



NATURAL HERITAGE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes Natural Heritage Advisory Council

October 22, 2019

(Minutes Approved March 27, 2020)

Natural Resources Building – Room 172

1111 Washington Street SE

Olympia, Washington 98504

Council Members in Attendance: Adam Cole (RCO), Peter Dunwiddie, Janet Gorrell (WDFW), Heather Kapust (DOE), Kathryn Kurtz, Lisa Lantz (State Parks), Brock Milliern (DNR), Claudine Reynolds, Cheryl Schultz, Randi Shaw, Ian Sinks. **Via Phone:** Becky Brown, Heida Diefenderfer, Janelle Downs. **Absent:** Maynard Mallonee.

Staff in Attendance: John Gamon, Mark Reed, Curt Pavola, Andrea Thorpe, Keyna Bugner, Molly Jennings, Julie Knobel.

- 1. Welcome and Introductions:** Chair Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. Council members and DNR staff introduced themselves. It was highlighted that Claudine Reynolds was newly appointed and that this is her first meeting. She fills the “forest landowner or representative thereof” position on the Council. Another new member, Maynard Mallonee, was not able to attend. He fills the “agricultural landowner or representative thereof” position.
- 2. Review and approval of June 20, 2019 meeting minutes:** Sinks moved and Shaw seconded approval of the minutes as presented. Approval was unanimous.
- 3. Carry-Forward Items from June 20, 2019 meeting:** Council member visits to Natural Areas - Kapust reported that she visited, with three staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dabob Bay Natural Area as a National Coastal Wetlands site. Sinks reported a trip to various forested sites in Klickitat County, including the Klickitat Canyon NRCA, which included DNR foresters and forest health staff, as well as community partners in the landscape. Dunwiddie visited Columbia Hills Natural Area Preserve in early June and reported it was “spectacular.” Gamon encouraged council members to contact Natural Areas / Natural Heritage staff for advice on site access and for accompaniment to sites if desired. Several council members reported that the new map application created by Natural Heritage staff is very helpful.
- 4. Progress on Past Recommendations:** Reed provided a written report (attached) and presented an overview of recent acquisitions. Conservation acquisitions funded under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act, but where the acquisitions are not part of a natural area, were included in Reed’s report. Their inclusion prompted discussion of DNR’s role in Section 6 acquisitions. Gamon

and Reed explained that private conservation organizations can acquire lands using Section 6 funds, and that state agency sponsors (such as DNR) hold easements over the private lands acquired. Land management is the responsibility of the landowner.

Gamon provided updates on past Natural Area recommendations: Marsh Creek, Upper Dry Gulch, Onion Ridge and Steptoe Butte. He also provided an update on Pineroft NAP.

Marsh Creek p-NAP: Gamon reported that there have been on-going discussions with DNR's NW Region trust land managers regarding this proposal, which was first developed and recommended by the Council in 2015. The proposal has not yet been presented at a public hearing for public comment. The next steps will be to have program and region staff agree on a boundary (or boundary options) to take to the public.

Upper Dry Gulch NAP: The previous boundary expansion proposal recommended by the council and the follow-up action by the commissioner of public lands were reviewed. Additional discussions are underway between DNR trust land managers and the private landowner interested in a land exchange. DNR trust staff will hold a hearing in November for an exchange proposal. After an exchange, DNR likely will want to take a new boundary for the Natural Area Preserve to the commissioner. The council discussed having, at minimum, a review of any boundary change. However, if substantive issues come up the council could weigh in with a revised or new recommendation. Dunwiddie suggested that potential impacts from recent wildfires on the rare plant population should be considered as this expansion proposal moves forward.

Onion Ridge p-NAP: Gamon reviewed the original site-establishment proposal from the 1990s. Recently, program staff and region staff have renewed discussions regarding establishing a boundary. Council discussed current and planned trust land management activities, and how the programs coordinate when conservation values are known. Council members expressed concerns regarding the fate of recommendations that involve forested trust lands.

Steptoe Butte p-NAP: Gamon reviewed the status of the funded acquisition grant and discussions around future ownership and site management. Lantz noted interest in this site by the Nez Perce Tribe. Gamon added his understanding of the tribe's use for an annual event. As part of the boundary establishment process, DNR committed to additional public outreach and management planning, which also will include outreach to tribes. While the current path is for DNR to receive the property, this has not been formally decided. Brown inquired about the acquisition timeframe, and Milliern suggested about 12 to 18 months. Milliern mentioned the outstanding policy question about using the RCO funds to acquire the portion of the property with cell towers, including perhaps keeping cell tower revenue to defray future management costs for the preserve. Gamon noted that the current landowners will also need to find any resolution of the cell towers and future revenue to their liking, in their role as willing sellers.

Pineroft NAP: Gamon described a potential partnership with the City of Spokane Valley parks department at Pineroft Natural Area Preserve, which is adjacent to a city-owned park. DNR is discussing with city recreation staff the creation of an environmental education trail, which would allow appropriate public access to the site while minimizing (displacing) inappropriate uses that occur now (homeless encampments, dog walking). Gamon invited council members to be part of this discussion. Factors being discussed internally and with the city include location of high quality plant communities versus impacted areas, restoration and research opportunities, and notable social trails/problem areas. Milliern noted that people currently breach the fence from several locations around the 100 acre site, and go directly to the highest points. Kurtz noted that a high

school and grade school are nearby, and an educational trail would be good for student use. Gamon added that a science teacher from North Central High School had used the site for several years for student research projects. Kapust asked about the original acquisition funding source and allowance of public access activities; staff replied that they would need to check the fund source for the 1990s acquisition.

General Discussion: Dunwiddie requested a summary of all past natural areas designation proposals that have not moved forward. For ease of information sharing, during or outside of meetings, Kurtz requested that we use a service such as a Google folder, which would be easier for council members, especially those participating in meetings remotely, to use than searching old email strings for documents.

- 5. Natural Areas Management Planning:** Additional DNR staff members joined the council meeting in person for this discussion: Land managers Carlo Abbruzzese and Michele Zukerberg; Natural Heritage Program staff members Walter Fertig, Jake Kleinknecht, Tynan Ramm-Granberg and Joe Rocchio.

Gamon and Pavola offered introductory comments about past Natural Areas Program management planning efforts, program capacity, and various styles that the program has used for management plans. Pavola referenced examples of plans that had been distributed to the council electronically and at the meeting. Pavola also reviewed the findings of a quick staff survey about the values for land managers of having a site management plan. Pavola concluded his comments suggesting that we should address the following questions: what is the purpose of a plan and who is the audience for the plan?

Natural Areas and Natural Heritage staff were asked to provide input. Points made by staff during the discussion included:

1. It is challenging to achieve an appropriate balance between creating a succinct, easy-to-use plan while also including sufficient details to justify management directions provided in a plan.
2. New issues will arise that were not anticipated during management planning, so the plans and how they are implemented need some degree of flexibility.
3. Plans should offer broad guidance to frame decision-making by the land managers.
4. The Natural Heritage features for which a site is being conserved, and their related management needs, should be explicitly identified in management plans.
5. Plans should identify priority management needs, including monitoring, and to the extent possible, sources of funding to address those needs.
6. Plans should include identification of improved ways of communicating management goals and objectives to the public.

Council discussion followed. Kurtz suggested that DNR consider developing a program-wide plan for NAPs similar to the NRCA Statewide Management Plan, and then create site-specific prescriptions for management of each natural area. Pavola supported the concept with the caveat that our experience with NRCAs did not result in streamlining the process or the final products. Follow-up site-based NRCA plans tended to be equally detailed and rigorous as the statewide plan, especially since they were written to address in detail the elements of the statewide plan.

Brown commented that plans need to address management uncertainties, how changing site conditions might affect management needs and actions, and a means of measuring whether our management actions are succeeding.

Kurtz proposed a focus on stressors: measure them, monitor changes, and help the public understand the need for a management action.

Lantz described the approach used by State Parks, in which they use a land classification, or matrix, of land uses, similar to zoning. This allows generalized decisions to be used in each park, so that park-specific plans don't need to go into detail about the management goals within each zone.

Diefenderfer suggested that plans should include a prioritization of what needs to be done at sites. The council review would consider whether staff have prioritized the needs appropriately for the many challenges at each site. Are we meeting goals? If not then perhaps the goal becomes a focus of a grant or a higher priority for non-grant funds.

Dunwiddie stated his appreciation for the good discussion, and asked if we could gather additional examples for future council consideration. Sinks indicated that he can also share plan examples, noting that some add value for the land managers while others serve broader organizational or public information goals.

- 6. Update on health/viability of NHP and Natural Areas Program:** Dunwiddie noted this segment is intended to be a recurring topic on council agendas.

Milliern summarized DNR's work during the past year with OFM staff in creating a "maintenance level" budget request for the Natural Areas Program. This type of request doesn't change the program design or mission, but acknowledges the ongoing future costs of acquiring lands or building infrastructure. The program received about \$440,000 that will be prioritized for increased capacity around the state.

DNR also requested a program enhancement budget package to fund additional ecologist time and the vacant zoologist position in Natural Heritage, which would allow staff to focus greater attention on non-grant-funded activities. This budget request also proposed additional funds for the Natural Areas Program to reduce reliance on capital projects and grant funds, as well as fully fund staff in both the Olympic Region and Northeast Region. The requested enhancements for the programs were not successful.

Milliern also stated that there will be no supplemental funding request on behalf of the programs going to the Legislature in 2020, and the how the added capacity from the maintenance increase will be distributed is not yet clear.

Milliern reported that both programs remain reliant on grants (or capital funds) to fully fund staff, both for the Olympia staff and our region land managers. He feels better now about the social-political support for our work than when he joined DNR, but also feels support may not be strong enough to successfully promote a budget enhancement. At present there does not appear to be any legislative champions for the Natural Heritage and Natural Areas Programs. DNR's internal budget allocations may be finalized by mid December, or earlier.

Dunwiddie requested that for the next council meeting, the agenda include a conversation about funding of stewardship and management for DNR natural areas. The Steptoe Butte example of potential funding with cell towers touches on a broader need for stewardship funds. What is the broader DNR need? Are there models to get other funds for stewardship? He noted that the focus during his years on the council has been creating natural areas, but they haven't grappled with

stewardship as much. He suggested the need to generate ideas with the benefit of information about other program successes.

7. Agency Reports: The following agency reports were presented and/or provided in written form.

Recreation and Conservation Office – A report submitted by Adam Cole is attached.

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife – The following report was submitted by Janet Gorrell.

Funding: Last spring, the Legislature only partially funded WDFW's structural deficit, and at the same time initiated a number of new costs not supported by revenue, increasing the overall size of the agency's deficit. The structural deficit is due to a number of factors, including state general fund reductions enacted in 2009, no increase to hunting and fishing fees since 2011, growing state population requiring more fish and wildlife management, and decreasing federal funds. To address this, WDFW has submitted a supplemental budget request for \$26 million, towards the following:

- \$6.8 million for emergent needs, such as post-fire habitat recovery, pinniped predation, and humpback whale protection;
- \$6.7 million to address at-risk public services, such as technical assistance, lands management, and customer service WDFW currently provides; and
- \$9.5 million for new legislated cost increases, such as COLAs and centralized state services. WDFW has also submitted a \$22 million capital funding request.

Acquisition: WDFW has started its review of proposals submitted by regional staff through the Lands 20/20 process, through which WDFW seeks to secure public land, either through acquisition, easement or sponsoring another entity in such actions. Lands 20/20 is meant to ensure that the agency is strategic and selective in its acquisitions, acquiring lands that provide the highest benefit to fish and wildlife and the public, and lands that would otherwise face some sort of risk (such as changing regulations, land uses, or ownership) that would seriously compromise statewide fish and wildlife values. From across the state, 18 proposals were submitted for a total of approximately 6,380 acres.

Department of Ecology – Heather Kapust provided the following:

Since the last meeting, Ecology submitted seven National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grant applications, totaling more than \$5 million in funding requests. We are partnering with land trusts and one tribe for the submitted proposals. Several of the projects are adjacent to or near DNR Natural Areas.

Discovery Bay – Jefferson Land Trust
Drayton Harbor – Whatcom Land Trust
Lower Eld Inlet – Capitol Land Trust
Lower Henderson Inlet – Capitol Land Trust
Misery Point – Great Peninsula Conservancy
Stillaguamish Wetlands – Stillaguamish Tribe
Tarboo Creek – Northwest Watershed Institute

Ecology is convening an internal acquisitions workgroup to ensure consistency for our grantees from all programs when working on acquisition-related grants. This will involve coordination with all programs that fund conservation acquisitions as well as non-habitat programs, such as stormwater and solid waste facilities.

Ecology is proposing to submit agency request legislation (pending approval by the Governor):

-Drought Preparedness and Response

-Model Toxics Control Act amendment

-Anti-Fouling Paint

State Parks - Lisa Lantz reported the following:

- Rob Fimbel retired September 30th. Andrea Thorpe, Natural Heritage Program Manager, has been hired to fill Rob's position starting on November 1st.
- All three of State Parks' stewardship-related budget requests were funded. Their operating request included money for additional vegetation surveys.
- State Parks completed first-ever prescribed burn in September on Jones Island.
- State Parks completed a climate change adaptation plan.

8. Natural Areas and Natural Heritage Program Reports: Curt Pavola (Natural Areas) and Andrea Thorpe (Natural Heritage) submitted written program reports (attached).

9. Scheduling meetings for 2020: The council recommended the following meeting dates during 2020:

January 15

March 27

June 3 & 4 (to include a meeting and a field trip)

October 23

Gamon stated that he will pursue meeting rooms for these dates and then have the meetings published in the Washington State Register.

10. Adjourn: Reynolds moved to adjourn the meeting; Shaw seconded. The meeting was adjourned.

MINUTES APPROVED: March 27, 2020