

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee Meeting
May 24, 2016 – Totier Room 235**

Committee Members: Lonnie Murray (Vice Chair), Peter Hatch, Ari Daniels, Rochelle Garwood, Manuel Lerda, Nancy Weiss

Other Participants: David Hannah, Tom Olivier

The meeting was called to order at 5:44 by Lonnie. Minutes of the 4/26/16 meeting were approved.

A site visit to Bellair Farm (one of the identified Important Sites) has been scheduled. Devin and Peter have arranged it, Peter will let everyone know the date and logistics. Healthy hemlocks on the bluff is one of the attractions, there is also an active bald eagle nest. It will be a public meeting if another committee member participates, and 5 calendar days notice will be needed. Lonnie would like to look into grant opportunities for treating healthy hemlocks.

Peter also visited Rivanna Bluffs recently, and spoke to the landowners' daughter. Peter plans to contact the landowner about visiting the site. There was discussion about the importance and need to have conversations with all types of people and landowners in the community, to be transparent and forthcoming about the purpose of visits, and involve the landowners in the visit if they are interested.

The Native Plant Society has a field trip planned to Gladden Fields on July 23. Gladden Fields is the location of Red Hills Wetlands, an Important Site identified by the committee at our previous meeting. Lonnie reported that the owner of Gladden Fields is open to a wetlands easement or some type of protection of his land. He is ready to do this if it is not complicated. No one knows if the landowner has talked with anyone about this. David will check with Scott Clark to see if county staff have been in touch with him.

Discussion followed in which the legal and procedural requirements of placing land under a conservation easement were talked about. It is not a simple and straightforward process. The committee would like to have an information sheet about conservation easements that can be distributed to interested landowners. The information should include a list of organizations that hold easements in this area and knowledgeable people who are willing to talk with landowners. Committee members should not recommend attorneys, appraisers, or other professionals to landowners.

Tom has compiled/made changes to the Mo Stevens data on 13 of the 20 quads, as requested by the plant team. Some cleanup of the data is also needed, and Tom will create an explanatory document/narrative. Andrew Walker of Green Infrastructure Center (GIC) is interested in using Mo Stevens data in his analysis. Tom hopes to get the data to Andrew by next week. Tom also wants to put all the data on thumb drives and provide them to committee members and other appropriate people. It will include images of the quad sheets with Mo's notations, GIS shapefiles (points) of the locations he visited, and other notes that he made.

David noted that the updates to the Important Sites data, approved at last month's committee meeting, need to be made soon. The revised data needs to be provided to Andrew by mid-June. David will work

with Devin to get this done. Since last month's meeting, Dan Bieker made us aware of two other active bald eagle nests in the county – North Fork Rivanna River near Bentivar Farms subdivision and Bellair Farms.

Motion Approved: The committee approved adding these 2 nest sites to the Important Sites data.

There was short discussion about the need to review and revise the Important Sites data, including developing strict criteria and definitions about the Important Sites. The committee would like to begin this soon. The plant team, or a group that includes some members of the plant team, may already be poised to take this on.

There was discussion about the need to identify species that are at the northern or southern edge of their geographic distribution as the committee deals with climate change issues. There are references for lists of northern and southern distributions – Lonnie has looked around a little but his list of references is not complete. Peter said someone has done this for trees/plants. Manuel said the two researchers, Terry Root and Parmesan(?), have done this for birds. Manuel also recommended the committee needs to continue focusing and acquiring data on non-plant taxa, to which there was agreement. Dan Bieker can be approached about helping with local bird data. The VA Breeding Bird Atlas begins its first field season very soon. There may be Breeding Bird Survey routes in Albemarle County, David will look into this.

The committee meeting concluded at 6:50, when Nancy and Manuel had to leave and a quorum was no longer present. Others remained to review the maps from GIC and discuss the grant project. Several comments on the maps were noted. David will compile all comments and forward to Andrew. Feedback on the core areas and connectivity maps is needed within the next two weeks. Feedback on the theme maps can be provided later. David will ask two questions of Andrew regarding the Core and Connectivity map:

- What are the land cover types included in “landscape that highly supports connectivity”?
- What are the primary factors in determining the costs of paths in connectivity (in addition to distance and land cover type)?

Lonnie and others feel it would be very useful to have a comprehensive “menu of options” developed, describing protection options for landowners and localities that are enabled under state law and that have been implemented somewhere in Virginia. David will check with GIC to see if that will be included in their grant report or recommendations. Transfer of development rights programs (TDR) was mentioned, and how to identify sending sites that would protect important areas of the county. The large core areas identified by GIC are probably too large to serve as sending sites, but the Important Sites could potentially serve as sending sites. The simple ability to extinguish development rights on property was also mentioned.

Next Meeting: June 28, 2016 at 5:30pm, Totier Room 235. Presentation by Austin Kane and/or Chris Burkett of Va DGIF will begin at 6:30.