

**Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council
MARCH 5, 2014**

NATURAL RESOURCES BUILDING
1111 WASHINGTON STREET SE
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON
ROOM 175
March 5, 2014
9:30 AM – 3:30 PM

Voting members present: Cathy Baker, John Banks, Al Black, Heida Deifenderfer, Janelle Downs, Peter Dunwiddie, Cherie Kearney, Bob Meier, Norm Schaaf and Wade Troutman

Ex Officio members present: Rob Fimbel (State Parks), Sarah Gage (RCO), Jed Herman (DNR), Heather Kapust (DOE) and Cynthia Wilkerson (DFW)

Members absent: None

DNR Staff: Carlo Abbruzzese, Joe Arnett, Rex Crawford, Birdie Davenport, John Fleckenstein, John Gamon, DeAnn Johnnigk, Paul McFarland, Curt Pavola, Joe Rocchio, Pene Speaks, and Dave Wilderman

Others: None

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Kearney called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. Everyone present introduced themselves including council members and staff.

II. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes - Minutes of June 19, 2013

The minutes of the June 19, 2013 council meeting were presented for approval. (The draft minutes had been distributed to the council prior to the meeting.)

A motion to approve the minutes of the June 19, 2013 meeting of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council as presented was made by Cathy Baker, seconded by Janelle Downs. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Old Business

Progress on past recommendations – Acquisitions Report

Johnnigk reported on natural areas acquisition activities since June 20, 2013. During this reporting period, the Department acquired 19 properties totaling 169.16 acres and successfully spent \$2,529,800 on land value, using grant funds. The properties have been included in the state's Natural Area Preserves and Natural Resources Conservation Areas. A written copy of the report is attached to these Minutes.

Natural Heritage Methods - Setting conservation priorities in the State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan

Gamon presented the council with background information regarding how the Natural Heritage Program establishes conservation priorities. The intent of the presentation was to inform new council members and provide a refresher to longer serving members regarding the methods used for evaluating species and ecosystems (plant communities). The presentation included information about how state and global ranks are determined using NatureServe methods and tools and how these influence priorities established in the Washington Natural Heritage Plan. Gamon referred to the information regarding priority setting included in the 2007 Natural Heritage Plan (http://www1.dnr.wa.gov/nhp/refdesk/plan/plan07_entire.pdf). Gamon used three plant species and three plant associations to demonstrate some of the factors used to determine global and state ranks. He then demonstrated how the status/rank related to priorities for those species and plant associations established in the Natural Heritage Plan.

There was some questions and discussion about how the rank of species and ecosystems are considered during the development of a natural area design. The council suggested that how a natural area is designed would be a good topic for the next council meeting.

Process for Natural Area Recommendations to Commissioner of Public Lands

Kearney and Speaks provided background information regarding the role of the Council in making recommendations for natural area designation and establishing proposed boundaries for new sites or expanding existing sites. Staff provided a simplified flow chart demonstrating roles in the process. There was some discussion about differences from past practice and the council's desire to continue to play a meaningful role in the designation process. A suggestion was made to show council involvement earlier in the process, particularly if council members have knowledge of a potential site, could help in site selection or wanted to suggest a site for evaluation. It was also asked if the council would be made aware of sites that weren't approved for moving forward or the rationale if the Commissioner decided not to accept a council recommendation.

There was also discussion about the status of the *Natural Heritage Plan*. Staff provided a flow chart showing the *NH Plan* review and approval process similar to the one referred to above. There was some question about what priority should be placed on tracking other taxonomic groups (i.e., in addition to what the NHP currently tracks) and whether the Council has a broader role to play in terms of providing guidance to the program. Herman suggested that DNR staff could develop a flow chart for the broader role of the NHAC in the work of both NH and NA programs. DNR staff will follow up with ideas regarding more complete engagement with the Council on this subject.

IV. New Business

Review funded Trust Land Transfer parcels for 2013-15 Biennium

Speaks reviewed several natural areas that would be added or expanded due to the Trust Land Transfer Program. Four sites will require boundary expansions: Elk River NRCA, Morning Star NRCA, Mt Si NRCA and Columbia Falls NAP. A proposal for expanding the boundary at Columbia Falls NAP will be brought to the council for review.

Forest Restoration and Management on Natural Areas - Review draft guidance for DNR Natural Areas Program

Pavola and Wilderman reviewed the draft Natural Areas Program forest restoration guidance document that had been sent to the council prior to the meeting. Wilderman and Davenport used a PowerPoint presentation to cover aspects of the guidance document and an opportunity at Elk River NRCA for implementation. Pavola explained that the program received funding from the legislature to support forest restoration activities at Elk River NRCA, which facilitated finalization of the draft guidance. The council had several questions and suggestions, including the potential for activities to provide research opportunities. Fimbel shared his experience regarding tree removal/timber harvest on State Park lands and encouraged outreach prior to beginning activities at the NRCA. The council also suggested developing a one page fact sheet regarding the topic. Questions and points for clarification were captured as "parking lot" issues (attached) that staff will address at the next council meeting.

Secret Harbor Restoration at Cypress Island NRCA

Paul McFarland, Natural Area Manager for DNR's Northwest Region, presented information and slides of recent restoration activities at Secret Harbor on Cypress Island NRCA. The intent of the project is to restore natural wetland function including reconnection of freshwater stream and salt marsh/estuary areas at the site. The project included removal of fill and culverts, reconstruction of the stream channel, dike removal and re-vegetation of the area with native plant species. The project should be completed in the fall of 2014.

V. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office – Gage reported that the office was celebrating their 50 year anniversary this year. The agency is working on a public lands inventory. The project was directed and funded by the legislature to get an accurate account of how much land in the state is in public ownership. RCO is administering the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation. The agency is also busy with grant programs. Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grant applications are due May 1.

Department of Ecology – Kapust reported that the National Coastal Wetland Conservation Program (NCWC) received 16 grant applications nationwide. Washington was awarded three of them. One was awarded to The Nature Conservancy for their Ellsworth Creek Preserve. An acquisition project at Elliott Slough and a restoration project in the Skokomish River estuary were also funded. DOE would like to hear about any new NCWC proposals by the end of month.

State Parks and Recreation Commission – The agency continues to develop a restructuring strategy to implement recent funding changes. Consideration of management priorities includes assessing natural heritage features within State Parks and including citizen science in gathering scientific information. Fimbel also mentioned that the issue of whether to expand the ski area at Mt. Spokane is still being considered by the Commission.

Department of Fish and Wildlife – Wilkerson indicated that the department is working on a 10 year update of the State Wildlife Action Plan. This includes review of the species of greatest conservation need list. She also mentioned the department's interest in using ecological systems state ranks as they relate to the state plan priorities. DFW has been working on their WWRP grant proposals for the coming biennium. They are also working with the federally funded Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative on grant proposals. Wilkerson also indicated that she is representing Washington DFW on the Joint Implementation Working Group for implementing the National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy.

Department of Natural Resources – Herman mentioned that the department is working on grant applications for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. The projects will include parcels in private ownership within established natural area boundaries.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report – See handout

VII. Natural Heritage Program Report – See handout

VIII. Other Business

Peter Dunwiddie raised an issue regarding the use of prescribed fire as a management tool during the late summer and early fall. The Commissioner of Public Lands established a statewide outdoor burn ban beginning July 1. Dunwiddie indicated that he has concerns about the ban's potential negative impact on natural areas management. Dunwiddie suggested that he'd like to see the council communicate the scientific case to allow or make it easier to get approval to use prescribed fire as a management tool

during the time period the ban is in place. The council discussed the idea of convening a small group to consider options for communicating with the Commissioner, including a face-to-face meeting with him. *Dunwiddie moved that he draft a list of talking points for speaking to the Commissioner to circulate to council members; Schaaf seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

Next Meeting Date

Speaks will send out a Doodle Poll to council members to identify dates. A preference was expressed for late May, June, or July.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 pm.