**Meeting Minutes**

**CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR WHTE CLAY CREEK STATE PARK**

**April 23, 2013, Chambers House Nature Center**

**Persons Present:**

**Council and Division Representatives:**

AFL/CIO – Delaware – Bill Foster

Coalition for Natural Stream Valleys – Andy Urquhart

Delaware Audubon Society – Dorothy P. Miller

Delaware Equine Council – Mary Everhart

Delaware State Sportsmen’s Association – Not represented

Delmarva Ornithological Society – Michael Moore, PhD

Friends of White Clay Creek State Park – Mike Ott

Mason-Dixon Trail System – Robert Bennett

Trail Dawgs – Pete McLaughlin

Trail Spinners – Not represented

UAW CAP Council – Delaware – Donald Sharpe

White Clay Flyfishers – Ed O’Donnell

White Clay Watershed Association – Linda Stapleford

Wilmington Trail Club – Gary Kirk

Nick McFadden – Superintendent, WCCSP

**Members of the Public:**

Peter Saenger

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I. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chair Linda Stapleford. Council Representatives, Division Representatives, and Members of the Public introduced themselves.

II. The minutes of the January 22, 2013 meeting were approved unanimously as issued by the Secretary.

III. OLD BUSINESS

* Proposal to require remediation of habitat losses associated with the addition of facilities to the park. Mr. Saenger reported that he met with Greg Abbott and Rob Line of the Division of Parks and Recreation in October. They stated that maintaining and improving habitat is the normal business of the Division, and they didn’t feel that an additional policy is needed for these situations. Also, some in the Division believe that the acquisition of land to be added to the park could be considered as a remedial measure.

However, Mr. Saenger stated that he would still urge the Division to adopt a policy of restoring at least a 2 to 1 ratio of natural habitat for each acre lost in facility additions to the park. For example, this could involve converting agricultural lands to natural areas, but would not include land acquisition. Mr. Saenger will consider preparing a resolution to this effect for consideration by the Council.

(Mr. Saenger’s presentation on his concerns about major connector trail sizing and Lower Carpenter Trails, including the need for remediation of certain trail sections and recommended corrective action by trail rerouting, is included under the Public Comments section of the minutes.)

* Chairperson report on follow up of safety for Pomeroy trail users entering North College Avenue (Creek Road) just above Bubblegum Rock. Mrs. Stapleford reported that she and Mr. Urquhart walked this trail to form an opinion on the subject. She stated that she believes this is well-designed, attractive trail. She feels that its impact on the local environment was unfortunate, but understood. Regarding the junction of the trail with Creek Road, she believes that the current signage provides pretty good safety for trail users, but she had a couple of suggestions for consideration by the Division:

1. Recognizing that the trail is used by children as well as adults, an additional sign along the trail indicating “Caution/Road Ahead” would be a helpful supplement to the existing “STOP” sign.

2. Along the road south of the trail junction, the existing sign shows a bicycle symbol and the word “Ahead.” This could be clarified by adding the words “Trail Entrance” such that the complete message would be “Bicycle [symbol]/ Trail Entrance/Ahead.”

* Request that “double track” trails be clarified in the Trail Plan. Such trails can vary from approximately 5’ wide dirt trails to 10’ or more wide “roads” through the park, which can have a significant impact on the environment. Greg Abbott of the Division discussed this request with Mrs. Stapleford before the meeting. He indicated that the Division would provide such information to the Council as they approached the implementation of each project.
* Proposed Connector Trail from Fairfield Crest to Creek Road. Mr. Sharpe reported that he and Mr. Foster met with Newark Mayor Vance Funk, State Representative Paul Baumbach, and Mr. Mark Brainard of the University of Delaware concerning this proposal. During the meeting the University agreed to allow its property to be used by the City of Newark for the proposed trail. The cost to upgrade the trail and to blacktop it was estimated to be $66,500.00. Mr. Sharpe indicated that he requested Senator Sokola to consider providing half of this amount through the Bond Bill. The city could seek the balance from Land and Water Conservation Funds.

Mrs. Stapleford pointed out that, in the meantime, signs have been erected at both ends of the existing trail to facilitate access by trail users.

IV NEW BUSINESS

* A resolution to the UofD Trustees and President Harker stating the importance of the Laird Tract to the park. Mrs. Stapleford reported that Greg Abbott of the Division discussed with her such actions by the Council. He pointed out that the legislation establishing the Council provided for only one function of Council, namely to advise the Division on the development and operation of the park. Thus, resolutions such as this to outside parties would be outside the scope of the Council.

Council representatives agreed with this limitation. While individual Council member organizations are free to write letters and advocate on their own behalf for certain actions, in the future the Council will confine itself to providing advice to the Division.

* Exploratory discussion of issues relating to public use of the existing State right-of-way from Paper Mill Road to the Park (mill race area). It was noted that Newark’s Coverdale Park provides very good, nearby access to this area. As such, use of the State right-of-way is not needed. Mr. Sharpe, who originally raised this question, agreed that it need not be pursued.
* Support for legislative efforts to arrange permanent funding for Farmland Preservation and Open Space. As noted above, such action by the Council would be inappropriate. However, Council member organizations may wish to advocate for such funding arrangements by the Bond Bill Committee.
* A request that the Division place a high priority on the acquisition of a key inholding in the park. Prior to the meeting, Mr. Abbott indicated that the Division is well aware of the value of the parcel. However, a note from Council to the Division about this could be considered.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

* Mr. Saenger noted that major connector trails (spine trails) may be sized not only to accommodate the expected pedestrian and bicycle traffic, but also to accommodate park maintenance vehicles and equipment. He requested that the Division consider whether such trails can be made narrower (to minimize loss of habitat) when the trail is paralleled by a road which can carry any needed vehicle and equipment traffic. He gave as an example the location where the proposed Tri-Valley Trail would parallel the Nine-Foot Road. He stated that his desire was to see that the trails were right-sized for the need they fulfilled.
* Mr. Saenger questioned the description of trail conditions in the Lower Carpenter Area as functional and mostly not eroding given during the January 22, 2013 meeting of the Council. He presented several photographs and measurements that he interpreted to show major erosion of sections of the Yellow Trail near its southeast corner. He expressed concern that the Division’s hands were tied by the resolution passed at the meeting. That resolution requested that existing trails in the Lower Carpenter Area be maintained in lieu of new trails or major trail changes. He stated that he had lost confidence in the Council because he felt that the trail conditions were not described accurately.

[During the October 22, 2013 meeting, Mr. Saenger requested, and the Council agreed, that the following alternative material be added to these minutes.] “Mr Saenger stated that remediation should not be limited to new construction sites like the Pomeroy. Existing problems should also be addressed. To illustrate the point he displayed photographs of the active erosion of the long fall line sections of the Yellow trail in the Wedgewood area of lower Carpenter. Mr Saenger stated the Advisory Committee's advice of no new trails denied the Division the use of best practices, i.e. the rerouting of the trail, in order to remediate eroding fall line trails. Mr Saenger stated that rerouting eroding fall line trails to sustainable contour trails is the widely recognized best practice for remediating conditions that exist on the Yellow trail.”

Mr. Urquhart, Mrs. Stapleford, Mrs. Miller and others made several comments on Mr. Saenger’s assertions, as summarized below:

(a) The trail sections selected by Mr. Saenger represent only a very small fraction of the entire trail system in the Lower Carpenter Area. In fact, one section he photographed isn’t even considered an official trail.

(b) The condition of the trail in this area is not at all representative of conditions on the rest of the trail system, which are in much better shape.

(c) The trail in this area has a very long term history as a farm road [and subsequently as a horse trail]. Likely much of the configuration Mr. Saenger interpreted as erosion derived from these previous uses rather than its subsequent use as a foot trail. The more recent erosion at the level of the trail surface, while not desirable, is relatively minor considering its decades of use as a foot trail with no maintenance.

(d) During the January 22 meeting it was stated [as presented in the minutes] that the trail system in the Lower Carpenter Area is in “generally good” condition. This still seems to be an accurate description, considering the very localized and non-representative nature of the area of Mr. Saenger’s concerns.

(e) Even if the Division should decide to close this local trail section, this can be accomplished by the addition of perhaps one to two hundred feet of new cutoff trail (somewhat as proposed in the Trail Plan). This would be consistent with avoiding major new tail construction, which is the intent of the resolution.

(f) In any event, the Division’s hands are not tied by such Council actions, since the Council is only advisory, and the Division can always come back for further discussion with the Council.

Mr. Saenger also stated that the Carpenter trail system was not fully functional in his opinion because the Wedgewood area was not connected to upper Carpenter by an acceptable trail. He explained that there is an existing social trail from the Wedgewood area to the Yellow Trail but that the trail route is actively eroding. He showed photographs of the highly eroded existing social trailhead.

* Mr. Saenger initiated a brief discussion of the proposed connector trail that would link Wells Lane with Creek Road, paralleling Wedgewood Road and the “Bullfrog Run” tributary. He stated that the Division indicated this could be as narrow as 4 feet wide and could be snaked around vegetation to minimize or eliminate loss of forest canopy. In this regard, Mr. McFadden presented information from the Trail Plan about the widths of different types of trails. In particular, the typical widths of “Sustainable, Hardened, Shared-Use, All Weather Trail Links” was given as 5 to 8 feet. Mr. Urquhart pointed out that these dimensions normally cover just the width of the hardened trail surface and that the actual width of affected habitat is usually greater. Mr. Saenger indicated that one advantage of the terrain in this area is that the slope of the proposed connector could meet ADA accessibility standards. The connector trail would provide access to upper Carpenter via Wells Lane and to the Yellow trailhead at Wells Lane, solving two problems with one trail.

This resulted in some discussion by the Council, but more detailed information would be needed for further consideration of the question.

VI. ISSUES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL – None were offered.

VII. NEXT MEETINGS – scheduled for July 23, 2013 and October 22, 2013 at the Chambers House Nature Center.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT – the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Urquhart, Council Secretary