

Sparks fly over 250th fireworks location plan

Use of conservation land called a 'really bad idea'

■ HUBBARDSTON

By CHRISTINE SMITH

CSMITH@THEGARDNERNEWS.COM

The Open Space Committee, which manages the Mount Jefferson Conservation Area, voted on Wednesday against the proposal to hold a fireworks display at the site as part of the town's 250th anniversary celebration on Father's Day in June.

Open Space Committee members cited the recent rain that has made the site wet and the potential damage that could occur from cars parking in the field, as well as a concern for nesting baby bobolinks that could be killed off if clearing a portion of the property for visitors is done before July 1.

Committee members also noted that the Laine Family, which has had a contract to hay the fields for many years, may not be able to get their equipment onto on the wet site prior to the June 18 date.

Even if they do, they said that the bobolinks in the particular section of fields to be used under the plan would be killed, and the damage left behind by visitors and the cars could inhibit the growth of a second hay crop and result in a loss of revenue for the family.

"I think Hubbardston is not ideally suited for a fireworks display because we don't have parking or the venue for it."

— **Jim Hansgate,**
Ladybug Farm
OWNER

watershed area.

"I just think this is a really bad idea. I'm sorry. I support the 250th - I appreciate the work you've done," Open Space Committee member Lassy Bratko said to 250th Anniversary Adviser Katie Young, who was at the meeting to discuss the potential use of the Mount Jefferson fields during Wednesday's meeting. Bratko expressed support for the parade that will be held the day before, on June 17, and noted the committee will be participating with a float, but added that there "are so many reasons I feel this is not a good idea and you just hit the nail on the head - because it's been so wet."

She pointed out that haying requires at least three days of dry weather before a field can be cut for a hay crop, but there is no guarantee that there will be that opportunity before the day of fireworks.

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Bratko noted the many years that the Laine Family has been haying the fields on Mount Jefferson, and that they pay \$4,500 per year to be able to do so.

She said that vehicles parked on the field could end up with mud up to their axels, leaving the town liable for damage to the cars as well as the damage to the field.

Normally the Laine Family waits until July to begin haying, when the conditions are drier and most of the bobolinks have already fledged, she said.

"This is just wiping out every single bobolink that's going to be in there. There is no chance. They've just nested and you're wiping them out. I don't think that's a particularly good way to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the town. Even with no options. Sorry, this is not an appropriate location."

Young, who is a sixth-generation farmer, said she "understood the risk and the potential damage to the fields and that she knew the situation with the bobolinks, but believed that the grass would begin to grow again. She said she was alone in planning for the parade, fair and fireworks and was simply trying to fulfill the task she was assigned, as she was "asked by the town to make this happen."

She said that she has tried many possible locations in town without success, and that at this point it is "the eleventh hour."

She noted the wording in the Mount Jefferson Land Use Management Plan that says that the lessee of the property "acknowledges the fields may be used for special events by the town," and that the town would provide notification of such plans four weeks prior to the date, which has been done. She said the management plan also requires that events be "passive in nature, providing nothing detrimental to the environment" and that neither the town nor the organizers would have to assume any fault for the field.

She said that Atlas Pyro Vision Entertainment Group, based in Jaffrey, N.H., does not have issues with contamination, as the company works "hand in hand" with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to provide shows throughout Massachusetts.

However, there was some question by Open Space Committee members whether the appropriate DCR officials have been contacted regarding the matter.

Committee Chairman Robert Hatch said there are conservation restrictions on the land and that DCR officials he has spoken with and who also may have a say in the property's use, are not willing to say yes to fireworks at this point.

In addition, member Mark Kresge said the Department of En-

vironmental Protection may have concerns regarding the potential of contamination to the watershed lands.

Bratko said that neither the Open Space Committee, which manages the land, nor the Conservation Commission, which has official care and control of the property and a procedure for allowing events at Mount Jefferson, was notified about the selectmen's discussion or the possibility of using the site. The Board of Selectmen voted earlier this month to approve the use of the Mount Jefferson fields as one alternative or a barge on Comet Pond as an alternative option to send up the fireworks.

Bratko said selectmen failed to follow procedure and did not have the authority to allow the fireworks on the Mount Jefferson site, as that decision rests with the Conservation Commission. "To disregard a small businessman to potentially cause serious damage to (the Laine's) source of income, to destroy wildlife - and this is a celebration of our town?" remarked Bratko. "The town voted to have a fireworks display, but I don't think the town voted to have a fireworks display at the expense of the farmer, at the expense of his fields, and at the expense of wildlife."

Jim Hansgate of Ladybug Farm on Williamsville Road, who was present for the discussion, said, "I think Hubbardston is not ideally situated for a fireworks display because we don't have parking or the venue for it" and that "it just seems like a bad idea."

Hansgate said that Young has "done a heroic job of trying to find a place in Hubbardston," but "are we pushing a rope uphill?"

Young said that many people have been asking for the fireworks, especially those with young children.

Conservation Commission member Rick Greene said he understood Bratko's concerns, but that for the sake of the community, "we have this event, the 250th, that's pretty cool." He said, "Having fireworks is a pretty good thing for the community; the people are getting excited for it."

He said the Mount Jefferson Conservation Area is town property and that it is "probably the best place" for the fireworks event. He said that with the Laine family amenable to cutting one field, and that as a citizen and a farmer who understands the impacts, it was "not ideal, but I think we should go ahead and do it."

He said the Conservation Commission has not yet addressed the question, but that members will have to meet to consider it.

Open Space Committee members raised the possibility of delaying the fireworks event until the fall and after the haying season is over. Greene said holding the fireworks later in the year might be a "nice compromise."