

Meeting Minutes

Natural Heritage Advisory Council

June 14, 2018

Minutes Approved: October 25, 2018

Holiday Inn Express
1190 SE Bishop Boulevard
Pullman, Washington 99163

Council members present: Peter Dunwiddie (Chair), Kathryn Kurtz, Janelle Downs, Ian Sinks, Heida Diefenderfer, Becky Brown, Wendy Connally (WDFW), Sarah Gage (RCO), Heather Kapust (DOE), Rob Fimbel (State Parks) and Brock Milliern (DNR).

Council members absent: Norm Schaaf and Cheryl Schultz

Staff present: John Gamon, Andrea Thorpe, Curt Pavola, Mark Reed, Tynan Ramm-Granberg and Walter Fertig.

Guests/Others: Lisa Lantz (State Parks), David Hall (Palouse Prairie Foundation), Joan and Ray Folwell (partners in Steptoe Butte Prairie Reserve), Kent Bassett (partner in Steptoe Butte Prairie Reserve), Dave Bassett, Tom and Kathy Brannon (Colockum Road registry site owners).

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Chair Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Council members, DNR staff and others present introduced themselves.
2. **Review and approval of March 19, 2018 meeting minutes:** It was moved (Downs) and seconded (Kurtz) that the minutes be approved as presented. The motion passed unanimously.
3. **Carry forward items from March NHAC meeting**
 - a. **Climate change discussion** – Gamon and Thorpe reviewed the DNR climate change workshop addressing Natural Heritage and Natural Areas issues/topics that was held in early May 2018. Olympia staff of both programs, along with statewide Natural Areas staff attended the workshop. Council member Kathryn Kurtz also participated.

Thorpe indicated that the next step in the process is for the programs to explore action items, priorities, and timelines. Specific action items have not yet been identified, nor have the resources necessary to carry those actions out been secured. There was discussion of the need to monitor for potential climate change impacts and the role that remote sensing might play. Fimbel suggested that because State Parks and WDFW also manage natural areas, a common approach to addressing climate change would make sense. Dunwiddie suggested that a subcommittee of the council might help produce useful comments for DNR prior to additional internal DNR efforts.

There was mention of the climate change vulnerability assessments, and the tools available to do such assessments, for species and ecosystems. Sinks asked whether vulnerability assessments have been done for individual natural areas. Gamon responded that such assessments have not been done to date, although the Natural Heritage Program does have limited federal funding to identify what actions, if any, could improve the resilience of natural areas that harbor federally listed species.

b. Visiting Natural Areas – Gamon reported that there have been no requests from council members to visit natural areas since the discussion at the March 2018 meeting. He will look for opportunities to offer to the council.

4. Council Vacancies - Gamon reported that two council members, whose terms were set to expire at the end of June, have now been reappointed: Chair Dunwiddie and council member Diefenderfer. The agricultural representative slot remains vacant, after a potential member eventually declined. Members offered ideas for sources of leads, including the state or local conservation districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the state Department of Agriculture, along with a few named individuals.

Gamon also noted that Amanda Reed has left the council after taking a job in Canada. Norm Schaaf has also stepped down, coinciding with his retirement from Merrill & Ring Timberlands. Schaaf volunteered to talk with the Washington Forest Protection Association to see if they have any leads on a replacement for the forest industry position. Gamon has also inquired within DNR with the staff of the Small Forest Landowners Program and our green certification team for potential candidates.

Gamon also reported that Randi Shaw, with The Nature Conservancy of Washington, has been appointed to the open “general public” position on the council and will be joining us for the October meeting.

5. Acquisitions Update – No conservation lands have been acquired since the March report to the council. We are currently processing nine new grants from the 2016 WWRP cycle for acquisitions at the following: Crowberry Bog NAP, Lacamas Prairie Natural Area, Washougal Oaks Natural Area, Bone and Niawiakum River NAPs, Cypress Island NAP, Chehalis River Surge Plain NAP, Woodard Bay NRCA, Stavis NRCA, and Mt. Si, Middle Fork Snoqualmie River and Rattlesnake Mountain NRCAs.

We are also finishing up the applications for 10 grants for the 2018 WWRP cycle, including acquisitions at the following sites: Lacamas Prairie Natural Area, Kennedy Creek Natural Area, Stavis NRCA, Mount Si NRCA, Merrill Lake NRCA, Dabob Bay Natural Area, Methow Rapids NAP, Mima Mounds NAP, Steptoe Butte Proposed Natural Area, and Dewatto Proposed NRCA.

6. Steptoe Butte Natural Area Recommendation – Thorpe and Ramm-Granberg presented a proposal to designate an area at Steptoe Butte as a natural area (see attached PowerPoint and recommendation document). At the conclusion of their presentation, three questions were posed:

- Does the site or portions of it meet the standards of a Natural Area Preserve?
- Which designation (NAP, NRCA or a combination of the two) is appropriate, given all site considerations?
- Is there a recommendation for State Parks, including whether any of the existing state park should be designated as a natural area?

Considerable discussion followed the presentation. Topics of discussion included whether the site, or portions of it, warranted designation as a Natural Area Preserve; management differences between NAP and NRCA designations; potential State Parks ownership and management versus DNR ownership and management; public access and how it might vary by designation category and ownership; and hunting as a specific public use and whether it is beneficial or harmful to maintenance of the ecological condition of the site.

Notes on the Council discussion as it occurred:

Lantz explained State Parks' system of land classification, which includes Natural Area Preserve and Natural Area as two distinct categories, and the process by which such designations are made. Council members were reminded that the council advises State Parks and WDFW as well as DNR. Fimbel commented that the State Parks "Natural Area" designation was similar to DNR's NRCA designation. Lantz indicated that any council recommendation involving or including the state park would be forwarded to the State Parks and Recreation Commission for consideration in their land classification and planning process.

Diefenderfer urged council members to think long-term about how surrounding land use could change and how such change might impact conservation of the features at Steptoe Butte.

Downs asked if the area might receive higher levels of recreational use under State Parks ownership. Lantz stated that many people already think that the private property is part of the state park. It was noted that during the field trip to the site, several members of the public were seen pulling off the road, getting out and taking pictures, although there was not much in the way of social trails leading very far away from the road. Brown noted that the hunting impact on animals should be assessed and that trail development should avoid sensitive areas. She also suggested that appropriate signage could help direct people away from sensitive areas.

Dunwiddie encouraged council members to focus on three questions: 1) does the site, or some portion of it, meet NAP standards? 2) which designation, NAP or NRCA, is appropriate? and 3) does the council want to include any of existing state park within a natural area recommendation?

Downs asked if designation of a portion of the site as NRCA would allow for more uses than would a designation of NAP. Staff responded that there is a reasonable amount of flexibility, but that one significant use that is treated differently between the two designations is hunting. On NAPs, hunting has been permitted only when it has been deemed important to maintain or restore some missing ecological process or function. On NRCAs, the recent practice has been to allow hunting unless there has been a management plan developed that expressly prohibits the activity.

Possible pros and cons of hunting were discussed, including from both an ecological perspective and from the standpoint of public support for designating the property as a natural area. The current landowners indicated that they have enrolled the property in a hunt-by-permit program administered by the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Several council members voiced their opinions that the site has high conservation value and warrants recognition as an NAP, while also acknowledging the strong public support and that that support is somewhat contingent upon continued public access to the site. Milliern suggested that the public support for the project is an important factor that warrants consideration in the decision-making. There was discussion about a dual designation: portions of the site could be designated NAP and other portions NRCA.

After considerable discussion, the Chair requested a motion. Diefenderfer made the following motion, which was seconded by Downs: "The NHAC recommends designation of the area as a Natural Area Preserve and that staff should develop a management plan to address and consider current public uses, including photography, educational uses, hunting, and hang gliding, in ways that effectively maintain the ecological elements for which the NAP is designated, on both private land and the state park, and that the plan be informed by inventory and regular monitoring."

Discussion ensued regarding whether NAP designation was warranted and appropriate for the entire site, including the state park, in terms of both the ecological features of conservation concern and in

terms of current and potential public uses of the site. Brown asked that the council's intent to provide the highest level of protection possible for the elements for the long-term be clearly captured. Gamon suggested that the council could recommend the greater site (including both the Steptoe Butte Prairie Reserve and the state park) as a natural area, with final designation to be approved through a management planning process that would include DNR, State Parks and the public.

Diefenderfer withdrew her original motion and Downs withdrew her second. The following motion was then made (Diefenderfer) and seconded (Downs): "The NHAC recognizes that the lands within the boundary of the Steptoe Butte Prairie Reserve and Steptoe Butte State Park meet the standards for a Natural Area Preserve. The NHAC recommends the site be approved as a natural area, with designation as a NAP or NRCA or a combination of the two, to be determined through a management planning process involving State Parks and stakeholders."

It was clarified that "the site" in the motion refers to the existing Steptoe Butte Prairie Reserve and the existing State Parks ownership. The motion was approved unanimously.

Gage requested that DNR staff share with the Commissioner of Public Lands that this site has been brought to the attention of the Natural Heritage Program by the landowners and that all parties are seeking the best conservation outcome. Dunwiddie also requested the following comments be added to the record regarding the approved motion: 1) long-term monitoring and stewardship is important and 2) staff should explore a larger long-term boundary to protect adjacent high-quality features that are outside of the current boundary recommendation.

7. **Washington Register of Natural Areas** – Thorpe presented the Natural Heritage Program's recommendation to add the Colockum Road site to the Washington Register of Natural Areas (see attachment). The site harbors Whited's milk-vetch (*Astragalus sinuatus*), a plant species with an extremely limited global range. Walter Fertig, Natural Heritage Program botanist, discussed his site visit in May and reviewed the quality of the habitat.

Thorpe also introduced the owners of the Colockum Road site, Tom and Kathy Brannon. Mr. Brannon expressed their desire to maintain the property in its current state. He referenced increasing development pressure in the region.

It was moved (Sinks) and seconded (Kurtz) to approve the recommendation to add the Colockum Road site to the Washington Register of Natural Areas. The motion passed unanimously.

Diefenderfer asked whether DNR has plans to communicate to the public about the Register of Natural Areas. To date, staff have discussed the Register with individual landowners and with the Washington Association of Land Trusts and a few of its member land trusts. Gamon noted the need to discuss the release of information with each participant in the program. The discussion that ensued highlighted the voluntary nature of participation in the program, its conservation potential, and a need to create a greater awareness of its existence.

Gamon indicated that he will invite Pene Speaks, the volunteer who is working to bring new life to the Register, to a future council meeting to share her thoughts about the program. Ms. Speaks formerly worked in DNR in the position now held by Gamon.

8. **Council Charter / Bylaws Discussion** – Gamon summarized a draft version of council bylaws, for which the council subcommittee has provided comments. Subcommittee members include Janelle Downs, Ian Sinks, Becky Brown and Sarah Gage. Chair Dunwiddie suggested that DNR staff come to the full

council with the next version for review. He reiterated that his primary concern was the issue of the length of the term for the Council Chair position and the process by which selection takes place.

9. **Public Comment** – No public comment was received or given.

10. **Agency Reports**

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife – Connally provided a review of WDFW’s 2018 WWRP grant applications. She also mentioned a recent acquisition of prairie and Mazama Pocket Gopher habitat near Tenino. She noted that the agency’s \$30 million shortfall will result in staff reductions, but that WDFW will be requesting funding from the Legislature to retain mission-critical positions.

Department of Ecology – Kapust provided the following report. USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Conservation (NCWC) grants awards have been released after being on hold for six months under the new Department of Interior review process. Ecology received five grant awards, totaling \$5 million. WDFW received one restoration grant for \$1 million. Next week Ecology is planning to submit seven new NCWC grants; WDFW will be submitting one. These grants are focused on acquisition and/or restoration of coastal wetlands.

Ecology’s Floodplains by Design grant program is underway for the current round. Preproposals have been reviewed and those who were invited to submit full applications can do so now. Kapust also reported that Andrea McNamara Doyle has been hired as the Director for the Office of the Chehalis Basin. McNamara Doyle was previously the Executive Director of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.

Department of Natural Resources – Milliern reported on the following three topics.

New Manager of DNR Wildfire Resources: Commissioner Franz recently hired a new manager of DNR’s wildfire activities, George Geissler. He is from Oklahoma where he served as the director of forestry services and state forester with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, which included forest management. He was previously a wildland firefighter and forester for the U.S. Forest Service in Idaho. In 2017, 404,223 acres burned throughout Washington. Summer fire rules governing private and state forestlands are now in effect, through October 15.

20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington

DNR assessed eastside forest health and created a framework to treat 1 million acres of forestland by 2033. The “20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan” for eastern Washington prioritizes forest health projects to both protect state trust lands and reduce losses from wildfire or disease. The plan is a collaborative product involving more than 33 organizations, with the goals of:

- Assuring ecologically functioning and resilient eastside forests
- Managing forested landscapes at a pace and scale that reduces the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires and increases forest health
- Coordinating and prioritizing forest management activities across large landscapes and multiple ownerships.

17 miles of new mountain bike trails

DNR just opened a new 17-mile mountain bike trail network at Raging River State Forest. With a team of trail builders and a partnership with Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, the new trail system adds to DNR’s existing East Tiger Mountain trails. Combined they total 40 trail miles between Issaquah and North Bend. With future funding, the Raging River and East Tiger Mountain trail systems will be connected across Highway 18, and potentially all the way to downtown North Bend. The trail system

implements part of the new Snoqualmie Corridor Recreation Plan, which guides recreation development on 53,500 acres of working forestland and conservation land along Interstate 90. DNR's sites have an estimated 1 million visitors every year at trails on the Raging River and Tiger Mountain state forests and within four NRCAs: Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area, Middle Fork Snoqualmie, Mount Si, and West Tiger Mountain.

Milliern also reported that the Natural Areas and Natural Heritage programs have been developing an operating budget request for possible inclusion within DNR's request for the 2019-2021 biennium.

Regarding the budget request for Natural Areas and Natural Heritage, Diefenderfer asked for more details, including about the status of the request and the likelihood of it being successful. Milliern stated that the process will extend through the summer and that the request will likely go through numerous refinements and that it might end up being packaged with requests from other programs within the department. Milliern also added that there will be a capital budget request for Natural Areas.

Recreation and Conservation Office - Gage gave the following report. RCO and the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office received an \$18.8 million award from the federal Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, which is the same amount as in 2017. This award, matched with state funding, underwrites the grants given out by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB).

A 4-4 tie in the U.S Supreme Court left a lower court order in place, which means that Washington State must restore salmon habitat by removing barriers that block fish migration. Justice Anthony Kennedy stepped aside from the case because he participated in an earlier stage when he served on the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The effect of the "Culvert Case" on SRFB programs is unknown at this time.

RCO is working on its budget request, including funding for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program—an important source of dollars for the Natural Areas Program. As a cabinet agency, RCO makes its request to the Governor.

The 7 month delay in Washington's capital budget means that RCO grant managers are now issuing contracts at the same time as they are processing new applications. RCO has hired several new staff members, some of whom come to RCO from other state agencies, including DNR, Ecology, and WDFW.

At future NHAC meetings, RCO policy staff member Adam Cole will assume the RCO ex officio seat, but Sarah's workplan will continue to allow her to participate.

11. **Natural Areas and Natural Heritage Program Reports** - A written report for each program was provided to those in attendance at the meeting (see attachments). Gamon also noted that he and Becky Brown met with the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy (INLC) to discuss the potential for greater information sharing between Natural Heritage and INLC and the potential for collaboration on various projects.

12. **Other Business** – None

13. **Adjourn** - Chair Dunwiddie adjourned the meeting at 2:50 p.m.