

NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COUNCIL
35 Years of Service to Improving Delaware's Quality Of Life
"Preserving Delaware's Natural Areas Today For All Delawareans Tomorrow"

Environmental Laboratory
Richards and Robbins Building

Dover, DE 19901

June 4, 2013

9:00 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Council Members:

Debbie Heaton, Chair

David Athey

Theodore Palmer, Jr.

Pete Martin

Guests:

Staff:

Eileen Butler, Parks & Recreation, DNREC

Rich Phifer, Fish & Wildlife, DNREC

Ron Vickers, Parks & Recreation, DNREC

Rose Ryödi, Parks & Recreation, DNREC

I. Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions/Announcements

Ms. Heaton, Chairperson, called the Natural Areas Advisory Council meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. She welcomed Council members and asked for announcements.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Due to the lack of a quorum, minutes could not be approved. Council deferred approval of the March 5, 2013 meeting minutes to the September 17, 2013 meeting.

III. Old Business

No old business

IV. Natural Areas Registry

Ms. Butler's presentation for information only:

- There is a property off Old Baltimore Pike that includes forestland which is a part of the Christina River Natural Area. Delmarva Bays are present on the property. This is the only large forest tract in the area and the wet woods are surrounded by intense development. The site is roughly 140 acres. Senator Townsend made the initial contact to the Department requesting staff look at the property to determine the preservation potential of the property. Parks Staff, along with Fish and Wildlife Staff will survey the property to ascertain whether the property meets the Natural Area standards and criteria to determine if the property should be included on the State Natural Area Registry and possibly dedicated as a State Nature Preserve. If it is determined that the property fits the criteria/standards for Natural Area designation, it will be brought before Council for its recommendation to the Department Secretary. This property is privately owned.
- Frenchtown Woods Natural Area – Parks Staff has become aware of a property that is within the Frenchtown Woods Natural Area. It is being developed and according to the New Castle County Code, the area designated as open space, the wet forest that is a part of the

Frenchtown Woods Natural Area, can be obtained by the State. That would give the State a foothold in the Frenchtown Woods Natural Area to then pursue permanent preservation for other portions of the natural area on various properties. Ms. Butler is moving forward by reaching out to the landowners in the area to discuss permanent preservation opportunities. On June 20, 2013 Parks Staff will meet with the Peoples Construction Co. for further discussions.

- Mr. Athey said New Castle County was given a 50-acre property (Dickerson Farm) that is associated with Frenchtown Woods. The property is essentially a stormwater management area and is now the responsibility of the County. The County has made an inquiry to the State of its interest in owning the property.

Mr. Vickers explained that from the State's perspective, it was looked at 15 years ago and at that time, the developer was trying to get rid of that liability and they had contracted with NCC Conservation District to maintain the berm and water control structures from the site.

Mr. Athey says the reason he got involved with this project is because the stormwater structure was not designed properly and the County hired his company to do an analysis on the structure.

The State is still considering the County's request.

V. Nature Preserve Dedications

- White Clay Creek State Park Nature Preserve Articles of Dedication (AOD) review:

Council reviewed the draft Articles of Dedication for the 1,300 acres slated for Nature Preserve dedication. Ms. Butler indicated that internal meetings with Parks Operations staff were necessary to ensure that the Staff's long term plans for the areas proposed for dedication do not interfere with the restrictions proposed for this area.

The proposed Nature Preserve dedication areas contain older growth forests with appropriate buffers to protect the forest resources as well as areas that house rare and endangered species, and high quality streams.

Ms. Heaton asked Ms. Butler if approval of the AOD could be postponed to the September meeting as Council did not have a quorum at this time. Ms. Butler agreed.

- Discussion of Open Space Council land purchases that contain natural areas, to assist the Department in prioritizing future nature preserve dedications:

Mr. Vickers explained how Open Space properties are analyzed for acquisition and/or easements and how they sometimes overlap with the Natural Areas program. One of the Department's current projects focuses acquisition efforts along the Delaware Bay. This new initiative is relatively new, begun within the past 16-18 months. The intent is to look at the resources Delaware has along the Bay Shore coastline.

There are three components to this initiative –

1. Focus on the high quality of the natural resources that are found within this area. Many people are not aware of the quality of natural resources found - in terms of the marsh land, forest lands and the mixture of working farm lands up and down the coast.
2. Encourage more passive recreation use - more fishing, hunting, hiking, and birding within these areas.

3. Build a strong community through eco-tourism and have a public presence in use along this area. There are a lot of communities up and down this area from Lewes, to Slaughter Beach, to Kitts Hummock right up to New Castle that would benefit.

There are approximately 220,000 acres contained within the project area. Several committees are set up: the recreation, marketing and outreach, and the habitat restoration, of which Mr. Vickers and Rich Phifer are involved. Part of the Habitat committee is dealing with land protection.

Of the 220,000 acres within the Delaware Bayshore Initiative area, 116,000 acres (about 53%) are already protected, either in fee ownership, or through easements.

The Department has begun to look at other properties that are of concern and are considered important for a variety of reasons such as, resource protection, if the area can be used for canoe/kayaking access, a burning area, old growth forested areas, or cultural resource areas that need protection.

VI. Nature Preserve Management Issues

Ms. Butler invited Council on a field trip to observe the water buffalo at Freshwater Marsh Nature Preserve. Council agreed that Ms. Butler would schedule a date for a visit.

VII. New Business

No new business for discussion.

VIII. Public Comment and Synopsis Reports From Other Councils, Stakeholders, and Partner

Mr. White emailed his report of the May 2, 2013 Parks & Recreation Council meeting. Following issues were discussed:

- 1000 hunters participated in hunting on State Parks last year ~ 400 deer were taken.
- A Zip Line Ride will be installed at Lums Pond. Chris Bennett and Rob Line are working to minimize disturbance to woodlands.
- Brandywine Creek St. Park conducted a prescribed burn of grassland.
- Gordon's Pond Trail at Cape Henlopen State Park - staff has completed 50 percent of the design plans.
- Recommended from Open Space Council to Secretary O'Mara to move forward with acquisitions:
 - Jestice – 98 acres along the James Branch – Parks & Recreation
 - Gore (donation) – 3 acres along the White Clay Creek - Parks & Recreation
 - Webb – 2 acres Deep Creek east of Seaford – Fish & Wildlife
 - DTCC Education Foundation – 665 acres adjacent to the Midlands Wildlife area east of Laurel – Fish & Wildlife

IX. Next Meeting

The next Natural Areas Advisory Council meetings will be held on September 17, 2013 at DNREC's Environmental Laboratory, Richards & Robbins Building, 89 Kings Highway, Dover, DE, starting 9:00 a.m.

X. Adjournment

Ms. Heaton asked for a motion to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m.