

Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee Meeting
April 26, 2016 – Totier Room 235

Committee Members: Devin Floyd (Chair), Lonnie Murray (Vice Chair), Peggy Cornett, Peter Hatch, Ari Daniels, Jeremy Glode

Other Participants: David Hannah, Ruth Douglas, Tom Olivier, Ellie Thomas

The meeting was called to order at 5:37 by Devin. Minutes of the 3/29/16 meeting were approved. Devin shared a greenstone rock he found in the field, from the Catoctin formation. Magnets were attached, illustrating the significant iron content.

David updated the committee about the “flag layer”, which has been in production since November 2015. It is an automated process run once a week, not an online tool for use by planners. The flag layer is compared with parcels for which subdivision plans, special use permits, zoning amendments, etc. have been submitted. To date, only a handful of “hits” have occurred. David and Scott Clark investigate the hits and inform the reviewing planner when necessary. The flag layer is comprised of five different datasets: selected Important Sites, wooded riparian buffers (based on 2009 land cover data), non-impoundment wetlands, steep bluffs (> 50%) adjacent to streams or rivers, and hydric soils > 50’ from streams and rivers.

The ACE committee has requested assistance with developing a conservation easement for the Helen Evans property on Dudley Mountain. The property contains a piedmont mafic barren community which has been documented by the Virginia Natural Heritage Program. Several committee members are familiar with the property and barrens. This would be the first ACE easement that focuses on a rare or uncommon natural occurrence. They want an easement that is not overly complex, is easily enforceable and readily monitored, yet protects the resource. David has forwarded examples of VA Dept. of Forestry easements to Ches Goodall, ACE Program Coordinator. David has emailed The Nature Conservancy about sharing easement examples.

Motion Approved: The committee agreed to help the ACE committee on this potential easement. Lonnie expressed interest in working on this. Tom suggested contacting Scott Clark, as his work with PRFA easements might be very useful.

Discussion of the Evans property reminded Ellie Thomas of a property on Dudley Mountain Road that is scheduled for development. After some discussion and research, it was determined to be separate from the Evans parcel. The proposed development is called Greenloft Farms and Megan Yaniglos is the planner from Albemarle County who is working on it. Ellie will send more information. David will talk with Megan to get more details and share with the committee. It appears to be a Rural Preservation Development.

Lonnie updated the committee on a focus group meeting he was part of for the county’s Economic Development Office. There was discussion and analysis of the recent failure to lure Deschutes Brewery to the county. The meeting did not seem very productive. Lonnie likes to compare resource usage of proposed economic development versus full by-right development. Water use is an example, and can sometimes serve as a proxy for other resources.

Devin briefed the committee on 14 sites that he recently delineated using Google Maps. He used Google Maps to show and talk about the sites. Most sites are known to other committee members, and all are being considered to add as new Important Sites. There was agreement that the boundaries of Red Hill wetland area needed to be expanded, and that another site – a rhododendron site that Liz Palmer made the committee aware of – should be added to the list of new sites.

Motion Approved: The committee approved adding these to the Important Sites dataset. Devin and David will make the two modifications in Google Maps, and David will create an updated Important Sites dataset in GIS. This will be done in the next few weeks so that Green Infrastructure Center can incorporate the revised data in their grant project.

David will send the ArcGIS shape file of the sites to Ari, and will create a KML file of the revised Important Sites data. Since few committee members have access to GIS, we need to consider having KML data available for use with Google Maps and Google Earth.

There was brief discussion about the need to thoroughly review the Important Sites data in the near future. A work group or subcommittee may be necessary to lead the effort. The review would include assessing the currently existing sites and their boundaries and site descriptions. New sites will need to be considered periodically (e.g., the sites that Mo Stevens documented in the past). Rigorous methodology for assessing sites, definition of “important site” and other terms, and possible classification schemes are among the things that need to be developed in reviewing these data.

There has been difficulty in making contact with a landowner about a possible site visit. The committee would like to pursue developing a form that can be mailed to landowners, which grants permission to visit the property and look for plants, plant communities, and other natural resources. Even though it will be a lengthy process (likely many months), will necessitate working with a county attorney, and the ultimate letter could be lengthy and user-unfriendly, the committee feel this should be done. In the meantime, obtaining verbal permission from landowners to visit their property is adequate. Tom made the point that committee members need to be open with landowners about the fact they serve on a county committee.

David shared the Certificate of Appreciation and the owl picture that are being presented to Scott Clark (unbeknownst to him). David has talked with other county staff, and the best plan is to appear at the Board of Supervisors meeting on May 4 at 1:00. During the “Matters from the Public” section at the beginning of the meeting, a committee member will speak briefly and present Scott with his certificate and gift. David will make sure that Liz Palmer and Ann Mallek are aware ahead of time, as well as county support staff. Scott’s supervisor, David Benish, will try to ensure that Scott attends the meeting. Tom and David will be present and plan to speak. Other committee members are encouraged to be there too. Tom and David will coordinate with one another and try to contact past committee and Biodiversity Work Group members to see if they can be there.

Ruth gave an update about the RareQuest project, which the Master Naturalists are heavily involved in. It is a pilot project to use Master Naturalists to look for occurrences of rare species at sites that have not been visited in many years. Ruth will contact Chris Ludwig, who is coordinating the project for the VA

Natural Heritage Program, to see if any target sites are located in Albemarle County, where they are, what species were observed in the past, etc. The target sites could affect the Important Sites data. Ruth will also ask for examples of forms or permission letters that Natural Heritage uses with landowners when arranging site visits.

Devin updated the committee on the status of the Brookhill development and salamander crossings on Polo Grounds Road. The developers have been good to work with and done everything possible to protect the salamanders. Assuming the project moves forward, the committee should publicly acknowledge the good work and cooperation from the developers. Joel Denunzio of VDOT indicated last week to David that he is ok with the 3 crossings if the Homeowners' Association (or some organization) will take responsibility for maintaining the tunnels and keeping them clear of debris.

Austin Kane and Chris Burkett have been invited to make a presentation at the committee meeting on 6/28. Both were heavily involved in developing DGIF's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan for Virginia. Both are authors of the 2013 report "Virginia's Climate Modeling and Species Vulnerability Assessment" for the National Wildlife Federation. The suggestion was made to invite Rod Walker to a future meeting, to make a presentation about Blue Ridge PRISM. The August meeting might work well.

Ruth reported that only one more topo map (of the 20 total maps) of Mo Steven's data remains to be processed, and the group is meeting next week. Ruth also spoke about the occurrence of wavyleaf grass (*Oplismenus hirtellus ssp. undulatifolius*) at the Arrowhead property. She met with Matt Smith last week, the County Parks Superintendent. Matt is very eager to help get rid of the occurrence. No one knows how it arrived on site, or where the nearest occurrence is.

The grant subcommittee met on April 12. David displayed a couple of map images that Andrew Walker created. The next subcommittee meeting was tentatively scheduled for May 3, but no public meeting room is available after 5:00 that day. David will email members to set up a meeting.

Lonnie posed a question about what sorts of recommendations are likely to result from GIC grant report, and if they would include policy recommendations. No one on the committee has information about this, but it should be raised as a question with GIC. There was general discussion about when and how the committee should make recommendations to the BOS, and how to handle the possibility of the committee disagreeing with GIC recommendations. David offered his view, that the committee is assisting GIC on the grant project, but the data analysis, reporting, and recommendations will basically be those of GIC. The committee will take the project results and begin developing a Biodiversity Action Plan. If the committee takes issue with some GIC recommendations, it may want to document its concerns in a short report or statement.

The committee has \$1,084.24 in funds, from a private gift a few years ago. There appear to be no restrictions on how the money is to be used.

The meeting concluded at 7:39.

Next Meeting: May 24, 2016 at 5:30pm, Totier Room 235.

