

Meeting Minutes

CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR WHITE CLAY CREEK STATE PARK JULY 25, 2017, CHAMBERS HOUSE NATURE CENTER

Persons Present:

Council Representatives:

AFL/CIO – Delaware – Bill Foster
Coalition for Natural Stream Valleys – not represented
Delaware Audubon Society – not represented
Delaware Equine Council – Mary Everhart
Delaware State Sportsmen’s Association – not represented
Delmarva Ornithological Society – Andy Urquhart
Friends of White Clay Creek State Park – Debra Chiczewski Price
Mason-Dixon Trail System – Mike Ott
Omnia Humanitas – Cindy Kranz Greene
Silent Knights Soaring Society – Terry Lisansky
Trail Dawgs – Pete McLaughlin
Trail Spinners – James Ireland
UAW CAP Council – Delaware – Desmond Kahn
White Clay Flyfishers – Joe Allison
White Clay Watershed Association – not represented
Wilmington Trail Club – Gary Kirk

Division Representatives

Vinny Porcellini – Superintendent, WCCSP
Matt Ritter – Delaware State Parks
Kendall Sommers – Delaware State Parks

Members of the Public:

None signed in.

- I. Call to order. The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chair Bill Foster. Council Representatives, Division Representatives, and Members of the Public introduced themselves.
- II. Review of minutes. Minutes of the August 25, 2017 meeting were reviewed with no comments or corrections. Motion to accept by Terry Lisansky, second by Desmond Kahn, accepted unanimously.
- III. Old Business
 - A. Update on general park activities and questions from Council Representatives (Vinny Porcellini). No specific issues so went directly to items below.
 - B. Update on in-progress and planned construction projects.
 1. Tri-Valley Trail paving and parking area (Division).

Vinny Porcellini reported that the Tri-Valley Trail was open as of July 1. Asphalt was installed from the new parking lot to the intersection with Nine-foot Road. Work still to be done is the remaining parking lot topcoat and the delivery of a pre-fabricated bathroom unit. The bathroom is anticipated to arrive in September; the topcoat will be done afterward. A new guard rail added will be added as well as a new information board. New stop signs are now installed Nine-foot Road crossing for pedestrians. Signs are also in place for farmer access; Gary Kirk noted that these may not be well placed. Porcellini said they may need to add more signs as well as markers on the edge of the new concrete culvert. Gary Kirk added that there is a problem with seeing the traffic light at the pedestrian crosswalk at the end of the trail by Bank of America.

Pete McLaughlin commented that the new paved section of former single-track trail to the pond seems out of place. Porcellini said they hope that it will allow handicapped access, possibly to bring back a handicapped fishing program. McLaughlin added that it might be worth considering another route because of possible hazards of slow walkers there at the same time as fast cyclists. Jim Ireland noted the speed differentials where high-speed road-biker traffic up to 30 mph coming down hill on Nine-foot Road where it intersects with gravel where slower mountain bikes could be encountered. He thinks a reroute on other side of pond might be good way to resolve the bike-pedestrian speed differential issue on that trail section; he noted that the 90° turn on the new pavement has sand washover there after rain storms.

Ireland added that likes the gravel alignment but had an issue with the net loss in unpaved trail. He also expressed the opinion is that the asphalt should be 12 to 14 feet wide because of likely erosion on the new 2-foot trail margins on. He noted sod may be needed to heal the erosion. He said he hopes that the next phase of work does not result in another 8-month closure of the large park area.

2. Group campground (Division). Vinny Porcellini reported on group campground plans. Parks is still mulling whether the best option is to put the campground at the end of Nine-foot Road on the left. No movement on that issue otherwise.

3. Bridge on road to Nature Center (Division).

Update was given by Vinny Porcellini. Installation of the replacement bridge is slotted for the late fall followed by re-gravelling of the road. Hopefully will have it done by December 1. Target is to begin the work after the end of the environmental education program. Gary Kirk asked about what might be done to prevent continuing pothole development; he noted that Arc Corner Road in Pennsylvania was given a pitch surface. Porcellini replied that DeIDOT tried to fill the holes with pitch and tar in the past but without any luck, ended up just doing gravel for the surfacing instead. Access to the Nature Center will be closed during work to replace the bridge. Because the PennDel trail near Chambers Rock Road may be an alternate access route, they may deal with washouts in that area at that time.

Desmond Kahn asked how to keep the bridge from washing out. Porcellini replied that they will have steel framing with the timber decks deck and use the existing abutments. The new bridge will be longer than the current bridge but not higher or wider. Kahn also asked about Creek Road north of the gate coming from Newark. He noted that noted the drainage ditch is full so the water flows over the road eroding it, resulting in ice on that part of the road in the winter. He suggested parks plans clean it out as well as the culvert it drains into.

Vinny Porcellini added a note that the park will repair apron to the Chambers Rock parking lot, probably in the first week of August. Gary Kirk asked if they could make the lot bigger; Porcellini replied that it could possibly be a little bit bigger.

4. Discussion on issues related to restoration of dam at Big Pond (Division).

Bill Foster asked for update on Big Pond and Matt Ritter gave a reply for State Parks.

Ritter noted that there are three options for Big Pond and passed around a summary document. Option one is to fix it but not do any restoration. This would be temporary, and would cost about \$1 million. Option two is to essentially do a full restoration, removing sediment and rebuilding the dam, with an estimated cost of around \$2 million. Option three is to do nothing and let nature take its course, which would create a natural meadow, at zero cost.

Ritter noted that there is no human safety concern related to the dam so it is not monitored by the state dam safety group. Cost would be a major issue with any possible work. The impact on wildlife has potential pluses and minuses. If a dam is rebuilt, it would require regular work to maintain it. It would also create the need to build a temporary road in the meadows for the vehicular access to the work site. Ritter said that a project of this size and expense is low on the list of what could be funded relative to other issues in state parks around the state.

Desmond Kahn recalled that a State Parks representative claimed that an Army Corps of Engineers permits would be needed to restore this dam and pond; Ritter said that the document he shared has information about that issue. Jim Ireland asked whether the state will do invasive species work on the yellow flowered plant by the culvert. Kahn commented that the pond should not require a lot of maintenance because it has lasted 80 years with little maintenance. Kahn also expressed worries that the William du Pont family might be unhappy about the pond not being restored and as a result be unwilling to sell the nearby land they own to the park in the future. Jim Ireland commented that the pond environment has basically been displaced over to Paper Mill Park and noted that washed out dam materials are now in the stream in that low area. Ireland suggested that perhaps community funding could pay for this kind of restoration because government funding is not available.

C. Trail plan and development update (Division). Matt Ritter reported that the trail master plan revision was almost complete. However, work on it is now being rolled into the effort to create an overall master plan for the park, which he said this group requested.

1. Division response to Council recommendation of January 22, 2013 re trail plans for Lower Carpenter Area (requested in previous meeting) by Matt Ritter.

Ritter said that there are erosion challenges on the current trails in the lower Carpenter area, especially in the area near the Wedgewood Road parking area. He said that State Parks division does not have plans to do any work in this area in the near future. He said that they will consider science (related to conservation concerns in lower Carpenter) in their trail planning. Ritter invited the council members to attend the master plan planning session to give input on this trail issue as well as other important park issues. He gave a letter to chair Bill Foster in response to our request for a formal reply to the Council's request for information on this subject. Kendall Sommers added that State Parks does biological surveys on a year-to-year basis and monitor changes, so will have data to take into account in trail planning.

2. Other trail program and plan updates (Division). Matt Ritter added the Division will probably start work on the park master plan by taking the old plan and reviewing it and revising it. Kendall Sommers said it is been five years since the previous plan and they try to revisit plans every five years. Mike Ott asked about bridges on the Charles Bailey and Twin Valley trails. Matt Ritter said the work is to start in August. They will be replacing the bridge 41 near Creek Road and Hopkins Road intersection. The work is supported by a donation by Wendel Cassel's family.

D. Resolution of Ag Lease Amendment Issue to address pesticide spraying (Cindy Kranz-Greene, requested in previous meeting). Cindy Greene reported that she was pleased with progress on this issue and thanked Matt Ritter for his attention to the pesticide issue. Matt Ritter said that Vinny Porcellini should be thanked.

The park management and Division talked with the farmer and the three items of concern regarding Kranz Hill Farm have been addressed: 1) no pesticide spraying; 2) timing of mowing; and 3) height of mower deck. The farmer has agreed to modify their approach to resolve these issues and signed a document in agreement. The Division acknowledged the farmer's cooperative attitude. Matt Ritter clarified for Cindy Greene that this signed agreement goes into the ag lease for the area around the farm. The contract required a list of pesticides upon request and the disclosure of pesticides will be automatic in future leases. Greene offered to help with evaluation of pesticides noting that she has a background in pesticides with EPA. Ritter said he would look into modifying all State Park ag leases to address the three issues being incorporated into the Kranz Hill Farm ag lease.

Desmond Kahn suggested prohibiting pesticide spraying on state parkland. Ritter noted the majority of agricultural fields are not near residential areas and houses so it may not be an issue. Greene noted that corn may require spraying though hay does not. She suggested language be considered for agricultural lease that prohibit spraying for mushroom hay.

Bill Foster noted that he suggested contacting the University of Delaware horticulture department about help in planting natural foods such as berries, apples, and cherries. Ritter said this is the first that his staff have heard of this idea. Cindy Greene noted that softer borders to the fields were discussed with ex-DNREC biologist/planner Rob Line. Desmond Kahn opined that the park should be natural area not agricultural and that natural foods for wildlife occur in the wild and do not need to be planted. Greene noted the benefit to wildlife of plants like milkweed and added that growing organic vegetables helps with erosion and health of pollinators.

Matt Ritter said that State Parks could pull land out of agricultural leases and do a “request for proposals” for orchards. However, he says that The Division would not anticipate much interest in leasing land for orchards because of the investment that would be required. Kendall Sommers noted that this idea is a good issue to discuss in developing the park master plan. Ritter noted that state parks are mostly self-supported, with 65% of park funds self-generated from sources including leases and admission and only 35% from state appropriations. So, agricultural lease income is important. Ritter also noted they work with Sue Barton of UD on invasive species. Pete McLaughlin commented that they could work with UD faculty possibly making projects for senior theses and master’s degree students.

There was a discussion of the Robinson Education Complex (an improved Nature Center). There is no funding for the improvements at this time. A small DNREC committee meets monthly to discuss the site. A representative from the Friends of WCCSP is on the committee.

IV. New Business

A. Bill Foster asked about the plans for removal of the second dam on the White Clay Creek. Pete McLaughlin said he would ask Jerry Kauffman of the University of Delaware, who is heavy involved in this effort, for an update.

B. Gary Kirk mentioned that legislators such as Paul Bambach do not know about our meetings, including today's meeting. Pete McLaughlin reported that he and Andy Urquhart discussed this issue that day and that McLaughlin will ensure they know for the next meetings. Cindy Greene invited everybody to their fall farm festival on Saturday, September 30.

V. Other new business items were requested. None were made.

VI. Public commented. Public commented were requested. None were made.

VII. Items for future consideration by the Council. Items for future consideration were requested. None were noted.

VIII. Adjournment - Gary Kirk moved to adjourn, Mike Ott seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Peter P. McLaughlin, Jr.
Council Secretary