



Meeting Minutes: Washington State Natural Heritage Advisory Council  
September 18, 2020 Special Meeting • 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Council Members in Attendance (all via conference call):** Peter Dunwiddie (chair), Becky Brown, Janelle Downs, Kathryn Kurtz, Cheryl Schultz, Randi Shaw, Ian Sinks, Heida Diefenderfer, Brock Milliern (DNR), Maynard Mallonee, Adam Cole (RCO), Janet Gorrell (WDFW), Heather Kapust (ECY), Andrea Thorpe (State Parks)

**Council Members Absent:** Claudine Reynolds

**Staff in Attendance:** Tim Stapleton, Joe Rocchio, Curt Pavola, Jake Kleinknecht, Tynan Ramm-Granberg, Bec Braisted

Chair Peter Dunwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The agenda was accepted without changes.

Introductions

Chair Dunwiddie asked Tim Stapleton, newly appointed Natural Heritage Conservation Section manager, to introduce himself to the council. Tim shared his environmental mitigation/remediation background and discussed his Master's degree in Sport Management, which he likened to an MBA with a sports focus. He noted that his first child is on the way and he'll soon be taking leave. Before that, he is hopeful of building the management focus and "decision space" for the Natural Heritage Program, Natural Areas Program, and Natural Heritage Advisory Council to make progress and implement our expertise. He has talked with several council members and will continue calling others. One primary goal is to establish a shared vision of advocacy for program goals that also includes implementation steps.

Diefenderfer inquired about advocacy for program budgets. Stapleton agreed that this is an area where the council can help create a strategy; and he noted he is looking at the new permanent nature of funding nationally under the Land and Water Conservation Program as one example. He noted his desire to focus on funding that would be available to broad-based conservation instead of site-specific grant deliverables, which would allow the programs to be more nimble in pursuing priority work. He will create a summary of staffing and open positions for both programs, showing the impact of the reductions from the 2008 recession. Adam Cole reported that project-specific funding is being requested at a historic level, \$140 million for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program for the 2021-2023 Biennium.

Approval of Minutes from the June 4, 2020, Meeting

Chair Dunwiddie solicited council comments on the draft minutes. He noted that the minutes called for a letter from the council to the Recreation and Conservation Office in support of land

acquisition at Steptoe Butte proposed-Natural Area, which he will draft and send to DNR. No corrections or edits were offered to the minutes, and they were moved as written by Ian Sinks, and seconded by Heida Diefenderfer. The minutes were approved unanimously.

#### Carry-forward Items from Previous Meetings

- *Report from NHAC member visits to natural areas*

Randi Shaw visited a conservation easement owned by The Nature Conservancy over private lands within Dabob Bay Natural Area Preserve.

- *Update on funding for Natural Heritage Program and Natural Areas Program*

Brock Milliern reported that the department made a decision, in light of economic concerns and the current reductions being asked of state agencies, not to pursue new, increased operating budget funding for most programs. The department is requesting Natural Areas Program capital budget funding for a public access facilities project list totaling \$5,046,000. The department is also requesting a “maintenance level” operating budget enhancement that provides a minor amount of new funds for the upkeep of recently constructed projects or for newly acquired conservation lands. In our current biennium the Natural Areas Program received about \$400,000, and the request for the 2021-2023 Biennium is nearly that amount. The funds were used to fill a growing budget shortage and add a margin of staff support to DNR’s Northeast Region.

The department also has decided, for the first time in 30 years, to not put forward a Trust Land Transfer (TLT) Program funding package. A recent TLT appropriation funded the final segment of transfers at Blanchard Mountain from trust status to conservation and recreation. Because the Blanchard lands were largely county-designated lands, instead of the Common School Trust lands generally eligible for TLT, this project created frustration among many stakeholders. In the current biennium, TLT will transfer a few sites, including additions to Middle Fork Snoqualmie NRCA and Dabob Bay Natural Area, however the program will be paused for analysis. Dunwiddie said he is sorry to hear about the pause for this significant program that has been so important to conservation land acquisition, however the analysis hopefully will help gain support for the future. Milliern noted that the TLT Program has transferred about \$800 million of trust lands to park, recreation and natural area designations (state and local) during the past 30 years.

Ian Sinks inquired about the TLT review and whether the Natural Heritage Advisory Council or land trusts will have a role in the discussion. Milliern said the next step is for DNR to scope the process and then invite others to weigh in, which will likely happen after the upcoming legislative session. If the review leads to a requested legislative action, it might be requested during the following, non-budget session.

- *Recommendation update – Steptoe Butte*

Milliern noted that the appraisal for the Steptoe Butte acquisition has been completed and his review of the values suggests that the acquisition will adequately compensate the original conservation buyers. The appraisal examined options for the communications towers on the inholding, and it demonstrated that moving the towers is a costly option. Milliern stated that acquisition of the towers combined with keeping the tower income for onsite land management operations is still a DNR goal. Another option might include creation of a county parcel for the towers and acquire only the conservation lands, which the county seems amenable to. Or, DNR

could acquire the towers as an investment for trust beneficiaries. Milliern said the DNR project manager is in regular communication with the current landowners. Dunwiddie noted this is an extraordinary project and may be the first conservation acquisition by private individuals, instead of a land trust, as a holding action until the state can buy them out. He expressed hope that the outcome will be positive for all parties. Andrea Thorpe noted that State Parks is willing to step in to support this process to bring it to a successful conclusion.

Map of Biodiversity Importance by NatureServe: A collaborative effort to identify the places most important for conserving at-risk species

Joe Rocchio shared a slide presentation about NatureServe’s landmark collaboration with Esri, The Nature Conservancy, Microsoft’s AI for Earth program, and the network of natural heritage programs to create a portfolio of maps (Maps of Biodiversity Importance or MoBI) that identify areas critical to sustaining biodiversity. Using information from over 2,200 habitat suitability models of the nation’s most imperiled species, coupled with information on range size and degree of protection derived from those models, the MoBI projects provides a series of maps for the lower 48 of the United States -- 15 in all -- that can help inform conservation efforts. The maps indicate where multiple imperiled species co-occur, and are not already protected. Data from the Washington Natural Heritage Program was critical for generating the maps for our state.

The council inquired the about the animals used in the model, and Rocchio said he has inquired with the developers. Diefenderfer said that mapping pollinators would be important for the program’s work, and Rocchio noted the project currently does not have an explicit pollinator focus but does include some pollinator-based maps. Cheryl Schultz added that it would be helpful to look at both pollinators and more animal information together.

Thorpe clarified that the NatureServe info comes from the state programs, and for this work they pulled from their Biotics database, however for Washington the animal information largely is not included in Biotics. Rocchio agreed and noted that NatureServe attempts to create consistency across states. Diefenderfer asked whether the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has incorporated any of the Natural Heritage Program species information from the former zoologist. Janet Gorrell confirmed that the WDFW data does include such information in their various databases. She also noted that WDFW manages and identifies conservation priorities for species beyond those considered ‘characteristic megafauna’ and game species.

Dunwiddie wondered whether the maps portray modeled areas where “species might occur.” Rocchio clarified that the mapping is based on known locations, and then predicts the possible location of suitable habitat. Dunwiddie noted that conservation actions involve a question of scale for the available information, such as the fine scale used to create natural areas versus other mapping exercises like The Nature Conservancy’s ecoregional planning. Would it be useful to compare past and current mapping to inform how things have changed? Rocchio agreed and suggested that the level of integration in such mapping projects, depending on the species used, may be helpful in educating decision makers.

“Quick-Plan” Format for NAP Management Plans

Curt Pavola shared a slide presentation covering the purposes of site-based management planning, including the advantages of adopting a “quick-plan” method. One advantage is the fact that it provides an opportunity to put management plans in place where a lack of staff capacity has prevented their development.

Kathryn Kurtz noted the example text in the quick plan regarding insects and noted that, in addition to mammals and birds, insect species lists would be important for teaching since kids are often most interested in the species they might see when visiting a site. She said non-mammalian species are often discussed in terms of ecosystem processes and also their presence or absence serves as indicators of healthy, functioning systems. If a full species list isn't available, instead include what is currently known. Rocchio noted the inclusion in the example text as insects being part of a natural disturbance process for a given site. Pavola noted that initial lists could be included in a plan with the goal of later creating a comprehensive list as an appendix.

Rocchio noted that past management plans have focused on the primary features of a site that were the reason for designation and thus emphasis in the management plans has been focused on those features. Rocchio also noted that the reason Natural Heritage Program identifies ecosystem conservation targets is because they serve as a "coarse filter" approach to conserving biodiversity. The assumption is that if we protect examples of these coarse filters we are by default providing protection to all the species that live within or depend on those ecosystems, including insects. This ensures that our efforts are not limited to rare species. Rocchio noted that we could do a better job of highlighting the 'coarse filter' function of ecosystem protection.

Randi Shaw inquired about which text in the draft plan was template text to keep versus example text that will change. Pavola responded that the programmatic or policy text is intended to be retained and the site-specific examples would most often be modified based on the specifics of each site. He agreed that the presentation needs to be more distinct so that plan writers can see the intent more clearly.

Shaw also questioned the characterization of cultural resources "surveys" and noted that the state Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation has a predictive model that might be referenced.

Additional comments included: Show the local noxious weed boards for the planning context section; As a "living document," focus on the strategies in the plan (goals, objectives, strategies) and allow the management actions to be updated without rewriting the plan; Call out if interior areas of a site is managed differently than exterior areas. With today's discussion and any comments that council members may send to DNR by the end of September, Pavola will engage the Natural Areas Program ecologists and land managers in a discussion about the template plans and potential sites to test quick-planning during the 2021-2023 Biennium.

#### Next Steps for the Natural Heritage Plan Update

Joe Rocchio shared a slide presentation outlining three options for the next Natural Heritage Plan update including: 1) Comprehensive update to the entire document; 2) Abridged update describing any changes to species and ecosystems Priority Ranks; and 3) Intermediate version, which is along the line of the 2018 Natural Heritage Plan. Additional recommendations and comments were solicited from the council.

Andrea Thorpe, former Natural Heritage Program manager, noted that while the "full plan" example from 2007 is good from an educational perspective, to meet biennial planning needs a shorter, abridged version may be desirable. A larger version of the plan could also be worked on over time. Chair Dunwiddie also view the documents as being appropriate for different

audiences. The purpose of the next plan was discussed, including the obligation to submit a plan to the Legislature, reflect department priorities, and to stay current for planning purposes with the Recreation and Conservation Office. Thorpe noted the emphasis in the last plan to bring in the land trusts that were new to the Natural Areas Category of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. Chair Dunwiddie called for volunteers to work with Natural Heritage Program staff as a subcommittee of the council. The subcommittee is Janelle Downs, Ian Sinks, Andrea Thorpe, and as a reader of the draft document, Heida Diefenderfer.

Council questions about materials distributed prior to the meeting

None.

Pavola shared with the council that a former council member, Robert Michael Pyle, has a film roughly based on one of his books that is premiering online today. The name of the film is “The Dark Divide” and links to viewing information can be found via Internet search.

Rocchio shared with the council that a former member, Wade Troutman, lost his farm and home in the Pearl Hill Fire of September 2020. He and his wife are safe, however all of their possessions were lost.

Setting Meeting Dates for 2021

The council determined the following date ranges may work for their four meetings during 2021: January 19 to 21; March 9 to 11; June 8 to 11 (with a field trip); October 12 to 14. An online poll will be used confirm specific dates and times.

Other Business / Comments from the Public in Attendance

No public were in attendance.

Adjourn

Chair Dunwiddie concluded the conference call at 12:58 pm.

MINUTES APPROVED: March 11, 2021