**Meeting Minutes**

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

**February 24, 2015, Judge Morris House**

**(Rescheduled from January 27, 2015)**

**Persons Present:**

**Council and Division Representatives:**

AFL/CIO – Delaware – Bill Foster

Coalition for Natural Stream Valleys – Andy Urquhart

Delaware Audubon Society – David Carter

Delaware Equine Council – not represented

Delaware State Sportsmen’s Association – not represented

Delmarva Ornithological Society – Michael Moore

Friends of White Clay Creek State Park – Debra Chiczewski Price

Mason-Dixon Trail System – Mike Ott

Trail Dawgs – Pete McLaughlin

Trail Spinners – James Ireland

UAW CAP Council – Delaware – Donald Sharpe

White Clay Flyfishers – not represented

White Clay Watershed Association – Linda Stapleford

Wilmington Trail Club – Gary Kirk

David Bartoo, Division of Parks and Recreation

Susan Moerschel, Division of Parks and Recreation

Sue Staats – Superintendent, WCCSP

**Members of the Public:**

Paul Baumbach, State Representative

Arabella Bianco

Chris Chapman

Sean Dwyer, aide to Rep. Baumbach

Cindy Kranz-Greene, Kranz Farm

Ed Osienski, State Representative

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. Minutes of the October 28, 2014 meeting prepared by the Secretary were approved unanimously, subject to a spelling correction for Schaen Cider Mill (not Shain).

III. OLD BUSINESS

* The legislative resolution establishing the Council requires that the Chair of the Council be elected at the first meeting of each year. Accordingly, Council unanimously re-elected the existing officers for the coming year: Chair – Linda Stapleford, Vice Chair – Ed O’Donnell, and Secretary – Andy Urquhart.
* Follow-up on open items from the October 28, 2014 meeting:
* State Representative Baumbach reported that legislation is being prepared to include Omnia Humanitas as a Council Member representing agricultural interests in the park.
* Status and plans for the connector trail from Paper Mill Park and the Tri-State Marker Trail are discussed below under Division plans for trail work during 2015.
* The proposed reconstruction of the Schaen Cider Mill was discussed. Ms. Staats reported that because the location is on the flood plain and there is no space for parking, this project is a low priority for the Division. Also, cost estimates have been very high. Mr. Foster and Mr. Sharpe indicated that they are looking for donated materials and volunteers to build the structure at no cost. They recognize that under County code, cider making would be just a demonstration, and the resulting cider could not be consumed or sold. Since there would be no parking, the facility would be for hikers and bikers to visit. Messrs. Foster and Sharpe will come back to Council when they determine what can be put together. Ms. Staats indicated that an interpretive panel for the cider mill exists in draft form.
* Concerning the City of Newark trail from Fairfield Crest into the park, Mr. Baumbach indicated that the City has budgeted $30,500 for improvements, including fixing some drainage issues, but not paving. Some DTF funds may also be available.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

* Concerning the proposed sale of land adjacent to the park owned by the Chruch of the Nazarene on Paper Mill Road, it was reported that no information has been made available following an executive session of the Newark City Council to consider this question.
* Two new or improved trails proposed by the Trail Spinners in the Judge Morris area were considered. Detailed trail planning and construction would be done in cooperation with the Division. These trails would be built by the Trail Spinners and other volunteers. The proposed new trails were depicted on conceptual trail maps forwarded to Council with the agenda.
* A loop around the yard waste site with connections to nearby neighborhoods. This would also involve moving the crossing of Polly Drummond Hill Road up to the Old Coach Road intersection. The trail would have a natural surface and would be located in hedgerows and along field edges. Chris Chapman, a resident of Woodrose, which would be a beneficiary of a community connection, spoke in strong support of the concept, both in terms of improved safety and park access. Others speaking in support included Messrs. McLaughlin, Ott, and Foster.
* A new loop on the east side of Polly Drummond Hill Road that would create better connections to Shue Middle School and businesses and neighborhoods along Kirkwood Highway. The trail would connect to an existing pedestrian crossing with a signal on Kirkwood Highway that leads to the school. State Representative Osienski, who represents neighborhoods in the area, expressed his support for the concept.

Council unanimously supported these two new trail concepts.

* Mrs. Moerschel indicated that Mr. Bivens, State Parks Director, would like to see work begin on an update to the Trail Plan during the fall of 2016, after the existing Plan will have been in place approximately 4 ½ years. This process would involve public input as in the past.
* Improved parking arrangements for trout fishermen were discussed. This is primarily a problem during the first two weeks of April. Parking is not allowed on the bridge or its approaches on Hopkins Road. Ms. Staats indicated that the Park plans the following actions to help the situation:
* Creek Road will again be open one-way north from Wedgewood Road daily during the month of April, as in past years. Parking is allowed along the road.
* The parking lots at Wedgewood Road and the Nature Center will open at 6:00 am for two weeks beginning April 4th.
* The parking lot at Chambers Rock Road will be open 24 hours during the month of April beginning April 4th. [Note – this was changed as of April 11th due to a nighttime enforcement incident not related to fishing activity. The gate is again being locked at night.]

Still there is often not enough parking along Hopkins and Chambers Rock Roads, especially during the first two weeks of April. Fishermen often park on the shoulders of these roads, in part to avoid the state park fees. This can cause congestion and safety problems with normal traffic passing by on the roads. One suggestion was to install temporary traffic signals to allow traffic to pass in only one direction at a time. Another suggestion was to seek advice from WILMAPCO on traffic control in this area, which Ms. Staats indicated she would plan to do. [Note – WILMAPCO was consulted, but they indicated this is not an issue that they would advise on.]

The question was raised whether park fees could be enforced along Hopkins and Chambers Rock Roads to eliminate part of the incentive for fishermen to park there. Ms. Staats indicated that this cannot be done because it is a DelDOT road. Because of the narrow rights-of-way (~15’) along these roads and the requirement that vehicles be parked at least 2’ from the pavement, cars parking on the shoulder are on Park land. If desired, the Division could install devices to block access to Park land in this area. It was noted that the number of fishermen is declining. Mr. Carter indicated that Audubon would like to reverse this trend. Negative experiences should be avoided; more people enjoying these activities means more support for open space preservation.

There was also a brief discussion of cars being broken into in parking lots, particularly in reference to the lot on Chambers Rock Road. Ms. Staats indicated that enforcement is difficult. Cameras are not always effective. Actual observation of the crime is often necessary for prosecution.

* Council next considered the possible extension of trail access hours until after sunset. It was reported that the Division is currently considering a pilot project in Brandywine Creek State Park and is working with the Trail Spinners on insurance coverage for this. In this trial project the parking lots would close at dusk, but trail access would be available up to 8:30 pm during December – April to see how it works. A specific goal is to provide opportunities for exercise and recreation after work hours, which is currently unavailable in the winter months. However, Mr. Ireland pointed out the WCCSP would be a better venue for such a trial because of the different situations at BCSP and WCCSP.

Primitive camping was cited as a precedent for after-hours park use. It was also noted that requests for evening trail and area use have been received from hikers, the Silent Knights model flying club, and also for sledding at night. Paul Nicholson is looking to see what other states are doing about this. There are concerns about impacts on park residences. A question was raised about possibly requiring special permits for after-hours access to the park.

Unlimited access (24 hours a day) is not being considered. The intention is to create a situation that would not require additional resources or staffing.

It was pointed out that nighttime trail activities are occurring now in Middle Run, and there have been no problems so far. It was noted that trails are more frozen at night during the winter, which reduces the impact of trail use.

The following resolution was moved and seconded: the Council supports the concept of a trial of after-hours trail use in WCCSP, to be done cooperatively with, and under the direction of, the Division of Parks and Recreation. In discussion of the motion, Mr. Sharpe pointed out that after-hours trail use could potentially conflict with possible raccoon hunting in the park, something that is desired by hunters and might be proposed in the future. After calling the motion, the proposed resolution was approved unanimously by the Council.

* Mr. Bartoo presented the Division’s plans for trail work in the park during 2015. An electronic copy of his presentation materials was forwarded separately to Council Representatives. He discussed 7 work areas, as summarized below. He also indicated that the covered bridge along one of the trails, described in his presentation last year, will not be built.
* The Tri-Valley Trail does not go through the golf course any longer. He described an approximately 2.5 mile segment that would connect Paper Mill Park to Milford Crossroads. This could be used as a commuter route, connecting to Newark via Redd Park trails. At this point, the Division is considering two possible routes from Paper Mill Park to Smith Bridge Road. One route will be selected. The plan is to complete design work this year and construction next year. Funding will require ~$2.4M taken from 2015 funds. The surface is planned to be all weather/asphalt. Various concepts are under consideration to keep the trail more rustic.

Later in the meeting the question of public input to route and design selection for the Tri-Valley Trail was considered. Mr. Bartoo indicated that this might be done at 30% completion of the plan, although he noted that changes at that point would be difficult. It was agreed that volunteers from the Council would be sought to form a temporary working group to walk the area with the Division and input to the planning process. As time was getting short, Ms. Stapleford announced she would email the Council asking for volunteers for this working group and let them select a spokesperson to report back to the council.

* Mr. Bartoo mentioned a proposed Newark-to-Wilmington trail for which various routes are being discussed. Portions of the Tri-Valley Trail might become part of the North Route.
* Work on the Whitely Farms Trail is about 30% done and is going slowly. Work is continuing but completion is not expected this year.
* On the Bryan’s Field Trail, some reroutes have been planned. Work has not started yet and will be sequenced with work on the Tri-Valley Trail. This might be started in the fall (manpower availability is limiting progress).
* The Creek Road upgrade is complete. In this project, the road was improved from the gate north of the Nature Center, including fixing a chronically wet/muddy area near Chambers Rock Road. Work was done in ~3 weeks. The Preserve Loop Trail relocation just north of the Nature Center is complete, except that signs and marker posts are still needed.
* On the Charles Bailey Trail, a new fiberglass bridge is being considered. This trail may be designed to accommodate pedestrians, bikers, and equestrians. To reduce the width, the trail may have passing zones.
* On the Tri-State Marker trail, there are two segments in Delaware. These are being worked on by the State Parks Trail Crew and an Americorps Team. The goal is to complete these two segments this year. It was noted that the tri-state marker stone was placed 250 years ago, and there will be an event on June 6, National Trails Day, to mark the occasion.
* Other discussion
* Mr. Carter briefly described a Delaware Audubon lawsuit to require the State to establish criteria for selecting properties for acquisition as open space. [He subsequently provided a copy of the case and Audubon’s comments on the Open Space Council to the Joint Sunset Committee. This material has been forwarded separately to Council Representatives.]
* Mr. Carter also informed Council that New Castle County is doing a long range plan for open space and parkland this year, updating the last one done in 2010. This will include a Master Plan for the Middle Run Valley.
* Mr. Carter urged relationship-building with the City of Newark and New Castle County. Their early involvement in projects should be encouraged.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

* Mr. Saenger also requested that members of the public who attend Council frequently should receive email notification when a meeting is postponed. Ms. Stapleford replied that the public can find this information on the meeting page of the DNREC website. DNREC staff anticipated their offices being closed the day of the meeting. Therefore they urged the cancellation decision be made the day prior to the meeting so the cancellation notice could be posted for the public as were other DNREC related meetings for that date.
* Mr. Saenger also requested that the agenda for the next Council meeting reopen the question of new trails or major trail improvements in the Lower Carpenter Area. Mr. Ireland noted that Council Representation had changed somewhat since that resolution was passed, and it might be worth reconsidering. However, Mr. Ott noted that the Division has stated that they have no plans for trail work in that area of the park in the near future; he suggested that the Council defer reconsideration until then. This approach was accepted by the Council.

VI. ITEMS FOR POSSIBLE FUTURE CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL – None were suggested.

VII. NEXT MEETINGS – Scheduled for July 28 and October 27, both at the Chambers House Nature Center.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT – the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Urquhart

Council Secretary