



Meeting of the Washington State Natural Heritage Advisory Council

January 24, 2024 • 9:08 a.m. – 3:56 p.m.

Hybrid Meeting – Remote and in-person

NHAC JAN 24 meeting notes

9: 08 Attendance:

NHAC Members attending: Heida Diefenderfer, Peter Dunwiddie, Ian Sinks, Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn, Kathryn Kurtz, Ailene Ettinger, Heather Kapust, Andrea Thorpe, John Bishop, Adam Cole, Janelle Downs, Claudine Reynolds, Rebecca Brown

DNR Staff attending: Lori Price, Joe Rocchio, Mark Reed, Rebeca Dzieza, Curt Pavola, Bruce Schneider, Sienna Wessel,

[Peter Dunwiddie is chairing the meeting in Chair Diefenderfer's absence.](#)

John Bishop introduces himself and his background of plant ecology and evolution.

Ailene Ettinger introduces herself as new councilmember.

Lori ~~P~~price introduces herself as new acting ADM for DNR's Conservation program.

Agenda approved.

9:25 AM: Division Manager Report

- Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn provided report related to cancellation of October Meeting and subsequent Council conversations.
- Division will draft a process for creating natural areas internally.
- Division will identify which areas need further discussion from the regions, staff, etc., and putting areas through the process. Potential candidates: Toutle Fen, Marsh Creek, Eagle Creek.
- DNR is currently discussing decision package concepts for the 2025 session. Describes DNR's internal process of working with Exec and the "shark tank" for concept papers, generally 50 are

proposed, 15 are shark tanked, and up to 10 are moved forward with. There will also be a different commissioner next session.

- Heida mentioned the disconnect between the concepts and connecting with the new education group.
- Kathryn discussed management plans and using the legislative interest to expand the support for natural heritage staff.
- Janelle questioned how the long list of previously suggested NAPS fits in. DNR is discussing internally which sites still have conservation needs.
- Joe R. replied the problem isn't a lack of sites, it is capacity and staff time. Goal is to establish a process that also incorporates feedback from the Regions.
- Peter wants to ensure that this is clear: that the council considers themselves part of DNR's team. The Council understands that staffing is a challenge, and the process will be incremental.
- Joe wants to make sure that getting council members on the ground in areas that are still considered a priority. So much of the classification and taxonomy has changed in the past 30 years. Peter emphasized using members of the council based on their experience to help.
- John asks how staffing relates to asking for more funding. Kristen O-H outlined during the great recession staffing was cut drastically, and the program had to rely on grant money that has specific deliverables. Last leg session, Kristen's predecessor put forward a decision package asking for more funding in Natural Heritage and Natural Areas management. Funding was received, but not enough to fully implement the Natural Heritage Plan.
- Andrea: we have been discussing interagency programs, there may be opportunities with DFW and especially Parks – if something doesn't fit with DNR, Parks has alternative methods to reach the same goal.
- Heida wanted to tie constituent support back together with the education program and getting the next generation into these science-based jobs and do workforce development.
- Heather: another place to add interagency conversation is with the habitat and recreation lands group – the whole point of the group was to coordinate land acquisitions between the three agencies (Brock Milliern chairs that group now)

10:29: break for fifteen minutes

10: 49: meeting resumes

- Kristen discussed history of state trust lands in Washington State. Some were granted by the federal government, and some were taken by DNR from counties where lands were abandoned during the depression for back property taxes. In those cases, counties became beneficiaries.
- There has been siloing of data between foresters and heritage. In the last year, as we were starting the new biennium, uplands deputy decided to prioritize heritage data. In BNR meetings, there is a lot of pressure from constituent groups based on element occurrences whenever there is a proposed timber sale. Uplands deputy appointed a staff member to oversee education of all foresters.
- DNR is hiring a planner in Natural Areas to develop site management plans as required.

Legislative updates:

- As a result of the '23 session: DNR received proviso in capital budget #3130 – 83 million dollars allocated to the department for a variety of items, \$70 million was allocated to preserve 2,000 acres of structurally complex carbon rich forest land (carbon sequestration forests).
- DNR directed to find these 2,000 acres of trust lands – the January 3 BNR meeting outlines this land. Definition of structurally complex carbon dense forest based on old growth characteristics defined in Van Pelt's "Identifying Mature and Old Forests in Western Washington" guide. Now that the acres have been identified, DNR needs to find replacement lands for these places. DNR cannot dispose of lands, needs to acquire them first. DNR needs to transfer 2,000 acres out of trust status but needs to acquire 2k acres first. There are concerns over what status these acres will be under. Expectation of the process will take at least a year. Peter asked how the 2,000 acres were determined and the meaning of equivalent lands. How lands were determined is unknown. Equivalent means in terms of land and timber value. Peter also asked if there is any risk of protecting old growth and replacing it with more old growth that will then get cut. Kristen's response outlined these are lands that have been managed (i.e. already harvested). Transfer out of trust status and go under another designation that DNR determines.
- Tim's strategy was to submit applications for every state land transfer – ended up submitting nine.
- DNR just hired a Trust Land Transfer staff position and is convening a committee to prioritize lands for the list.
- Joe provides updates on the two new positions for natural heritage – 40 applicants thus far.

Upcoming field opportunities for council members

- Joe refers to the October and January reports.
- Eagle Creek Savanna – October writeup: beargrass savannas in lowlands thought to be much like south sound prairies that were managed by the tribes historically. Very interesting ecosystem on DNR lands brought by the heritage program and DNR is interested in moving forward with this. DNR staff hasn't been out there at this point, Tynan Ramm-Granberg is collecting more data. Opportunity for council members to go out there and be part of the discussion in early spring.
- Toutle Ridge Fen: June or July it would be accessible, depending on snowpack. Possible June field trip. Peter has a staff member who worked specifically in those areas.

Reports on Natural Area visits:

- Peter has encouraged councilmembers to get boots on the ground to see natural areas, opens the floor to recount adventures in natural areas.
- John Bishop has been trying to visit the NAPs in Klickitat County did a Christmas bird count, and has been exploring the White Salmon Oaks area. Saw many Lewis's Woodpeckers, as they depend on oaks for winter forage. Two years ago, there was a total failure of acorns to appear, and birds left to California. This winter they returned. Also went to the Monte Cristo NAP.

Conservation Acquisitions Report:

- 1700 acres were acquired for 15 million dollars.
- Large parcel in Dabob was purchased using TLT funds and WWRP funds.
- 2-acre parcel in Lacamas Prairie
- Mark Reed notes that it can take years to acquire a parcel.

- References the progression maps provided in the meeting materials.
- Peter suggests adding a color-coded legend for the map.
- Heather clarifies the Dabob Bay expansion area – mostly private acquisition.
- Ian asks about capacity and bottlenecks.
- Mark states at times it is overwhelming. His staff is focused on acquisition of natural areas properties, which gives him time to work on Columbia Land Trust, which is more complicated. Money isn't the bottleneck, it is negotiations. I.e., Merrill Lake we are doing negotiations with Whatcom, on the other side, we have landowners wanting to sell tomorrow, and the issue is do we have funds to follow through with that at that site.
- Peter asks for rationale for the grassland being in the NAP at the Wright property at Washougal Oaks.
- Dave Wilderman can speak to that (isn't in the call at this time)
- John asks to consider development buffers for the NAP – development pressure in the area is strong.
- Heida is interested in long term projections in light of population growth and residential growth – there could be opportunities to do analysis of areas around NAPs to look ahead for their protection in creating recreational opportunities – many people who live in the area may want recreational opportunities and it may be possible to work with RCO and the Rec program to do a spatial analysis of potential future opportunities in proximity to every natural area based on development and projected population growth. Kristen's stated this would be part of a management planning process.
- Curt: Natural Areas is in the process of hiring a planner. The analysis would be site specific.
- Peter: difficulty in cultivating a constituency that will advocate for the natural areas in front of the legislature. Encourage a constituency that can recreate in the area near the NAP but not in the NAP itself. If there's blurring in the public's eye that is acceptable, and it may lead them to value that area. Having the greater picture in mind could work to our benefit if we don't encourage rec in areas that aren't appropriate for it, but nearby.
- Andrea stated DFW, DNR, and Parks are engaged in a process of working with the tribes, governor and RCO, on looking at rec impacts on natural and cultural resources. Landscape scale and where is being recreated in the most. Methodology is in development.
- Curt shares the map of Lacamas. There were farms in the northwest, all owned by one farmer. Design includes a parking lot and trail. There is habitat in part of the golf course. Planning is from the creek at the entrance. Idea is to expand parking and trail access.
- Becky states this reminds her of the Pineroft discussion. Likes the idea of looking at the broader landscape. There is a strong need to put up educational material about the natural area. Curt commented a verbal agreement was reached with city of Spokane valley on an educational trail development at Pineroft.
- Joe commented on Mount Moran State Park. There is great signage about the nearby natural area available to the public. Recreation users are made aware of the NAP within the park. It explains why there is no recreation in the area and outlines the sensitive ecology of the NAP. Where possible, we should replicate this.

12:07: break for lunch (one hour)

1:00 PM Meeting resumes

Natural Areas Report

- Two reports – one for October and one for January
- Curt acknowledged RCO support during the period where DNR's staffing and funding were reduced.
- Dave Wilderman invited to address the Washougal Oaks area. Those lands were a mix of prairie and Oakland, and the area is being actively replanted. Prairie restoration will be done on part of that parcel, including Kincaide's lupine.
- The Woodard Bay expansion is with the Commissioner for signature. Woodard Bay has been expanded to almost 1,000 acres. The conservation area is tripled in size. Large areas that are underdeveloped in riparian areas are included.
- Peter stated there is a different process for NRCAs and NAPs, which is why the Woodard Bay expansion never came before the council. There are also no natural heritage occurrences present.
- Michele Zukerberg is working on conversations with landowners in the boundary expansion.

Natural Heritage Report

- Sienna Wessell, DNR botanist, introduces herself to the Council.
- Natural Areas survey and updates: in October, there are reports on Eagle and Marsh Creeks, and Toutle Ridge Fen.
- Jesse has been leading the species of concern list – updated which species we consider endangered, vulnerable, or least concern.
- Sienna has been working on climate change vulnerability assessments - 50% of our rare plants have climate change vulnerability indexes.
- Both working on multiple BLM Section 6 grant projects.
- Ecology: Irene accepted a position outside the agency and DNR has been working on filling her vacancy
- DNR Natural Heritage contracted with university of Washington for hydrological impact modeling on our wetlands.
- Bruce has started Essential Conservation Area development process using GIS to aggregate element occurrences into polygons.
- Jasa has been continuing to input data into the databases.
- In October, the Program went to a Natural Heritage convention in Montana.
- Joe was invited to be a part of a team that incorporates plants into the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to elevate rare plants in the state.
- Heida asked if there are there any areas with a lack of element occurrences and lack of studies that could have been overlooked. Joe responded that the Program's Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead (HSIL) funding explicitly funds surveying for such data.
- John question: Understands that in the previous meeting, invertebrates were discussed – are they being considered at all? Joe responded in terms of the funding for the ECA work, there are two issues, getting zoology expertise back in the program, and thinking ahead for future budget requests. Right now, a huge data gap is animal information. Primary focus with current funding will be for plant species and ecosystems.
- John asked who gets to use the data and how? Joe responded when DNR updates ranks, that will be reflected in any data product DNR has that includes a rare species or ecosystem in it. There is

a NatureServe data exchange every six months. Climate vulnerability information is shared on the website.

- Ian would like to know when the data products will be made available.

1:45: Agency and Private Agriculture and Forest Land Reports

- Peter thought it would be useful to have reports from councilmembers who represent the agricultural interests and private forest land interests. Those would be Maynard Mallonee and Claudine Reynolds.
- Maynard is not present.
- Claudine represents Port Blakely environmental policy and private foresters. Forest is 50% of the state. Main concern is conversion of forestlands, disease, and wildfire. Species distribution shifts are occurring. From a regulatory perspective, species may become rarer or limited, which could impact how forest managers are rotating the forests. Trees planted today need to be healthy in 40-80 years from now. Due to human caused wildfires more private forest lands are being closed to visitors.
- Role of forests in sequestering carbon and climate: Consider that younger forests also sequester a large amount of carbon, vs older forests storing it. Programs exist for private forest owners to get carbon offset credits, but there are regulatory hurdles.
- A large fear is increased regulations, wants to provide incentives rather than penalties to reduce resistance to regulations.
- Growing a forest to 80 years old is considered optimal for carbon and harvesting, but it is also on the precipice of being considered too ecologically important for harvesting.
- There is more emphasis on endangered and rare animal species rather than rare plant specimens.
- Heida wondered if there's possible to piggyback on Tynan's goal of education to private foresters.
- What we develop could be a pilot for collaboration with private forest owners.
- Peter referenced the "Propagation Nation" article in the Seattle times ([Do redwood trees have a place in the future of WA's forests? They're already here | The Seattle Times](#)) regarding redwood planting in Washington, asks Claudine's thoughts on them. Claudine responded we are prohibited from planting nonnative species as a rule. There is no large-scale planting of redwoods going on at this time. People are thinking that redwoods do well here, and the red cedar is receding. Individuals are planting redwoods in the lowlands, and they are growing very fast, but it's not widespread. Certainly, smaller forest owners could be doing it. Currently they are growing California strains of fir in experimental pockets and learning where they can plant it where the genetics are struggling.
- Joe stated ponderosa pine is being planted Green Diamond land in places where beargrass occurs. While a native species to Washington, ponderosa pine was historically very uncommon in western Washington.
- Peter stated if you have a species that only grows in Oregon and makes its way across the river, is it now invasive to Washington? The definition of invasive is challenging.
- Kristen informed the Council the DNR has a seed plant and orchard and nursery and has a geneticist who has opinions on assisted migration. If interested, he can be brought in for his viewpoints. Peter agrees that Jeff DeGraan's perspective would be welcome at a future meeting. DNR will follow up on this.

- Dave reported at Lacamas prairie, a few species have shown up that aren't typically in Washington. Some have been from purchased seeds, others have not.
- Joe states it is complicated and risky, our program's position on this issue has been to be conservative on introducing new species that aren't native.

2:10: Agency reports

State Parks Report

- Andrea mentioned interagency tribal on recreation.
- Steptoe Butte: Parks is reinvigorating the planning process for Steptoe Butte. Their steward is doing work with stakeholder groups and having conversations with Keyna. Looking at long term planning for state park portion of Steptoe butte. Also looking at updating the road and taking the bathroom off of the summit, because the summit is sacred to the tribes. Determining whether it will be a NRCA or NAP. The camp plan will be for Steptoe Butte and Steptoe Battlefield. Considerations of renaming the park.
- Gingko: Proposal for NAP is outstanding, EIS process of whether to keep access road open to recreation. Opportunities for public comment on that. Significant concerns of resource damage.
- Continuing efforts at Hope Island Skagit restoration using RCO grant money. Success in restoring the bald eagle habitat.
- Restoration for sand verbena moth (*Copablepharon fuscum*) – getting rid of beachgrass to allow the plant the moths need to thrive.

Ecology Report

- Heather Kapust: One agency-requested legislation submitted – cap and invest program linkage with California and Quebec
- Requested 70 million additional funds, additional FTEs, some to work on wetland permitting program.
- Expanded access to the Conservation Corp to meet environmental justice goals.
- Transitioning school buses to electric.

Recreation Conservation Office (RCO)

- RCO is still growing – now almost a hundred employees. Budget has improved drastically.
- WWRP was funded at a record \$120 million, trendline is up.
- Applications are open in February and will have a new list to consider.
- Nonprofits are considering competing for the money and are submitting applications.
- All the projects in natural areas were funded.
- Legislature: Tax exemption for some conservation projects, specifically salmon restoration. Other than that, no big changes on the horizon.

Department of Fish & Wildlife Report

- Looking at habitat connectivity priorities and focusing where to have improvements at road crossings, trying to take advantage of federal funding.

- Focusing on giving WSDOT more authority when it comes to connectivity.
- Developing a portal to gather information from staff regarding species of greatest conservation need.
- Working with the three agencies and tribes on rec impacts. DFW is involved with the ecological monitoring. Hiring an ecological assessment lead.
- Wildlife diversity division: hoping for 140 million in funding (presents org chart with new positions funded by money) recruiting for a marine mammal person, invasive species specialist, just hired a specialist in bees, moths, invertebrates.

2:48: Dave Wilderman Presentation

- Capturing plant diversity in a network of small sites (PowerPoint presentation was provided to Council)
- Conclusions: High level of plant diversity on a small land area, site selection approach has been highly effective at capturing vascular flora, there are gaps in inventory systems.
- Q: Ian: is there a way to quantify resiliency and redundancy of certain elements?A: Next step is determining how many of those are protected in multiple natural areas.
- Q: Janelle: wondering if DFW has species lists for their protected areas. A: Unlikely that there are current or thorough lists of species for many areas, data is inconsistent.
- Q: Peter: Coarse/fine filter: have you looked at the s1 s2 species in terms of how many occur in the ecosystems represented in the sites? How many have been captured in the coarse filter?
A: No, haven't looked at that at this point
- Joe stated we have the coarse filter to try and capture these species – perhaps look at the S2s and S3s and determine if there's a mutual gap.
- Q: Peter: these small preserves are vulnerable to stochastic extinction events – do you have any data on extinctions in small preserves? A: Not at the site level scale. Closest is monitoring plot data from decades ago.

Spring Meeting Agenda Planning & Field Tour

- Toutle Ridge Fen for council field trip if weather permits.
- Staff suggestions for June 6-7
- Onion ridge, Wanapum, Ginkgo
- Should go to the ones most likely to be selected as NAPs – maybe Toutle Ridge Fen.
- Also wants to switch between different regions of the state.
- John asked if one day of field tours a year enough. There are other opportunities for council field tours – subsets of the council can go.

DNR and Council Action Items

- **Action item:** Make sure to revisit tribal representation on the council. Andrea mentions tribes are currently being asked to do too much.
- **Action item:** Address members who have appointments expiring.
- **Action item:** Send travel vouchers to participants who attended in person.
- **Action item:** Make org chart for DNR's side of the council, acronym guide glossary.

- John questioned if Heritage has a list of taxa that are part of the plan but not protected in other ways? Joe responded for species X, how many natural areas is it already protected in? That determines priority.

Motion to Adjourn, Meeting Adjourned at 3:56 PM