



## Meeting of the Washington State Natural Heritage Advisory Council

March 28, 2024 • 9:33 a.m. – 3:20 p.m.

Hybrid Meeting – Remote and in-person

9:33: Meeting called to order.

Introductions and roll call.

Roll call: Janelle Downs, Peter Dunwiddie, Becky Brown, Kathryn Kurtz, Janet Gorrell, Heather Kapust, John Bishop, Heida Diefenderfer, Ian Sinks, Andrea Thorpe, Ailene Ettinger

Absent: Maynard Mallonnee, Claudine Reynolds,

Staff Tynan Ramm-Granberg, BS, Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn, Rebecca Dzieza, Mark Enty, Joe Rocchio, Curt Pavola, Mark Reed, David Wilderman

*Review and approval of today's agenda: agenda approved.*

Chair Heida Diefenderfer asks for any changes and suggestions for the agenda.

9:41: Meeting Minutes approval

- Lori Price name not capitalized, insert Problems in page 2
- Include that Peter Dunwiddie chaired the meeting in Chair Diefenderfer's absence.

*Motion to approve meeting minutes.*

*Motion approved.*

### **9:43 Division Manager Report**

Updates that Jayana Marshall has been selected as Conservation ADM, highlights her career background with Tribal work and overlap with Natural Areas and Tribes. Invites councilmembers to reach out to her and share their thoughts about the Council.

Legislative updates:

- From the 2024 session, Lacamas Natural Area was ranked 4 (it was removed from the previous list in the 2023 session) – substantial support came from Brock Milliern of RCO to restore funding to that area.
- There are numerous seats in the Legislature that will be opening, there will be a new governor, and a new CPL elected, therefore a high level of change is coming.
- There will be a ballot initiative determining the continuance of the Climate Commitment Act, which will result in DNR’s funding being affected if passed.
- Thanked Kathryn Kurtz, Ian Sinks, and Chair Diefenderfer for their input on 2025 Legislative ideas.
- Looking for funding for Heritage staff and tie it to Heritage plan.
- Decision packages are in development, and DNR is seeking ways to make it more competitive and obtain letters of support to spread understanding of the importance of the Natural Heritage data.
- Will be updating the Natural Heritage Plan for the 2025 Legislative Session.

John Bishop asks about concept papers and what topics will be covered. Ohlson-Kiehn replied that it will contain the ideas that were discussed earlier, but specifics are still in progress.

Ohlson-Kiehn shares a draft process proposal for bringing in the NHAC to be involved in the decision-making process to establish new natural areas.

- The gap between site identification and staff submitting recommendation to NHAC has been a challenge.
- Showed 3-year timeline for creating NAPs - decisions need to be made prior to the end of 2024 to obtain funding, then more work in 2025, to make ready for 2026 WWRP grants.
- There is no process that fits all scenarios – each step can be different depending on the site and circumstances surrounding it.
- She has applied this process to all three potential new NAPS (Marsh Creek, Eagle Creek, and Toutle Ridge), and to the potential expansion of Marcellus NAP.
- Reminder: when we start discussing boundaries of natural areas, on one hand we want a scientific boundary that reflects ecological needs of the priority features. However, socio-political considerations will ultimately be incorporated as DNR Region, NHAC input, and public input are provided. Discussions with the landowners are part of the boundary establishment process.
- It would make sense to have a field visit to the area. Due to multiple mandates and interests in how the boundaries are drawn, DNR would initiate a discussion.
- If there are private lands in that boundary, it could be less complicated – the way we incorporate public feedback would include feedback from those landowners and they can discuss opting out their property from the boundary.
- If there’s a need for an ultimate decider, that would go towards the Region Manager, the RCD manager, and the Uplands Deputy, and potentially a COO.

Kurtz: Thanks Ohlson-Kiehn for the transparency, suggests sharing the original document with Council Members

**Action item: distribute the timeline chart to members.**

Janet Gorrell: has been in discussions with Joe Rocchio regarding including wildlife values in natural area discussions and integrate DFW into the site visits.

Jannell Downs: Has question regarding scheduling – NAP would have to be approved by end of 2024 – Did that approval include the commissioner signing off on the approval?

Ohlson-Kiehn: what needs to be accomplished is a Council recommendation by the end of 2024.

Curt Pavola: the boundary work needs to be done by Fall of 2025.

Chair Diefenderfer: the criteria of highest importance has been sustainability, not element occurrence.

Rocchio: when DNR establishes an ecological boundary, we consider the adjacent areas we view as essential for viability of the species / ecosystem that DNR is proposing the natural area for. It's a risk assessment (is this a good investment for state dollars?). Additionally, each site's timeline varies. Some sites take multiple years to complete due to other circumstances. I.e., Marsh Creek, there were county lands within the boundary and DNR had less control over the process.

Sinks: wonders where the Council can help and advocate for new sites.

Chair Diefenderfer: is the tie breaker or decision maker new to the process?

Ohlson-Kiehn: making it explicit that there is a decision maker and identifying who it is is new.

Chair Diefenderfer: based on Rocchio's description, is there a possible additional new role for a resolution team?

Ohlson-Kiehn: DNR can work with the new idea and is currently clarifying roles and processes.

Rocchio: column on the tracker has progress for which steps have been taken and completed.

Kurtz: there is a risk that it looks like we're taking. Did not see a section for the DNR Communications team. Suggests bringing in individuals who collaborated in the past and present them as case studies to reassure and educate the public.

Ohlson-Kiehn: Agrees, saying collaborative communication is essential.

Chair Diefenderfer: asks Mark Reed if his team has any examples regarding communication with the public.

Reed: his team enters the process after a landowner has volunteered their lands

Andrea Thorpe: in the past it has been conservation acquiescing to state lands.

K: She has not yet run the process by the Regions. Outlines TLT – tool that allows landowners to transfer trust lands out of that status. Leg buys out the beneficiaries.

Brown: question – how do you ensure that different eco regions are getting represented equally? Notices that SE region manager needs to be traveling a lot more than others, due to diverse ecosystems.

Rocchio: ecoregion representation priority is built into the plan. In terms of the data collection, because DNR's science work is grant funded, DNR doesn't have the ability to choose where to collect data on EOs. work will help identify places across the state and ecoregions that may be suitable for natural area recommendations.

Pavola: for the management side, the NA program has been understaffed, has been focusing on weed control at the sites. Then, depending on the purpose of the sites, that determines staff's focus in those areas. When the program has new money, it applies resources where they are needed.

Chair Diefenderfer suggests that this explanation can be part of the narrative to the Legislature.

Bishop: seems that there is lack of incentives for trust land managers to cooperate. Are there other things that can be done to help mitigate the lack of incentives?

Ohlson-Kiehn: In terms of incentives, in those situations where there's a potential natural area that if protected would not allow the trust land manager to meet their objectives, are there funding options available to the beneficiaries from a different location? There was a proviso for a carbon sequestration forest – 70 million dollars given to identify structurally complex stands – designation of the area is still a question. The process to identify those locations, has been completed, Marsh Creek overlaps with it.

#### **10:47: Natural Areas Visits & Site Visit Suggestions NHAC Natural Area Visits**

Heather Kapust went to Woodard Bay with other Natural Areas staff. Federal team was excited about the applications going in. Landowner joined them. Also went to Dabob Bay, looked at a property with Dunwiddie and Peter Bahls outside the boundary. Talk hoping to see proposals for the properties within the expansion.

Kurtz: went to Woodard Bay with the Pacific Education Institute.

Brown: went to Steptoe Butte to look at the plant communities in early spring. Buttercups and perennials emerging.

Bishop Bishop: ~~had~~ Carlo Abbruzzese presented at a seminar at Washington State University. Attended an invasive species seminar. Tynan Ramm-Granberg gave a presentation, and Ethan Coggins presented.

Thorpe: went to Mount Pickett Natural Area Preserve at Moran State Park. Also went to Gingko (proposed natural area). Plants are starting to emerge.

Chair Diefenderfer: there has been email traffic regarding site visit opportunities.

#### **Field Trip Discussion for June NHAC Visit:**

Rocchio: can think about these in multiple ways. Some of these natural areas staff will visit and some can be considered for the June field trip as well.

- Eagle creek (Beargrass savanna site): the region is interested in moving the process forward. It isn't a highly productive forest for the region and is a unique area. Opportunity for Council members to join DNR and collect plot data. Likely mid-May to early June as an ideal window.
- Marcellus: existing site, historically there was a Nature Conservancy Preserve adjacent to the DNR NAP that was transferred to DNR. Shrub-steppe site. Looked at a boundary expansion concept. Could also be the focus of the June field trip.
- Toutle Ridge: Depends on status of snow melt. It would be risky to use this site as the June field trip due to uncertainty of access. Ramm-Granberg and Wilderman developed an ecological boundary for the site, but a timber sale was implemented within a portion of the boundary. Staff are wanting to see whether the timber sale is resulting in negative hydrological changes and possible sedimentation into the EO area. If not, staff will proceed with recommendation.

- Chair Diefenderfer mentions Barker Mountain: Ramm-Granberg has conducted extensive field work already. However, additional conversation with the Region needs to occur to determine whether they are supportive of a significant boundary expansion. The conversation was stalled. Ohlson-Kiehn will look into it.
- Eagle Creek and Marcellus: working staff field trips. Barker would be a tour without intention of establishing a natural area. Ramm-Granberg mentions that Barker is a good place in June.
- Dunwiddie is interested in any of these sites. Has considerable experience at Barker and Marcellus.
- Rocchio: the small parcels are not a good use of staff time.

Chair Diefenderfer asks if there is anyone interested in Marcellus and Eagle Creek and requests Councilmembers reach out.

Rocchio doesn't have a date for Eagle Creek, thinking mid-May or early June.

- Kurtz mentions that the Region Manager in the area has a botany background and suggests she join DNR for one day for the Marcellus trip.
- Brown is interested in Marcellus.

### **11:17: Natural Heritage Plan Update**

Rocchio: DNR did a significant update in 2022 and started a subcommittee within the council to keep the plan moving.

Staff preference is to focus update to priority changes for the elements (are they becoming more rare, less rare, etc.)

Update language of the plan to make it applicable to things that have happened since 2022, outlining successes, partners within the natural area network, revisiting challenges that were identified in 2022, and outlining new opportunities for the plan. How we may approach a legislative ask.

Ramm-Granberg and Rocchio had discussed changes of rare ecosystems –the 2022 Plan only considers Threatened and Endangered ecosystems (USNVC Association) as the ecosystem fine filter for natural area representation. They are considering including Sensitive associations for 2025 Plan.

Otherwise, no significant changes. Is looking for thoughts and input.

Chair Diefenderfer: recaps. Mentions a more streamlined process that doesn't involve a subcommittee.

Rocchio mentions that Ohlson-Kiehn says a subcommittee may still be helpful as there are only two more council meetings before submitting suggestions.

Chair Diefenderfer proposes continuing conversations and presenting a final briefing paper to be agreed upon in October and establish a subcommittee.

Chair Diefenderfer *moves a motion to establish a subcommittee.*

*It is seconded by Bishop and Sinks.*

Chair Diefenderfer calls for volunteers to help Rocchio's staff. Sinks volunteers. Bishop volunteers with the caveat that he will be traveling in May and June. Gorrell has the same constraints but is interested. Brown volunteers. Thorpe as well.

- Chair Diefenderfer clarifies that missing meetings is not a dealbreaker. Due to the non-voting participants, it does not need to be a public meeting (Four councilmembers).

**Action item: investigate if the subcommittee needs to be a public meeting due to 4 councilmembers participating.**

**Council bylaws state “A quorum is required to conduct a meeting of the council. The only actions that can be taken without a quorum are to fix a time of adjournment, adjourn, recess, or to take measures to obtain a quorum. A quorum requires that a minimum of five appointed positions on the council be occupied and is defined as a majority of the occupied positions.”**

New Topic (revisit Natural Area procedure Ohlson-Kiehn discussed)

Bishop suggests going into more detail with the process Ohlson-Kiehn outlined.

- Ohlson-Kiehn shares the draft process proposal (Marsh Creek).
- In terms of status and process we have 3 options for boundaries. Question is next steps.
- Reach out to RM, have a sequence of meetings to pull together history of the NAP. Talk about implications of the carbon sequestration project. Consider all the possible tools at our disposal. Region and natural area program considers how to manage it. Would need to talk through funding that is available, and how that works according to current staffing. Stakeholder, Tribal concerns, then educational next steps. There may be the need for another field tour.
- Chair Diefenderfer: normally she would want to go in the field, but the process has been stalled for some time. There is excellent GIS information, and to her, given limited capacity, it would be better for DNR to resume movement on Marsh Creek. It has already been voted on and approved by the council.

### **11:48: Conservation Acquisitions report**

Acquisitions have been in conversations with landowners, however no recent acquisitions to report.

Over the next month, acquisition staff will be working with natural areas staff to on Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grant applications, conduct county conferral and putting together application materials by May 1, which is the application deadline.

There are a couple of wetlands grants to help with the Woodard Bay area.

Kapust asks about Methow.

Methow and Trout Lake, there are landowners who would prefer DNR purchase entire property. Landowners’ property cuts through the NAP.

Bishop: what is the process for this?

- Reed: process is a commissioner’s order.
- Pavola adds that the boundaries are set by the CPL via a Commissioner’s Order (ie, the Woodard Bay CO).

*11:52: Break for lunch*

*12:50 Meeting Resumes*

## **12:50 DNR Reports – Natural Areas Program Update**

Pavola displays a map with the regions depicting the staff in each region that are funded with CCA funding.

There is a natural areas planner being hired and a Scientist 2, interviews in the coming weeks.

Shows the Woodard Bay expansion Commissioner's Order, mentions Michele Zukerberg's work with the community, local elected officials, and individual landowners.

## **12:54: DNR Reports –Natural Heritage Program Update**

Rocchio updates with the two project positions – DNR has hired two new staff, and they will start on April 16, both reporting to Ramm-Granberg

State Lands Ecologist (Erin Burke)

- Assisting region staff to develop training in identifying rare forest types – want to get foresters to flag areas with element occurrences so data can be gathered.
- Recreation impacts work – working with PARKS, Tribes to look at recreation impacts. Separate funding to support this work. Sites will be studied in the summer.

Natural Heritage Ecologist (Molly Wiebush)

- Will help Ramm-Granberg with invasive species ranking project, Essential Conservation Area work, wetland climate change vulnerability assessment project.
- If the CCA is repealed, we would still retain enough project funding to the end of the biennium for this position.

Downs: wondering if a ECAs will be reviewed with other agencies. Is there utility and advantage in trying to get comment?

Rocchio: the conservation sites are built around Eos, if those agencies know of ones that DNR isn't aware of, that could be extremely helpful. Each ECA will have a few ranks assigned to them such as protection urgency ranks. Manager could provide input on what that rank should be.

## **1:19: Agency and Private Agriculture and Forest Land Reports**

*Claudine and Maynard are not present.*

### Agency reports

Gorell (Dept. of Fish and Wildlife): noted that during the last meeting, it was mentioned that \$32 million dollars were coming into the agency biannually for biodiversity. Diversity division has been able to add crucial capacity to assist the wildlife program. Recruiting for a herpetologist who will implement studies on invasive herps. \$2.5 million per biennium was received from the legislature to focus on recovery after wildfires.

Kapust (Dept. of Ecology) The agency received most of what was requested in the legislature. \$2 million dollars was received for wetlands since the rollback of the Clean Water Act. A million dollars for Washington Conservation Crew for justice work in underserved communities. Offshore wind and green

energy development. Amendments to the CCA to allow them to link with CA and Quebec for carbon work. Huge level of uncertainty for the CCA.

Adam Cole: Recreation & Conservation Office): most work RCO has been conducting is adjacent to the work of the heritage program, except for accepting applications for WWRP. By the end of the year in October, they will be evaluated, and their board will create a ranking list. When the legislature convenes, the budget work will begin. In July 2025, the list will return to them and the RCFB will approve the projects. Operationally, staff is mirroring growth in the budget, and has increased substantially. There is a new assistant program manager, Carl Jacobs. Also added new grant staff. Did get additional funding for salmon recovery and coastal restoration, and additional money for community forest programs (working forests). Continuing to respond to invasive species (northern pike, green crab, zebra mussel).

Thorpe (State Parks & Recreation Commission): Shared photo of Gingko State Park. There are sections that have burned due to 3 fires in the past 5 years that burned most of the sagebrush communities. Been applying herbicide and seeing resurgence of perennial plants. Going through land classification process for Steptoe Butte. In the supplemental budget, not a lot. Funding for restorations at Gingko, will be applying for work at Gingko and other sites. Rec impacts work is ongoing, and Parks is collaborating with the Tribes for that work.

Dunwiddie: 2 questions

- Were those 3 fires human started?
  - Thorpe: Yes, all off the highway.
- When there were big fires going through Hanford, there were millions of dollars spent on post-fire vegetation rehabilitation. The shrub planting was misguided, as they burn in the next fire. What planning has Parks done with the reality that the fires will be frequent in the coming years and it will be hard to sustain the ecosystem? How are you viewing long term management of these communities?
  - Thorpe: Gingko is challenging due to where it is in the landscape. There were studies on likelihood of success. Below a certain precipitation threshold, it is a roll of the dice, and Ginkgo is beneath that threshold. It isn't like other sagebrush ecosystems. Post fire response is thinking about letting annuals come in and recover naturally. Focus is on defending the core and protecting the patches of good quality sagebrush. Seeing success in defending against invasive annuals.
  - Rocchio: From the EO perspective the biggest concern is getting cheatgrass or other annual invasive species afterwards, which could transition the land from a shrub steppe to an annual invasive grassland.
  - Wilderman: adds that fire was a historically natural process in these systems.

### **1:47: Update on 2025 Legislative Requests/CCA Initiative and potential implications for Conservation Program**

Vote for the CCA will be in the general election in November.

Pavola: the legislature moved the money from the CCA to another account that would not have the funds cease at the end of the calendar year but continue until the end of the fiscal year.

sinks: has seen benefits of CCA funding and the pro repealing side has effective communications. TNC will be meeting to discuss messaging in favor of the CCA.



### **1:49: Ohlson-Kiehn presentation of spreadsheet**

Eagle Creek:

Process is that a DNR Region forester noticed a unique plant community and brought it to the attention of the Natural Heritage Program. NH Program is of the opinion that this is potentially an area of significant conservation value and that there is justification for continuing the process. Next question is if there is enough of it the plant community present.

Toutle Ridge: Region suggested it. High level of agreement.

Marcellus Natural Area expansion: The Natural Heritage Program visited the site and verified the extent of the element occurrence. Natural area already exists, the question is whether expanding it would be appropriate. Work was done a decade ago driven by a DNR parcel south of the NAP.

Dunwiddie asks: is a portion of that area still under a grazing lease?

Rocchio: DNR parcel is not. It's wildlife habitat status, however there is livestock trespass occurring on the parcel. Rex was impressed with how the site has improved after grazing stopped there.

There are plans to revisit the vernal pools in these areas. Jim Adams did work out there about ten years ago.

*2:02: Break (15 minutes)*

*2:20 Meeting resumes*

### **2:20 Proposal for June discussion on introduction of Golden Paintbrush (*Castilleja levisecta*) at Rocky Prairie NAP**

David Wilderman noted the intention for this meeting is a brief introduction to the topic with more discussion during the June council meeting.

Topic is bringing in golden paintbrush seeds with genetics not from the Rocky Prairie area.

Dunwiddie has been involved in efforts to restore the populations of this species, from the Willamette Valley to British Columbia, and the species was delisted from the Endangered Species Act

The original populations have been declining dramatically over the past 8 years, especially in Rocky Prairie. Only 314 plants exist at the site today. There has been a decline of over 95%, from the original numbers averaging 6,000 to 9,000. It is functionally extinct. There isn't enough wild collected seed to maintain the population.

Question: do we want to try to maintain the genetics of the site and collect what seeds we can or use the seed that has been produced large scale elsewhere? Is interested in the Council's feedback.

Pavola: adds that today is an opportunity to be introduced to the topic and Wilderman is planning on coming back in June with a recommendation. The survey is being done again in Spring prior to the June meeting. Wilderman is collaborating with a student at Evergreen to survey.

Thorpe: is also interested in this conversation. State Parks manages one of the remnant populations and it has also been declining at Fort Casey State Park. Last year added seed from elsewhere.

Downs: what is causing the decline?

Wilderman: No clear answer. The plant community has degraded substantially over the time, there has been loss of perennial plants. Other sites have degraded similarly, and the population hasn't collapsed in the same way.

Ettinger: Is it possible using seeds/plants to reduce, engineer and monitor the reasons for the change?

Wilderman: potentially, though DNR is reliant on others for such research due to limited program funds and time.

Chair Diefenderfer: what is the capacity of the state for producing seeds like this?

Wilderman: we do small amounts for Rocky Prairie but larger local, one in Oregon, one up north who produce the many pounds of seed needed.

Dunwiddie comments:

Wants to know the history of the production, know what populations were used in what quantities and when that was, and whether anything has been done that would significantly alter the source population since then. Is concerned that nursery grown seed will select for genotypes that thrive in nursery settings. There's a point of no return. Problem is there are no wild populations that are pure anymore with the exception of Rocky Prairie and it's bottlenecked. It is no longer possible to get wild seed anymore. Knowing what the likely genetic diversity of potential sources of seed would be useful in this discussion.

Wilderman: this topic came up in the last discussion on this. The large scale produced seeds are exclusively from San Juan Island sourced populations. Tom Kaye (Institute of Applied Ecology) has suggested that the Oregon-sourced seed may be better.

Bishop: the rationale for not introducing new material is that the population may be locally adapted, and you may not want to add other alleles. Ideally you want to introduce variation that may rescue the population but not so much that the adaptive alleles are lost. Knowing how much of the potential source populations are from Rocky Prairie would help.

Bishop Q: How soon do you want to get material out there?

Wilderman: Can start as early as this fall if we use existing seeds.

Dunwiddie: we have done a lot of studies on individual out planted plants from sources. Never tried with seeded populations. Trying to track the fate of those is impossible. Demographic studies would be hugely useful in this, but it is labor intensive and consistent. Overall, out planted plugs haven't been very successful. Few have taken hold and increased. More successful have been sowing seed.

### **2:47: Final decision on field trip**

Several options were discussed for the June field trip, including Eagle Creek, Marcellus, Toutle Ridge, Gingko, Onion Ridge, and Barker Mountain. The Council decided on Barker Mountain as the first choice, with Eagle Creek as the second choice, and Marcellus as the third choice.

### **3:19: Other business**

Chair Diefenderfer asks if anyone has other business.

Nobody has additional items.

**3:20: there are no comments from the public.**

*Motion to adjourn.*

*Seconded.*

*3:20: meeting adjourned.*