

Parks & Recreation Council

**LOCATION:
Delaware Fire School
1463 Chestnut Grove Road
Dover, De 19904**

**Thursday, May 2, 2019
9:30 a.m.**

Council Members

Ron Mears, Chairperson	Ron Breeding, Vice Chairperson	Ed Lewandowski
Clyde Shipman	Bobbi Steele	
Jim White	Jan Durham	

Staff

Ray Bivens, Director	Esther Knotts	Matt Ritter	Wayne Kline
Greg Abbott	Bob Ehemann	Chris Bennett	Trevor Ditmore
John Lister	Tyler Beutler		

I. Introductions/Announcements

- A. Chairman Ron Mears called the Council meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.
- B. Ron Mears read a “favorable” article written by a “downstate reporter” regarding the January Parks and Recreation Council meeting. Ron sent the reporter an email thanking him for his interest and report.
- C. Ron Mears enjoyed Parks School. He said the programs were worthwhile and the guest speaker (John Kennedy) did a good job.
- D. Long-time Parks and Recreation Council member Bill Craven passed away. Ron stated, “Bill was very conscientious and historically oriented.”
- E. Ron Mears thanked former Park’s Environmental Program Administrator Matt Chesser for his years of service with the Division. He stated that, “Matt left his footprint on State Parks and he carried the cross on Yorklyn.”

II. Official Business/Council Activities

- A. Approval of Meeting Minutes
Ron Mears asked for Council approval of the January meeting minutes. Ron Breeding made a motion to approve the minutes. Clyde Shipman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
- B. Council Member Reports:
 1. Fort Delaware Society – *Bobbi Steele reported.*
The Society replaced a couple of cannon wheels recently and they are taking artifacts to the island for the season.

The Society wants to provide speakers and be helpful in any way they can.

Only one POW weekend was scheduled this year as we are competing with Gettysburg.

2. Natural Areas Advisory Council – *Bob Ehemann reported.*

Interviews for the vacant Natural Heritage Program Manager position are scheduled to take place on May 9th and 10th. Ray stated that there were several very qualified applicants.

3. Wildlife Management Committee – *Clyde Shipman reported.*

The Environmental Stewardship Program (ESP) has two crews; one assigned to the southern region and one assigned to the northern region. Both crews with lots of support from park staff began removal of invasive Japanese Black Pine and White Poplar from the Towers Road area of Delaware Seashore State Park. In addition to removing non-native invaders of our coastal dunes, crews also opened up the view of the tower lit by the Delaware Seashore Preservation Society.

The southern crew began working on a vegetation management project to open up shooting lanes around the permanent deer stands at the Fresh Pond area of DSSP in early April.

In order to manage the number of Canada Geese in State Parks, ESP staff added approximately 180 eggs this year. At Fort Delaware State Park, lethal harassment took place.

The ESP is using Green Grazer goats to help remove invasive plant species near the Nature Center at White Clay Creek State Park. Cost for this initiative is approximately \$10K. Goats will be used to clear an area at Brandywine Creek State Park in the fall.

This year a total of 336 deer were harvested at 9 different State Parks including 150 at White Clay Creek, 67 at Cape Henlopen and 47 at Lums Pond. Archery hunting was expanded at Killens Pond State Park.

ESP intended to purchase two trailer-mounted, fully accessible hunting blinds. The cost of each blind is \$7K. Due to the cost, the Division will build the accessible blinds and will be able to fabricate 7 blinds for the same amount of money.

ESP has started this year's bird count at the heronry in Fort Delaware. Clyde stated that the counts are "down a little bit."

4. Resident Curatorship – *Matt Ritter reported.*

A lady contacted the Division regarding a curatorship at the Cleaver House. Her background is in ecotourism.

The Lums Mill House has structural damage. The Division is having a structural analysis to determine the extent of the damage and path forward.

Ron Mears noted that the maintenance of these historic buildings "costs us a lot of money." Matt stated, "Ideally we can invest some money in these properties to attract curators."

Clyde asked for an update on the Fenton Barn. Matt said it is damaged and needs to be demolished. Restoring the barn would have cost millions as it would have had to be torn down and rebuilt on the existing location. The State Insurance Office sent the Division a letter stating the barn is in urgent need of removal. The Division is working with SHPO (State Historic Preservation Office) and will try to keep as much of the foundation and silo as possible. As soon as the barn is removed, it will be safe for the house to be occupied again. Clyde asked if the demo company will be able to salvage some of the materials for State Parks use. Ray said we have asked for some portions to be salvaged. Matt stated it is not feasible to save some of the materials.

5. Executive Session

At 10:15 a.m., Jan made a motion that the Council go into executive session. Ed Lewandowski seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

At 10:42 a.m., Jan made a motion to end the executive session and Jim seconded the motion. The motion was unanimous.

6. Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Funds – *Bob Ehemann* reported.

The 2018 LWCF grants were awarded. Nineteen municipalities received grant funding for projects. The invitation letter for the 2019 grants will be sent this month.

Ron Mears asked for an update on the skate park in the City of Wilmington. Bob stated and MOA has been signed and they have 1 ½ years to spend the money. Ray shared that the Division “pulled their money” for the Speakman Park project because they did not complete the project in a timely manner.

The balance in the State Parks endowment fund is \$57M. The Division took a 3.5% draw this year.

III. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IV. Staff Reports

1. Policy/Legislation – *Ray Bivens* reported.

Ray thanked Clyde for speaking at the Bond Bill Hearing. Ron Mears asked why staff was not, “allowed in the JFC (Joint Finance Committee) Hearing room.” Ray shared that space is limited and reserved for senior staff.

Ray shared drawings of the State Fair Exhibit and talked about the changes which are being made to the DNREC Building. The exhibit will highlight public lands (forestry, ag lands, etc.) and will feature a huge map detailing land managed by State of Delaware agencies. Delaware State Parks is purchasing a custom built Airstream to use at events. This mobile exhibit space will allow the Division to easily attend vendor shows and is a great addition to the Parks marketing efforts.

The Division requested \$600K in funding from the Volkswagen emissions penalty funds. The Division will be receiving nine new electric and hybrid vehicles. This is the Division’s biggest

boost in fleet vehicles ever. In addition, this funding will help pay for the Wiggins Lift at the Indian River Marina.

Ray stated that lifeguard recruitment is one our biggest challenges. Wayne shared that the Division has negotiated and received approval for an incentive plan for recruiting lifeguards. Any Division staff member who refers a new lifeguard will receive \$100 if the lifeguard fills out an application, passes the swim test and works through the season.

Also new this year is a program which allows lifeguards to receive an increase in salary if they work longer into the summer. If a guard works up to 50 hours from August 19th - Labor Day, they receive an increase. If they work over 60 hours during that period, they could receive up to \$300.

Wayne introduced a new enforcement trainee (Tyler Beutler) and shared background information on Tyler and the Division's other new recruit, Connor Smith.

The legislation for Park Patrol Officers (PPO) authority, which would allow seasonal enforcement officers to issue tickets, is set to be introduced in the Senate Natural Resources Committee meeting next week. Ray feels positively about the outcome. If approved, the code will allow PPOs to write tickets. Only seasonal employees who have been with the Division 2-3 years will be given ticket writing authority.

Ron Mears asked if seasonal employees had been hired for the upcoming summer. Greg said that, "we are right in the thick of the hiring process."

- V. **Section Updates** – A handout was provided to the Council and highlights were discussed. The Division received the approval to purchase 18 more automated fee machines. Ron Mears asked if the machines would have "arms." Matt Ritter explained that they do not have arms. They look similar to an ATM machine. Greg Abbott explained that the machines are "pay and display" units that require the driver to purchase a ticket and display it on the dash of their vehicle. The new machines will be used to supplement the Division's current fee collection efforts after hours, during shoulder seasons, and to provide debit and credit card payment options for visitors. The two current pilot machines at Alapocas Run State Park and Holts Landing having worked well. If the Delaware Code is changed and Park Patrol Officers are able to issue tickets, they will patrol parking areas and issue tickets to visitors who do not pay for parking.

Wayne Kline received the Division's Employee of the Year Award. The Council congratulated Wayne on the "well-deserved" award.

Greg Abbott reported that the number of surf fishing permits sold is up by 5000 permits compared to this same period last year, with the majority of the increased sales in two year permits. The Division has a plan it will implement to manage the cap of 17,000 permits sold. When 15K permits have been sold (estimated to take place in mid-June), the Division will pull all permits from our retail sales agents, most state parks and stop internet sales. At that time, visitors will only be able to purchase permits at Bellevue State Park, the DNREC building located in the Richardson and Robbins Building in Dover, Cape Henlopen State Park and Delaware Seashore State Park. By implementing this plan, the Division will be able to monitor the sales (hourly if necessary) and discontinue sales when 17,000 surf fishing permit cap for sales is reached.

The Brandywine Zoo has three wallabies; two of them have joeys in their pouches. There is also a new goat exhibit at the Zoo. This summer the Zoo will exhibit four alligators.

Staff moved out of the Wilmington State Parks Office into three different locations in Wilmington including the Blue Ball Barn and the maintenance building formerly occupied by County staff. Salesianum is moving forward with design of the new Wilmington State Park Office complex. Once the Abessinio Stadium is completed, State Park enforcement will be involved in security and the Division staff will be responsible for grounds keeping and maintenance outside of the stadium.

VI. **Old Business**

- A. Wayne Kline introduced K-9 officers Vos and Leo and their handlers John Lister and Trevor Ditmore. These officers spent three months in a basic obedience academy and will assist with tracking and building searches. The officers are NPCA (National Police Canine Association) certified.

Trevor presented an overview of how the dogs were selected and stated seven dogs were selected and will be working in different enforcement agencies in the State of Delaware. Trevor stated that Leo is a 2 ½ year old German shepherd. Leo and Trevor started specialized explosives training three weeks ago and will finish the training at the end of June. Trevor and Leo have attended recruiting events with many attendees stopping by just to meet the dog. They also attended the Toys for Tots event at AI Dupont Children's Hospital where Leo had his picture taken with Santa Claus. Last weekend, they attended the Outdoor Expo.

John Lister shared that Vos is the Dutch word for fox. Vos is a Belgian Malinois. In mid-September, they will begin a three month narcotics training. It is anticipated that Vos and Leo will serve the Division for 7-9 years. Vos and John have attended several events this year including the Touch a Truck event and an event at Fort Miles.

VII. **New Business**

- A. Chris Bennett provided a hand out and updated the Council on the projects that the staff from the Environmental Stewardship Program (ESP) is working on.

Chris described the process for hunting in Delaware State Parks. A State Park hunting permit is \$10 per year.

Last year, 97 hunters hunted at Brandywine Creek State Park last year logging over 1200 hours. Twenty seven deer were harvested. This year ESP will institute a check in/check out procedure at White Clay Creek State also.

Ron Mears asked if hunting was allowed at Thompson Island last season. Chris affirmed and stated that hunting took place with limited access and hunters are required to provide their own stands in "pin" locations. This was the first year for public hunting and seven deer were harvested.

Ron Mears asked what is going on at Fox Point. Chris shared that the Park is not heavily visited and is part of the meadow management program. Certain areas in Fox Point and

Brandywine Creek are mowed according to an established plan. The Division tries to avoid mowing when birds are nesting.

Years ago, the Division used prescribed burns to assist with invasive species management. Chris would like to do that again. Staff must have special certification to use wildfire to manage invasive species.

Several research projects are taking place within Delaware State Parks. Researchers are required to request a permit to conduct research on park properties. There is no cost for the permit and the Division uses information gathered to help manage the resource. There is groundbreaking work being done in Delaware Seashore State Park; since 1998 Christopher Heckscher has been tracking the Veery nesting migration. His research determined that the birds are actually migrating to two different locations in winter.

Jim commended Chris Bennett and his staff on the work they are doing. He stated that it is incredibly challenging and extremely valuable to manage the stewardship program.

- B. Ray shared that the Division will be conducting a major repair project on the Rocky Run Trail in Brandywine Creek. The Rocky Run Trail is the second most popular trail in our system. There is an area of the trail that continues to washout. A large culvert was installed to alleviate the issue. Though it has helped it has not solved the issue. The Division plans to pave that section of the trail. There has been opposition from some park visitors to this plan. However, the Division feels “environmentally” this is the best way to correct the issue and will be moving forward

Jim asked when the bridge at Auburn Heights will be open. It is currently in fabrication and will be installed in time for Yorklyn Day, June 2nd. There is no completion date set for the Red Clay Bridge.

Ray shared that Ron Breeding will be meeting with the DNREC Secretary to discuss pursuing a splash park at Trap Pond State Park. The meeting is scheduled for May 14th.

Ron Mears asked if swimming will ever reopen again at Trap Pond State Park. Ray stated that society no longer looks at pond-swimming favorably. There are several factors that negatively affect the chances of swimming in our Parks including run off, water quality, algae bloom and the lack of lifeguard staffing.

Two parcels have been purchased and will become part of Auburn Valley State Park. They are located near the Oversee. Jim state this provides, “great protection for the valley.”

Jim shared his experience when recently staying in a cabin at Cape Henlopen State Park. Jim stated that the staff was great and he had a great time. He recommended that other Council members try it.

X. **Upcoming Events**

There will be a ribbon cutting event for the new playground and parking lot at Holts Landing. In addition, the Seahawk Trail and boardwalk will be built later this year. Representatives Dukes and Senator Hocker provided funding for the projects. Council will receive invitations to the event.

The Council requested that the next quarterly meeting (August 1, 2019) be held at the Fenwick Chamber of Commerce. Ron Mears suggested eating at the Big Chill restaurant and visiting Holts Landing after the meeting.

XI. Meeting Adjournment

The chairman called for a motion to adjourn. Ron Breeding made a motion to adjourn, Jan seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.