

Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council
APRIL 16, 2013

Best Western Hotel
121 2nd Street
Washougal, Washington
Conference Room
APRIL 16, 2013
10:00 AM – 4:30 PM

Voting members present: John Banks, Len Barson, Al Black, Janelle Downs, Peter Dunwiddie, Cherie Kearney (chair), Bob Meier,

Ex Officio members present: Rob Fimbel (State Parks), Eric Gardener (WDFW), Elizabeth Rodrick (outgoing WDFW), Nona Snell (RCO), and Jed Herman (DNR).

Members absent: Wade Troutman, Chris Hempleman (Department of Ecology)

DNR Staff present: Carlo Abbruzzese, Rex Crawford, John Gamon, Rex Hapala, DeAnn Johnigk, Curt Pavola, Joe Rocchio, Pene Speaks, Dave Wilderman, and Michele Zukerberg.

I. Introductions

Chair Kearney called the meeting to order at approximately 10am. All present introduced themselves including new members, Eric Gardner who is the representative for the Department of Fish and Wildlife and is replacing Elizabeth Rodrick who is retiring at the end of the month, Nona Snell the representative for the Recreation and Conservation Office and Jed Herman representative for the Department of Natural Resources.

II. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes
Minutes of June 25, 2012

The Minutes from the June 25, 2012 meeting were distributed to the council prior to the meeting.

A motion to approve the Minutes of the June 25, 2012 meeting was made by Len Barson, seconded by Peter Dunwiddie. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Old Business

Special Lands Acquisitions Report – Program Update and Recent Activities

Johnigk reported (Power Point presentation) on the activities of the Special Lands Acquisition staff. She indicated that presently DNR has Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) funds for natural area acquisition totaling \$23.9 million: \$11.7 million for 12 sites from the 2009-2011 biennium and \$12.2 million for 9 sites from the 2011-2013 biennium. In addition to the WWRP funds, there are federal funds available for Dabob Bay Natural Area (\$2.67 million in Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program funds and monies from the U.S. Navy) and for Elk River NRCA and North Bay NAP (\$591,000 in National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program funds).

Johnigk also reported on the list of WWRP projects currently being considered for funding in the 2013-2015 capital budget by the Legislature. Those projects, by funding category, are as follows:

- State Lands Restoration
 - Klickitat Canyon NRCA – Forest and meadow restoration
 - Admiralty Inlet NAP – Rare plant habitat restoration
 - Kahlotus – Marcellus NAPs – Shrub-steppe habitat restoration
 - Washougal Oaks NA – Oak and riparian habitat restoration
 - Lacamas Prairie NA – Wet prairie and oak habitat restoration
 - Woodard Bay NRCA – Wetland and shoreline restoration
 - Cypress Island NRCA- Estuary and saltmarsh restoration
 - Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP – Slough, waterway and riparian wetland restoration
- State Lands Development
 - Woodard Bay NRCA – Public access and environmental education
 - Middle Fork NRCA – Trail development
 - Cypress Island NA - Public access and environmental education
- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account
 - Woodard Bay NRCA – Public access and education
- WWRP Land Acquisition
 - Natural Areas
 - Camas Meadows NAP
 - Wanapum NAP
 - Upper Dry Gulch NAP
 - Washougal Oaks NA
 - Lacamas Prairie NA
 - Dabob Bay NA
 - Trombetta Canyon NAP
 - Urban Wildlife Habitat
 - Stavis NRCA / Kitsap NAP
 - Woodard Bay NRCA
 - Middle Fork Snoqualmie / Mt. Si NRCAs
 - West Tiger Mountain NRCA
 - Riparian Protection
 - Dabob Bay NA
 - Kennedy Creek NAP
 - TOTAL = \$23,778,351 grant funding requested for 13 acquisition projects

Snell noted that there are three proposals for funding WWRP being considered by the Legislature at this time:

- Governor Inslee - proposes \$75 million
- House of Representatives – proposes \$70 million
- Senate – proposes \$39.6 million with many changes to the ranked lists provided by RCO including no funding for critical habitat and natural areas projects.

Progress on past recommendations

Johnigk reported that during the period from June 2012 to April 2013, DNR acquired a total of 24 properties at 10 sites. The properties totaled 790 acres for a total cost of \$6.92 million (including WWRP and Coastal Estuarine Land Conservation Program and National Coastal Wetlands Conservation funds).

The ten sites included:

- North Bay NAP
- Niawiakum River NAP
- Dabob Bay NA

- Stavis NRCA
- Ink Blot NAP
- Woodard Bay NRCA
- Mima Mounds NAP
- Lacamas Prairie NA
- Washougal Oaks NA
- Columbia Hills NAP

Additional details about the acquisitions at these sites are included in a written report submitted by Johnigk and attached to these Minutes.

Speaks also provided updates on the status of efforts at three sites:

- Upper Dry Gulch NAP - a public hearing will be scheduled next month or in June regarding the boundary expansion. Information from the hearing will be presented to the Commissioner of Public Lands for a determination regarding the expansion. The proposed expansion involves DNR-managed trust lands and one major private landowner.
- Wanapum proposed NAP - the Commissioner of Public Lands has requested that we take another look at the site and prioritize and perhaps phase the acquisition. The site was approved by the Council more than 5 years ago, but no public hearing has been held, yet.
- Trombetta Canyon NAP - a boundary hearing was held in 2011 and a Commissioner's Order establishing the boundary was signed by Commissioner Goldmark soon after. Trust lands within the boundary are on the proposed Trust Land Transfer list for the coming biennium.

IV. New Business

Kennedy Creek Natural Area Preserve: proposal for boundary expansion

Zukerberg presented (Power Point; written proposal sent to council prior to meeting) a proposal to expand the boundary at the Kennedy Creek Natural Area Preserve to include two parcels totaling approximately thirty-three acres. The expansion includes riparian and upland buffer areas associated with approximately 1,520 feet of Schneider Creek. A hydrologic and salmonid habitat connection exists between the proposed expansion area and the primary natural features of the preserve.

Zukerberg emphasized that the Kennedy Creek NAP boundary expansion is designed to increase site protection and the long-term viability of the existing preserve. The expansion is located adjacent to the existing preserve. It includes the adjacent riparian and upland forest habitat of Schneider Creek, a major tributary to Oyster Bay. The west side is bounded by the preserve and the south side is bounded by Highway 101. The east side is defined by private property currently used as a horse farm. The north side is bounded by the top of the ridge with private properties on the other side.

The criterion used for boundary expansion was to strengthen the protection and connectivity between estuarine and associated stream riparian habitat on Schneider Creek. Forestlands, such as those along Schneider Creek that are adjacent to the current NAP influence the interception of rainfall, condensation, evapotranspiration and infiltration of moisture into the aquatic system (Lindenmayer and Franklin 2003). Forests also provide coarse woody debris recruitment into the estuary (Gonor 1988), a feature whose ecological role is not yet completely understood (Simensted 2003). While a portion of the expansion area forest is generally in early stages of development, long-term protection will allow these influences to develop as the forests mature. Other important riparian and estuarine connections include water quality and erosion control.

The expansion area is threatened by existing use as a home site and by future development. Current county zoning for the properties is one unit per five acres, which could allow up to 15 homesites. Over the past 30 years, adjacent properties have seen a substantial increase in development.

Council members asked several questions about the small size of the area proposed for addition, how this addition benefits the existing features being protected, and the threats to the site if these parcels were not included. Some members indicated frustration at not having information about the larger watershed of Schneider and Kennedy Creeks and how this proposal fits into overall water quality protection. Zukerberg responded to a question about whether the site is a priority in the Puget Sound Partnership Agenda by indicating that maintaining shellfish is and Totten Inlet (where site is located) is an important shellfish growing area. More discussion occurred regarding concern about the lack of context and landscape level information and the potential threats of not including these parcels now. A desire to move forward with the proposal was indicated by members but also direction about the need for more complete information for recommendations in the future.

A motion was made by Len Barson to approve the Kennedy Creek NAP boundary expansion proposal as presented; seconded by Bob Meier. The motion passed unanimously.

NH Plan update – Status Changes

Gamon presented the proposed changes to the Washington Natural Heritage Plan for 2013. (The proposed changes and background materials were sent to the council prior to the meeting.) He began by providing background information regarding the purpose of the plan: it is intended to provide an objective process and criteria for selecting areas for designation as natural areas. He reviewed the Natural Heritage Program's process for establishing element priorities considering rarity, degree of threat, and the degree to which adequate protection or representation already exists. The proposed update would be an amendment to the current list of plan priorities and would be available electronically after the approval process is complete. There are several changes to plan priorities proposed:

- Rare plants
 - 16 additions
 - 4 changes in status
 - 5 deletions
 - 42 taxonomic/nomenclatural changes
- Rare animals
 - 7 additions
 - 4 status changes
 - 1 deletion
 - 3 taxonomic/nomenclatural changes
- Ecosystems
 - 1 status change
- Lichens added – 52 taxa

Gamon indicated that the review of elements was somewhat abbreviated this time due to limited capacity of staff and a number of vegetation classification changes that are being considered. The recommendation to add the lichen species as priorities in the plan came from the Washington Rare Lichens Committee. The committee, whose members have been monitoring a number of lichen species, documented the need for adding the 52 species included as plan priorities. This is the first time lichens have been included in the plan.

The council discussed some of the proposed changes including the change in status for *Rorippa columbiae* (persistentsepal yellowcress) and *Brachyrampus marmoratus* (marbled murrelet). The discussion also included information about how additions are made to the priorities. Staff indicated that inventory information is getting better and the program is getting more input from others and more reporting about the rarity of species. The ranking of species and ecosystems compared to priorities in the plan (plan priority = NA importance, status rank = conservation importance) was also discussed including how ranking for animals and plants are determined.

A motion was made to approve the changes to the state of WA Natural Heritage Plan proposed by the Natural Heritage Program as presented to the Natural Heritage Advisory Council on 4/16/13 by Al Black, seconded by Peter Dunwiddie. The motion passed unanimously.

NHAC 4-16-13 Meeting Minutes

Approved: June 19, 2013

Future NH Plan update:

Gamon indicated that the program would like to begin considering a full update of the NH Plan and start discussions with the council about what might be included in a future publication. He started the conversation with some background about the history of the plan and how the conservation world has changed since its inception. Some potential topics were introduced that might be addressed in a plan update. For instance:

- Update of the ecosystem classification system;
- Review of the role of the NH Plan priorities for 'Representation' or 'Conservation;'
- Consideration of how to address wide-ranging animals and animals with large area needs;
- Including connectivity in assessing priorities;
- Addressing climate change in establishing priorities and designing natural areas;
- Looking at element priorities vs. explicit spatial priorities.

The council discussed some potential topics to include and several members emphasized the importance of the present focus of the plan and the program toward protection of natural areas. There was some discussion about the need for a landscape level approach to conservation. Staff conveyed a comment from Troutman regarding his concern about the changes already occurring on the land from changes to the climate regime and the importance of the NH program and plan being on the leading edge of adapting to protection and conservation needs. There was also consideration of the potential need for more collaboration between the NH program and conservation efforts in the Department of Fish and Wildlife and if a gap remains from the demise of the Biodiversity Council that could be addressed.

Conclusion: Keep the topic on the agenda for future council meetings and have staff develop a number of options for a NH Plan update. Include any new directions that the program and council might want to consider in future discussions. Staff will develop a framework for discussion that addresses the thoughts were provided today.

Council Member Nomination Process

Speaks gave an overview of current vacancies on the Council. There is one vacant scientist position and one vacant at-large position. Additionally, the terms for three positions end in 2013: John Banks (scientist), Bob Meier (timber land owner representative) and Len Barson (at-large). Speaks presented a nomination process (see handout) developed in collaboration with staff and the ad hoc Council nomination committee (Dunwiddie, Downs and Kearney). The process would include:

- Recruitment – the Nomination Committee reviews Council vacancies and term expirations; solicits names from the council, staff or others;
- Review – the Nomination Committee conducts first review of candidate materials and forwards to the full council with a recommendation from the committee;
- Recommendation – The Council considers committee recommendation and drafts recommendation for Commissioner;
- Commissioner of Public Lands – The Commissioner considers candidates and council recommendation; and makes appointment from forwarded candidates or others.

Staff suggested consideration of including a statement regarding council members continuing in their positions until they are reappointed or, if they so choose, until another candidate is appointed to fill the position they are vacating.

A motion was made to approve the council member nomination process as presented by Janelle Downs and seconded by Peter Dunwiddie. The motion passed unanimously.

A standing committee was established to review nominations and to present recommendations regarding nominations to the full Council. The standing committee will consist of Downs, Black and Dunwiddie. It was

noted that all Council members share the responsibility of submitting names to the committee. It was also noted that those Council members whose terms are expiring should indicate if they are interested in being re-appointed.

Natural Areas Monitoring and Restoration Projects

Wilderman gave an overview (Power Point) of two projects: monitoring of *Ranunculus tritermatus* (obscure buttercup) at Columbia Hills NAP and habitat restoration work within Oregon Spotted Frog habitat at Trout Lake NAP. The monitoring data for obscure buttercup suggest a decline in the population. However, there is no apparent change happening in terms of the habitat for the species or the management of the site, and overall observations of the population and its distribution within the NAP do not indicate a major decline. Wilderman suggested that more intensive and/or focused monitoring and research into potential causes of a population decline would be needed to clarify whether a decline is truly happening and to identify the cause(s).

Fimbel suggested that RareCare might be interested in playing a role in monitoring other sites to determine if there is a decline in other populations. Note: RareCare is a volunteer program administered by the U.W. Center for Urban Horticulture whereby volunteers gather information on selected rare plant populations. RareCare partners with the Natural Heritage Program in the identification of species and sites for the volunteers to visit. Natural Heritage also participates in the annual training of the volunteers.

Habitat restoration activities at Trout Lake reported on by Wilderman include work on water control structures and reed canarygrass control and revegetation. The water control work was done primarily to improve hydrologic conditions in existing breeding habitat for the Oregon Spotted Frog and has also created at least one new area of suitable breeding habitat on the site. The reed canarygrass control efforts utilized a variety of methods, including herbicide, mowing, covering with weed cloth, and planting treated sites with native vegetation. Recent trends in the number of egg masses are positive; in fact, Trout Lake NAP is the only known site in Washington with a positive trend.

V. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office

Snell mentioned the availability of the descriptions of Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program projects on the RCO website. She also indicated that RCO is recruiting individuals to serve on the evaluation panels for the various Habitat Conservation Account grant categories.

Department of Ecology – No report.

State Parks and Recreation Commission

Fimbel reported that the state parks system in Washington is now 100 years old. He indicated that the agency continues to have budget concerns and that some parks may be closed as a result. He also indicated that the State Parks and Recreation Commission has identified stewardship as a priority. The agency is making an effort to prioritize resources and focus funding on those priorities. He referred to work that was done by Natural Heritage staff (Crawford and Rocchio) to help identify priorities.

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Rodrick reported on the new acquisition grants that were submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act. Four projects were submitted at the end of January: (1) I-90 Wildlife Corridors project, (2) Mtn. View Ranch in Asotin County which is also tied to a WWRP grant, (3) Heart of Cascades and (4) Camas Meadows (an expansion of the existing NAP). She also indicated that WDFW has six existing natural areas and that the agency is revisiting the management of those sites. There are no new state endangered species listings. Gardner discussed the USFWS 5 year time line to make listing decisions regarding more than 250 species nationwide. A number of Washington species are part of this effort, including the Mazama

pocket gophers, streaked horned lark, Oregon Spotted Frog, and others. Gardner also indicated that there are draft recovery plans being published by DFW that are available for comment.

Department of Natural Resources

Herman indicated that the budget is the primary issue facing the agency (at least with regard the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas programs). He stated that his priority is to ask for funding for NHP. He also reported that the Commissioner of Public Lands will be updating the agency's strategic plan. As components of this, some attention will be given to the agency's activities in shrub-steppe and work that the NHP does/can do on state lands. Barson requested information on the budgets for both Natural Heritage and Natural Areas. Speaks responded by indicating that both programs are okay through the end of this biennium, largely due to external funding in both programs that helps fill the gaps in state funding. Next biennium's funding is less clear. The NH program has more "hard" funding going into this funding cycle than in 2011 but still needs to make up a sizeable shortfall of about 50%. The Natural Areas program's funding is more tenuous. The program has become more dependent on grants and capital projects for permanent staff making it more vulnerable if grant or capital funding doesn't come through.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report – See program report attached to these Minutes.

VII. Natural Heritage Program Report - See program report attached to these Minutes.

VIII. Other Business – Future Meeting Dates

There was a brief discussion about the frequency of future council meetings and potential dates. It was decided that two meetings will be scheduled for the rest of this calendar year, one in June and one in September or October. Speaks will send a Doodle poll to Council members with options for both meetings.

The Council recognized Elizabeth Rodrick for her long service on the Council and her contributions to conservation in Washington by giving her a rousing ovation. She is retiring at the end of this month.

IX. Prep for field trip to Lacamas Prairie and Washougal Oaks NAs

Abbruzzesse gave an overview of the field trip tomorrow to Lacamas Prairie and Washougal Oaks natural areas. We will meet at 8am to get an early start.