

Meeting Minutes

Natural Heritage Advisory Council

March 19, 2018

Minutes Approved: June 14, 2018

Natural Resources Building
1111 Washington Street SE
Olympia, Washington 98504

Council members present: Peter Dunwiddie (Chair), Norm Schaaf, Katherine Kurtz, Janelle Downs, Ian Sinks, Dave Hays (for Wendy Connally, WDFW), Sarah Gage (RCO), Heather Kapust (DOE) and Dale Mix (for Brock Milliern, DNR). **Council members participating via phone:** Becky Brown, Cheryl Schultz (from 10:30 to 11:30) and Rob Fimbel (State Parks).

Staff present: John Gamon, Andrea Thorpe, Curt Pavola, Mark Reed, Dave Wilderman, Rebecca Niggemann, Machel Leal, Regina Johnson, Keyna Bugner, Joe Rocchio, Tynan Ramm-Granberg, and Ben Guss.

Public: None

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Chair Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m. Dunwiddie introduced Dave Hays, who is filling in for Wendy Connally as WDFW's representative on the council. Connally has been temporarily assigned other duties within WDFW.

Logistics and safety procedures were reviewed.

Dunwiddie asked about items from the last meeting that needed follow-up action. Staff responded that those items are included on today's, but that they are not explicitly labeled as follow-up items. Dunwiddie suggested including a placeholder for such items on future agendas.

2. **Review and approval of January 25, 2018 meeting minutes:** It was moved (Sinks) and seconded (Kurtz) that the minutes be approved as presented. The motion passed unanimously.
3. **Updates since January 2018 NHAC Meeting**
 - a. **Natural Heritage Plan** - Commissioner Hilary Franz has reviewed and approved the draft 2018 Natural Heritage Plan; it is now at the printer. Distribution will occur soon. Dunwiddie asked whether the intent is to create a plan every biennium. Thorpe answered in the affirmative, noting however that this plan was finalized halfway through a biennium, and so that this edition will likely be in place for three years rather than just two years. Dunwiddie complimented the look of the final plan layout.

Thorpe noted that council edits and comments were incorporated into the final plan or will be considered for online documents or web page text that support the plan. Regarding climate change, the program has an upcoming session planned to review the work undertaken by an expert panel convened by the previous Commissioner. Dunwiddie requested that the council be notified of the review session date, in case any council members are interested and able to participate.

- b. **Potential Steptoe Butte Natural Area** - Gamon summarized a State Parks public meeting held on February 26, 2018 in Colfax regarding potential land acquisition adjacent to Steptoe Butte State Park. About a dozen people attended, including two county commissioners and a State Parks commissioner. Individuals present expressed appreciation for the site and its features and emphasized the need to have an active weed control program.

One option discussed was to have DNR take the lead on land acquisition, with State Parks leading on site management (via an interagency agreement). Another option discussed was to have State Parks lead on acquisition, but with some management assistance by DNR. Gamon will work with State Parks to finalize a strategy for inclusion of the site in the 2018 Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grant round.

Fimbel agreed with the former scenario (with DNR leading on acquisition and State Parks assisting with management), stating he sees Columbia Hills NAP/State Park as a model. Hunting could be an issue because it is not allowed on state parks. At present hunting of upland game birds does occur on the property in question.

An additional issue that needs to be resolved—and one for which the current landowners are considering options—is the future ownership of the existing communications towers and whether there is a mechanism to dedicate the revenue from the towers for management of the site (primarily weed control). The Palouse Land Trust attended the meeting but stated they are not in a position to acquire the land. Dunwiddie suggested we consider asking the land trust whether they would have an interest in managing the site and whether they have the capacity to do so.

Dunwiddie urged staff to keep stewardship activities and capacity “front and center” in future natural area proposals. He suggested that one way to better ensure that stewardship activities do not get dropped would be to form partnerships with multiple agencies and/or organizations. Hays mentioned that WDFW has been exploring creating an endowment. Dunwiddie suggested that a topic for discussion at the next meeting should be how we identify the stewardship needs of natural areas and how we can ensure that we have the appropriate resources to meet those needs. Brown suggested that there is a tradeoff between simply preventing conversion versus focusing on lands that need a lot of ongoing management.

Kapust inquired about the “heritage apples” in the former orchard on the Steptoe site, in reference to heirloom varieties that have been identified at the site. Fimbel noted that there are a large number of trees in the park and on adjacent lands, and said they are being mapped now. State Parks does manage such features, and this may be a partnership opportunity.

- c. **Council Vacancies** - Gamon indicated that he has received names of potential candidates for the vacant agricultural position on the council, and he will pursue action to fill the position before the June council meeting. He also noted that the council member terms for Peter Dunwiddie and Heida Diefenderfer expire at the end of June 2018; both have indicated an interest in being reappointed.
- d. **Visiting Natural Areas** - Dunwiddie summarized council interest in having opportunities to visit more natural areas, stating that better knowledge of sites in terms of ecological condition and management needs and issues would enhance council discussions. Kurtz agreed that seeing more sites would help her identify potential education opportunities on Natural Areas. Gamon referred to the Natural Areas Program staff list and site map provided to the council, suggesting that Olympia program staff could help coordinate visits and perhaps help lead trips with region staff.

Downs suggested letting council members know about volunteer events scheduled at Natural Areas so they might attend.

- 4. Climate Change Discussion** - Gamon presented highlights of a DNR climate change review conducted by an "expert panel" appointed by former Commissioner Goldmark. On May 1, staff of both Natural Heritage and Natural Areas will review the results of the previous panel and assess how climate change may impact the work of both programs. The results of this session (and others that are being held with other programs in DNR) will be shared with Commissioner Franz and Executive Management; future workshops will focus on identifying actions that can address identified risks, and development of a plan to implement those actions.

Council discussion regarding climate change and the work of the DNR and the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas programs included the following issues/topics:

- Given that fire regimes are changing in response to climate change, there is a need for improved coordination and communication regarding ecologically sound response to wildfires (e.g., should non-native grasses be used in reseeding efforts?).
 - Importance of soils and their utility in evaluation of potential natural areas and their management needs.
 - Tracking phenological data should be more robust and comprehensive than simply recording the "firsts" each year (e.g., date of first flowering of a given species).
 - What constitutes suitable habitat for a given species may change as climate parameters change.
 - Has the council (or staff) discussed assisted migration to – or from – natural areas as a conservation tool?
 - What can be done to proactively increase the resilience of the natural areas we manage?
 - Now might be an appropriate time to review the boundaries of some of the early natural areas; doing so might be an opportunity to partner with land trusts.
 - An interest was expressed in seeing additional information on climate change vulnerability assessments being made available online.
 - The council is well-positioned to discuss the goals of natural areas in light of climate change, and to advise DNR regarding different management postures that might be adopted. Management could range from treating NAPS as pristine sites at which the impacts of climate change would be documented, but without active intervention, to treating natural areas as the best places to actively manage in order to minimize the impacts of climate change.
 - An observation that DNR's current stance regarding forest health seems to be "tree centric" and that, particularly in light of the complexities of the impacts of climate change, a broader focus on ecosystems would help to better identify forest resilience.
- 5. Open Public Meetings Act training** - Council and staff viewed a training video on the Open Public Meeting Act from the Washington State Attorney General, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yTtVGTOW1A>. Gamon indicated that the Natural Heritage Advisory Council is subject to the Open Public Meetings Act.
 - 6. Potential Natural Areas Acquisition and Restoration Grants for 2018** - Pavola gave a presentation on the potential Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program 2018 grant applications for three grant categories: (1) land acquisition, (2) state lands restoration and (3) state lands development. Natural Areas Program Statewide Ecologist David Wilderman, Eastside Assistant Ecologist Keyna Bugner, and Westside Assistant Ecologist Regina Johnson helped address council questions.

7. **Council Charter / Bylaws Discussion** – Prior to the meeting, a copy of the council by-laws, which date to the early 1990s, was distributed to council members. Given the age of the existing document and its apparent incompleteness, Gamon suggested a working committee to review the old document and propose a new document for discussion during the June meeting. Council members Brown, Downs, Gage and Sinks volunteered for the charter/bylaws review committee.

Gamon agreed to prepare and distribute an outline to the charter/bylaws committee to get the conversation started. Sinks suggested leaving flexibility in establishing and dissolving committees as needed, rather than defining committees that may, or may not, be needed through time. Dunwiddie and Brown commented that making use of committees could help the council move ahead on key issues more effectively, particularly finding solutions to complex issues. Kurtz suggested it would be a good idea to include a provision addressing how meetings are to be conducted when the chair is absent.

8. **Agency Reports** - Written reports submitted by each agency (State Parks, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Department of Ecology, Recreation and Conservation Office, and the Department of Natural Resources) are attached to these minutes.
9. **Natural Areas and Natural Heritage Program Reports** - Pavola distributed the Natural Areas Program report (attached); Thorpe delivered the Natural Heritage Program report (attached).
10. **Public Comment** - No members of the public were in attendance.
11. **Other Business** - Gamon reminded the council of the dates for the June meeting and field trip (June 13-14). He suggested a site visit to Steptoe Butte on the first day, followed by the meeting on the second day, which may include a nomination of Steptoe Butte for Natural Area Preserve or Natural Resources Conservation Area designation.

Gamon provided an update on the Wanapum proposed-NAP. He mentioned the project at an Arid Lands Initiative meeting recently and other partners stated they would like to see the designation move forward. In order to do so, the site needs to have a boundary established, which entails holding a public hearing. Gamon suggested that there is a need to build local community support and to engage with the landowners prior to a hearing.

Chair Dunwiddie noted that he and council member Diefenderfer sent a letter to Commissioner Hilary Franz about the programs' budget challenges, but they have not yet received a response. Gamon indicated that he expects that Dan Stonington, DNR's policy director and former NHAC member, will contact Chair Dunwiddie.

Andrea Thorpe presented a cake to celebrate release of the *2018 State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*. It was warmly received by the council and staff with a round of applause.

Adjourn

Chair Dunwiddie adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.