**Meeting Minutes**

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

**July 22, 2014, 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 – not represented

Delaware Equine Council – Mary Everhart

Delaware State Sportsmen’s Association – Donald Palmer

Delmarva Ornithological Society – not represented

Friends of White Clay Creek State Park – Art Sullivan

Mason-Dixon Trail System – Mike Ott

Trail Dawgs – Pete McLaughlin

Trail Spinners – Jim Ireland

UAW CAP Council – Delaware – Donald Sharpe

White Clay Flyfishers – Douglas Janiec

White Clay Watershed Association – Linda Stapleford

Wilmington Trail Club – Gary Kirk

Ray Bivens – Director, Division of Parks and Recreation

Sue Staats – Superintendent, WCCSP

Chrissy Palmer – Delaware State Parks

**Members of the Public:**

Paul Baumbach, General Assembly

Glenn C. Everhart

Cindy Kranz-Greene, Kranz Farm

Melanie Jago Hiner, Omnias Humanitas/Kranz Farm

Peter Saenger

Glyn Thomas, Friends of White Clay Creek State Park

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I. The meeting was called to order at 7:08 pm by Chair Linda Stapleford. Council Representatives, Division Representatives, and Members of the Public introduced themselves.

II. Minutes of the April 22, 2014 meeting prepared by the Secretary were approved unanimously.

* Mr. Saenger indicated that he had not been able to find the minutes of the April 22 meeting on the DNREC web site. Mr. Urquhart indicated that he had requested that the minutes be posted when he issued them in final form. [Subsequently, Ms. Staats reported that the minutes of the January and April meetings had inadvertently not been posted and that this was corrected on July 29, 2014.] The secretary was requested to include a link to the DNREC Public Meetings web page in the minutes of this meeting to facilitate future access to minutes and agendas. [That link is <http://egov.delaware.gov/pmc/#agency114>. Items listed can be filtered for “parks and recreation.”]

III. OLD BUSINESS

* Rerouting of the Preserve Loop Trail just north of the Nature Center has been delayed because a rare plant was found along the proposed re-route. Rob Line’s final review is needed for the new route. When it is approved, the Trail Crew has set aside time for implementation, but there is no schedule for the work.

The trail has been marked “Closed” at both ends of an area where the creek has partly undermined it. However, Mr. Ott pointed out that trail users have created a social trail around the closed area so that the trail is continuing to be used. In response to a suggestion that the trail signage be changed temporarily to allow use of the social trail, Ms. Staats stated that the trail needs to remain officially closed, but people are not being discouraged from using the unofficial re-route. The request was still made to open this very popular trail, using the social trail reroute that is safe and changing the closed signs to direct trail users to bypass the unsafe portion using the social trail.

* Division representatives did not have an update on the plan for improving a wet/muddy area of the Creek Road Trail where it crosses a field north of the Nature Center and just south of Chambers Rock Road. Some Council representatives emphasized that this work should be given priority as this area can be very unpleasant to cross. Mr. Bivens indicated that he would resolve this question and would communicate back to the Council in 6 weeks.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

* Meeting and discussion with Ray Bivens, new Director, Division of Parks and Recreation

Mr. Bivens introduced himself as the new Division Director effective November 2013. He indicated his background is as a Naturalist, spending several years in the Maryland State Park system. Prior to his current position, he spent 11 years in Delaware as Chief of Interpretation. Mr. Bivens’ discussion and items raised by Council representatives covered many points:

* + Division has a $100M capital projects backlog and few dollars to address it. This year they received $2.5M. They have a scoring system for projects for use in prioritizing the work.
  + Legislation this year gave Parks the authority to do design/build projects. The design and construction phases can be done as one project through a vendor.
  + SB75 concerned Land & Water Trust Fund grants that involve a 1:1 funding match. This program will be managed by the cash management board; funds not being used can be invested in equities.
  + Fees generate 65% of funds for parks. The percentages received from the General Fund have been slipping.
  + Priorities at White Clay include maintaining the trail system and also accommodating the day camps that are bursting at the seams. However, the Robinson House needs $200K to upgrade for day camp use, including handicap access.
  + The Division needs more dollars to take care of historic structures both at White Clay and elsewhere. Mr. Bivens would like to see a separate budget line item for maintenance of historic structures. Parks has more structures on the National Register than any other entity in the state.
  + Mr. Foster and Mr. Sharpe discussed their desire to see Creek Road repaired and reopened to one-way car traffic 5 afternoons per week from the lower footbridge to Wedgewood Road. This portion of the road has been closed for several years because erosion by the creek has undermined the pavement. They stated that the road needs to be repaired or it will eventually fall into the creek and not be usable even as a trail. They stated (a) that the park belongs to everyone, (b) they want what is right for the general public, and (c) they believe that closure of the road is unfair to people who want to drive it to enjoy the creek and the valley. Park users who prefer not to encounter cars in the park can use the Pomeroy Trail that parallels Creek Road on the opposite side of the creek. Mr. Sharpe indicated that they intend to bring legislators in to view the situation.

Mr. Sharpe stated that several years ago DelDOT offered to fix the road but Parks declined because they preferred to use it as a trail. More recently, in 2013, DelDOT reported the results of a study of the feasibility and cost to repair the road. It was estimated that repairs would cost $2.2M [note – an incorrect figure of $3.5M was suggested during the meeting].

Mr. Sharpe and Mr. Foster stated that they also want the unpaved portion of Creek Road from Wedgewood Road to Hopkins Road opened 5 days per week, rather than the current 1 day per week.

* Mr. Bivens expressed appreciation for all the Friends groups and other volunteer efforts that support the parks. He stated that in total these efforts were equivalent to 52 full time employees statewide.
* In response to a question from Mr. Urquhart, Mr. Bivens stated that $2M was allocated by the Legislature for open space acquisition this year. This covers several agencies, not just Parks. The Division is continuing efforts to identify suitable lands to be added to state parks and to maintain contacts with the owners.

Mr. Janiec noted that the White Clay Wild and Scenic Program has been very successful in acquiring or protecting lands on the Pennsylvania side of the watershed. He suggested there might be scope for some cooperation between the two land preservation efforts.

* In response to a question from Mrs. Kranz-Greene, Mr. Bivens stated that the Division does have a curatorship program, in which people are allowed to live in historic structures in return for improving/maintaining them. Many structures are also occupied by Division employees. It was estimated that there are approximately 6 barns in the park. The Niven barn, in particular, has deteriorated and may be beyond repair. The Kranz House is currently being used for housing for interns, and may be considered as a future location for the Park Office. Community Supported Agriculture is the main current use of the Kranz Farm. Community gardens are also under consideration.
* A question was asked about what process is used to obtain public input to decisions on the use of structures in Parks. Mr. Bivens indicated that the Master Plan for WCCSP is used a source of concepts for the use of structures. He noted that although the Master Plan was never finalized, there was public input to the initial planning process many years ago. In the particular case of the Park Office, if the Division decides to move the office Mr. Bivens indicated that the Division would work through the Advisory Council to obtain public input to the decision.
* Mrs. Kranz-Greene asked if locating the Park Office at the Kranz House would preclude the agricultural programs at the farm, noting that there was an agreement with the family to continue such programs at the time the property was acquired. She stated that to date the state had done a very good job of sustaining these programs.
* An alternative use of the house was suggested as a place to house hikers and bikers and/or to sell food to park users. This could be a way to raise funds. Community gardens at the Kranz Farm were also suggested. It was noted that there was a Legislative Resolution supporting community gardens.
* Mr. Janiec suggested using the pump house by the creek as a stopping point for trail users with a concession for food. He also suggested improving the holding pond for better aesthetics and flood control.
* In response to a question about the connector trail from Paper Mill Park, Mr. Bivens stated that design work is nearly complete on this project. A funding request will be needed for its implementation. He stated that the Division is programming funds for trails projects 3 years out, and he was not sure of the priority assigned for this trail connector.
* Inadequate parking for trout fishermen
* It was noted that a major parking problem occurs mostly during April (first month of trout season) and not at other times. The problem is especially severe along Hopkins and Chambers Rock Roads. The Nature Center parking lot is a bit too distant for many fishermen wanting to fish near Hopkins Bridge. Some accommodation is needed during April. It was suggested that an improvement could be made by opening at least one of the shoulders on Hopkins Road during April. Also, the parking lot at Chambers Rock Road might be expanded for use during April. Major or disruptive changes to the park should be avoided since the problem is for one month only.
* Other discussion
* The first dam (near Delaware Park) will be removed (partially) this fall. All the necessary permits and funding have been received. The next two dams upstream are being evaluated. A grant is being sought for the $2.3M needed. A historical study has been done of all the dams. The project is moving forward, but slowly; the money isn’t there right now.
* The dam for the City of Newark water intake has been assessed. No action is planned. No alternatives were found that were better than what is there now. Underneath this dam there is a dam from 1791. The area of this dam can be accessed from the parking lot at the former Curtis Mill.
* An underpass under Paper Mill Road is being planned to carry trail users from White Clay Creek State Park to the Middle Run Natural Area. The underpass would carry water on one side and people on the other. Funding is not yet allocated for this project.
* A question was raised about whether fees could be required to park along roads in the park. This may not be possible if the road is a public right-of-way.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

* Mrs. Kranz-Greene suggested that a representative be added to the Council for the agricultural interests in the park. This would include programs at the Kranz Farm (such as community gardens, community supported agriculture, and youth programs) as well as farming done on leased parklands. Mr. Urquhart agreed to determine what action would be needed to add another organization to the Council membership and suggest a resolution for consideration by Council at the next meeting. Mr. Baumbach offered to help with any needed legislative actions.

VI. ITEMS FOR POSSIBLE FUTURE CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL

* Follow-up on open items from the discussion with Mr. Bivens, above.
* Consideration of the addition of a representative for the agricultural interests in the park.
* Schedule of meetings for 2015. Continue with the 4th Tuesday of the first month of each quarter of the year?

VII. NEXT MEETING – scheduled for October 28, 2014 at the Chambers House Nature Center.

VII. ADJOURNMENT – the meeting was adjourned at 8:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Urquhart

Council Secretary