

MINUTES

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

January 26, 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

GUESTS PRESENT

Mike Walsh, DCNR (presenter)
Nicole Faraguna, DCNR (presenter)
Nathan Reigner, DCNR (presenter)
Nate Lotze, DCNR (presenter)
Chris Novak, DCNR
Cindy Thomas, DCNR
John Norbeck, DCNR
Aara Vinsh, DCNR
Shea Zwerver, DCNR
Jake Newton, DCNR
Wesley Robinson, DCNR
Justin Royer, DCNR
John Hallas, DCNR
Meredith Hill, DCNR
Mike Kern, DCNR
Audrey Miner, DCNR
Kalaia Tripeaux, DCNR
Tyler Semder, DCNR
Julie Brennan, Clinton County Tourism
Jack Clark, SAAC
David Hess, PA Environmental News
Sarah Corcoran, Sierra Club
Elizabeth Krug, PSSA
Vincent Ryan

DCNR

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary
Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

Frank Kummer, The Philadelphia Inquirer
Deborah Weisberg, PA Outdoor News
Sheila Linn, Killens Pond State Park (Delaware)
Andrew Miller, Susquehanna River Valley Visitors Bureau
Marcus Schneck, Patriot News
Tom Venesky, PA Outdoor News
Jean Ruhf, Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau
Cassie Miller, PA Capital Star
Jennifer Dunlap, PA Parks and Forests Foundation
Tory Gates, Radio Pennsylvania Network
Josh Zucal, Cameron County
Laura Legere, Post Gazette
Jen Quinn, Sierra Club
Mark Nale, MarGail Enterprises
John Confer
Brian Whipkey, USA Today Network
Brenda Adams-Weyant
Nicole Weiler, FedEx Supply Chain

WELCOME

Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's virtual meeting for January 2022. Ms. Leslie read a list of Council members on the call. She stated audience members are muted, but can be unmuted to receive any public comments. 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.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Geralyn Singer, Chair, noted the first public comment period is primarily for anyone wishing to make a comment on a topic not on the meeting agenda. No public comments were offered during this time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Council unanimously approved the November 17, 2021 minutes.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Chair

Ms. Singer advised that Joanne Kilgour and Meredith Graham have been reappointed, and their terms will expire in January 2025. She stated Council continues to work on other reappointments and vacancies so all Council seats can be filled.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary

Secretary Dunn expressed appreciation for everyone joining the call and for their time.

Secretary Dunn stated 2022 will be the biggest and best year yet for DCNR. She noted the COVID pandemic has highlighted the essential nature of DCNR's mission, and DCNR has been challenged to rise above where they have been in the past. Secretary Dunn stated DCNR strives to provide the very best possible services with the staff and funding DCNR has but has to do more with outdoor recreation being such an essential part of Pennsylvania life. She said DCNR has an opportunity and challenge to serve in a bigger and better way and will be implementing an aggressive agenda for the last year of this administration.

Secretary Dunn discussed the importance of outdoor recreation to Commonwealth citizens, including the need for services and amenities to be close to their homes and for a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation to exist across Pennsylvania. She stated internal and external planning processes have led to the hiring of Dr. Nathan Reigner as the Commonwealth's Director of Outdoor Recreation, who will be presenting later in the meeting. She advised Nathan will be helping to elevate the Commonwealth to be even better known as a great place to live, work and play.

Secretary Dunn noted the pandemic and the rapid increased usage of state parks and forests highlighted the weakness in DCNR funding, particularly for infrastructure. She stated the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation has been telling the story for many years of old infrastructure, including failing structures built more than 50 years ago, unsafe dams, and water and sewage systems that need maintenance and repair. She said DCNR is tackling the issues the best they can with available funding, but there are large gaps. She explained there needs to be a regular investment of about \$175 million a year to maintain infrastructure and bring unsafe issues into compliance; currently the investment is only about \$75 million a year. Secretary Dunn said an example are the 139 dams where \$200 million is needed to bring them into compliance. She noted in addition to bringing infrastructure into compliance, DCNR also wants to create amenities that are attractive to visitors, such as closing gaps with major trail corridors.

Secretary Dunn discussed the need for clean water and noted DCNR is seeking funding to plant more forest buffers along streams and rivers. She also discussed the need for urban forest and tree canopy to minimize the impact of climate change and maximize the use of resources for clean water.

Secretary Dunn noted another priority is the department's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative, which works to create a more diverse DCNR workforce and create public lands that are safe and welcoming for all.

Secretary Dunn advised a NextGen Council of young people is being developed so DCNR can learn from a younger generation of users; applications are being reviewed. She also discussed the continuing importance of the Outdoor Corps program in involving youth and encouraging them to continue into the conservation/environmental/outdoor recreation workforce.

Secretary Dunn reviewed some of the many other goals for 2022 including working with water well drillers to supply safe water, advancing green infrastructure, and bringing state parks to

net zero by 2025. She noted a number of the sustainability activities can be implemented by users at their own properties.

DCNR ADVISOR REPORT

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

Ms. Leslie reminded everyone the remaining 2022 CNRAC meetings will be March 23, May 25, July 27, September 28, and November 16.

Ms. Leslie advised DCNR's 2022 grant application process is now open and will be open until 4 p.m. on April 6. She noted more than \$70 million in grants were awarded last year through the Community Conservation Partnerships grant program.

Ms. Leslie discussed a recent settlement with Sunoco related to a pipeline spill at Marsh Creek State Park. She advised Sunoco will be required to dredge the cove where the spill occurred and pay a \$4 million settlement to repair the natural resources damage and to improve the visitor experiences at the park.

Ms. Leslie announced French Creek in northwestern Pennsylvania has been named the 2022 River of the Year.

Ms. Leslie gave updates on two topics the Council has been closely involved with and for which the Council had prepared comment letters. She noted there had been a recommendation that the ecology and environmental Pennsylvania science standard be combined, and a number of stakeholders, including DCNR and CNRAC, had suggested this not be done. Ms. Leslie advised the Board of Education reviewed and acted on recommendations which included a set of standards entitled "environmental literacy and sustainability." She noted DCNR is pleased with this outcome. Ms. Leslie advised there is nothing new to report regarding the Maryland National Guard Duke MOA Low flyovers; comments letters from DCNR and CNCRA were submitted, along with letters and comments from many other organizations and individuals.

DCNR LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Nate Lotze, Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs

Nate Lotze advised DCNR will have a Senate budget hearing on March 2; no House budget hearing is scheduled this year. He noted several land transfer bills are being tracked. Mr. Lotze said another bill being monitored is HB598 regarding prescriptive easements which passed the House and is in the Senate but does not appear to be moving forward; DCNR opposes this bill.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

Ms. Singer stated two letters were completed between meetings due to the required submission dates and needed to be ratified at this meeting. She explained the Council's second letter on the Maryland Air National Guard Duke MOA Low flyovers was finalized by an e-mail vote and requested more community involvement and a deeper analysis through an Environmental Impact Statement. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously adopted to ratify the letter. At Ms. Singer's request, Ms. Meredith Graham discussed a guidance document prepared by DCNR for low-impact solar siting; the purpose of the document is primarily to help other stakeholders evaluate the impact on the environment. She advised DCNR is currently not authorized to site large-scale solar projects on DCNR lands nor do they wish to do so. Ms. Graham noted a letter had been prepared to encourage DCNR to clarify the type of solar

projects being addressed by the document and better define some terms and perhaps include a glossary; she advised another suggestion was to have bonding requirements. Ms. Singer noted the letter had been approved by an email vote. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously adopted to ratify the letter.

PRESENTATIONS

BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY IN STATE PARKS/FORESTS

Mike Walsh, DCNR Deputy Secretary for Administration

Nicole Faraguna, DCNR Director of Policy and Planning

Mr. Walsh reviewed the definition of broadband, noting it is Internet service that is always on and faster than traditional dial-up service with a baseline of 1.5 megabits per second. He stated broadband includes a variety of ways people connect to the information superhighway, such as cable modem, wireless and fiber.

Mr. Walsh displayed an excerpt from the Pennsylvania Constitution regarding natural resources being the common property of Pennsylvania citizens and the Commonwealth's responsibility to conserve and maintain these resources. He stated it is a reminder of the foundation for all the work done by DCNR, and specifically has played a role in the broadband issue as to where towers are placed on public lands.

Mr. Walsh showed the current location of 335 cell towers on state park/state forest land across Pennsylvania. He noted almost all of the 335 cell towers are on state forest land; he added the placement of towers on DCNR lands goes back 60 years.

Mr. Walsh advised a moratorium was issued in 2000 by John Oliver, the first DCNR Secretary that stated no new towers would be placed on public lands except for reasons of public safety. He said the moratorium was updated with Secretary Dunn's policy, which provides for tower placement where there is a specific broadband need that will help with delivery of services in that community. He noted there are 800,000 Pennsylvanians that do not have high-speed Internet access, with more than 525,000 being in rural areas, often close to DCNR lands.

Mr. Walsh discussed some recent activities including AT&T's commitment to the Governor in 2017 that they would build 25 towers over 60 months to provide a FirstNet application, an emergency services application; two of these towers will be on DCNR lands. He stated some of the funding that became available during the pandemic has been used for antenna sites in Bedford and Fayette counties that supported local broadband.

Mr. Walsh reviewed a list of funding sources and other prohibitions which may prevent a cell tower from being placed on DCNR lands. He said an example is the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which excludes above ground infrastructure that does not provide or support recreation. He also discussed some restrictions on rights-of-way and potential deed restrictions. He advised there is an internal DCNR review process that is followed by an interagency team when a request is made for placement of a cell tower. He displayed a list of some of the criteria which is part of the review process to look at potential environmental impacts. Mr. Walsh noted other considerations are Memorandums of Understanding which might be in place with local government entities and any potential impact to the historical designation of a building or structure. Mr. Walsh said it is not always a yes or no decision, but can also be a re-direct to another suitable site.

Nicole Faraguna discussed the infrastructure funding that has recently become available and its impact on the broadband issue, as well as some policies and activities that have occurred in Pennsylvania over the last few years.

Ms. Faraguna stated the COVID pandemic exacerbated the broadband issue. She noted the most recent funding for broadband was under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that allocated about \$65 billion for grants, programs and investments for broadband. She stated there are a number of initiatives within this program that Pennsylvania could capture, particularly the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program under which Pennsylvania will receive at least \$100 million to provide service--prioritizing unserved and underserved communities. Ms. Faraguna said this program requires a 25% match and for the states to spend the money within four years; it also requires the states to develop a five-year action plan with the assistance and collaboration of local and regional partners. She advised under the same bill there is the Broadband Middle Mile Grant Program, focused on the capacity to support retail broadband and building resiliency within the broadband system. She added there is also the Broadband Digital Equity Grant Program, which is trying to establish equity and advance digital inclusion; the program focuses on specific populations including aging individuals, veterans, the incarcerated, individuals with disabilities and language barriers, and rural residents. She stated this program has a 10% match, and funds must be spent within four years.

Ms. Faraguna discussed the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program which previously existed and through the infrastructure bill is being renamed the Affordable Connectivity Program. She advised it has been permanently authorized and now provides \$30 a month to offset the cost of internet service, plus \$100.

Ms. Faraguna said in 2021 the American Rescue Plan dedicated \$288 million for the Broadband Infrastructure Program being administered through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. She advised this program does not require any match, but it was a relatively small pot of funding with more than 230 applications submitted totaling in excess of \$2 billion. She stated a \$34 million package was submitted for Pennsylvania, led by DCED in collaboration with regional and local partners. Ms. Faraguna said Pennsylvania is still waiting to hear about its application. She added that direct funding to government entities, particularly counties and municipalities through the American Rescue Plan, also supports broadband investments.

Ms. Faraguna discussed the 2020 CARES Act, which provided \$625 million in funds to counties which could potentially be used to support broadband investments.

Ms. Faraguna stated Governor Wolf has created the Pennsylvania Office of Broadband Initiatives to expand high-speed Internet access for all.

Mr. Faraguna explained that with knowledge of potential broadband funding programs coming to the state, the Governor and the legislature decided there was a need to establish a centralized process to allocate the state and federal funding effectively and transparently. She continued explaining that in December 2021, Governor Wolf signed bi-partisan legislation that established a PA Broadband Development Authority, whose overall purpose is to ensure the unserved and underserved populations are prioritized.

Ms. Faraguna noted there will be challenges in how the funding will be distributed, but a process is being developed to ensure communities in need are prioritized and there is an equitable

distribution of funds.

Ms. Faraguna noted DCNR is reviewing its broadband policies as private interest is increasing.

Mr. Silas Chamberlin asked if there is a role for DCNR in working with communities that might be building trails and looking at rights of way and the opportunity to promote the one dig policy when putting down trails such as putting down conduit underneath those trails or coordination if there is a right of way being acquired. Mr. Chamberlin noted York County has used CARES Act funding to install 16 miles of fiber underneath the Heritage Rail Trail, with more trail development and rights of way being acquired over the coming years. Ms. Faraguna responded she had conveyed York County's concept of co-location to the state agencies working to build a framework for equitable distribution of funds, and it became a common theme of how to utilize resources most effectively and efficiently and to think beyond the silo approach.

Ms. Graham asked how CNRAC might be able to assist with the broadband conversation through activities such as CNRAC Conversations, gathering needed data to fill information gaps, or providing information to the public. Ms. Faraguna advised there will be a public comment period in the next couple weeks on the equitable distribution of funds framework, and CNRAC may be interested in commenting on the document. Mr. Walsh added that CNRAC can provide assistance by sharing information with the public in addition to publicizing the public comment period. He stated having time on CNRAC's agenda periodically is also helpful for sharing information. Ms. Singer added that CNRAC can also provide information in its e-newsletter.

INTRODUCTION TO PA'S NEW DIRECTOR OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Dr. Nathan Reigner, DCNR Director of Outdoor Recreation

Ms. Singer introduced Dr. Reigner noting he comes to DCNR most recently from Penn State's Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management Department.

Dr. Reigner stated he is a native of Pennsylvania and has been active in the outdoors since his youth. He noted he believes early outdoor experiences are very meaningful and help individuals understand their place in the natural world and become more connected to the natural world.

Dr. Reigner discussed his education and career, noting he earned a MS in Forestry from Virginia Tech and a PhD in Natural Resources from the University of Vermont. He advised he has worked in academia as well as private consultancies. He stated he has worked in dozens of units of the National Park System and state park and forest systems. Mr. Reigner said he has been involved heavily in tourism and has spoken with thousands of tourists and users so he feels well connected with recreationists.

Dr. Reigner mentioned in his past teaching assignments, a key component was a discussion of outdoor recreation. He noted outdoor recreation is easy to think about in terms of activities; however, research has shown there is more to outdoor recreation than the activity, for example, relationship building and stress relief. He added that outdoor recreation can be viewed as a system which includes many components such as the natural resources, the businesses which offer goods and services, and the beneficial outcomes and impacts. He encouraged thinking beyond the activities and appreciating outdoor recreation as a system of people, activities, institutions and benefits.

Dr. Reigner said the benefits is one of the primary reasons why outdoor recreation is so important. He discussed the importance of the economic benefits—from the dollars generated from outdoor recreation services such as guides, outfitters, manufacturers, retailers to the connected tourism and travel opportunities associated with outdoor recreation. He added that there is an even greater appreciation since the beginning of the pandemic on the value of outdoor recreation on workforce recruitment and retention as work becomes more dispersed and employees look to locate to places that have the resources that fulfill their lives. Dr. Reigner said outdoor recreation helps to create vibrant communities as people want to move to locations where recreation is accessible and diverse and high quality. He noted outdoor recreation can particularly be an advantage for small communities. Dr. Reigner stated outdoor recreation has obvious physical health benefits, as well as mental health benefits. He discussed conservation benefits and stated conserved lands and water are often spaces where outdoor recreation occurs, bringing more attention to outdoor recreation by building constituents for outdoor recreation and expanding the opportunities for expanding conservation assets. Dr. Reigner said there are also infrastructure benefits as the recreation infrastructure serves more than leisure purposes. He noted an example is the Heritage Rail Trail in York with its co-alignment of broadband fiber.

Dr. Reigner discussed why investment is needed to ensure the full return on investment is achieved. He noted more work is needed in this area including investment in equitable opportunities for outdoor recreationists, such as universally accessible opportunities and geographical access. He noted informational access is also important so people know how to get to the recreational opportunities, what they will find when they arrive, and how to engage in the opportunity. Dr. Reigner said economic access is also a key factor including having the money, time, employment structure and ability to get to the recreational opportunity. He added that social or societal access is also an area where more investment is needed. He noted there are many other areas where investment is needed in partnerships, small businesses, communicating the economic significance, and environmental resources.

Dr. Reigner shared a few statistics on the success Pennsylvania has had and the progress that is needed moving forward. He noted Pennsylvania is the sixth largest outdoor economy in the country in terms of value added, but the growth rate is 22nd. He advised part of that is due to strong progress of other states in catching up to Pennsylvania and part is due to the awareness of the need to pay greater attention to this sector. He said Pennsylvania has 121 state parks, 2.2 million acres of state forest, 1.5 million acres of game lands, and more rail trails than any other state. Dr. Reigner emphasized the important of investment into natural resources to keep them maintained and attractive and ready to welcome the even larger next generation of outdoor recreationists.

Dr. Reigner advised another area he will be focusing on is the further diversity of park and forest users in terms of their character or desires. He noted this need has been recognized in the Penn's Parks for All plan, along with many efforts outside of the state to welcome new populations of recreationists.

Dr. Reigner said his job is to expand the benefits for all Pennsylvanians. He said his vision is to be a bridge and a hub to connect with the many stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation including municipalities, counties, user groups, conservation groups, Chambers of Commerce, economic development agencies, Federal partners, businesses, and service providers to understand their perspective and their hopes for outdoor recreation. He noted he would also be connecting with other state government agencies.

Dr. Reigner said his initial efforts have been to understand DCNR's programs. He advised he is now meeting with stakeholders and partners to move forward with a broad campaign of growing awareness and support. He said another goal of his is to put together a longer term strategic vision for outdoor recreation.

Secretary Dunn thanked Gretchen Leslie who has played a significant role in establishing the Director of Outdoor Recreation position and the hiring of Dr. Reigner. She noted DCNR is very excited to have Dr. Reigner onboard due to his extensive experience and passion for outdoor recreation.

Ms. Singer invited Dr. Reigner to participate in future CNRAC meetings and offered the Council's support and assistance with his future plans for outdoor recreation.

WORK GROUP REPORTS

MOTORIZED RECREATION WORK GROUP

Bob Kirchner, Chair

Bob Kirchner advised the Motorized Recreation Work Group continues to work on following up with DCNR on the recommendations in the original and updated reports. He noted the Work Group is down a few members and invited any Council members interested in motorized recreation to join the group.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH WORK GROUP

Sarah Hall-Bagdonas, Chair

Sarah Hall-Bagdonas mentioned the work group will be sending out a poll to the newsletter list to gauge interest in topics for future meetings, CNRAC Conversations, or through newsletter articles. She advised the work group is also working on the 2022 CNRAC Conversation sessions and is anticipating focusing again on DEI and Infrastructure issues; she said the tentative dates are April and October.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION WORK GROUP

Joanne Kilgour, Chair

Ms. Singer noted Ms. Kilgour could not be present but asked her to share three things the work group is currently focusing on—better integrating DEI conversations into CNRAC meetings, developing another CNRAC Conversation session focusing on DEI issues, and continuing with coordinate with Emily Hendrickson regarding DCNR's internal DEI team.

INFRASTRUCTURE WORK GROUP

Geralyn Singer, Chair

Ms. Singer advised the Work Group is working on an infrastructure CNRAC Conversation for October, articles for the newsletter, and monitoring legislation including SB525. She stated the work group is looking at a newsletter article regarding the use of American Rescue Act funding for parks and trails.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Singer confirmed there had been no requests to provide public comments. No public comments were offered.

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 12:02 p.m.

Notice of the January 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.