

MINUTES

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

July 28, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT

Rocco Ali, Member
Silas Chamberlin, Member
Greg Goldman, Member
Meredith Graham, Secretary
Sarah Hall-Bagdonas, Member
Bob Kirchner, Vice Chair
Gary Kribbs, Member
Geraldyn Singer, Chair
Steve Stroman, Member
Janet Sweeney, Member
Ted Tharan, Member
Dave Trimpey, Member

DCNR

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary
Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

GUESTS PRESENT

Eric Nelson, DCNR, Director of Legislative Affairs (presenter)
Robert Young, DEP, Energy Programs Office (presenter)
Nicole Faraguna, DCNR, Director of Policy (presenter)
Chris Nicholas, DCNR, Susquehanna District State Forester (presenter)
Nate Lotz, DCNR
Chris Novak, DCNR
John Norbeck, DCNR
Aara Vinsh, DCNR
Shea Zwerver, DCNR
Peter Spadaro, DCNR
Jake Newton, DCNR
Wesley Robinson, DCNR
Meredith Hill, DCNR
Tyler Semder, DCNR
Joseph Herbstritt, DCNR
Nate Reagle, DCNR
Chris Firestone, DCNR
Eric Rensel, DCNR
Geoff Bristow, PA DEP
Kimberly Yeakle, PA DEP
Jonathan Geyer, PA Department of Agriculture
Michael Roth, PA Department of Agriculture

Emma Diehl, PA Historical and Museum Commission
John Lavelle, Lycoming County
Kirsten Vernin, RES
Richard Allan, Pugliese Associates
Clifford David, Conservation Economics
John Kline, Kline Associates
Tom Kase, Collins
Amy Shields, Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group
Ezra Thrush, Penn Future
Linda Devlin, Visit Allegheny National Forest
Jim Jackson, JNE Group
Penny Pifer, PA Senate
Natalie Shearer, Geosyntec Consultants
Sarah Corcoran, Sierra Club
Edward Stoddard, Happy Valley Outdoor Adventure Bureau
Adrian Markocic, National Renewable Energy Corp.
Elizabeth Krug, PSSA
Dave Geci, Geci and Associates
Jennifer Dunlap, PA Parks and Forests Foundation
Clinton Ivins
Stephen Layne
Andrew Layne
Bob Shughart

WELCOME

Ms. Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's virtual meeting for July 2021. Ms. Leslie read a list of Council members expected to be on the call. She stated audience members are muted; a few will be unmuted to receive their comments during the public comment periods. She explained Council members have the ability to interact with presenters and have discussions among themselves. She stated the meeting is being recorded, and by participating, consent is being given to the recording, retention and use of the session recording. She advised if after hearing the presentations, anyone is interested in making a comment, they can place their name and topic in the Chat feature, and they will be acknowledged during the public comment period.

Ms. Leslie introduced some of the DCNR staff present. She also acknowledged the individuals joining the virtual audience.

Geralyn Singer, Chair, expressed appreciation for everyone taking the time to attend and DCNR's support of the virtual meeting. She also thanked the individuals presenting today who will be providing information and sharing ideas.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Ms. Singer noted that Council had decided to add a second public comment period at the beginning of the meetings which would primarily be for issues not on the meeting agenda. She stated there would also be an opportunity at the end of the meeting for any general public comments regarding presentations or issues discussed during the meeting. She noted Council will not be engaging in any discussion of the comments but simply offering the opportunity to provide comments to Council members and following up after the meeting if needed. She

reminded everyone that comments are limited to five minutes.

Ms. Singer invited Mr. Jerry Walls to provide his comments. Mr. Walls did not seem to be on the call.

Ms. Singer invited Mr. Steven Layne to provide his comments. Due to technical difficulties, Mr. Layne provided his comments at the end of the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Council unanimously approved the May 26, 2021 minutes.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Chair

Ms. Singer deferred her report until Council Business and Work Group reports.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary

Secretary Dunn stated staff is beginning to return to the Rachel Carson Building in Harrisburg, and she is looking forward to the time when face-to-face Council meetings can resume. She stated DCNR staff are very busy, including hosting two major national conferences—the National Association of State Park Directors in Western Pennsylvania in September, and the National Association of State Foresters. She added State Liaison Officers will also be meeting in Pennsylvania this fall.

Secretary Dunn advised visitation continues to be very high across the statewide park system, with capacity closures occurring at a number of parks. She noted outdoor recreation continues to be important to many Pennsylvania residents. Secretary Dunn stated she has been traveling across the state since the last CNRAC meeting to participate in numerous events, including ribbon cuttings, grant awards, and groundbreakings. She noted parks and forests continue to see record-breaking numbers of visitors over 2019 and 2020 numbers.

Secretary Dunn provided CNRAC members with an update on DCNR's budget. She noted DCNR continues to carry forward a very large infrastructure funding need. She advised Eric Nelson will be discussing some potential legislation which would help cover some of the funding needs. She advised funding for 25 more rangers was included in DCNR's current budget and the hiring process is underway; DCNR is experiencing the same challenges as others in the public and private sector with hiring in a competitive environment. Secretary Dunn referred to Council member Silas Chamberlin's white paper educating others on the potential uses of the American Rescue Plan Act funding, including park and forest trails; she encouraged all to read the white paper and offered to provide copies to those interested.

Secretary Dunn discussed a recent Pennsylvania Supreme Court case which issued a decision regarding the use of oil and gas industry fees and found the funding coming from public lands belongs to the trust and should not have been used for general operating budget purposes. Secretary Dunn explained there are still some legal issues being resolved, and DCNR will be closing monitoring this issue.

Secretary Dunn noted Chris Nicholas will be discussing the ATV pilot program. She reminded

Council of the background to the pilot program legislated in the fiscal code of 2018 which required DCNR to create an ATV pilot program. She explained there are many stakeholders involved in the pilot program including DCNR, PennDOT, local townships, and users. She advised the pilot program opens up 11 miles of forest road previously off-limits to ATV users. Secretary Dunn advised there are some upcoming webinars on August 18 for advisory committee members and August 25 for the general public.

Secretary Dunn stated DCNR is keeping an eye on Federal legislation around the re-creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps introduced by Senator Casey. She noted with many state park structures built by the original Civilian Conservation Corps and DCNR's current green initiatives, the state park system would be a ready-made fit for this program.

Secretary Dunn discussed the PA Outdoor Corps youth crews currently working within the state park system and noted she and other executive team members try to visit each crew to discuss potential future careers with DCNR, as well as reinforcing the goal of citizens educated about sustainability and conservation.

Secretary Dunn mentioned DCNR's search for a funding stream for riparian buffers and mentioned the Chesapeake Bay Foundation as a strategic partner for this program.

Secretary Dunn referenced her discussion at the previous meeting regarding the old growth forest network and noted Pennsylvania is a leader in this program, with 18 protected old growth forests open for public visitation. She advised 6 of the 18 forests are ones just added to the program in the past few months. She stated DCNR's team has a goal of one in every county to provide Pennsylvanians with access to the old forest network.

Dave Trimpey asked for an update on the timber sale market. Secretary Dunn said John Norbeck is reporting that it is on an upswing. Secretary Dunn said she will have an email sent to Mr. Trimpey with the latest numbers.

Rocco Ali mentioned a proposed rulemaking was discussed at a recent Fish Commission meeting to open trout season the first Saturday of April 2022. Secretary Dunn said DCNR is coordinating closely with the Fish Commission. She mentioned DCNR has a newly hired person in the position of Director of Governor's Advisory Council For Hunting, Fishing & Conservation, Derek Eberly, who CNRAC might want to invite to a future meeting.

DCNR ADVISOR REPORT

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

Ms. Leslie reminded everyone of future 2021 CNRAC meeting dates -- September 22 and November 17. She noted decisions will be made at a later date as to whether the meetings will be virtual, in-person, or a hybrid meeting.

Ms. Leslie gave an update on the Keystone Tree Fund which is funded through drivers' registration. She noted as of June 30, 2021 the fund has collected approximately \$184,000 which will be used to support grants for tree planting and buffers. She noted the funding has come from more than 70,000 individuals' \$3 donations.

ATV PILOT PROGRAM

Chris Nicholas, Susquehanna Forest District Manager, DCNR

Mr. Nicholas advised his district includes Potter County and part of McKean County; he stated ATV riding has been ongoing in his district for decades. He said some of the County ATV roads have been opened for more than 20 years. Mr. Nicholas said the area made a good location for the pilot program since only a minimal amount of work was needed to provide the designated connectivity with existing roads.

Mr. Nicholas summarized the extensive pre-planning that was done including three main priorities of connecting DCNR's 45-mile trail system to other legal riding opportunities (primarily existing approved township roads), connecting the local community and businesses, and connecting to other DCNR ATV trails. He advised that including PennDOT roads, all the targeted connectivity was able to be completed, resulting in more than 250 miles.

Mr. Nicholas said a monitoring program is in place which includes counters along some of the roads, as well as adjacent non-motorized roads. He advised invasive plants were also identified along the route on state forest land, as well as along connecting township roads. Mr. Nicholas said an analysis was done of any roads where there may have been illegal riding, and while none were found, some potential roads were identified and will be monitored.

Mr. Nicholas explained that Penn State's Recreation Department will be doing some research with users and owners of camps along the route, as well as doing some social monitoring and forest economic monitoring with businesses in the area through 2022. Mr. Nicholas stated the fiscal code requires a report be provided to the legislators in early 2023.

Mr. Nicholas reviewed the permit system in place, noting a permit is needed to be legal on the PennDOT/state forest roads. He noted since the program started mid-year, the fee has been prorated to \$20; next year it will be \$40 and there is a potential for additional trails/connections to be added. He stated the permits are for the riding season of Memorial Day weekend through the end of September to avoid conflicts with hunting season and other user groups and so maintenance can be conducted in the months of May and October.

Mr. Nicholas said the pilot program opened July 16 and to date about 900 permit tags have been sold which is less than anticipated. He advised there are riders on the roads, but the number is not overwhelming as they are now spread over a larger area. Mr. Nicholas advised one citation has been issued to date, and it seemed to be an unintentional act on the part of the rider.

Mr. Ali complimented the work being done to provide more opportunities for the motorized recreation community.

Bob Kirshner asked for clarification on whether the permit is needed for state forest connectors or does it also include township connectors. Mr. Nicholas responded the township connectors are designated as open roads where no permit is needed. Mr. Kirshner echoed Mr. Ali's compliment on the pilot program.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Eric Nelson, Director of Legislative Affairs, DCNR

Eric Nelson said DCNR is participating in many events across the state, including a tour with the

House Democratic Committee at Presque Isle, which Secretary Dunn and John Norbeck will be attending, and a Senate Policy Roundtable discussion in Schuylkill County to discuss funding opportunities for cleanup of the Schuylkill River. He added another event is an elk tour with the Game Commission, the Game and Fisheries Committee, and the House Tourism Committee in Elk County, followed by a tour of Kinzua State Park; a tour of Ohiopyle with both committees is also being planned, as well as a tour of the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon for the Senate Environmental Resources Committee.

Mr. Nelson summarized several bills DCNR is monitoring:

- Senate Bill 525, which is very important to DCNR.
- Senator Regan recently circulated a co-sponsorship memo to allow off-highway motorcycles on state lands; DCNR has some concerns with this Bill.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

Ms. Singer advised Council had recently prepared two letters. She stated the first one was to the Pennsylvania State Board of Education on proposed changes to the academic standards for science and technology in which CNRAC supported separate standards for science and technology and environment and ecology. Ms. Singer noted the second letter was to Governor Wolf and the General Assembly regarding the American Rescue Plan funding and urged them to allocate funding for infrastructure of state parks and forests. Ms. Singer explained both letters were approved by Council via email due to the time sensitivity and deadlines and therefore need to be ratified. She said both letters are available on the CNRAC web site. Ms. Singer asked for a motion to ratify the two letters. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to ratify the two letters.

PRESENTATION

LARGE-SCALE SOLAR SITING IN PENNSYLVANIA

Robert Young, Energy Programs Office, PA Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP)
Nicole Faraguna, Director of Policy, DCNR

Robert Young noted that DEP's Energy Programs Office (EPO) is the primary agency responsible for implementing clean energy programs in Pennsylvania. He stated EPO is responsible for supporting renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, alternative transportation, energy assurance, and associated education, outreach and technical support efforts.

Mr. Young said in 2018 a Solar Future Plan was prepared to set a goal for solar adaptation across the state. He noted the target goal was 10% electricity from in-state solar by 2030 (currently less than 0.5%). He explained that if 90% of in-state solar comes from grid-scale or utility scale sources, which would be about 10 GW of solar generation at a ratio of about eight acres of land needed for every MW, it would be about 80,000 acres of land or about 0.3% of total land in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Young discussed the different scales of solar—from residential/commercial to community solar to grid-scale solar. He explained residential/commercial solar is for on-site use, while community and grid-scale solar are for off-site use. He further explained community solar is not yet allowed in Pennsylvania, while grid-scale solar is a new emerging market.

Mr. Young next discussed the factors driving grid-scale solar in Pennsylvania including access to the transmission infrastructure, technical advances improving project economics, availability of open land and marginal farmland, and policy and regulatory requirements such as the Governor's Executive Order to reduce carbon emissions.

Mr. Young reviewed development characteristics, noting it is being driven by developers working with landowners. He noted the projects do not require additional subdivision of the property. He advised there is limited state oversight beyond the standard water and erosion permitting related to construction projects. Mr. Young stated solar siting may present opportunities to preserve farmland for future agricultural use after the project is properly decommissioned, as well as opportunities for integration into agricultural uses (pollinators, grazing, etc.).

Mr. Young presented some of the key factors driving project siting and location. He stated the ideal site for a developer consists of contiguous parcels of cleared land with limited slopes and proximity to transmission infrastructure. He explained this combination of factors drives the lease rates offered to landowners. He noted solar developers are not specifically seeking out active farmland; however, many active (and fallow) farms meet the desired criteria. Mr. Young advised the lease rates (per acre) for highly advantageous locations may exceed the economic value of the land for both short- and long-term agricultural production.

Mr. Young displayed and discussed showing the grid-scale solar project development process. He explained PJM is the organization that manages the grid in Pennsylvania and receives the technical documentation from developers and determines whether it is a feasible project only from the perspective of the transmission grid. He noted there are 398 projects in various stages of review, with 7 of those projects having moved into the operations phase.

Mr. Young discussed a graph showing the growth of grid-scale solar projects in Pennsylvania over the last few years. He also showed maps of Pennsylvania with the location of the 398 projects by county, the potential electric generation capacity of the projects, and the land use impact.

Mr. Young discussed a map showing the high-level solar land use analysis, relying on the documentation submitted to PJM. He noted the land use for about 80% of the proposed 398 projects is farmland and only about 5% of the proposed projects are on forested lands. Mr. Young displayed a graphic showing the amount of impacted land by type in acres.

Mr. Young summarized some of the key impacts on economic development, noting the investment potential is more than \$14 billion. He also reviewed some of the land use topics to explore more include guiding new development to where it makes the most sense, discussing farmland and forest preservation, using former mine lands and other Brownfields, property tax collections impact, property value impact, and end of project concerns (decommissioning, recycling/disposal, restoration of land, etc.).

Mr. Young reviewed some of the outreach activities being planned by his office, including working with local officials, holding forums, conducting research, developing best practices, and examining potential environmental impacts.

Nicole Faraguna stated DCNR is actively working to address climate change in a variety of

ways, as it is a priority for this administration. She referenced a 2018 plan that contains 123 action steps related to climate change. She noted forests are a key part of the plan, with DCNR working to manage forests sustainably, including carbon sequestration. Ms. Faraguna said DCNR is looking to increase its forests and the amount of trees planted to increase carbon sequestration. Ms. Faraguna referenced the State Forests Management Plan, which guides the DCNR in best practices and reinforces the value of state forests in mitigating the impact to the climate.

Ms. Faraguna provided information on an investment DCNR is making in solar projects, noting it does not include siting commercial-scale or utility-scale solar projects on DCNR lands. She explained DCNR projects are small-scale projects targeted at supporting on-site park/forest operations. She stated DCNR is very supportive of solar projects and considers it another tool in combating climate change; however, DCNR does not want to see valuable forest land lost and wants to be sure decision makers use best possible practices in considering solar projects. Ms. Faraguna advised an internal workgroup has been established to better understand the potential impact, to develop a plan for DCNR's role, and to provide good information, technical assistance, and coordination among agency partners. She added that technical assistance is already being provided to private landowners through DCNR's foresters by sharing information and resources on the best management practices DCNR is using on its own lands; she noted discussions with DCNR's key stakeholders is continuing. Ms. Faraguna said DCNR is also examining how other states are managing the increased interest in solar siting.

Ms. Faraguna stated the goal is to use marginal lands and not high quality natural areas such as prime farmland and natural forests. She added that forests offer many environmental benefits such as air quality, water quality, storm water management, and biodiversity, which are reasons for keeping forests intact, along with economic impacts to local communities and the state.

WORK GROUP REPORTS

MOTORIZED RECREATION WORK GROUP

Bob Kirchner, Chair

Bob Kirchner advised the Motorized Recreation Work Group did not have any updates.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH WORK GROUP

Sarah Hall-Bagdonas, Chair

Sarah Hall-Bagdonas stated the work group continues to issue the e-newsletter and will be assisting the Infrastructure Work Group with the October CNRAC Conversations discussion on infrastructure.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION WORK GROUP

Joanne Kilgour, Chair

Ms. Singer noted Ms. Kilgour was not present, but the work group is working on their next steps following the recent CNRAC Conversations discussion "Equity in the Outdoors."

INFRASTRUCTURE WORK GROUP
Geralyn Singer, Chair

Ms. Singer advised the next CNRAC Conversations will focus on infrastructure with a tentative date of October 21 [after the meeting the date was changed to October 27]. She referenced an earlier discussion about the letter sent to Governor Wolf and the General Assembly regarding the use of funds from the American Rescue Plan for funding infrastructure needs at state parks and forests.

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORK GROUP
Meredith Graham, Chair

Meredith Graham thanked all the CNRAC members for the assistance with getting a letter prepared on the proposed changes to the state science education standards.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Singer invited Mr. Stephen Layne to provide his comments. Mr. Layne read and provided a copy of a prepared statement in which he asked CNRAC to consider holding a public hearing regarding improper treatment by DCNR employees of adjacent landowners to Commonwealth property. Ms. Singer advised CNRAC will review Mr. Layne's statement and respond.

Ms. Leslie advised any comments or questions in the chat feature will be collected and provided to CNRAC members.

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 11:58 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.