Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee Meeting
June 28, 2016 – Totier Room 235

Committee Members: Devin Floyd (Chair), Lonnie Murray (Vice Chair), Peter Hatch, Peggy Cornett, Rochelle Garwood, Manuel Lerdau, Nancy Weiss, Christine Putman, Jeremy Glode

Other Attendees: David Hannah, Ruth Douglas, Tom Olivier, Leah Jung, David White, Dan Bieker

The meeting was called to order at 5:33 by Devin. The committee's newest member, Christine Putnam, was welcomed along with two visitors at the meeting, Leah Jung and David White. Each introduced themselves. Minutes of the 5/24/16 meeting were approved.

Devin passed around a small rock from Ragged Mountain Natural Area (RMNA). It is a rock high in nutrients that when broken down results in soil with high cation exchange capability. Devin gave a short overview of his ecological survey work at RMNA, looking from a broad perspective. He discussed the importance of cool, sheltered, deep ravines at RMNA and across the landscape. These sites are critical to protect as they often contain rare species (e.g., glade fern, log fern) and will play an important role in adapting to climate change. A recent report identified Virginia as a national bottleneck for species moving northward in response to climate change, with much agriculture and disturbed land occupying the areas between the mountains and the coastline.

Lonnie began a discussion about management of RMNA. He pointed out that the parks survey (documenting what local parks provide the public) is old and probably no longer accurate. He feels the City of Charlottesville (owners of RMNA, and developing a management plan) should work cross-jurisdictionally with other organizations (including Albemarle Parks & Recreation) to consider RMNA as part of the larger ecological complex of the Ragged Mountains. There was much agreement on this point, and the committee feels it is appropriate to propose this to the City.
Motion Approved: Lonnie will draft comments to submit to the City prior to July 20, while they are seeking public input on management of RMNA. The committee will review the draft comments via email and approve before submitting.

Nancy Weiss and others recently visited the North Fork Rivanna Bluffs looking for Bradley's spleenwort, as part of Rarequest. They did not find it, but want to return in November when it will be more visible (as an evergreen). Accessing the cliff areas might be necessary. Devin reported on the 6/27 site visit to Hardware River Bluffs (Bellair Farm) with Peter and others. He filed a report, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1e5UczTV1aqcR2G2tuBRgX16406itd1hh24EHQQHn8cE/edit?usp=sharing. Highlights include a healthy stand of eastern hemlocks (no signs of hemlock wooly adelgid) and observing a juvenile bald eagle hovering briefly over its nest. Peter recently contacted the landowner of the Rivanna Bluffs below Buck Island Creek site, and a site visit with a small group will be planned. Lonnie would like a group outing (possibly by bike) to visit several sites in the Decca Lane/Ridge Road area, with Meriwether Lewis School as the probable starting point.

Ruth reported the plant team has completed all their work on the Mo Stevens data. Tom should be commended for the time and work he has put in over the years to capture and document Mo's work. He has all the digital data completed and compiled. At the conclusion of the meeting, Tom gave a thumb drive to David, containing all the Mo Stevens data and a documentation file explaining the data.

Devin reminded the committee of a commitment to re-establish an education subcommittee in 2016, with specific goals and mission. Ari Daniels expressed interest at previous meeting in serving on the committee. Christine Putnam expressed interest. Tom and Lonnie have some time and specific skills to offer the subcommittee. Possible first goals for the committee could involve assisting with other committee obligations (e.g., developing biodiversity action plan).
Motion Approved: The committee formally established an education subcommittee.

David gave a short update on the Green Infrastructure Center grant project. He recently provided updated Important Sites data to Andrew Walker. The data is current except for two sites yet to be added (previously approved as sites by the committee): Old Mills Trail and the great rhododendron site on Decca Lane. Lonnie will develop boundaries for the Decca Lane site. Devin can redraw the boundaries he created for Old Mills Trail. David will check in with Andrew about the need for a subcommittee meeting. Project completion is scheduled for August/September. Completion of the grant project will probably be the time for the committee to begin working in earnest on the biodiversity action plan.

Nancy gave a short update on the advisory work group and their work to help identify priorities for the county's natural resources program. She noted that Ann Mallek is part of the group, so some Board of Supervisors education is being done. Nancy stated her belief that more education is needed over time, given that no efforts to protect the Important Sites has been made through the years. Lonnie suggested that two recommendations be made on behalf of the committee at the next work group meeting: Consider adopting the full Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act in Albemarle County, and consider changing the criteria for the open space category of the Land Use program. Lonnie will email the recommendations to Nancy and the committee for consideration before the next meeting on July 5.

At 6:35, the meeting was turned over to Austin Kane of the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech. Austin has been involved in developing the VA Department of Game & Inland Fisheries Wildlife Action Plan for 2015 and a 2013 study and report, "Virginia's Climate Modeling and Species Vulnerability Assessment." Austin gave a powerpoint presentation on these and answered questions from committee members.

Austin concluded her presentation at about 7:40, and the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting: July 26, 2016 at 5:30pm, Chris Greene Room 246.