

MINUTES

**CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ADVISORY COUNCIL (CNRAC)**

July 22, 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT

Rocco Ali, Member
Sara Hall-Bagdonas, Member
Silas Chamberlin, Member
Greg Goldman, Member
Meredith Graham, Member
Dean Jackson, Member
Joanne Kilgour, Member
Bob Kirchner, Member
Geraldyn Singer, Secretary
Steve Stroman, Member
Janet Sweeney, First Vice Chair
Ted Tharan, Member
Dave Trimpey, Member

GUESTS PRESENT

Marci Mowery, Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation (presenter)
Alfred Uzokwe, DCNR (presenter)
Chris Novak, DCNR (presenter)
Tara Ramsey, DCNR (presenter)
John Norbeck, DCNR
Nicole Faraguna, DCNR
Eric Nelson, DCNR
Sherri Anderson, DCNR
Stacie Amsler, DCNR
Sim Suter, DCNR
Justin Royer, DCNR
Ryan Madara, OA OIT
Cliff David, Conservation Economics
Ephraim Zimmerman, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Emily Gates, Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society
David Hess, PA Environment Digest Blog
Robert Swift, Capitol Wire
Liz Johnson, The Nature Conservancy
Mabari Byrd, Sierra Club
Jen Quinn, Sierra Club
Sarah Corcoran, Sierra Club

DCNR

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary
Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

Randy Green, DCNR Volunteer
Linda Devlin, Allegheny National Forest Visitors Bureau
Bernard Hoffnar, Pennsylvania resident
Sarah Corcoran, Sierra Club
Nick Troutman, Office of Senator Gene Yaw
Griffin Caruso, Research Analyst, PA House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

WELCOME

Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's second virtual meeting. She stated the meeting is being recorded, and by participating, consent is being given to the recording, retention and use of the session recording.

Geralyn Singer, Acting Chair, expressed appreciation for everyone taking the time to attend. She thanked the DCNR and DEP staff helping with the arrangements for the virtual meeting.

Ms. Singer read a list of individuals who registered to attend the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Council unanimously approved the May 27, 2020 minutes.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Secretary/Acting Chair

Ms. Singer advised an email had been received through the CNRAC public comment form on the web site regarding the potential for sewage work to impact the historic Luzerne Street elm trees in Westmont. She noted the information was forwarded to the Bureau of Forestry District 6, Gallitzin State Forest, which is the district where Westmont is located. Secretary Dunn noted she was familiar with these beautiful trees and will follow up to check on the status of the response and offer assistance.

Ms. Singer noted Gretchen Leslie and Katrina Harris will be working on CRNAC's annual report. She stated the annual report will highlight the work groups so Ms. Harris will be reaching out to the work group chairs for input.

Ms. Singer advised July 1st was the 25th anniversary of DCNR, and she thanked all the DCNR staff for the critical role they play in the management of state lands.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary

Secretary Dunn highlighted the following topics:

Pandemic Operating Conditions: Secretary Dunn stated the state parks are full and busy with needed COVID safety measures in place. She said DCNR staff have risen to the new challenges and are making visitor safety a top priority. Secretary Dunn said May visitor numbers across 121 state parks were 5.8 million compared to 4.2 million in 2019; June numbers were 6.6 million compared to 5.6 million in 2019. She further explained June numbers represent a 36% increase system wide, with 6 parks showing 100% increase, and 24 parks

experiencing a 50% increase. She stated these significant increases occurred in spite of large events across the park system having to be cancelled. She noted staff have had to address specific challenges in many parks, especially in the eastern/southeastern part of the state; for example, in Carbon County, visitors have increased so much that gates close around 10 am because the park is at capacity. Secretary Dunn said DCNR has been working with local municipalities and using social media messaging to keep people safe, along with assistance from the Pennsylvania State Police and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission on signage and directing voluminous area traffic.

Secretary Dunn stated the significant increase in visitors shows the incredible need for connection to the outdoors--even more so in times of crisis. She said an economic benefit is that businesses have seen significant increases in the purchase of outdoor recreational equipment. Secretary Dunn said Governor Wolf and Dr. Levine also have recognized the essential nature of outdoor recreation and exercise.

DCNR Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Program: Secretary Dunn reviewed DCNR's DEI Program which has included hiring a coordinator to help the agency move forward. She noted components of the program include DCNR's workforce and access to grants and contracts. She expressed appreciation for CNRAC also forming a DEI work group, being led by Joanne Kilgour. Secretary Dunn stated there are many stories that remain to be told regarding the diverse history of Pennsylvania's park system, and a few projects are underway with respect to signage and interpretation.

Budget: Secretary Dunn stated a budget had been passed for the first five months of the current fiscal year based on the previous fiscal year budget. She noted revenues for the Commonwealth are down by about \$5 billion; DCNR's gas and timber revenues are down while revenue from campgrounds likely will see a boost. She advised DCNR is closely watching Congress on proposed actions to support states, as state governments play an important role in economic stimulus in terms of grants, contracts and employment. Secretary Dunn stated Congress is expected to vote on the Great American Outdoors Act to fully fund Land and Water Conservation Fund projects; the bipartisan effort will provide for improvements to national, state and local parks.

Teleworking: Secretary Dunn said staff who have been teleworking will continue to do so for some time. She noted most of DCNR's staff are front line staff who are working safely in the parks and forests.

DCNR ADVISOR REPORT

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

Ms. Leslie thanked Sherri Anderson from the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation and Ryan Madara from IT for assisting with hosting the call today and troubleshooting.

Ms. Leslie reminded the Council she had sent a link from the Bureau of Forestry who is looking for public input on their next strategic plan. She encouraged all to complete the short online survey and share the link with any of their stakeholder groups.

Ms. Leslie noted September is trails month, and DCNR hopes to celebrate with a few events. She advised the new Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan received final approval from the National Park Service, and a public event to unveil the plan is being planned.

Ms. Leslie discussed a new campaign--Buffer My Stream—to encourage 10,000 Pennsylvania landowners with streams on their property to plant native trees and shrubs to improve water quality and reduce erosion. She noted the plan provides for technical and financial support. She stated more details can be provided if desired, and a presentation on the buffer program will be on the agenda for the September or November meeting.

Ms. Leslie invited Council input on a proposal by the Maryland Air National Guard (MD ANG) to establish a lower flight path over areas of the Pennsylvania Wilds. She noted the area is heavily forested and includes game lands which are also managed for timber and recreation. She advised DCNR is very concerned about the low flight path, possibly down to 100 feet above ground, twice a day for four hours, for up to 170 days a year. Nicole Faraguna added that the MD ANG has an existing MOA over this six-county area, but operates at a much higher flight zone. She stated there are no benefits to Pennsylvania from allowing such usage as is often the case with MOAs, and DCNR submitted a letter with its concerns and recommendations in the fall of 2019. Ms. Faraguna advised the Environmental Assessment is coming out in September, and DCNR will be reviewing the document; DCNR also wanted to bring the issue to the attention of CNRAC and provide information.

Rocco Ali asked the purpose of the navigation easement, and Ms. Faraguna said the purpose is to provide a certain number of hours of low flight training for pilots, and this area is an easy area for them to claim as being open space. Mr. Ali asked about the legal standing to move forward despite DCNR comments. Ms. Faraguna said she was not sure of the legal aspects, but it would be good to raise the concerns to local and state elected officials. She added that other alternatives may not be included in the Environmental Assessment. Mr. Ali stated it would be a good opportunity for the Council to voice its concern to the House and Senate as it is almost a statewide issue.

Bob Kirchner stated he lives in the Pennsylvania Wilds area, and this is the first he has heard of the project. He said he has not seen any news coverage or has any awareness that citizens have been informed. Ms. Faraguna stated the MD ANG has indicated they are sharing some information with certain stakeholders, however, some of their contact information was incorrect. She noted there has been little education of the public on the issue, particularly in a rural area with some Internet issues and limitation, and in light of the pandemic.

Ms. Leslie said she would provide the Council with a copy of the letter from the MD ANG and DCNR's response, and then follow up with Council. Mr. Ali offered his assistance to developing a response.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Eric Nelson, Director of Legislative Affairs, DCNR

Mr. Eric Nelson discussed the following bills:

- HB 1311: This bill provides a 15% discount to military personnel, retired military members, and disabled veterans and family members at state parks; bill passed the House unanimously before the summer recess and is now before the Senate Environmental Resources Committee.
- HB 2646: This bill allows all classes of e-bikes to be operated on roadways, with class 1 and class 2 e-bikes permitted on paths where bicycles are permitted unless prohibited by local ordinance, and class 3 e-bikes permitted on paths adjacent to a highway or on paths permitted by a local ordinance. This bill is before the House Transportation

Committee this morning.

- HB 1822: This bill places restrictions on departments from entering into any contract which requires the expenditure of money from special funds. This bill is with the Senate Appropriations Committee.
- HB 2004: This bill repeals the allocation directed to the Keystone Fund and would require the General Assembly to appropriate the money in that fund.

Mr. Rocco Ali asked if the e-bikes bill is enacted, would it impact motorized recreational use in state forests. Mr. Nelson responded that he is reviewing the bill now but it might have an impact. Mr. Ali noted Council's Motorized Recreation work group has done excellent work trying to modernize recreation within state forests within environmental constraints. Mr. Nelson said he would send Council a summary of testimony from today's hearing.

Mr. Greg Goldman asked about any committee leadership changes. Mr. Nelson said Senate leadership will change in the near future, and he will be monitoring and advising of any changes.

Ms. Singer asked if there was any action that CNRAC should be moving forward with at this time. Mr. Nelson responded that the Special Fund bills (House Bills 1822 and 2004) are important as any freeze on grant spending could impact the economy.

PRESENTATIONS

Marci Mowery, President, PA Parks and Forests Foundation Protect Our Parks and Forests Campaign

Ms. Singer expressed appreciation for all that PPFF does in support of DCNR and highlighting the economic value to the local community of our state parks and forests, as well as the need for funding for maintaining these important natural resources for current and future generations.

Marci Mowery advised she would be following up on an infrastructure report provided at a CNRAC meeting in 2019. She stated PPFF prepared a report which showed about \$1 billion needed for infrastructure investments, equally divided between state parks and forests, due to normal wear and tear, not the heavy visitation being seeing recently that will only increase the needs.

Ms. Mowery advised after release of the report, PPFF organized legislative tours of state parks and forests. She noted DCNR staff do a great job of ensuring visitors have an amazing experience when visiting parks and forests, so visitors do not always see the infrastructure needs, such as sewage and water treatment plants. Ms. Mowery stated about 15 visits were completed with good participation by elected officials and the media. She said the pandemic caused the in-person tours to stop, but PPFF has done some re-organizing and is doing some virtual advocacy. Ms. Mowery emphasized the importance of protecting the special funds currently used for critical infrastructure maintenance funding through legislator education.

Ms. Mowery showed and reviewed a PPFF website created specific to protecting parks and forests (www.protectourparksandforests.org).

Ms. Mowery discussed how CNRAC can help PPFF's efforts including growing the stakeholder base, especially the business community such as outdoor recreation equipment companies, landscape architects and engineers who benefit from grants and contracts, and local

businesses who benefit from state park and forest visitors. She also suggested CNRAC can help by participating in PPF's advocacy programs and event days.

Ms. Singer asked how PPF is capitalizing on the current increase in visitation at state parks. Ms. Mowery responded that she is seeing firsthand the variety of new users and people reconnecting and returning after many years as they understand how critical the outdoors are for their physical and mental health; this is a new group of people who can become advocates for investment in state parks. She noted there will be much data coming out soon on the critical role the outdoors has on overall health which is something the general public gave little thought to prior to the pandemic; it will be important to capitalize on the research and statistics.

Ms. Mowery noted PPF keeps a close watch on pending legislation to see if bills move forward and keeps comments ready.

Alfred Uzokwe, Director, DCNR's Bureau Facility Design and Construction DCNR's Infrastructure Status and Priorities

Alfred Uzokwe advised his presentation would focus on DCNR's infrastructure funding streams and how infrastructure maintenance needs are prioritized.

Mr. Uzokwe noted DCNR has 133 dams (46 in the high hazard category), 926 bridges and culverts, 4,275 buildings of different sizes and designations, 68 sewage treatment plants, and 173 water treatment plants. He explained the six funding sources for upkeep of this infrastructure and the amount of funding obtained over the past few years:

- Key '93: Established in 1993. Allots funds from Real Estate Transfer Tax for deferred maintenance. Average of \$19.3 million per year.
- Environmental Stewardship Fund: Created in 2002. Used for environmental restoration, conservation & community revitalization projects. Average of \$6.2 million per year.
- Dirt & Gravel: Funding to eliminate stream pollution caused by runoff and sediment from unpaved and low volume public roads. Average of \$7 million per year.
- Act 26 Fund: From oil franchise tax and used solely for bridge projects. Average of \$11 million per year.
- FEMA: Flood damage rehabilitation (funding only provided when a disaster occurs).
- Capital Funds: Established by legislation for capital projects. \$261 million for five years.

Mr. Uzokwe discussed the breakdown of the funding streams by category of use. He stated there is not sufficient funding for all the infrastructure needs with the most recent estimate being \$1.5 billion. He noted this number is not static as more infrastructure will continue to age deteriorate and require attention.

Mr. Uzokwe next discussed how DCNR prioritizes the needs due to the lack of funding. He stated dams and bridges are inspected on a cycle, conditions are documented, and the worst issues are prioritized. He explained buildings cannot be inspected in the same manner as bridges and dams as the inspections are multi-disciplinary in nature and require different types of experts. He said the priorities for buildings are employee and visitor safety, compliance with regulations and codes, and mission criticality. He noted all assessments currently are qualitative; however, DCNR is working with Penn State to introduce a quantitative element to the decision-making process by providing a replacement value and cost to fix all deficiencies in a building. He continued explaining the system calculates an index which provides a

benchmark for comparing the condition of buildings.

Mr. Uzokwe said his office will continue to do their best to maintain parks and forests infrastructure to give visitors the best possible experience.

Chris Novak, DCNR, Director of Communications
Tara Ramsey, DCNR, Digital Director
DCNR Communications and Public Outreach

Chris Novak advised she would be addressing some Council questions about DCNR's communications and public outreach programs, with the assistance of Tara Ramsey, DCNR's Digital Director.

Ms. Novak reviewed the list of DCNR's Office of Communications staff and responsibilities, as well as staff located within individual bureaus.

Ms. Novak noted many of the communications are electronic and focused in the digital arena, such as an electronic newsletter, a blog, and website. Ms. Novak said a question was asked about planning, and she stated monthly themes are decided at the beginning of the year, along with creating an editorial calendar for the newsletter and social media outlets around those themes.

Ms. Novak discussed DCNR's social media accounts including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Flickr and advised content is posted almost daily; she noted 54 state parks and forests also have their own Facebook accounts with content managers at the individual sites and the Office of Communications having administrative rights. Ms. Novak advised there is almost 24/7 monitoring of social media accounts, along with engagement with the public on questions and comments posted on the accounts.

Ms. Ramsey discussed the significant growth seen with social media and audience characteristics. She said with all accounts combined there are over 700,000 followers, the largest following among all Pennsylvania state agencies.

Ms. Ramsey stated the growth is generated by having a good understanding of your audience and their content needs as not all content works on all social media platforms. She said DCNR's Twitter audience engagement comes primarily from other Pennsylvania agencies, reporters and legislators; department news works well on Twitter as does grant and program announcement and photos of wildlife and parks and forests scenery.

Ms. Ramsey said the fans and followers on Facebook mirrors pretty closely the demographic of the state with the greatest number of followers from Pittsburgh, followed by Philadelphia; 60% of the followers are women and 40% are men with the largest age groups being 35 to 45 and then 45 to 55. She stated infographics such as conservation tips or numbers do well on Facebook along with safety tips and invasive species information. Ms. Ramsey said people are coming to Facebook for recreational information not agency news.

Ms. Ramsey said Instagram has a younger audience, and the majority are looking only for scenic pictures of state parks and forests.

Ms. Ramsey said DCNR believes there is an opportunity to interact with more people via video

so a Deputy Digital Director was hired with those skills. She said DCNR is still gauging what works best with video, but currently educational videos on invasive species have been popular.

Ms. Novak advised there have been increases in social media numbers recently due to COVID, and DCNR has been doing a significant amount of messaging on what is open and closed and safety measures. Ms. Novak said a question had been asked about what is being done to retain recent new visitors, and DCNR is examining ways to respond to what their audience wants and also to include messages around conservation, stewardship, and doing the right thing so visitors are not only enjoying the natural resources but learning about how DCNR takes care of them and how they can help DCNR do so. She stated DCNR is also looking at new recreational opportunities that new visitors are looking for; for example, geocaching has been popular.

Ms. Novak gave an example of a social media post asking visitors to pick up their trash, and this post reached more than 1.2 million people.

Ms. Novak stated there has also been a 50% increase in web site traffic during the pandemic which people looking for information about what is open and closed, information about trails, and information about parks particularly in the southeastern region of the state.

Ms. Novak displayed a list of current public engagement activities and methods including Survey Monkey, outreach through Penn State, email, news releases, feedback through the web site, surveys of recipients of electronic publications (a survey of the resource newsletter is upcoming). She said there are limited public meetings and open houses, with the majority of feedback concentrated in the electronic realm. Ms. Novack said it is challenging to reach diverse audiences, so DCNR has done some targeted focus groups working with various organizations to capture audiences not being engaged through other outreach methods.

CNRAC Officer Elections

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator (for Nominations Committee)

Ms. Harris stated she would be presenting the report from the Nominations Committee as Stockton Illoway was unable to attend the meeting. Ms. Harris stated the Nominating Committee is submitting the following nominations for officer positions for a one-year term:

- For Chair, Geralyn Singer
- For Vice Chair, Bob Kirchner
- For Secretary, Meredith Graham

Ms. Harris asked for any other nominations for any of the offices from the Council; none were offered. Ms. Harris stated that based on hearing no other nominations, the nominations are closed. She said that since there is only one nomination for each office, the nominees are elected to the respective offices by acclamation. Ms. Harris asked for any objections; none were offered. Ms. Harris said that hearing no objections, the election process is complete.

WORK GROUP REPORTS

Bob Kirchner, Motorized Recreation Work Group Chair

Mr. Kirchner said the Motorized Recreation Work Group has not had a recent call, but anticipates meeting to discuss the responses to comments on the proposed revised ATV policy when they become available. He noted the work group is planning to have an update to its 2019 Report by the January 2021 meeting. Mr. Kirchner said the work group was presented with an opportunity to have an article about CNRAC and the work group's motorized recreation recommendations in the magazine Sharetrails, a publication of the Blue Ribbon Coalition based in Idaho. He said the magazine publication was delayed and should be published in the next few weeks.

Communications Work Group

Ms. Leslie reported for the group as there is currently not a chair. She noted the Council's annual report will be prepared for publication in September. Ms. Leslie noted the pandemic has made it difficult to secure group photos and videos of the Council so the web site has not yet been updated per the work group's suggestions. She stated the work group will be working with the other work groups on their goals to assist with communications and outreach.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Work Group Joanne Kilgour, Chair

Joanne Kilgour stated this new work group had its first call recently and discussed the setting of goals and priorities. She said the group is coordinating with DCNR's DEI coordinator, Emily Hendrickson. Ms. Kilgour invited comments and suggestions from Council members and the public. She noted the work group hopes to have this topic regularly included at future Council meetings.

Geralyn Singer, Infrastructure Work Group Co-Chair

Ms. Singer advised the work group will continue to work with the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation and other stakeholders for some outreach to media outlets highlighting our parks and forests, as well as highlighting the infrastructure needs.

Meredith Graham, Strategic Planning Work Group Chair

Meredith Graham was unable to be heard on the call and provided an update after the meeting. She noted the work group is awaiting several plans that they will be reviewing. She encouraged everyone to participate in the Bureau of Forestry survey mentioned by Ms. Leslie to help with the development of the forestry strategic plan.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Singer stated a question had been received through the CNRAC web site from Randy Green which stated: "With snowmobiles and ATVs having very different environmental impacts and such different histories in the state parks and forests, why are they always grouped together in public surveys and reports? Regarding environmental impacts, snowmobiles and ATVs are at complete opposite ends of the spectrum, yet they are constantly lumped together. I don't understand the logic—apples and oranges, if you will. Snowmobiles have a very long and successful history in state parks and forests where ATVs only minimally exist. This doesn't give either group a fair representation." Ms. Singer thanked Mr. Green for his question and comments and requested Mr. Kirchner respond to the question. Mr. Kirchner said the Motorized

Recreation work group will be issuing an update to their January 2019 Report, which will be an excellent opportunity to address this comment and include a recommendation or discussion of the comment in the report update.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Singer asked for any other business topics, and none were offered.

MEETING ADJOURNED

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 12:06 p.m.

Notice of the July meeting was published in a newspaper of general circulation in Dauphin County and mailed to individuals and offices in compliance with the Sunshine Act (1986-84). These minutes constitute the official record of the Conservation and Natural Resources Advisory Council; no official transcript is provided.