

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee Meeting
July 26, 2016 – Chris Greene Room 246**

Committee Members: Devin Floyd (Chair), Lonnie Murray (Vice Chair), Peter Hatch, Peggy Cornett, Rochelle Garwood, Manuel Lerda, Ari Daniels

Absent: Nancy Weiss, Christine Putnam, Jeremy Glode

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

The meeting was called to order at 5:38 by Devin. Minutes of the 6/28/16 meeting were approved.

Reviewing the draft meeting agenda, Devin noted two priority topics – forming a subcommittee to work on the Biodiversity Action Plan and discussing comments the committee may want to make to the Charlottesville Parks & Recreation Advisory Board on management of Ragged Mountain Natural Area (RMNA). Dan Bieker will talk about the issue. Ruth wanted to add Invasive Species as agenda topic.

There have been no visits to Important Sites since the June visit to Hardware River Bluffs (accessed from Bellair Farm). Peter is planning a visit to Brush Mountain Rock Face site, hoping to see woolly lip-fern. Peggy is leading a walk on August 13 at Tufton, to see ferns (among other things). The July 23 visit to Gladden Fields (Red Hills Wetlands site), organized by the Native Plant Society, was very good and very well attended. Some of Mo Stevens' data includes Gladden Fields. Committee members would like to recognize or commend the landowner (Ron Brunk) in some way, possibly involving the BOS.

David gave brief update on Advisory Work Group. Nancy has been representing the committee, but cannot attend the next meeting. David will make sure the two items developed by the committee are included in the discussion and any lists developed. David briefly showed a map of Important Sites to the group at an earlier meeting.

A lengthy discussion about RMNA and potential comments by the committee took place. Several committee members attended the July 20 public meeting of the city's Parks & Recreation Advisory Board. A 30 day public comment period began on July 20. Lonnie had questions, comments about Center for Urban Habitats' survey and report on RMNA –

- Maps show that existing trails cut thru some coves, maybe those trails should be moved or realigned. Devin agrees and has firmly expressed that idea to Chris Gensic.
- Some trails look like they come close to identified sensitive areas.
- Agrees with CAMBA that some old road beds are unsustainable, maybe they should be treated for invasive species.
- We are still looking at RMNA in isolation, is only one small part of larger Ragged Mountains, with public lands that will later involve these same arguments about recreational uses.

Dan Bieker gave his perspective: The reality of the situation is the political arena in which the discussion is taking place. Hedgerow Park (county owned land south of I-64, site of future county park) is lost for strong protective measures. The land was donated to TNC, who later donated it the county. The landowner (Jane Heyward, now deceased) stipulated that bikes, dogs, horses, will be included in park activities. So the committee should not dicker around at RMNA about where trails should go, but should advocate for Option B (passive recreation). Option B does not eliminate any people from RMNA

(everyone can hike), but it eliminates certain uses (mountain biking, bringing dogs on hikes). Dan read a statement from the recent report about fragmentation, which he feels is key to the whole situation. Dan feels the committee should sign as individuals and list their credentials.

Among the many comments and observations made during group discussion:

- There is no sound data about the impacts of different recreational uses to natural resources - bikers vs. runners vs. hikers, etc.
- Expanded human use and number of visitors is the issue, not the specific activity. There will be greater resource impacts with increased use of the area.
- The area is overrun in places with young invasive plants, it will look horrible in 10-20 years. It is not a pristine site, even though many people refer to it as such.
- RMNA is in Moores Creek watershed, a TMDL stream, so we should not introduce more coliform bacteria by allowing dogs. Bacterial monitoring of the reservoir should be resumed. There are often contaminants in dog poop (flea treatments, etc.). There was a recent dog attack on a person at Byrom Preserve.
- What is future status of the 300 acres of RMNA south of I-64? It has never been discussed publicly. General discussion of the ecological value of the Ragged Mountain area as a whole, including the future Hedgerow Park.
- Lonnie – the parks use survey should be updated (last done in 2005, a joint study of City and County). We shouldn't be saying where bike trails should go at this point, but say we have a need for XXX miles of new bike trails (based on updated survey) – then collectively decide where the trails should be located.
- Dan – there is “no stomach” for further studies, City Council wants to make a decision. So bacterial monitoring (or proposed park survey update, etc.) will not delay City Council decision.
- Manuel shared the gist of letter he wrote to the City, and his comments at the July 20 public meeting.
- Tom shared comments the Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club submitted at the public meeting.

Devin – Dan's comments, Manuel's letter, and Lonnie's observations (landscape perspective, parks use survey) should all be incorporated in the committee's comments. Devin could guide the compilation and development of the comments, but should not be a decision maker. Dan should be the writer, but not noted. There could be separate comments from former committee members who endorse our comments, but maintain a distinction (“bright line”) between comments of the current committee and any other people or groups.

Motion Approved: Dan will create first draft of comments for the NHC, which the group will review and edit in the next few days. The comments will be signed only by current committee members. Hopefully all members will sign on, former members cannot sign on.

David noted we need to decide how the comments will be submitted. The County might send very short comment letter about RMNA, but it has not been decided yet. Several staff members are away this week (vacation, etc.), so David will talk with them next week. There is no precedent for NHC corresponding with other groups or individuals, and no clear method for county committees (e.g., Historic Preservation Committee) to submit public comments. If the County submits comments, should

the NHC comments be included as an attachment? Should NHC comments be submitted independently? Should the comments be signed as a committee, or as the individuals who comprise the current committee? Should the BOS be informed of our comments, or simply copied when they are submitted?

There was brief discussion about the need to form a subcommittee to begin working on the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). A new subcommittee is needed, rather than shifting the mission of an existing subcommittee or work group. Content is needed for the BAP, so the Education subcommittee might be asked to help with the BAP.

Motion Approved: The BAP subcommittee was formed consisting of Lonnie, Peggy, and Tom.

Lonnie would like to have a menu of policy options in hand for discussion at first BAP subcommittee meeting. Is Green Infrastructure Center (GIC) going to include this in their grant report? Tom – we should look to Maryland for policy, legislation examples and ideas. But, Virginia’s Dillon Rule complicates what policy options are open to Albemarle County.

Tom reported on the Invasives/Climate Change work group. Plans or strategies that address climate change should be reviewed periodically, perhaps every 5 years, and adjusted as needed. The committee should assess which Important Sites contain species that are prone to extinction, should include resilience as a factor in prioritizing Important Sites for protection. Invasives are a more concrete and immediate threat. Blue Ridge PRISM is interested in using aerial photography to identify invasive hot spots, and they may have money to use? Some invasives are pertinent to agriculture, so could attract more political support for combatting them. We need to include agriculture in addressing invasives and climate change. A draft of how to prioritize Important Sites with regards to resilience will be available to share with committee soon. Lonnie noted that benthic macroinvertebrates are sensitive to the presence of non-native plants in riparian areas. They will not use the leaves of non-natives as food and can be absent in streams where non-natives are heavily present. He will share the study documenting this with the committee.

Andrew Walker of GIC is requesting a meeting to discuss risks to green infrastructure in the county. David will coordinate with him to set up a grant subcommittee meeting, but other NHC members can hopefully attend too. It will be a good opportunity to be updated on the project and ask other questions. Andrew foresees completing all the maps and analysis by the end of September. Lonnie requested that we inquire about updated versions of his maps.

Brief discussion about moving the August meeting date from the 23rd to the 30th, but original date of 8/23 will be kept. David will contact Rod Walker of Blue Ridge PRISM to confirm his presentation at the 8/23 meeting. We should request a 15 minute summary of PRISM, followed by lots of time for Q&A, discussion. We will plan on a short committee meeting, and give Rod the floor at 6:30.

Ruth – two more sites of wayleaf grass have been found in Albemarle. Information she shared includes:

- One location is only .1 mile from Round Top location at RMNA. She made Chris Gensic (Park and Trail Planner, Charlottesville Parks & Recreation) aware of this.
- Wavyleaf grass has also been found on Rod Walker’s property near Sugar Hollow.

- It is a perennial.
- Arrowhead property (on Dudley Mountain) is the other known county location. Ruth wonders if it has spread to Biscuit Run. DCR staff recently surveyed Arrowhead and found much wavyleaf grass. Black bears may be the vector.

Former owners of Arrowhead are aware of the presence of wavyleaf grass. They could be open to treating it.

Two brief notes from David.

- John Murphy, founder of StreamWatch and former NHC member, was recently hired as MS4 Program Manager for Albemarle County.
- New land cover data (including amount of impervious surface) is available for use, though the QA/QC process has not been completed yet. Data reflects land cover as of 2013, the previous data is from 2009.

Meeting adjourned 7:30.

Next Meeting: August 23, 2016 at 5:30pm, Chris Greene Room 246.