

**Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council Meeting
October 22, 2008**

Natural Resources Building, Room 172
1111 Washington Street SE
Olympia, Washington
9:50 a.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Approved: January 14, 2009

Voting members present: Alan Black, Cherie Kearney, Cheryl Schultz, Bob Meier, Wade Troutman; (by telephone as noted below: Janelle Downs, Elizabeth Gray, Merrill Peterson). Ex-Officio members present: Rob Fimbel for the State Parks and Recreation Commission, Jeanne Koenings for the Department of Ecology, Elizabeth Rodrick for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (by phone), Jim Eychaner for the Recreation and Conservation Office

Members absent: Roger Hoesterey, Stephen Saunders for the Department of Natural Resources

DNR staff present: Pene Speaks, John Gamon, Curt Pavola, Marsha Hixson, Anna Jones, Craig Calhoon, Michele Zukerberg, Kathy Stone, Karrie Brandt, Denice Wilmovsky

I. Introductions

Chair Black called the meeting to order at 9:50 a.m. and participants introduced themselves. There being no quorum present, the order of the agenda, including approval of Minutes and setting of dates for Meetings in 2009, will be changed to allow conference call participation at 11:00 a.m.

II. Minutes of the March 26, and June 6, 2008 Meetings

During the 11:00 a.m. conference call, it was moved by Kearney and seconded by Troutman that the Minutes of the March 26, 2008, Meeting of the Council be approved with no corrections. The motion carried. It was then moved by Troutman and seconded by Meier that the Minutes of the June 6, 2008, Meeting of the Council be approved as distributed. The motion carried.

III. Old Business

Progress on Past Recommendations: Acquisitions Report

Calhoon, with Gamon adding information on species and ecosystems of interest, presented the eight properties at five different sites that have closed since the last meeting of the Council. They included 5 acres of forested property north of Tide Point, bordered north and west by natural area lands on Cypress Island; 1.79 acres north of Cypress Head; 13.5 acres donated by The Nature Conservancy in the center of the Niawiakum River Natural Area Preserve (NAP); 80.35 acres of undeveloped property inholding in the center of the Niawiakum River NAP; 5.5 acres bounded on the north and east of Methow Rapids NAP; 14 acres bordering existing NAP lands at the northeast corner of Methow Rapids NAP; 110 acres in the Washougal Oaks NAP/NRCA containing the largest contiguous stand of Oregon white oak woodland; and 200 acres in the northcentral part of the Trout Lake NAP.

Dabob Bay Proposed Expansion Update

Speaks explained that there is a hearing regarding the proposed boundary of the Dabob Bay natural area scheduled for October 23, 2008, in Quilcene. Staff presented the initial boundary expansion proposal to the public in an informational meeting in May. At the June meeting, the Council finalized their

recommendation that was then forwarded to the Commissioner of Public Lands. The Commissioner and the department state land managers accepted the recommended boundary except for the Council-recommended addition in the northeast corner. Comments from the public so far have included a number that were enthusiastic and supportive, but recently there has been opposition citing potential economic loss to the county. One of the major concerns brought up is the potential for fiscal impacts to the fire district. DNR met with the fire district and the county commissioners to discuss how the Trust Land Transfer program works and what potential for inter-grant transfers there might be within the county to minimize potential fiscal impacts. Speaks said staff is preparing for up to 300 people to attend the hearing and have planned the timing to accommodate as many people as possible.

Important Bird Area Progress Report

Gamon reported that the Natural Heritage Program is now viewing IBAs as a set of conservation priorities rather than as a new land-use designation. Natural Heritage and Audubon will meet next week to look at current IBA designations compared with natural areas. Audubon is re-examining IBA boundaries, and they want to make use of natural heritage data. Rodrick suggested doing an overlay of important WDFW areas at that meeting, also. She will arrange it. The discussion continued about the intent of the language used by the legislature in setting up IBAs.

IV. New Business

Woodard Bay NRCA Restoration Activities Report

Zukerberg reported that Woodard Bay NRCA, named as a part of the Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act in 1987, includes 500 acres of aquatic lands that include 150 acres of tidelands. DNR has begun a feasibility study to develop four restoration alternatives and identify nearshore conservation priorities. She reviewed with the Council the presentation she gave during a public meeting on October 16, 2008.

There was discussion about the seal and bat habitat, changes in bird activity and location, how human intrusion has impacted the site, what restoration has been done, how various changes might affect the current populations of seals and bats, the high educational value of the site, and potential liability issues in not changing or further protecting some features of the site. Zukerberg will keep the Council informed as the study progresses.

Kennedy Creek Interpretive Site Completion

Zukerberg gave a description of the interpretive site and recent sign installation at the Kennedy Creek Natural Area Preserve. The signs are tied to the Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail, about a mile away, where the same illustrator and text writer were used.

Natural Heritage Plan Update

Gamon explained to the Council that the Natural Heritage Plan is updated every two years for the legislature. This update for 2009 is short, giving a high level overview of the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas programs, referring readers to the 2007 Natural Heritage Plan for detailed information about the methodology and process used to identify potential natural areas.

The draft Plan includes short discussions of a few of the priority projects that each program will work on during the 2009-2011 biennium.

Speaks said that this update for 2009 is intended to go with (be a companion piece to) the 2007 plan. More program details and the lists of Natural Heritage priority features are on the web, where they have been since the 03-05 plan edition. Kearney mentioned that the information is buried on the new DNR web site. Speaks indicated that DNR is aware of the issue.

Koenings said she was interested in how much money (*i.e.*, from funding sources such as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)) is raised to protect Natural Heritage elements. Speaks replied that the information is not in the plan update, but could be added under the natural areas section.

Gamon asked for input from the Council. He requested a special meeting by conference call during the week of November for formal approval so that the program can have the plan ready for early presentation to the legislature. There was general consensus. Jones will query the Council and arrange the meeting.

There was discussion and suggestions relating to the details of the draft Plan.

Natural Areas Association Conference Update

Pavola reported that the letters from the Commissioner to other agencies and non-profits have gone out. The Field Trip Committee has a "short list" of potential sites to visit and will be meeting soon. Fimbel indicated an interest in the field trips. The Program Committee will be meeting next, planning for the Call for Papers in January. All key sponsors will be on committees. Speaks said they are also looking for volunteers to work at the conference. In response to Schultz' question, she said that graduate students would be "perfect."

Speaks mentioned the 2008 NAA Conference in Nashville. The conference included using new technology to record the audio portion of the concurrent sessions that will sync to the PowerPoint presentations. This will allow NAA to share the conference information with more people through their web site. If the same approach is used for the 2009 Conference, it will require a tech person in each room.

The 2009 Conference is in Vancouver, Washington, September 15-18. Field trips will be about one and one-half hour's maximum drive from the hotel in Vancouver. Kearney said that there will be a Land Trust Alliance meeting in Portland the month after.

Pavola asked that permission for co-sponsorship be in writing from the director of an agency before going to staff to ask for assistance, so the staff will know they have the agency's support.

Speaks talked about the poster session, which is a good way for students to participate. Pavola said that a letter went to the Vancouver office of Washington State University. Kearney suggested including Clark College, also.

V. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office

Eychaner reported that the RCO has reorganized. He reported that for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP), a proposal for a budget of \$100 million was sent to the Governor's Office. He reminded the Council that WWRP is supported through the sale of state bonds.

RCO is a cooperating agency in hydro project relicensing. Snohomish County PUD owns the Jackson project. The project forms Spada Lake, and much of the project is adjacent to the Morning Star NRCA.

The Public Utilities District (PUD) and others will collaborate on a federally-required recreation plan. An item of interest is the DNR-owned road from Olney Pass to the Greider-Boulder trailheads. DNR has proposed decommissioning the road. The PUD has expressed concerns about losing access to the recreation sites it owns along that road. Eychaner introduced the concept of road-to-trail conversion. DNR's regional staff, including Mr. Kurowski, are leading the discussion on the future of the road.

Department of Ecology

Koenings talked about the pre-announcement of the NOAA Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) grants. She said that up to \$6 million for projects is available, with the official announcement being released in December and the applications due to DOE in March. She handed out a flyer explaining the process. She said that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) cannot apply on their own, but can as a partner.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

State Parks will move to its new headquarters on December 8, 2008. The agency is settling in while moving ahead with a decentralization reorganization plan, where operations and development activities will be merged in the regions.

On the stewardship front, the agency is advancing forest health efforts by implementing prescriptions (Mount Spokane and Lake Wenatchee) and undertaking surveys / plans at Seaquest, Lake Isabella, Brooks Memorial, and Squilchuck State Parks. The agency is also involved with the state Biodiversity Council and has been involved with the hiring of a scientist to develop a biodiversity scorecard for the state. Finally, "Quiet, Nonconsumptive Recreation Reduces Protected Area Effectiveness" (p 146-154 in Conservation Letters) by Sarah E. Reed and Adina M. Merenlender, provides some interesting observations that may have relevance to natural areas in urban - suburban landscapes. The article is available on-line for free.

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Rodrick remained with the meeting via telephone from 11:00 a.m. until after the Kennedy Creek report. She had no WDFW report to submit; however, she commented that it "makes sense" to do an abbreviated report for the Natural Heritage Plan format.

Department of Natural Resources

Speaks said that Saunders is in California with the Commissioner and other department staff to talk about a potential land acquisition. She reported that the Sustainable Recreation Work Group (SRWG) has convened. The first meeting was last month, and focused on "why we're here." The group will be developing recommendations for the department regarding the department's role in providing recreation and potential policy needs. The group reports to the legislature in December 2009, addressing primarily trust lands, but may also consider natural areas. There was some discussion as to the composition of the group, and that although mostly forestlands are under discussion, agricultural lands are included where there is public access.

Speaks also reported that the proposed Recreation and Public Access Rules (332-52 WAC) will apply to all DNR-managed lands. The newly revised version is on the website. They are hoping for approval at the December 2, 2008, meeting of the Board of Natural Resources.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report – see attachment

Pavola summarized the WWRP funding, and said it depends on the level of funding by the Legislature. If the program is funded at \$100 million, then we could have 11 of 15 projects funded; if \$50 million, then only 3 of 15. He said the DNR staff presenters were professional; they had the information needed; the presentations were great; and now it depends on money from the legislature.

VII. Natural Heritage Program Report

Gamon delivered a hard copy report of the Program's activities since the last Council meeting. He indicated that all of the great fieldwork that staff accomplishes gets short changed in the summary. The staff do a tremendous amount of work in the field.

Gamon handed out LandScope wall maps for the Council. National Geographic had the lead, and the map was rushed to get to the ESRI conference in the spring. The map is a "beta" version. Gamon asked the Council to let him know if they notice errors. Washington is a pilot state for the project. Individual state wall maps may be a future product.

VIII. Other Business

Council Meeting dates for 2009 calendar year

During the 11:00 a.m. conference call, the Council agreed upon the following dates for the 2009 calendar year:

Wednesday, January 14, 2009, Olympia

Wednesday, March 11, 2009, Olympia

Wednesday and Thursday, June 10-11, 2009, (Anacortes/Cypress Island)

Wednesday, October 21, 2009, Olympia

Travel / per diem update

Jones distributed the new state per diem rate map and highlighted some of the changes. She will e-mail the map to those Council members not present.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.