

Draft Meeting Minutes
Natural Heritage Advisory Council
June 20, 2019

Minutes Approved: October 22, 2019

Goldendale Grange
Goldendale, Washington

Council members present: Peter Dunwiddie (Chair), Becky Brown, Heida Diefenderfer, Randi Shaw, Ian Sinks, Janelle Downs, Janet Gorrell (WDFW) and (via phone) Rob Fimbel (State Parks).

Council members absent: Adam Cole (RCO), Heather Kapust (DOE), Kathryn Kurtz, Brock Milliern (DNR) and Cheryl Schultz.

DNR staff present: John Gamon, Andrea Thorpe, Curt Pavola, Mark Reed; later joined by Joe Rocchio, David Wilderman and Walter Fertig.

Guests/Others: Nate Ulrich (Columbia Land Trust).

Welcome and Introductions: Chair Peter Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 11:18 a.m. Council members, staff and others introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes of January 29, 2019 Meeting: The council discussed the mention, in the minutes of the January 2019 meeting, of a potential letter to the Legislature in support of program funding. Conversations following the January 29, 2019 meeting led to the alternative of more personalized legislative contacts being pursued. Approval of the minutes without changes was moved and seconded; approval was unanimous.

Carry-forward Items from the January Meeting: John Gamon updated the council on vacancies, noting that two pending appointments will bring the council to full membership. The two individuals are Maynard Mallonee, from Cowlitz County filling the agricultural landowner position, and Claudine Reynolds, director of wildlife and fisheries for Port Blakely, filling the timber landowner position. Also, two council members with terms expiring soon have agreed to continue on the council and have been re-appointed: Kathryn Kurtz and Randi Shaw.

Ian Sinks discussed the council field trip to Stavis NRCA, which was held in place of the cancelled council meeting in April. Other council members on the field trip included Kathryn Kurtz, Adam Cole (RCO) and Janet Gorrell (WDFW). Sinks noted that while the site does not have a completed management plan, DNR is addressing critical needs such as shoreline restoration, which was the focus of the field trip.

Gamon also led Becky Brown and three of her graduate students at Eastern Washington University on a visit to Marcellus NAP in Adams County. Brown commented that the site is in good condition, but with patches of weeds needing treatment. Since the visit was to the recently transferred former TNC parcel, Chair Dunwiddie suggested checking old TNC files for information about weed history, plots, etc.

Progress on Past Recommendations - Acquisitions Updates: Mark Reed gave a presentation (attached) on recent acquisitions from January 2019 through the present. Acquisitions during that time include five properties, just under 400 acres, with a total value of \$2.3 million.

The council asked about source of funds to be used at Woodard Bay NRCA for removal of the structure on the acquisition site and subsequent site restoration. Curt Pavola noted that Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grants from the Recreation and Conservation Office allow for removal of structures and basic site protection measures, such as weed control, signs, gates, etc. However, for site restoration, the Natural Areas Program will need to compete for funding in the WWRP “state lands restoration” category. DNR has been very successful in this category and generally completes restoration of such parcels within a few years of acquisition. The Department of Fish and Wildlife and State Parks also compete for funding in this category.

The council discussed the WWRP categories and questioned why Woodard Bay was funded in “Urban Wildlife” instead of “Natural Areas.” Gamon and Pavola explained that DNR submits each grant proposal in the category in which it is most likely to be funded. Woodard Bay NRCA continues to rank well in Urban Wildlife (in addition to the Riparian Category in the past) because of its proximity to both Olympia and Lacey and the fact that it hosts a rich diversity of wildlife species.

Updates on Past Natural Area Recommendations: Steptoe Butte NAP (DNR SE Region) is included in the list of projects to be funded through the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program for the 2019-2021 Biennium. DNR and State Parks continue to work on issues regarding the communications towers on the site.

For Crowberry Bog NAP (DNR Olympic Region), DNR has WWRP grant funding in hand from the 2017-2019 Biennium and the acquisition process is underway for both the state trust land parcel and the privately owned parcel.

Gamon also provided updates on two older site recommendations: Marsh Creek (DNR NW Region) and Onion Ridge (DNR NE Region). A number of years ago the council approved various boundary options for Marsh Creek for DNR to consider. No boundary decision was ever made, but Gamon indicated that discussions within DNR are on-going and that he is hopeful that a boundary will eventually be established for the site.

Gamon also stated that he has renewed conversations with the NE Region regarding designation of a natural area on Onion Ridge (Stevens County). Natural Heritage Program staff will visit the site later this summer.

The question of how potential natural area recommendations originate, or get identified, was posed to staff. Gamon explained that the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas Programs generate recommendations internally, but that external parties also provide site leads. Some external leads include lands with priority species and/or ecosystems, as identified in the *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*, but not all. With a more deliberate and better funded approach for outreach to external partners, external leads could potentially align better with priorities identified in the *Natural Heritage Plan*. Dunwiddie reflected on the many former TNC nominations for NAPs and state-owned natural areas, noting that the energy for site designation and conservation may now be with local land trusts. Gamon confirmed that the new focus on information sharing with land trusts could lead to greater land trust participation in the statewide system of natural areas.

Heida Diefenderfer mentioned the increasing landscape threats to these older proposed sites. There was discussion of a potential role for land trusts for some of the older recommendations that have languished.

Lunch Break: A special thanks to the good people with the Goldendale Grange for preparing and serving lunch. The food was great and plentiful!

Legislative Session Summary / 2019-2021 Budget Outcomes: Gamon gave a PowerPoint presentation (attached) that identified the budget outcomes for Natural Heritage and Natural Areas, including appropriations in both the operating and capital budgets. The latter included information on trust land transfer and state forest land replacement appropriations whereby lands will be transferred from trust ownership to natural areas status.

Diefenderfer asked whether there was any legislation passed that would have a negative effect on the programs. Thorpe mentioned a bill that passed regarding conservation of pollinators. It could have a minor impact on the scoring of WWRP grant proposals.

Sinks asked for clarification regarding the final budget for the Natural Heritage Program and Natural Areas Program. Gamon confirmed that the enhancements proposed by DNR for the programs was not included in the final budget passed by the legislature. For the Natural Areas Program, however, Gamon said a small “maintenance” increase for operating capacity was included and the goal for that funding is to support or enhance operations statewide.

Natural Areas Management Planning: Pavola reviewed the history of management planning in the Natural Areas Program, referring to examples of previous NAP plans emailed to the council, as well as the planning guidance for NRCAs in the NRCA Statewide Management Plan. This discussion focused on NAP plans, where the council has a more formal role via state statutes for review and acceptance of final plans than it does for NRCAs.

Discussion focused largely on what is needed in a plan and the effort required to complete a plan. There is a new opportunity in that RCO acquisition grants now allow funding for development of a site stewardship plan. These stewardship plans would likely be smaller and take less time than the current template which has been used in the past. Gamon indicated that clear statements about research, educational, and recreational opportunities are currently missing from many management plans. Dunwiddie suggested that prior to the next meeting, Pavola send one to a few draft outlines for the council to review; these outlines will then be the focus of discussion during the meeting. Gamon indicated that staff could provide the council with a list of sites that have been prioritized for management planning.

Report on Stewardship Needs to the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee: Gamon summarized a report prepared by DNR, State Parks and WDFW that was submitted to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC). The report addressed stewardship needs related to habitat conservation and recreation. A previous JLARC report indicated that the three agencies did not have a consistent and comprehensive approach to identifying and reporting on stewardship needs and the costs associated with meeting those needs.

The report recently submitted by the three agencies identified three categories of stewardship needs: natural resources, recreation and infrastructure resources, and cultural resources. Four questions were addressed in the report:

1. Where are we today in terms of our ability to identify and report on stewardship needs?
2. Where do we want to be in the future?
3. How do we close the gap?
4. How will we know if we are succeeding?

The total estimated cost, as identified in the report, for the three agencies over three biennia to put systems in place and to collect the baseline information to be able to identify and report stewardship needs was \$23 million. Gamon will send the final report to the council.

Agency/Member Reports: Rob Fimbel (State Parks) gave an oral report to the council and submitted a written report (attached). Janet Gorrell (WDFW) indicated that the department was facing a \$7 million shortfall for the biennium following the legislative session, but the agency expects to apply full funding to the first year of the biennium and submit a supplemental request for the funding gap for the second year. Also, WDFW Director Susewind made changes in his administration, including creating “Director of Conservation Policy” and “Director of Fish Policy” positions.

Natural Areas and Natural Heritage Program Reports: Curt Pavola presented a slide show (attached) highlighting work by the Natural Areas Program staff in each of DNR’s six regions. Featured projects during the past year included ecological restoration, public access reconstruction or development, wildfire assessment, site interpretive signs, and environmental education visits.

Andrea Thorpe presented highlights of work by the Natural Heritage Program in the past three months (see attached report), including hosting a visiting ecologist from the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, co-authoring a new article on ecological integrity assessments, and conducting rare plant surveys with the Washington Native Plant Society and University of Washington RareCare citizen science program.

Council Field Trip Overviews

A preview was provided for the following day’s field trip to Columbia Land Trust properties above the Klickitat River and the Klickitat Canyon Natural Resources Conservation Area, with drive-by view opportunities to the Klickitat Canyon Community Forest which is co-managed by DNR and the Columbia Land Trust.

Gamon also noted a field trip opportunity after the meeting to be led by Randi Shaw to Rock Creek, which is owned by The Nature Conservancy of Washington.

Chair Dunwiddie adjourned the meeting at 3:50 p.m.