

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
January 17, 2019 – Room 235**

Committee Members: Christine Putnam (Vice Chair), Michael Rodemeyer, Peggy Cornett, Emily Luebke, Kennon Williams, Lonnie Murray

Absent: Nancy Weiss (Chair), Mary Tillman

Other Attendees: Ruth Douglas, Matt Lawless, David Hannah

Christine called the meeting to order at 5:38. Minutes of the 12/20/18 meeting were approved.

David updated the committee on amending the county's Comprehensive Plan with biodiversity strategies. He will be making minor changes to the draft revisions the Planning Commission reviewed on 11/20/18. The only outstanding question is the status of a proposed new strategy from Karen Firehock about diverse urban forests. There is broad support for the strategy, including from the committee. But staff believes it should go elsewhere in the Comp Plan, and not be included under the biodiversity objective. David and other staff will meet with Karen to discuss. Despite the need for public meetings and public hearings, David hopes to finalize the process in mid-year.

Matt Lawless, Town Administrator of Scottsville, discussed his continuing efforts to have a segment of the James River designated as a Virginia Scenic River. He and others have been working with Va DCR. James River Association is being very helpful. Topics discussed included what stretch of the river might be appropriate to nominate, how to best involve the County, and the questionable quality of the two NHC Important Sites along the James. Matt will provide more information to the committee.

David encouraged committee members to contact BOS members and encourage them to support the budget request (\$32,000) to create the Albemarle Conservation Assistance Program, ACAP. David feels this follow up is needed to the letter of support the Christine wrote for the committee last November. The TJSWCD confirmed to the County they will administer the program. David reported there is no news regarding the ACE Committee and more effectively incorporating biodiversity in their criteria.

The Va Safe Wildlife Corridors Collaborative was discussed. Lonnie described the map he created where a wildlife crossing on Route 29 in southern Albemarle should be considered. Nancy provided the map to VSWCC earlier this year. They will consider it in 2020. The committee approved signing on to a letter of support developed by VSWCC, for Virginia HB 2331, Wildlife Corridor Action Plan and Advisory Council. Christine described another sign-on letter developed by Chesapeake Bay Foundation in support of Virginia HB 2333. The bill is related to tree canopy and localities. The committee approved signing on to the letter.

Action Items:

- Christine will go online by end of day 1/18/19 and add NHC as a signatory to the VSWCC letter.
- Christine will contact Sidney Huffman, a CBF volunteer, about how to add NHC to the CBF letter.
- Christine will contact Albemarle BOS to make them aware of these two bills, and that NHC is supporting them.

There was a brief discussion about Biscuit Run. Lonnie and Kennon have not met to work on the letter to the Steering Team. They will make the compilation of comments available to everyone, as some members are unsure if they have seen them. David reminded the group of a site visit with DOF staff to the hemlock stand is scheduled for 1/31. Nancy plans to participate, and Emily volunteered to participate as the second committee member.

Action Items:

- Kennon will make the most current version of BR comments available on Google drive.

Emily showed and described the reorganization work that she and Nancy have done on the Google drive. It is a work in progress with more work to do, but the work to date is outstanding and greatly appreciated. She showed draft templates with instructions on how to name files and photos, and how to complete site visit forms. There were questions about who has, and should have access to the drive. There should be a way the the drive can be backed up.

Action Item:

- Nancy and Emily will continue working to improve the Google drive.
- David will send a list of current NHC members and their email addresses to Emily and Lonnie.

There was no new information about Important Sites, site visits, or landowner contacts. This time of year is slow for site visits. With spring nearing, some site visits should be scheduled soon (e.g., for spring ephemerals). Ruth volunteered to lead a walk at Key West. She will look at possible dates. David read a very recent email from Devin Floyd, in which he expressed his intent to “train a volunteer army” to expand and improve efforts to “inventory, assess, classify, and map natural communities in Albemarle County.”

David gave a brief update on the stream health proposals for Development Areas and the 1/9 work session with the BOS. Lonnie suggested the NHC should express their ideas about protecting intermittent streams. After some discussion, the group agreed that Lonnie and David should provide “brief briefings” on the topic at the February meeting, each briefing limited to 10 minutes.

There was a very brief conversation about iNaturalist and its potential uses. It was agreed that a block of time at the February meeting would be devoted to learning how to use iNaturalist. David informed everyone of TNC’s City Nature Challenge in April. Rivanna Master Naturalists had already been notified. There was also a very brief conversation about reviewing and updating plant lists that are used by the County. There are multiple lists, used by diverse staff and divisions, depending on the county application. Education may need to be part of updating lists.

Homework Assignments for Everyone before the February meeting:

- Download and play with the iNaturalist app.
- Review the comments compiled to date about Biscuit Run.
- Review the county’s Site Plan plant list (emailed earlier by Lonnie).
- Play with the new and improved Google drive.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 21. The meeting was adjourned at 7:40.