

NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COUNCIL
36 Years of Service to Improving Delaware's Quality of Life
"Preserving Delaware's Natural Areas Today for all Delawareans Tomorrow"

NATURAL AREAS ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES

September 5, 2019
Rose Cottage
102 South State Street
Dover, DE 19901
9:30 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Council Members:

Debbie Heaton, Chair
Dr. Christopher Heckscher
James White
Theodore Palmer
John Williams, Esq.
Edward Lewandowski, Secretary

Park Staff:

Bob Ehemann
Elena Stewart
Jennifer Holmes
Bill Miller
Tim Byan

Visitors:

I. Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions/Announcements

Debbie Heaton called the Natural Areas Advisory Council meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. She welcomed Jennifer Holmes as the new Natural Areas Program Manager; and Bob Ehemann gave a brief introduction of Jennifer to the Council.

Ms. Heaton made updates to the agenda. Mr. Williams announced that there is a conference regarding the Christina River on Tuesday, September 10 from 8 am – 4 pm.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The June minutes were unanimously approved.

III. Old Business

- Fork Branch dedication update – Ms. Stewart explained that Tim Byan is in the process of obtaining a legal description for the DelDOT Nature Preserve parcel, as suggested by John Williams. This property is located south of the stormwater pond just east of Saulsbury Road and was approved by the NAAC at the March meeting. Ms. Stewart also gave an update from the Open Space Council meeting held on September 4th. Parks is going to pursue the farm fields located on the western boundary of the Fork Branch Nature Preserve at the intersection of Dennys Road and Kenton Road. This acquisition would not qualify to become part of the Fork Branch Nature Preserve; however, it will prevent a 196 unit subdivision from encroaching on the preserve as well as give opportunity for Parks to build support infrastructure for the preserve.
- Frenchtown Woods – Ms. Stewart discussed the site visit by Delaware State Parks staff to the Frenchtown Woods Nature Preserve. This tract of land would benefit from the protection of adjacent land, as it is a relatively small tract in a sensitive area. The Council asked for clarification regarding infrastructure and land use in the area, and stressed the importance of preserving this type of sensitive, high priority habitat. Ms. Heaton also commented on the interest of a neighbor in land preservation efforts in this area. Ms. Holmes also discussed the Village at Pine View (Kucharsey property) project, which could provide a possible opportunity for conversations about land preservation of the natural area on that site. Parks staff will work to contact adjacent property owners to gauge interest in land preservation.
- White Clay Creek State Park Master Plan (added to the agenda) – Bill Miller thanked the Council for their comment letter and addressed the Council’s comments to the draft plan. Mr. Miller mentioned that he will be working with the proper DNREC staff to address the concern of trail design in the respect to rare species, and will work with the Office of Nature Preserves to continue use of appropriate and consistent signage for Nature Preserves. The Council was also concerned with the placement of camping areas; Parks is considering options as it relates to camping opportunities to address concerns. Mr. Miller also addressed comments about research relationships with local colleges and universities. Dr. Heckscher suggested that the language in the plan be clarified to be more inclusive of all higher education/research institutions. Mr. Miller will be addressing comments received and prepare a final draft of the master plan. A public meeting will be held after the final draft has been completed.

IV. Natural Areas Registry

- Flint Woods addition – Ms. Stewart discussed the acquisition of a parcel of land adjacent to the northeastern portion of Flint Woods Nature Preserve managed by Brandywine Creek State Park. It was noted that this parcel has not been listed on the State Natural Areas Registry. This would be the first step in potentially dedicating it as part of the Nature Preserve. Ms. Holmes will work with Chris Bennett to evaluate the property and look into the necessary requirements in listing this as part of the existing Natural Area.

V. Nature Preserve Dedications

- WCCSP, Papermill Road parcel – Ms. Stewart discussed the potential donation of a portion of a property on Papermill Road adjacent to White Clay Creek State Park. This

area is within an existing Natural Area. Ms. Holmes will work with Chris Bennett to evaluate if this parcel meets the requirements for a Nature Preserve.

VI. Nature Preserve Management Issues

- Angola Neck Nature Preserve – Ms. Stewart provided an overview of the meeting with Cape Henlopen State Park staff to discuss public access to the Angola Neck Nature Preserve. Ms. Stewart and Mr. Byan explained their literature research regarding the road, which was found to be a private road with public access (the State of Delaware is one of many owners of the road). DNREC currently provides material to maintain the road, and a local community member helps to spread that material. The residents in the area are concerned about public access, as they have experienced some negative interactions including theft and trash dumping. Parks proposes to remove the posts in an existing parking area to open that as a public parking. In addition, Parks proposes to provide educational information regarding the activities that should and should not occur within the Nature Preserve. There will be a meeting with the community on October 16, 2019 at Camp Arrowhead.

VII. New Business

- Program updates and path forward
 - Ms. Stewart will continue to attend the Council meetings and provide updates from the Open Space Council meetings.
 - Ms. Holmes gave a brief overview of current activities and future directives for the Office of Nature Preserves:
 1. Establishment of electronic tracking and organization of Nature Preserve information
 2. Conducting site visits and inspections – opportunities for the Council to participate
 3. Establishment of an outreach strategy with the understanding that there is a delicate balance with providing access and protecting resources
 - a. Reviewing other states' programs and on-line presence
 - b. Ms. Holmes will be attending the Natural Areas Association in October and will participate in the State Roundtable Meeting.
 4. Drafting management plans for all Delaware State Parks owned and managed Nature Preserves
 - The Council discussed the importance of an outreach strategy, and discussed the steps that have been completed including the development and approval of a logo, as well as draft language for a palm card and website.

VIII. Public Comment and Synopsis Reports from other Councils

- Jim White gave a brief update regarding the Native Species Commission. He is the liaison between the Commission and the Council. There is opportunity to provide support for each organization.
- Ed Lewandowski, liaison for the Parks Council, mentioned that Ron Mears passed away. Ron Breeding will be acting as the interim Chair of the Parks Council.
- Ms. Stewart mentioned that New Castle County has started a Land Preservation Task Force with which she is involved.

IX. Proposed Meeting Dates

- December 12 subject to change

X. Adjournment

Ms. Heaton thanked everyone and asked for a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 11:04 am.