

**Minutes of Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) Meeting
March 4, 2021 – Virtual Meeting on Zoom**

Committee Members: Christine Putnam, Peggy Cornett, Kate Mallek, Emily Luebke, Bruce Gatling-Austin, Leah Jung, Lonnie Murray, Michael Rodemeyer

Absent: Kennon Williams, Nancy Weiss

Other Attendees: Ruth Douglas, Rod and Maggie Walker (BR Prism), Nicola McGoff, Michelle McKenzi, David van Roijen, Amy Johnson, Charlotte Lorick

Staff: Kim Biasioli, Carolyn Schaffer

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

Welcome to guests.

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

Michael moved approval of the minutes, Emily seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.

Follow ups

- Annual Report – Leah moved approval of the annual report, Bruce seconded. Approved by a roll call vote.
- Subcommittees
 - NHC will be part of a pilot to have subcommittees. Meetings will have to be recorded and open to the public. Guidance on procedures and FOIA requirements will be provided soon.
 - Wildlife Corridors
 - Leah has been studying databases identifying ecological priority areas to help identify corridors for the NW area of the county.
 - Wildlife Corridors legislation passed general assembly to encourage consideration of wildlife corridors in planning.
 - Camera traps set out at five sites in the Southern Albemarle Mtns. Roadkill surveys planned to improve collision data.
 - 1 salamander seen using the new tunnels.

Virginia Working Landscapes (VWL) Programs and Biodiversity Surveys - Amy Johnson (VWL Program Director), Charlotte Lorick (VWL Program Coordinator), and Michelle McKenzi (Bellair Farm)

- VWL – A Smithsonian based program that brings together scientists, landowners, citizen scientists, and regional partners to study and promote the management of Virginia's landscapes for native biodiversity.
- Research, education and outreach
 - Biodiversity Survey Sites – 200 (80,000 acres) – predominantly privately owned.
 - Working to enhance understanding of local ecosystems, determine BMPs, collaborative projects, and engagement in conservation science.
 - Interested in status, restoration, and management of grassland communities.

- Majority of grasslands in eastern US are dominated by non-native warm season grasses. VWL is working to establish native meadows for habitat and biodiversity. Studying reduction of chemicals, regenerative grazing, and timing of management for grassland birds, insect abundance, etc; as well as adding structure and cover (plantings) for birds and other wildlife.
- Landowners can volunteer properties or volunteer as a citizen scientist.
- Biodiversity surveys – gathering ecological information and studying plant communities and grassland bird declines; engaging communities and informing management practices. Report to landowners provided.
- Bellair Farm – Participated in VWL program and changed management practices (e.g. timing of mowing); required a mindshift of staff that was easier with the support of VWL. Education of CSA members through newsletter. Program was very successful and well-received at Bellair.
- Need to clarify County policy on land use assessment so if landowners enroll in these programs (and NRCS) to create meadows they will not lose their tax benefit. County needs criteria for open space.
- Better mapping for grasslands is needed to identify them as distinct from lawn for soil health and water quality improvement (Bay model and other potential applications).
- Potential for tour of Bellair Farm. Ambassador landowners can help educate others. Demonstration projects at high visibility sites like Monticello and County parks are also a good opportunity.

Other Matters

- HJ527 – new VA legislation looking at restricting invasive species in the nursery industry.
- Christine has been working on moving forward invasives groups in County parks and reduced mowing in powerline at Darden Towe.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30. Next meeting date is April 1st, 2021.