

Natural Heritage Committee

April 2018

Annual Report of the Natural Heritage Committee for 2017

Committee Members in 2017: Nancy Weiss, Lonnie Murray, Rochelle Garwood, Peter Hatch, Peggy Cornett, Manuel Lerdau, Ari Daniels, Christine Putnam, Jeremy Glode

Meeting Frequency: The committee met monthly during 2017. There were ten full committee meetings and two informal meetings due to lack of a quorum. There were many subcommittee meetings held concerning evaluating our Important Sites and drafting a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for the Board of Supervisors. Several site visits involving multiple committee members were also conducted.

Summary: The Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) is proud to report on the goals it met and other achievements during the calendar year of 2017.

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 and completed a draft plan in December. Current committee members and one county staff person, and especially former committee member Tom Olivier, did the bulk of the writing and organizing of the extensive information. As part of the process we reviewed the data and maps from the Green Infrastructure Center. Three conservation focus areas in the county were identified— Northwestern Albemarle (near Shenandoah NP), Southern Albemarle Mountains area, and the Rivanna River corridor. Final editing and developing maps and illustrations for the plan still needs to be completed for presentation to the Board of Supervisors in April 2018.

Important Sites Assessments:

Information about the county's Important Sites was updated during the year to keep it current. A work group was formed which better organized and updated information about the Important Sites and developed a ranking procedure for them.

Important Sites, including Ragged Mountain Natural Area, were visited by NHC members and others in 2017. We have ongoing concerns especially about Ragged Mountain Natural Area. We hiked it with Ann Mallek and Dan Mahon. We did a complete circuit of the reservoir looking at the potential biking trails that have been marked by the City of Charlottesville. This committee supports the board's position that increased traffic, both foot and bike, will be detrimental to the area. We support the Board of Supervisors position that the county ordinance takes precedence over any land in the county even if owned by the City of Charlottesville. These discussions pointed out the need to revise the county ordinance governing land around public drinking water sources. Currently, resolution of this disagreement is in litigation.

Other Notable Achievements:

- Continued our own education with Lonnie Murray giving us a presentation on Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) and how we might encourage their broader consideration. We also attended a presentation on 6/26/17 by Bridget Donaldson of VA Transportation Research Council, who described her research about wildlife use of highway underpasses on I-64, the use of fencing, and possibilities for additional underpasses.
- Started a review of the information Mo Stevens had on his topographic maps about the flora of Albemarle County.
- Recruited four new members for the committee in early 2018 as four members either resigned or timed out.

Conclusion:

Natural Heritage Committee Goals for 2018

Complete the Biodiversity Action Plan for Albemarle County. Present overall findings and recommendations from the action plan to the Board of Supervisors in April 2018. Hold a work session with the Board after April to discuss the plan and recommendations in detail.

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.

Work with Don Mahon and other staff of the Parks and Recreation Department to provide input on development of Biscuit Run Park, the Hedgerow property, and county-owned lands in the three conservation focus areas, particularly the Rivanna River corridor.

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.

Develop closer ties with the members of the Board of Supervisors by inviting them to site visits with us.

Develop a "plant rescue" process for surveying and harvesting plants and seeds from areas that are about to be developed.

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