

Working Draft
Minutes from the Albemarle County
Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
May 2, 2024

Present: Meghan Sobbott, Christine Putnam, Mike Callahan, Leah Jung, Mona El Khafif, Ph.D., Rob McGinnis, Abigail Wilson +1

Absent: Lonnie Murray, Dan Mahon, Kaleb Notari

Staff: Scott Clark

1. The meeting was called to order by Meghan Sobbott at 5:49pm.
2. Establishment of a Quorum. Six committee members were present to open the meeting.
3. Welcome/Acknowledge guests - Three guests attended a portion of the meeting to contribute to the discussion about the Ragged Mountain Natural Area (RMNA):
 - Peggy Gilges, a self-described sustainability advocate and a committee member of the Albemarle County Solid Waste Committee
 - David Hannah, a former Albemarle County staff member and advocate for maintaining RMNA as a walkable, natural, and biodiverse preserve
 - Dan Bieker, Assistant Professor of Environmental Science and former member of the Natural Heritage Committee, with historical knowledge of earlier decisions regarding the status of RMNA
4. Review and approve Meeting Agenda
 - Motion by Christine to approve the Agenda; Agenda modified by Meghan to include discussion of RMNA:
 - 7. Staff Update
 - 8. Ragged Mountain
 - 9. Solar Grant
 - 10. Chair Update
 - 11. Work Plan
 - Motion was seconded for approval by Rob McGinnis; approved unanimously by members present.
5. Review and approve April 4, 2024 Meeting Minutes - Motion by Christine to approve the meeting minutes; seconded by Mona; approved unanimously by members present.
6. Matters from the Public not listed on the Agenda - Guests were present to contribute to discussion about recent effort by mountain biking community to influence Board of Supervisors (BoS) to reconsider policies adopted by the BoS regarding the recent agreement with City of

Charlottesville to revise policies that now restricts use of mountain bikes and domesticated animals (primarily dogs and horses) in RMNA.

7. Staff update by Scott Clark:

- Described ongoing staff efforts to develop working action steps for AC44
- Staff is working to update signage and increase public awareness of recent BoS decision to revise policies covering uses in the RMNA

8. Discuss Ordinance Pertaining to [Ragged Mountain Natural Area \(RMNA\)](#)

● **Issue**

- Dan Beiker, former President [of Ivy Creek Foundation](#), spoke - the Foundation had established one trail around the Ragged Mountain reservoir; took two years of efforts seeking approval to maintain RMNA as a [nature preserve](#); 2014 turned over land to the City of Charlottesville; allowed mountain bike trails to be established
- In March 2024, City and Albemarle County resolved a protracted legal disagreement and finally agreed to an Ordinance that allows public use but restricts bicycles, mountain biking and domesticated animals (includes restricting dog-walking and horseback riding).
- Mountain bike proponents have since been lobbying the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors (BoS) to reverse their most recent decision and allow mountain biking.
- Hence, there is a need for the Committee to advise the BoS regarding the threat to biodiversity in the natural area.

● **Discussion**

- Committee discussion included highlights from the original agreement, as guests, committee members, and staff, recalled previous efforts and actions
 - The City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County had worked together to achieve an agreed upon policy
 - Devon Floyd's report/paper (survey in 2016) cited the RMNA as a special place, with a diverse ecosystem.
 - There are extensive ongoing efforts by mountain biking enthusiasts and proponents, pushing the BoS to reverse their latest Ordinance decision.
 - It is foreseen that mountain bikers would push to even further modify the Ordinance governing the natural area to become a bike racing and tournament venue, with proposal(s) to enhance tourism and economic development as reasons for reversing the latest Ordinance decision.
 - There are perceived impacts to the area's biodiversity due to extensive mountain biking and dog walking.
 - [It was suggested that the Committee consolidate rational to leave the current policies in-place with no changes.](#)
 - It was noted that changing policies would contradict the BoS's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), approved in June, 2018.

- A proposal for the Committee was made to develop a letter recommending the Board of Supervisors to leave the Ragged Mountain Natural Area use policies in place with no changes.

- **Outcome/Next steps**

- **The Chair, leading the Committee to move forward with a decision and action, motioned for Abigail (who volunteered), to write a letter to the BoS, for the Chair to sign on behalf of the Committee, to sustain the Supervisor's approved policies from March 2024.** Mona seconded the Motion. The Motion was unanimously approved by the members present.

9. Solar Grant

- Mona proposed a motion for the Committee to contribute a letter of support for a Solar Grant (as Scott captured outline).
- Mona mentioned **Elizabeth Marshall (need a link for her)** had developed a model solar ordinance; noted opportunity to submit a grant.
- **Motion was made by Christine, for Mona to finalize a letter from the Committee based on Scott's outline and authorize Christine to sign on behalf of the Committee;** Rob seconded the motion; members present unanimously approved the motion.

10. Committee Chair Update

- For personal reasons, Meghan announced that she would be stepping down as Chair and as a Committee member at the upcoming June meeting.
- Christine thanked Meghan for her willingness to take a leadership role on the Committee. Christine encouraged other members to be prepared to elect new leadership at the June Committee meeting.

11. Follow Ups:

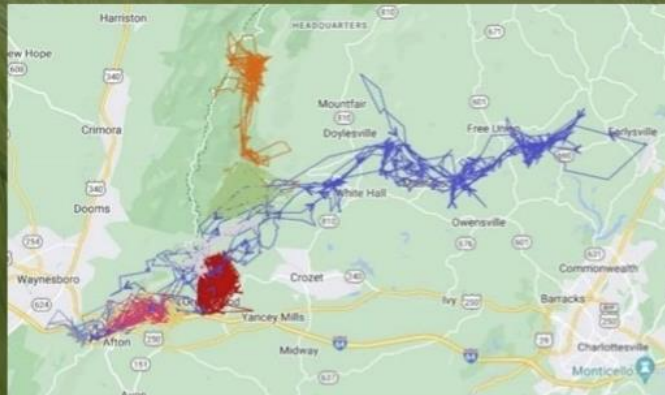
A) Wildlife Corridors

- Leah presented three slides updating the Committee on conflicts between area bobcats and motorized vehicles, primarily on locations along Hwy 250 and I-64.
- VDOT is collecting bobcat carcass at known locations
- Afton Mountain interchange is a site of interest
- Leah noted that she and **Bridget(?)** had recently attended a **meeting?**; Leah asked that her slides be included with the meeting minutes (attached below).

13. Adjournment. Christine adjourned the meeting at 7:25pm.

Note: The next NHC meeting will be held at the Albemarle County Office Building, 401 McIntire Rd. Charlottesville, VA 22902-4596, on June 6, 2024, starting at 5:45pm.

BOBCATS & AFTON MTN AREA



As of March 2024:

- Bobcat tracking shows I64 as a barrier to movement
- 1 cat travelled all the way from Earlysville to Afton Mtn

BOBCATS CROSSING I64 & HWY 250 AT AFTON MTN:

As of 4/30/24:

- 8 cats approached 64 &/or 250 from the North
- 5 didn't attempt to cross 64
- 3 crossed both 64 & 250
- 2 of the 3 that crossed were hit/killed on 250
 - 1 of the cats killed on 250 was hit near the W entrance Blue Ridge Tunnel
 - 2nd cat was killed on 250 South of 64
- 1 cat crossed the roads 16 times & is still alive

AFTON MTN WILDLIFE CROSSING GROUP

- Struggling with how to get a feasibility study to ID possible crossings on I64
- Potential funding sources depend on scope
- Springboard from informal VDOT study
- Don't forget hwy 250!
- Leah will be working on draft scope