an all-member BALA Zoom meeting in late April, prior to the Rapsallion social gathering. After discussion, the motion to hold an all-member Zoom to introduce Joe and allow members the opportunity to ask questions about weed treatments was passed unanimously. Since the Sturbridge annual town meeting is April 28, Chuck will ask Joe if he can meet with our membership the evening of Tuesday, April 29, or Wednesday, April 30.

Mark thanked Chuck for all his efforts as Environmental Committee Chairman, and both he and Chuck expressed confidence that our future treatments will bring better results than in the past couple of years.

Mark raised a delicate but important related issue. It is no surprise that as more homes with nice lawns are being built on Big Alum, we are experiencing a significant increase in aquatic weed growth. Based upon Mark's research and past personal experience, any chemical compound that enhances plant growth on land will do the same in water. Mark discussed his thinking with Joe Onorato, and Joe was in agreement. Mark expressly stated to the Board that it is very important this NOT become a divisive issue, pitting BALA members with treated lawns against those without treated lawns. As long as lake homeowners comply with Sturbridge Conservation rules, they are free to landscape and treat their yards as they wish, and BALA has no additional authority to regulate the application of lawn fertilizers. Having said that, if we educate BALA members about this issue, and they understand that less lawn fertilizer means fewer lake weeds, perhaps they will act accordingly, and we will obtain better results from future lake treatments.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark L. Smith, Acting Clerk