

**Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council
OCTOBER 12, 2011**

NATURAL RESOURCES BUILDING
1111 WASHINGTON STREET SE
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON
ROOM 172
10:20 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Voting members present in person: Len Barson, Cherie Kearney (at 11 A.M.) and Bob Meier. Voting members present on phone: Al Black, Janelle Downs, Wade Troutman. Ex Officio members present in person: Jeanne Koenings (Department of Ecology) and Elizabeth Rodrick (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife).

Members absent: John Banks, Peter Dunwiddie, George Rohrbacher and Rob Fimbel (State Parks and Recreation). Agencies with member seats vacant: Department of Natural Resources and the Recreation and Conservation Office (see below).

DNR Staff: Birdie Davenport, John Gamon, Curt Pavola, Joe Rocchio, Julie Sandberg, Pene Speaks, David Wilderman.

I. Introductions

Council Chair Black called the meeting to order and asked everyone to introduce themselves, both those on the phone and in the meeting room. No guests were present.

**II. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes
Minutes of the July 13, 2011, meeting**

The minutes of the July 13, 2011, council meeting were presented for approval. (The draft minutes had been distributed to the council prior to the meeting.)

Chair Black determined that a quorum was present. Koenings suggested two changes to the draft minutes in the Department of Ecology report on Page 3: 1) correction to the grant project name from “Clallam Bay-Port Gamble” to “Port Gamble Bay” and 2) in the same paragraph change “removal of creosote material” to “restoration of Puget Sound.”

A motion to approve the Minutes of the July 13,2011, meeting of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council as presented was made by Len Barson, seconded by Bob Meier. The motion passed unanimously. (Members on the telephone stated their names and votes.)

**III. Old Business
Progress on Past Recommendations: Acquisitions Report
(written report)**

Sandberg reviewed the Special Lands Acquisition Update for June 28, 2011, through October 7, 2011. A copy was provided to council members via email prior to the meeting. Sandberg also noted the return of

one (Heather Kapust) of the Special Lands Acquisition Program's two acquisition specialists from maternity leave and stated the program is "fully engaged" in making progress on acquisitions funded by Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grants.

Barson cautioned that any WWRP grant funds not obligated prior to the legislative session may be at risk for being swept. Sandberg said DNR is pursuing letters of agreement or purchase and sales agreements to show commitments with existing grants, and for new WWRP grants, the contracts are prepared for signature. Barson noted that a special session of the Washington State Legislature convenes on November 28 for up-to a 30-day period.

Budget Update: Natural Heritage Program funding –strategy development

Speaks reviewed the status of funding for the Natural Heritage Program. Following the legislative session, DNR's initial allotment of General Fund-State for the Natural Heritage Program was \$55,000. Following internal discussions, the Commissioner of Public Lands increased that amount to \$200,000, which would help fund the program through March or April. Later, an additional \$100,000 of GF-State was allotted, for a total of \$300,000, which combines with external (grants/contracts) funding and DNR management funds for a total of \$800,000 (see Natural Heritage Program Report for detail). Needed funding to support the program at the current staff level for the biennium is \$1.4 million.

Speaks described the strategy sessions held by DNR Executive Management and the current effort to develop a strategy to secure program funding from other sources instead of requesting restoration of GF-State from the Legislature. One idea is to pursue other public and private-sector funding to bridge the gap for this current state budget biennium (about \$600,000 through June 2013) and options for structuring the program differently to secure longer-term support from organizations statewide.

There was further discussion about potential options such as moving back to an earlier model of receiving some federal funds for base-budget operational support and the earlier legislative proposal to charge a fee for service, which was not favorably received on many fronts. An offer from NatureServe to help strategize and provide some resources was mentioned. Gamon noted that the director of NatureServe said the Washington State Natural Heritage Program was the only one currently in such dire straits.

Gamon described the most immediate task as creating "the ask," or determining what the program should look like and the resources needed. This will involve more clearly communicating the way consumers of Natural Heritage data use it and the value of the data to those partners/consumers.

Kearney arrived during the budget discussion, at approximately 11:00 A.M.

IV. New Business

Expansion Proposal: Columbia Hills Natural Area Preserve

Gamon presented a recommendation for a boundary expansion of Columbia Hills Natural Area Preserve (NAP). The presentation had earlier been emailed to the council, and an online meeting service was used to show the presentation in real-time for council members calling in via telephone.

Kearney made a formal disclosure of Columbia Land Trust's ownership of the area proposed for inclusion within the NAP boundary. She and Speaks described the conservation opportunity at the site and commitment by DNR to seek grant funds to eventually purchase the two parcels in question. While not initially ranked high enough on the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program list to receive funds, the Recreation and Conservation Office has since funded the grant with money not used in other grants, making the boundary expansion necessary at this time.

Len Barson moved to approve the Columbia Hills NAP boundary expansion recommendation as presented. Bob Meier seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, with Kearney abstaining. (Members on the telephone stated their names and votes.)

Discussion: Barson noted his support for the boundary expansion while also suggesting the proposal to expand the site should come to the council prior to conservation partners, like the land trust, stepping in to purchase properties. Black agreed with the sentiment but noted from his experience over many years on the council that such conservation sales often happen quickly and the action of land trusts is key to securing some properties. Barson suggested that future proposals should come earlier to the council "to the extent possible."

Expansion Proposal: Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve

Wilderman presented a recommendation for a boundary expansion of Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve (NAP), assisted by Davenport. The recommendation and presentation had earlier been emailed to the council, and an online meeting service was used to show the presentation in real-time for council members calling in via telephone. Wilderman noted an additional slide had been incorporated into the presentation given at the meeting.

Davenport described the earlier council boundary recommendation at Mima Mounds NAP which included some of the lands outside the current, adopted boundary. She explained that the department removed some property owners from the recommended boundary following public comment. She clarified that today's presentation includes lands not originally reviewed by the council. However, some lands from the previous recommendation may now be included in the final boundary proposal for consideration by the Commissioner of Public Lands following additional public outreach to those property owners.

Sandberg inquired about likely opposition to this boundary expansion given concerns voiced by some property owners during the last expansion process. Davenport noted that the key landowner of the parcels under consideration at this time has indicated an interest in selling to the department, and she feels others previously removed from the boundary may now be interested in being included.

Barson asked about funding for property acquisition. Davenport reported funds available in a Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grant, as well as possible acquisition funding from Joint Base Lewis-McChord through the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program.

Cherie Kearney moved to approve the recommendation to expand the Mima Mounds NAP boundary as presented. Len Barson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. (Members on the telephone stated their names and votes.)

V. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office – No Report

Speaks noted that Steve McLellan, policy director and legislative liaison, will be joining the council as the new representative from the Recreation and Conservation Office. Jim Eychaner, the previous representative, has retired from state service.

Department of Ecology

Koenings noted that she is retiring at the end of January. The Department of Ecology will be represented by Ms. Chris Hempleman, who is transitioning into her position at Ecology. Koenings reported that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is meeting this week to review National Coastal Wetland Conservation grant program projects, which is a dedicated grant sources with 25 applications nationally and nine submitted for Washington state by the Department of Ecology. She expects the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to complete reviews soon for the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP), however funding of the final, ranked project list is uncertain and awaits approval by Congress. From Ecology's Puget Sound Restoration fund, the Department of Natural Resources will receive money for creosote pile removal in Puget Sound utilizing helicopter crews as a training opportunity and the new Puget Sound Conservation Corps.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

Fimbel had submitted a written report by email: The agency is in flux as it seeks to adjust to the absence of general funds and an under-performing revenue stream from the Discover Pass. This has lead to losses in positions and severe restrictions on spending. Add to this the agency has a fairly new director (<12 months), no deputy director, and a relatively inexperienced Commission. This translates into less stewardship-related activities on the ground as the system contracts to focus on visitor services and safety. Current areas of focus in natural resources management include forest health (risk reduction funded in part from timber sales), rare species conservation (where grants and partners exist), salmon recovery (lawsuit driven), and general participation in landscape conservation efforts like the Puget Sound Partnership. The future remains unclear, but clouded, as the agency prepares for another round of budget cuts.

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Rodrick reported the receipt of Federal Fiscal Year 2011 Section 6 grant funds for Methow Watershed Phase 8 acquisition, Blue Mountains bull trout recovery and Thurston County South Puget Sound Prairie habitat conservation planning. WDFW is now preparing for the 2012 grant round, which because of uncertain funding will likely focus on resubmitting previous grant applications, such as Mountain View, Okanogan-Similkameen, plus Dabob Bay from DNR. Similar to federal CELCP funding, the President has requested funding at the previous, albeit reduced, level but the House of Representatives has zeroed out the program, while the Senate has yet to announce their budget. Rodrick stated that the Wildlife Diversity Division has a \$400,000 shortfall this biennium and requested increased spending authority from the personalized license plate fund. However the agency did not submit a supplemental budget request. The Governor has asked for 5 percent and 10 percent reduction options from state agencies. She noted that any additional reduction in the department's General Fund-State budget may cause competition among programs for dedicated revenue sources, such as license plate revenues. (revised-10/30/11er)

Department of Natural Resources

Speaks noted that Jed Herman, former division manager for the Forest Resources & Conservation Division, has served as the department's representative on the council. She anticipates the new division manager, Julie Sackett, will be designated to fill that role. Some major planning efforts are underway at DNR to complete a long-term strategy for marbled murrelet habitat management, develop and a management plan for the Olympic Experimental State Forest on the Olympic Peninsula. The department is also preparing for the 2013 Sustainable Harvest Calculation which was last completed in 2003. Sandberg added that the Phase II of the DNR-WDFW land exchange has been completed. This second phase was much more complicated than the first because the properties had a variety of federal government commitments attached. With this phase, DNR and WDFW have exchanged a total of 50,000 acres.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report

Pavola reported on two positive recent developments. The program held a public hearing in September for the proposed boundary of Trombetta Canyon Natural Area Preserve in Northport, Stevens County, with good community turnout, including local legislators and a county commissioner. After an earlier public hearing in Colville during the summer, which no one attended, the program discovered that some of the routine public notice had not occurred. Letters were then mailed to property owners within and adjacent to the proposed NAP and after phone conversations with most of them, it was determined another public hearing, in Northport, would be beneficial in sharing details about the project and gaining informed public comment. The local newspaper wrote an article on the proposal, 23 people attended, many questions and concerns were posed and addressed, and one person (a property owner within the proposed boundary) commented in favor of the boundary. Throughout the process, DNR received 12 written comments, some with questions or suggestions for future management, and none in opposition to the preserve. The program feels the extra outreach in this case was helpful both to establishment of the NAP and future management of the site.

Pavola noted that Dabob Bay Natural Area continues to be a success story. Beginning as a 195 acre natural area preserve, the site is now a combined NAP/natural resources conservation area totaling 1,929 acres after DNR transferred 1,734 acres from trust management to conservation management over the past two years. WDFW owns 160 acres, the county owns 30 acres and the remaining 1,856 acres are in private ownership, with The Nature Conservancy and Northwest Watershed Institute either owning a portion of that amount or having agreements for future acquisition. TNC announced recently that the U.S. Navy has entered an agreement with TNC for an initial \$3 million of acquisition funds in Hood Canal, including within Dabob Bay Natural Area, as part of their effort to maintain a buffer for Navy research and training activities in the area. Combined with \$3 million from the Federal Fiscal Year 2011 CELCP grant and nearly \$3 million from a WWRP grant, that represents \$9 million of active funds for the site. Added to this are the anticipated \$750,000 in Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program funds awarded to TNC and about \$300,000 of mitigation funds from Jefferson County and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to replace marbled murrelet habitat expected to be impacted by a road relocation through DNR lands in western Jefferson County. The success of Dabob Bay Natural Area seems largely due to the rigorous scientific analysis supporting its designation and the availability of an officially designated site with acquisition opportunities that have undergone public review.

VII. Natural Heritage Program Report

Gamon reviewed the program's list of funded projects in progress. (See attached report)

VIII. Other Business

Council Chair

Chair Black stated his intention to step down as chair of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council. With restrictions in the ability of council members to travel, he feels the council would benefit by having a chair who can attend meetings in person, noting the difficulty of directing meetings via telephone. The council discussed the duties of chair, both at meetings and outside of meetings.

Kearney said that while she would be willing to entertain the idea of being chair, she would first like the opportunity to talk with council members Dunwiddie and Meier (who had left the meeting a few minutes prior to the discussion) to gauge their interest in the position. The council agreed to this course of action.

2012 NHAC Meetings

Speaks offered to conduct an online poll of meeting dates based around the usual council meetings, in late January, March or April, June or July and October. The council agreed.

Climate Change Impacts

Rodrick suggested a future council agenda item might be a speaker on the topic of vulnerability assessments for rare plant population arising from climate change.

NatureServe Conference in Portland

Rodrick noted the upcoming national conference hosted by NatureServe will be in Portland, Oregon, and wondered if that would be open to the council and others who may not be a part of the natural heritage network. Gamon replied that he has been participating in planning efforts and outreach activities will begin soon; he'll provide conference information to the council and others who may be interested.

Federal Farm Bill

Troutman noted his active participation in the Farm Bill Task Force, promoting the interests of three conservation programs under a "national easement" program that may include the Conservation Reserve Program. Currently, under the House of Representatives budget proposal, the conservation programs would be zeroed out, however Troutman feels that such larger-scale protection programs may ultimately be funded in the \$30 million to \$50 million range.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 P.M.