

Meeting Minutes

Natural Heritage Advisory Council

January 19, 2019

Minutes Approved: June 20, 2019

Natural Resources Building – Room 172
1111 Washington Street SE
Olympia, Washington 98504

Council members present: Peter Dunwiddie, Kathryn Kurtz, Janelle Downs (remotely), Ian Sinks, Heida Diefenderfer, Becky Brown (remotely), Randi Shaw, Adam Cole (RCO), Heather Kapust (Ecology), Rob Fimbel (State Parks; remotely) and Brock Milliern (DNR).

Council members absent: Cheryl Schultz; WDFW representative

Staff present: John Gamon, Andrea Thorpe, Mark Reed, Ben Guss (morning), Dave Wilderman (morning), Rebecca Niggemann (during drone discussion), and Joe Rocchio (afternoon).

Guests/Others: Pene Speaks (during discussion of the Mountain Home Meadows registry recommendation and the Partners Meeting discussion), Sarah Gage (RCO).

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Chair Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m. Council members and DNR staff introduced themselves.
2. **Review and approval of October 25, 2018 meeting minutes:** It was moved (Kurtz) and seconded (Shaw) that the draft minutes be approved. There was no discussion. The minutes were unanimously approved.
3. **Carry forward items from October meeting:**
 - a. **Vacancies:** Gamon reported that he had received names of potential forest landowner representatives from Julie Sackett-Shively, the Forest Health and Resiliency Division Manager. Gamon has communicated with these individuals and hopes to have a representative identified by the April meeting.

Gamon reported that he has contacted potential agricultural landowner representatives, but the individuals contacted have declined further consideration. Diefenderfer asked for clarification regarding specifications for the position, specifically asking whether small-scale organic farmers would be considered. Gamon speculated that the original intent was probably to have a representative of larger-scale, traditional agriculture, but that having a few choices would be great. Kapust inquired if shellfish farming would qualify; Gamon indicated he was unsure. Kurtz stated that Norm Schaaf provided a benefit by representing natural heritage within the forestry community and it would be nice to have an agricultural representative who could do the same. Becky Brown suggested contacting the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife liaison for the Conservation Reserve Program and the Natural Resources Conservation Service for recommendations. Kapust suggested getting recommendations from eastside land

trusts involved in working land trusts. Chair Dunwiddie suggested Curt Soper and Chris DeForest of the Inland NW Land Conservancy. Gamon requested that Council members send additional recommendations of individuals and groups to contact directly to him.

- b. Bylaws and elections:** Chair Dunwiddie indicated that the recently approved NHAC bylaws included guidance and provisions regarding the conduct of an election of a council chair. He suggested that such an election be held. According to the bylaws' requirement that a council member must have served on the council for a minimum of two years, four council members are currently eligible (Schultz, Diefenderfer, Downs, and Dunwiddie). Three others will become eligible in May (Kurtz, Brown, and Sinks). Schulz, Diefenderfer, Downs, Kurtz, and Brown have stated they were not interested in serving as chair at the present time. Sinks expressed potential future interest, but indicated that he was not yet ready to take on the role of council chair. Dunwiddie expressed an interest in serving another term. Kurtz moved that Dunwiddie be elected as NHAC chair. Sinks seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **Acquisitions Report** – Reed summarized land acquisitions occurring since the October 2018 NHAC meeting. Acquisitions have occurred at West Tiger Mountain NRCA, Stavis NRCA, Washougal Oaks NRCA, Woodard Bay NRCA, Mount Si NRCA, and Bone River NAP. The acquisitions report is attached to these minutes.

During discussion of the Washougal Oaks acquisition, Dunwiddie asked if there was funding in the acquisition grant to remove a house on the property. Reed replied that there were funds available in the grant and that overseeing the process of removal is the responsibility of the Natural Area manager. Dunwiddie expressed a desire to see a site where a house had been removed and there had been subsequent restoration of the site.

During conversation about the Woodard Bay NRCA acquisition, there was a discussion about the process for adjusting Natural Area boundary lines. Milliern stated that the process of boundary adjustments includes conducting a public meeting and public hearing, then obtaining a Commissioner's Order designating the new boundary.

Dunwiddie remarked that acquisitions at Bone River started a long time ago (prior to 1996) and that the recently acquired parcels were some of the last inholdings.

5. **Natural Areas and Natural Heritage Programs 2019–2021 Budget Request** – Gamon provided information on the budget requests for the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas Programs. He characterized the request for increased operating funding for the programs as being bundled with other DNR conservation projects into one operating budget request. The Natural Areas capital budget request was primarily related to improving public access. The Governor's proposed budget did not include any funding for the programs' operating request, included \$2M of the \$7M requested for the capital budget, and \$440,000 for a "maintenance" request for Natural Areas to provide long-term support for recent land acquisitions and completed restoration or facilities projects. Sinks asked what the implications would be of not receiving the requested funding. Milliern replied that currently there is no manager in DNR's Olympic Region and there is a need to increase staff time in the Northeast Region. The \$2M in capital funding is approximately what was received in the prior biennium, but that there were some large projects, including implementing an access plan at Morningstar NRCA, that would now be postponed.

There was discussion about appointed NHAC members' ability to contact legislators regarding budget requests. Diefenderfer suggested that a letter would have greater impact if signed by multiple NHAC members. Kurtz suggested that they would be even stronger if there was also support by other organizations, such as the Pacific Education Institute and Washington Association of Land Trusts. Dunwiddie requested a motion that a letter be crafted to be signed by the chair of the NHAC that would be directed to appropriate individuals in the Legislature regarding support for budget requests with the details to be refined with subsequent communications. It was moved (Sinks) and seconded (Diefenderfer). There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously. Kurtz volunteered to take the lead on the letter with support by Sinks and Diefenderfer.

6. **Mobile mapping of Natural Areas / Natural Area site visits** - Niggemann gave a demonstration of using Google Earth to visualize Natural Areas. She indicated that the files used in the demonstration, along with information on contacts for Natural Areas and a site visit form, would be provided to NHAC members. The files will operate in Google Chrome if users do not want to download the Google Earth application. Gamon suggested that if possible, Council members should contact the relevant Natural Area manager prior to visiting a site, but that lack of contact should not prevent them from visiting a site. Gamon also said that completing the site visit form would be helpful.
7. **Drones and Natural Areas** – Gamon presented videos taken using a drone by an intern during summer 2018. The conservation programs shared the intern with the DNR Recreation Program. Natural Areas included in the drone videos shown at the meeting were Kennedy Creek NAP, Mima Mounds NAP, Selah Cliffs NAP and Camas Meadows NAP. The program's goal for the internship was to explore a variety of uses of drone-acquired imagery to see how the program could benefit from the technology. The most important lesson learned was that each drone flight should have very specific goals, whether the goal is simply to acquire promotional video or to capture more complex data to be analyzed later. We concluded that there is definite potential to use drone videos to map vegetation, to document change in vegetation over time, to identify issues (such as tree mortality) that might otherwise be difficult to detect, and potentially to quantify populations of rare species.
8. **Washington Register of Natural Areas - Mountain Home Meadow** -- Pene Speaks, a former DNR manager with responsibilities for the Natural Areas and Natural Heritage Programs, and a current Natural Heritage Program volunteer, presented a recommendation (see attachment) to issue a registry certificate to Brad and Kathleen Schmidt, new owners of Mountain Home Meadow, which was added to the Washington Register of Natural Areas under previous owners. It was moved (Sinks) and seconded (Kurtz) to issue a registry certificate for the Mountain Home Site to the Schmidts, and convey recognition of the ecological significance of the site. The motion was unanimously approved.
9. **Convening a partners meeting** – Thorpe presented a concept for a Natural Heritage Partner's meeting, to be held in 2019. The purpose of the meeting is to increase awareness and support for the WNHP, as well as to provide a forum for our conservation partners to learn about each other's current activities. Dunwiddie recommended developing metrics for success (e.g., monetary support and/or more requests for data) prior to the meeting. Council members were generally supportive though raised some concerns about the staff time it would take to organize and implement (Dunwiddie). Randi Shaw and Kurtz recommended making the 'partner sharing' portion of the day interactive and a small group activity.

10. Topics for future meetings / Natural Areas Recommendations: Roles and Responsibilities

Gamon asked for feedback on the process followed for the Steptoe Butte potential Natural Area. A few council members found the process to be atypical in that there was not a strong staff recommendation for designation of NAP vs. NRCA and that that decision (NAP vs. NRCA) was ultimately left unmade. Gamon explained that the process was a bit unusual because of the short timeframe available given grant deadlines. Gamon also indicated that the Council will be involved in the designation decision during development of the site's management plan. Gamon stated that Commissioner Hilary Franz signed the boundary and that the grant proposal is currently ranked 2nd in the Natural Areas category for funding; DNR is waiting for the state budget to pass before taking the next steps.

A discussion of management planning for natural areas followed. In response to a question by Dunwiddie, Gamon replied that there are not management plans for Crowberry Bog or Marsh Creek since they are not yet sites managed by the Natural Areas Program. The Natural Areas Program is also limited in capacity to complete full management planning. However, a recent change to Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grants now provides a small amount of funding for development of a stewardship plan for each acquisition project, which the program can use for basic site assessment and planning on natural areas with active acquisition grants. Sinks suggested that management planning would be a good topic for a future meeting. In response to a request from Kurtz, Gamon said he would route examples of site-specific management plans as well as the Statewide NRCA Management Plan.

In response to a question by Shaw, Gamon provided a brief description of how potential Natural Areas are identified and brought to the council.

Diefenderfer indicated an interest in having staff bring a broad array of issues to the council for discussion.

11. Agency/Member Reports – In the past, each of the five agencies on the Council has had the opportunity to report on agency activities. Chair Dunwiddie suggested that other Council members would be welcome to provide reports as well. A written report, attached to these minutes, was submitted by Adam Cole (RCO). No representative from WDFW was in attendance, and no written report was provided. Other members provided verbal reports.

State Parks - Fimbel reported that State Parks is working on several fronts to advance the stewardship of its natural resources, including:

- A decision package in the Governor's budget that will provide funding for:
 - A fulltime steward in the agency's NW region, returning the agency to pre-2007 stewardship staffing levels;
 - A part-time NR Scientist in eastern WA to augment the present steward in addressing habitat restoration activities;
 - Funding to support DNR Natural Heritage scientists in undertaking Level 2 Ecological Integrity Assessments across agency terrestrial vegetation communities;
 - Forest health and wildfire risk potential reduction that includes cross-agency staff funding with WDFW and DNR.

- First ever Capital appropriation to address the backlog of deferred forest health / habitat restoration actions needed statewide, with a focus in eastern WA where efforts will complement the DNR 20 Year Forest Health Strategy.
- Hiring a Natural Resources Program Manager to replace Rob Fimbel (presently working part-time as a NR Scientist).
- Miscellaneous
 - Gearing up to apply a first-ever WWRP grant to help restore the composition and function of the Ragged Ridge NAP in Mount Spokane State Park (emphasis on controlling St. Johnswort, eliminating social trails, and removing encroaching trees);
 - Development of a statewide estimate of deferred State Parks stewardship maintenance costs, with an initial focus on eastern Washington macrogroups (i.e., groupings of ecosystem types);
 - Working with the Center for Natural Lands Management to develop a plan to rehabilitate-restore oak woodland/bald habitats on Jones Island;
 - Preparing to enhance the understory vegetation in G2 communities at Squilchuck State Park where the agency recently completed a commercial forest health thinning, with a similar approach being examined at Fields Spring State Park with assistance from WDFW foresters.

DNR - Milliern (DNR) described several bills being considered by the Legislature that intersect with Natural Areas.

Council members reports - Sinks reported that he is currently a voting member on the Washington Invasive Species Council.

Kurtz reported that along with multiple others, the Pacific Education Institute brought forward climate science literacy bills being considered in the Washington State House and Senate. Kurtz also noted that due to the way that natural resources jobs are coded in employment security data, they are under-represented in workforce development funding; she is working with the Governor's office to address this.

Shaw reported that The Nature Conservancy is almost finished transferring their remaining South Sound Prairie Preserves to the Center for Natural Lands Management.

12. Natural Areas and Natural Heritage Program Reports – Written reports are attached to these minutes. Highlights were provided by Gamon and Wilderman for the Natural Areas Program and by Thorpe for the Natural Heritage Program.

13. No Public comment – There was no public comment

14. No other business – There was no other business.

15. Adjourn – Chair Dunwiddie adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.