

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting  
November 5, 2020 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom**

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Nancy Weiss, Peggy Cornett, Kate Mallek, Emily Luebke, Leah Jung

Absent: Kennon Williams, Lonnie Murray, Michael Rodemeyer

Other Attendees: Sean Tubbs, Jeremy Johnson, Bridget Donaldson, Supervisor Liz Palmer

Staff: Carolyn Schaffer, Kim Biasioli, Scott Clark

There was a quorum of six members present, and Christine called the meeting to order at 5:32.

Visitors welcomed.

Emily moved approval of the agenda, Peggy seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Peggy moved approval of the minutes, Nancy seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

**Follow-ups:**

- Important Sites updates
  - Blenheim Grasslands- CUH continuing to survey powerline ROW all the way to Rt 20.
  - Darden Towe powerline ROW has potential for reduced mowing/grassland habitat.
  - Important Site viewer has been updated. **Action Item:** Christine to provide access.
- Charlotte Humphris Education Initiative
  - Continued follow up with ACPR and members of Hydraulic CAC. Potential projects are tree tags with QR codes, brochure, stormwater site signage, natural playscape.
- Subcommittee Updates
  - Education subcommittee created a charter and goals. Working on Tip of the Month for social media, county parks projects, and county staff education.
  - Policy subcommittee. **Action Item:** Create charter and recurring meeting date.
- Website follow up
  - NHC webpage has been updated with resources, contact info, BAP, archive documents.
  - Continuing development of an environment 'hub' on county website. **Action Item:** Kim/Christine will continue working with CAPE on this.
- Update on recommendations
  - Letter to ACPR sent regarding reduced mowing in county parks.
  - Rivanna Corridor Plan recommendations provided to TJPDC. Additional opportunities to provide feedback.
  - Sugar Hollow recommendations sent to BOS. Liz Palmer provided an update – work needs to be done on the dam before a parking lot will be built; work will be ongoing until at least fall 2021. Awareness of the issue exists and discussions are in progress.

**Wildlife Corridors presentation and discussion with Bridget Donaldson, Virginia Transportation Research Council, VDOT**

- Wildlife crossings – underpasses/overpasses – most effective way to connect habitat and reduce collisions.
- Underpasses generally not designed for wildlife but can be easily modified.
- Next federal transportation bill - \$250 million for wildlife crash mitigation. Includes crossing structures. Virginia has a Wildlife Corridor Action Plan – VDOT should be implementing more solutions in some locations.

- Wildlife crash data from contractor carcass removal is better than police reports (mainly deer).
- Crossings often involve connecting two locations with underpasses ½ mile apart. Isolated underpasses can also be enhanced; fencing can help with effectiveness of connecting habitat and reducing collisions.
- I-64 study.
  - Two underpasses 5 miles apart. Pre-fencing study - wildlife cameras 0.1 mile apart (for 1 mile on each side of culverts).
  - 92% deer crash reduction. Crashes did not increase at fence ends. Ends can be tied into ROW fencing or steep slopes.
  - Huge increases in wildlife use of culvert and underpass.
  - Cost savings- reductions in property damage; increase in driver safety.
- Other measures to consider - animal detection warning systems, deer crossing signs
- VDOT – considerations of collision data and measures for crossings. Pilot testing app for carcass removal.
- Building on connectivity analysis in BAP – roads are easiest to focus on; shortest connections.
- Considerations: collision data, existing connections, current and future land use, can fencing be placed along road, expanding/enhancing existing structures.
- Previous discussions on 29 S found driveways may be a hurdle. Cattle guards are an option. Very site specific – Bridget could look at a site.
- Fencing on I-64 will last 20 years- VDOT has to maintain.
- VSWCC is looking to identify what are the steps for a locality to do a project (identify sites, funding opportunities, implementation and follow through).
- Albemarle has done more than most localities with the BAP – opportunity to explore a demonstration project on 29 S with VSWCC. Lots of anecdotal data. Good momentum with success of I-64 project in Albemarle, support of BOS.
- Scott Clark – several potential crossing locations identified over past 20 years.
- Liz Palmer- previous discussions w/VDOT – no logical or easy location could be identified on 29S. High level of interest in funding opportunities and identification of potential crossing sites.
- VSWCC update (Leah Jung)– focus is more on collisions than habitat.
  - Demonstration project work group will support several projects.
  - Smithsonian researcher analyzing police data on collisions; has provided access.
  - Focus on 29S could be on North and South Hardware crossings, Hickory Creek.
  - Lonnie had previously looked at this and identified a crossing site.
  - Consideration of what species to focus on. Area (large home range) species might be a consideration. Deer are not a good indicator as they will cross anywhere.
  - May need to focus on collisions (driver safety) for grant funding.
  - Consider number of driveways that need to be crossed. Scenic concerns with landowners may be an issue. VDOT likely has a ROW.
  - Cameras will help identify species and crossing sites.
  - Kim will present to VSWCC in January. **Action Item:** follow up meeting to plan and identify potential project sites/next steps.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25. Next meeting date is December 3rd.