

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting  
December 20, 2018 – Room 235**

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

Absent: none

Other Attendees: Dan Mahon, Ruth Douglas, Tana Herndon, Matt Lawless, Sidney Hoffman, David Hannah

Nancy called the meeting to order at 5:35. All the guests were welcomed. Minutes of the 10/30/18 committee meeting were approved.

Nancy gave a brief Chair's report, reviewing the recent PEC group meeting she attended and the county Board of Supervisors (BOS) meeting on 12/12. Nancy was one of roughly 10 members of the public who made comments about Biscuit Run park at the BOS meeting. The Master Plan for the park was approved by the BOS, among the many diverse issues and topics covered during the meeting.

David gave a status report on updating the county's Comprehensive Plan with biodiversity strategies. He summarized the public meeting held on 11/29, which Michael, Mary, Lonnie, and Christine attended. He also summarized the 11/20 meeting of the Planning Commission. Questions about "local" native plants and restoring piedmont prairies were resolved during the meeting. The NHC supports the proposed new strategy from Commissioner Firehock about urban tree canopy and forest, but has no strong feelings about where or how it is added to the Comp Plan.

A long discussion about Biscuit Run began, with Dan Mahon providing much background and information. Among the topics discussed were the speed at which park design and planning has occurred to date, a proposed soft opening of the park, the pros and cons of bio-blitzes, the need for reliable and appropriate data, the Trail Ambassadors program Dan is creating, the role of volunteers in this and possibly other parks, and training and education opportunities for county parks staff. A site visit with staff from Va DOF to assess the health of the eastern hemlocks was postponed due weather. It has been rescheduled for late January. Dan would like to come back to talk with the committee in several more months.

**Action Items:**

- Dan will send information about the Trail Ambassadors program to Nancy, who will circulate it among NHC members, who are encouraged to participate.
- Dan will send some county park Standard Operating Procedures manuals to Nancy, who will circulate them among NHC members, who will review and provide feedback to Dan.
- Kennon and Lonnie will work on a draft letter to send to the Biscuit Run Steering Team, giving NHC ideas and recommendations on the park. NHC members should continue sending ideas to them.

Matt Lawless, Town Administrator of Scottsville, told the committee about efforts to have a segment of the James River designated as a Virginia Scenic River. He and others have been working with Va DCR. He hopes the committee can offer help in providing biodiversity assessments of land along the river,

using DCR forms. The area is a hot spot for birding, and part of it is included in the Warren Christmas Bird Count.

The Google drive that is used by the committee was discussed, using the overhead projector to show the organization and some of the files. Nancy and Emily have spent time in the past months trying to improve the organization of all the information. There was agreement about the need to continue improving the drive, to make it more accessible and easier for committee members to use.

**Action Item:**

- Nancy and Emily will continue working to improve the Google drive.

Important Sites were discussed, including Mary's recent work to arrange site visits and data collection by Devin Floyd and his team at Mount Alto Bluffs. There was agreement that intensive data collection and analysis is very valuable, but that landowner outreach and site visits should be a priority regardless of whether structured vegetation sampling will occur. Landowner education and relationships as well as general observations about sites are valuable. The Important Sites were prioritized as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan process, and the list is in Appendix C. The need to review and update the list of all Important Sites was mentioned. A folder and information dedicated to county parks should be developed.

Committee officers for 2019 were elected. Motions were made and the committee approved Nancy Weiss continuing as Chair, and Christine Putnam continuing as Vice Chair.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 17, and Nancy will be out of town. The meeting was adjourned at 7:35.