

Meeting Minutes

Natural Heritage Advisory Council

June 15, 2017

Minutes Approved: October 19, 2017

Pybus Market
Wenatchee, Washington

Council members present: Peter Dunwiddie (chair), Becky Brown, Kathryn Kurtz, Ian Sinks, Amanda Reed, Sarah Gage (RCO), Rob Fimbel (State Parks), Jim Brown (WDFW), Brock Milliern (DNR).

Staff present: John Gamon, Curt Pavola, Andrea Thorpe, Mark Reed, Joe Arnett, Dave Wilderman, Keyna Bugner, Rebecca Niggemann, Joe Rocchio, Tynan Ramm-Gramberg.

Others present: Curt Soper (Executive Director) and staff of the Chelan Douglas Land Trust, Hannah Clark (Executive Director, Washington Association of Land Trusts).

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Dunwiddie called the meeting to order shortly after 9:30 AM. New council members (Becky Brown, Kathryn Kurtz, Ian Sinks and Amanda Reed) were acknowledged and welcomed. The Chelan Douglas Land Trust was also welcomed as a participant in the meeting.
2. **Review and approval of March 2017 meeting minutes:** The minutes of the March 2017 Natural Heritage Advisory Council (NHAC) meeting were not distributed prior to this meeting; they will be distributed for review and approval at the October 2017 meeting.
3. **Progress on past recommendations:** Mark Reed summarized acquisition activities during the 2015-2017 biennium, including those acquisitions made since the last meeting (see attached report). Three acquisitions occurred during the March-June period: Dabob Bay Natural Area (5 acres), Queets River Natural Resources Conservation Area (601 acres) and Camas Meadows Natural Area Preserve (1 acre). During the biennium more than 1,800 acres were acquired at eight different natural areas for a total cost of more than \$10,800,000.

Discussion during and following Reed's presentation provided council members additional information about the acquisition process, including grant funding sources, timelines, and how DNR prioritizes sites for acquisition efforts. There was also discussion of the opportunities that land trusts have within the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program to compete for acquisition dollars, as well as discussion of some of the current limitations to land trusts working with state agencies on acquisition projects.

4. **Natural Heritage Plan Update:** Thorpe gave an overview of the proposed format and content being developed for the Plan, highlighting major changes and new content since 2011. The overall timeline for a final document is as follows:
 - Staff will have a draft document ready for review and discussion at the October NHAC meeting.
 - A proposed final document will be presented at the January 2018 NHAC meeting.

- Upon approval by the NHAC, the final will be presented to the Commissioner of Public Lands and transmitted to the Legislature no later than March 2018.

Updated lists of priority species and ecosystems: Staff scientists, working with partners and their respective networks of knowledgeable individuals, have revised the lists of priority plant and animal species and ecosystems. Thorpe asked the Council for guidance on including a list of priority lichens. Staff have worked with a network of lichenologists in Washington to assign conservation ranks to lichens. The NHAC discussion that followed suggested that the Plan should include a list of lichens, along with a description of the data that were available and reviewed, as well as the process for review. A suggestion was also made to check with our partners, particularly the U.S. Forest Service and BLM, since they were the source of much of the data and there may be implications for both agencies if lichens are included in the Plan.

New Content Since 2011: A number of topic areas for new content development have been identified, including connectivity, climate change, collaboration, education, research, and strategies for outreach, communications and funding for the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas programs. Thorpe indicated that the intent will be to include in the upcoming edition of the plan a discussion of the relevance of these topics, to identify what we are currently doing to address them, and to state that they will be topics that we will emphasize during the coming years.

Discussion regarding the updating of the Plan included the following points:

- The new plan should include some discussion, and acknowledgement, of the protection provided by land use designations other than those explicitly recognized as part of the statewide natural areas system. For example, federal lands like national parks and wilderness areas are not explicitly included/recognized as providing the same level of protection as 'natural areas' for rare species and quality ecosystems. Similarly, land trust parcels may provide a similar level of protection, yet there has been no systematic approach to recognition of those lands as contributing to the statewide system of natural areas. A thorough analysis of the contributions of these other land designations is probably not feasible for this upcoming edition of the plan, but the need to address the issue can be identified and a commitment made to making it a priority for a future edition.
- There was significant discussion regarding the intended audience for the plan and its intended purpose. Staff stated that there is a need to keep priorities current so that conservation efforts, particularly acquisitions, address current needs. There is also a requirement that we complete a revised plan so that DNR will be eligible for Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grants administered by the Recreation and Conservation Office. A suggestion was made that the audience for the document, in particular an executive summary, should be external, and that it should focus on land conservation efforts.
- The importance of involving a communications professional in the development of the document and in outreach efforts regarding the document was emphasized.
- There was discussion of getting educators and students more involved in the activities of the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas programs.
- There was also significant discussion of having more in-depth conversations with the land trust community and with educators (also see next agenda item).

5. Potential Collaboration with Land Trusts: Gamon introduced this agenda topic by stating that the goal was to explore the potential for collaborative projects and partnerships with land trusts and to discuss how that might be reflected in the *Natural Heritage Plan*. The Executive Director (Curt Soper) and several staff of the Chelan Douglas Land Trust (CDLT) were present and participated in the discussion. Gamon identified six topic areas for the discussion:

- Understanding each other's priorities
- Sharing information / data
- Conservation tools / actions / outcomes
- Site specific conservation planning
- Stewardship
- Public access / education

DNR and CDLT presented information on each topic. Council members, DNR staff, and CDLT staff also broke into groups to carry out a conservation planning exercise, with the express intent of identifying potential ways in which we could collaborate.

The discussion and the planning exercise identified similarities and differences between DNR and CDLT. Significant points of the conversation that may have bearing on potential collaboration included (in no particular order):

- The capacity of CDLT is limited; most staff are not full-time employees. CDLT relies on volunteers for much of the land stewardship work (weed control, planting, trails work).
- Noxious weed control is a significant management issue for both DNR and CDLT.
- CDLT makes a concerted effort to involve the public in its projects, including those with a citizen science component.
- CDLT considers public access opportunities for each project; they get a lot of support because of the recreational opportunities they provide. They acknowledged that there is some tension between recreation and conservation.
- CDLT uses various communications and outreach strategies
 - Sponsoring events, such as dinners, social events, field outings, etc.)
 - Participation in community events (booths, tables, etc.)
 - Using social media as well as more traditional media
- Inventory of CDLT lands for priority species and ecosystems is incomplete.
- Land trusts often focus generically on 'habitat' rather than on rare species or a particular ecosystem type.
- DNR's conservation goals would benefit from partnerships with land trusts:
 - More efficient use of resources
 - Would show support, in a public manner, for the work DNR does.
- To the extent that land trust projects include priority species and/or ecosystems, their proposals for funding could potentially be strengthened.
- NHP could/should share data about the locations of priority species and ecosystems with land trusts.
- DNR and land trusts could share (or coordinate) outreach to land owners with priority species and ecosystems (might be a means to boost the Washington Register of Natural Areas, a voluntary landowner protection program).

- Some concern was expressed regarding who might do inventory for priority species and ecosystems on land trust parcels, recognizing that NHP does not have capacity to add work unless it is both funded and the work is considered to be high priority.
 - Options included training land trust personnel, working with educators, using citizen scientists, and developing ‘wanted’ posters.
- CDLT protection projects happen as a combination of strategic priorities of the land trust, funding opportunities, and partnership opportunities.
- CDLT does not directly use the *Natural Heritage Plan* to identify project priorities.
- A decision-tree (or similar tool) to identify when CDLT (and other land trusts) should engage with the Natural Heritage Program might be useful.
- Land trust parcels could contribute significantly to improved landscape connectivity and climate resilience, as well as helping to fill in species and ecosystems gaps in the statewide system of natural areas.

DNR staff, individual Council members, and Hannah Clark (Washington Association of Land Trusts Executive Director) agreed that the discussion was productive and that the conversation should be continued.

6. **Agency Reports:** State Parks, Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Recreation and Conservation Office, and the Department of Natural Resources each provided a summary report (see attachments).
7. **Natural Areas Report** – Pavola distributed a new version of a summary of research on DNR-managed natural areas (attached). This new version was compiled by a summer intern, Nick Royston.
8. **Natural Heritage Program:** Thorpe distributed a written report to the council (attached).
9. **New / Other Business:** Logistics for the next day’s field trip were presented and discussed.

Chair Dunwiddie adjourned the meeting around 4:30 PM.