

Natural Heritage Committee

April 2017

Annual Report of the Natural Heritage Committee

Committee Members in 2016: Devin Floyd, Nancy Weiss, Lonnie Murray, Rochelle Garwood, Peter Hatch, Peggy Cornett, Manuel Lerda, Ari Daniels, Christine Putnam, Jeremy Glode

Meeting Frequency: The committee met monthly during 2016, for a total of twelve full committee meetings. Sixteen subcommittee or work group meetings were also held. Several site visits involving various committee members were also conducted.

Summary: The Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) is proud to report on its milestones and achievements during the calendar year of 2016.

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP):

The NHC began work to develop a BAP as called for in the Natural Resources chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. The committee established calendar year 2017 as the target completion date. A commitment was made to address non-native invasive species and climate change in the BAP. A draft outline for the BAP was developed in late 2016.

In preparation for developing the BAP, two subcommittees were formed. The BAP subcommittee met three times in 2016, and the Invasive Species/Climate Change subcommittee met seven times. The NHC also hosted presentations or had meetings on the topics of climate change, non-native invasive species, wildlife conservation plans, and using GIS data. Presentations to the committee were made by Austin Kane of the Conservation Management Institute, housed at Virginia Tech, and Rod Walker of Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management). Committee representatives also met with University of Virginia professors Robert Davis and John Porter.

Grant project with Green Infrastructure Center Inc. (GIC):

The green infrastructure community planning project with GIC, which began in August 2015, was completed in September 2016. A grant subcommittee was formed to assist on the project, and met four times in 2016 with GIC. The GIS data developed during the project was delivered to the NHC in September. The data and analyses produced will be used in developing the BAP.

Important Sites Assessments:

Information about Important Sites was updated during the year to keep it current. Sixteen new Important Sites were documented and added in 2016. A work group formed to better organize information about the Important Sites and to begin a ranking process for them.

Six Important Sites, including Ragged Mountain Natural Area, were visited by NHC members and others in 2016. Other significant local areas visited by committee members include the Hedgerow property (site of a future county park), Woods Natural Heritage Area (Arrowhead property), and Tufton Farm.

Natural Resources Working Group

Nancy Weiss represented the NHC on a natural resources advisory work group that met seven times in 2016. The group reviewed and analyzed the state of natural resource management, providing the basis for developing a Natural Resources Program. A full report was submitted and a detailed presentation was made by David Hannah in a January 4, 2017

work session with the BoS.

Volunteer Contributions:

The volunteer Plant Team consists of five experts who have assisted the NHC and other groups with conservation efforts in recent years. The Plant Team met on several occasions with Tom Olivier, a former NHC member and active supporter, to review and organize the field notes and maps of the late botanist and naturalist, Charles “Mo” Stevens. Mo conducted extensive field work in Albemarle County (and beyond), dating back to the 1940’s. When working with Mo on the Biodiversity Work Group in 2002-04, Tom used GIS to digitize the locations of Mo’s site visits. Tom and the plant team successfully create digital files of the Mo Stevens data.

Several area citizens actively supported the NHC in a variety of ways in 2016. In addition to the Plant Team and Tom Olivier, other volunteers who deserve mention are Ruth Douglas, Leah Jung, and Dan Bieker.

Other Notable Achievements:

- Ragged Mountain Natural Area. NHC was very concerned about potential ecological harm to natural communities at RMNA if new trails were created and the level of human activity increased significantly. NHC submitted a letter to the Charlottesville Parks and Recreation Advisory Board during the public comment period, expressing their concerns. NHC also communicated their concerns to Albemarle County’s legal staff.
- Education subcommittee was established.
- At April 4th BoS meeting, NHC recognized Scott Clark with a Certificate of Appreciation for his many years of work and dedication.
- Presentation by Ari Daniels and David Hannah to BoS during December 7th meeting.

Conclusion:

Natural Heritage Committee Goals for 2017

Complete the Biodiversity Action Plan for Albemarle County. Present findings and recommendations from the action plan to the Board of Supervisors in late 2017 or early 2018.

Continue to review and update the original list of Important Sites developed by the Biodiversity Work Group in 2004 to reflect the status of those sites and the addition of newly discovered sites.

Complete formalization of ecosystem assessments and biological inventories so the Committee’s treatment of county level data aligns with state and national level conservation ranking and recommendation schemes.

Recruit new members to the committee to increase input from a broader range of competencies