

MINUTES

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

November 17, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

GUESTS PRESENT

Seth Cassell, DCNR (presenter)
Nicole Faraguna, DCNR (presenter)
Eric Nelson, DCNR, Legislative Affairs
Robert Beleski, Forestry Commission
Nate Lotze, DCNR
Ellen Shultzabarger, DCNR
Cindy Thomas, DCNR
John Norbeck, DCNR
Chris Firestone, DCNR
Aara Vinsh, DCNR
Shea Zwerver, DCNR
Jake Newton, DCNR
Wesley Robinson, DCNR
Matthew Crosbie, DCNR
Matt Wise, PA Senate
Roger Anderson, PA Dept. of Agriculture
Jonathan Geyer, PA Dept. of Agriculture
Brian Gallagher, Western PA Conservancy
Claudia Colwell
Benjamin Hughes
Travis Mathna
Arline LaTourette

DCNR

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary
Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

Jason Swartz, Susquehanna Watershed Outreach Specialist
Julie Brennan, Clinton County Tourism
David Hess, PA Environmental News
Natalie Shearer, Geosyntec Consultants
Sarah Corcoran, Sierra Club
Elizabeth Krug, PSSA
Wes Miller, AM Logging
Ad Crable, Bay Journal
Tim Heyler, Lycoming County
Jack Clark, PA OHV
Patrick Henderson, Marcellus Shale Coalition
Brad Snyder
Clinton Ivins
Alison Welfling
Norm Strotman
Gary Citro
Josephine Martin
John Abets
Jesse Lamp
Charles Burchfield

WELCOME

Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's virtual meeting for November 2021. 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 September 22, 2021 minutes.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Chair

Ms. Singer advised that CNRAC's officers are working on meetings with the House and Senate leadership on Council vacancies and reappointments so all Council seats can be filled. Ms.

Singer stated Council has made excellent progress on its 2021 priorities and goals and highlighted some of the Council's accomplishments. She said more information can be found in CNRAC's annual report which is posted on the CNRAC website. She noted Council will be working on priorities and goals for 2022 in early December.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary

Secretary Dunn expressed appreciation for everyone joining the call and encouraged those members of the public signing on for the first time to continue to join the meetings.

Secretary Dunn discussed her recent road trips, many of which included tours of the significant storm damage which has occurred, including damage to bridges and trails. She stated this heightens even more the importance of pending infrastructure bills in the House and Senate as the storms have only increased the need for infrastructure funding. Secretary Dunn also mentioned the need for completing trail gaps, which along with infrastructure repairs and improvements, would generate economic returns for Pennsylvania in addition to providing more outdoor recreation opportunities.

Secretary Dunn discussed the Federal infrastructure investment legislation recently passed. She stated while there is no direct funding for DCNR's mission, DCNR will be working with sister agencies, such as DEP, who will benefit from the bill. She noted one example are road and bridge repairs.

Secretary Dunn mentioned DCNR has begun an Electric Vehicle charging station network in state parks which will provide an opportunity for visitors to explore state parks while their vehicles are charging. She also discussed other sustainability advancements including solar panels, battery-powered tools, and reducing plastics and waste in state parks through the concession contracts. Secretary Dunn noted DCNR is taking advantage of many opportunities to provide information on sustainability activities to park visitors that they can then use at their homes.

Ms. Singer asked if there is anything CNRAC and others can do related to the pending infrastructure bills. Secretary Dunn responded that it is helpful to make it known to legislators that this is a good use of Federal dollars and in the public's interest as it will generate not only the required stewardship of natural resources but generate economic impact year after year in the parks and forestry sectors. She noted it also improves the quality of life in Pennsylvania and helps attract new individuals who may telework and desire the outdoor assets Pennsylvania offers.

DCNR ADVISOR REPORT

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

Ms. Leslie reminded everyone the 2022 CNRAC meetings will be January 26, March 23, May 25, July 27, September 28 and November 16.

Ms. Leslie advised this Thursday from 1 pm to 2 pm is the first input session by america250pa.org; the organization is seeking input on signature programs, projects and events for the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the country. She noted this first session focuses on agriculture, nature and the environment, and Secretary Dunn will be attending, along with the Secretaries of DEP and Agriculture. Ms. Leslie said upcoming sessions include DEI on

December 16, education and innovation on January 13, history and preservation on February 3, military and veterans on February 24, women in Pennsylvania on March 10, and tourism on March 31. She noted all the sessions begin at 1 pm and are open to everyone. Ms. Leslie said she would send out a link for the sessions.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

Ms. Singer stated a letter on the Duke MOA was recently sent after an email vote by Council but needed to be ratified at this meeting. She reminded Council the letter requested extending the public community period to at least 90 days and that public meetings be held in the areas directly impacted. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously adopted to ratify the letter.

PRESENTATIONS

STATUS UPDATE – TIMBER HARVESTING ON STATE FORESTS

Seth Cassell, Bureau of Forestry

Mr. Cassell first discussed the different basic types of forests in Pennsylvania and the reasons harvesting is performed which include maintaining habitat diversity for harvesting and for animals, as well as for the health and regeneration of the forest. He stated Pennsylvania is the meeting zone for two different life zones—the northern and southern life zone.

Mr. Cassell reviewed a list of six goals from the State Forest Resource Management Plan:

- Promote desired landscape conditions through sustainable harvest levels (acres).
- Promote natural regeneration of forest communities (versus planting)
- Provide economic and social benefits; provide a consistent flow of quality forest products.
- Promote old growth by maintaining at least 20% as potential old growth.
- Conserve and enhance wildlife habitat diversity.
- Provide education opportunities regarding the benefits of sustainable management.

Mr. Cassell stated managing state forests begins with how the forests are zoned and classified--wild areas (limited to no harvesting), limited zones (no harvesting), and natural areas and stream buffers. He advised that across the entire 2.2 million acres, approximately 50% of the state forest system is available for harvesting.

Mr. Cassell advised the timber harvesting plan looks out about 140 years. He noted the age of most of Pennsylvania's forests is in the 80 to 120 year time frame, with the goal of having 20% considered old growth. He stated that balancing the age of the forest provides a healthy, diverse forest.

Mr. Cassell next discussed silvicultural practices, a term for manipulating forested areas for desired goals and outcomes. He noted a common practice is to thin out more mature trees, let sunlight hit the forest floor, seed the area, and allow for regeneration.

Mr. Cassell advised the goal is to harvest about 14,000 acres per year to even out the age classes across the system.

Mr. Cassell discussed the dual-certification that the Bureau of Forestry holds which means the

timber harvested is certified by the organizations which provides buyers of the timber with access to those certified markets; it also adds to the Bureau's credibility as land managers and stewards of the resource. He stated the certifications also challenge the Bureau to maintain innovation and diverse perspectives to continue to improve as an organization.

Mr. Cassell displayed a chart showing timber revenues which contribute to the economy of the Commonwealth, as well as the Bureau of Forestry operating budget. He noted the revenues have highs and lows, with a high in 2003 of \$50 million to the current less than \$20 million.

Mr. Cassell discussed current challenges which include the increasing cost of forest regeneration, declining revenues, availability of specialized contractors, invasive species, tariff increases, COVID pandemic causing issues with transportation and availability of workers both here and overseas, and aging loggers opting to retire versus reinvesting in expensive new equipment.

Mr. Cassell discussed other challenges including invasive pests such as the increase in spotted lanternflies, managing safe prescribed burns to help regeneration, balancing social and economic considerations with timber harvest size limits, and managing the significant role forests play in carbon management.

Mr. Cassell recommended a publication released a few years ago entitled Woods that Work that was developed by the Governor's Green Ribbon Task Force, which discusses many of the issues he touched upon today.

Rocco Ali asked if harvesting more timber is being looked at in light of the invasive emerald ash borer before the trees are infected and die. Mr. Cassell responded that DCNR has been doing some salvage operations for ash trees while monitoring for ash resistant trees.

Mr. Ali asked if steep hillsides where logging is difficult are left to become old forests or select cut. Mr. Cassell said they will most likely be left alone and allowed to continue as high canopy forest; however, there is no prohibition against harvesting, which may become more feasible as technology and economics change.

Mr. Ali asked if timber revenue goes into the Keystone Fund or the General Fund. John Norbeck responded that funds in the Keystone Fund are generated by the real estate transfer tax, with the vast majority of infrastructure projects in state parks and forests being paid for through the Keystone Fund.

Dave Trimpey asked if all the timber put on the market during the past 12 to 18 months was sold. Mr. Cassell responded that there has been challenges and disruptions. Bob Beleski said almost all the available timber has been sold through the COVID pandemic.

UPDATE ON DUKE LOW MOA Nicole Faraguna, DCNR Policy Director

Nicole Faraguna displayed a map of the proposed Duke Low Military Operations Airspace (MOA) and explained the Maryland National Guard is proposing to revise the existing MOA to allow for low flying as low as 100 feet compared to the existing MOA, which allows flying at 8,000 feet. She continued explaining that other military wings would also be able to use the space including New Jersey and D.C. F16s and PA C10s (although there is no confirmation PA

would use the space). She noted there has been conversations with the National Guard over the past year, and they have added some buffers to their proposal including 500 feet over state parks or eagles' nests; the FAA recommended 2,000 foot buffers for national parks and sensitive areas.

Ms. Faraguna said the proposal would allow training to occur up to 170 days a year, and nighttime operations would be limited. She added there would be no supersonic weapons on the planes.

Ms. Faraguna explained once the proposal is approved, if approved, the Maryland National Guard has control over the airspace in Pennsylvania and a portion that extends into New York. She continued explaining if other wings or other branches of the military want to use the space, they would contact and coordinate with the Maryland National Guard. She noted it is unclear when another Environmental Assessment would be needed based on expanded use.

Ms. Faraguna gave a examples of how low 100 feet is such as it being approximately a 10-story building.

Ms. Faraguna said while the proposal stated the flying at 100 feet may only be a few minutes, the noise impacts can be traumatic to humans and wildlife. She noted this is one area where the Environmental Assessment could be improved upon by providing additional noise study data.

Ms. Faraguna explained the National Environmental Policy Act or NEPA is the law that requires environmental assessments to be done by Federal agencies. She noted each Federal agency establishes its own policies and procedures, with the Maryland National Guard being under the National Guard Bureau and the Air Force. She explained the initial step is scoping and information gathering, followed by preparing an Environmental Assessment if needed. She discussed the limitations of the Environmental Assessment including limited details regarding alternatives and limited public involvement. She stated the Environmental Assessment concludes with a Finding of No Significant Impact or the need to move to an Environmental Impact Statement, which provides much more analysis and more public involvement. She added that the Maryland National Guard issued a draft Finding of No Significant Impact with the Environmental Assessment.

Ms. Faraguna said some of the concerns are the potential impacts on the region from quality of life, resource protection, and economic impact perspectives. She noted there are a number of stakeholders who were not initially engaged by the National Guard in the process so additional public outreach should be conducted. She noted that while the National Guard Bureau has the authority to make the final decision, the FAA has a role in providing its approval, and EPA and the Department of the Interior have also submitted comments.

Ms. Faraguna noted the Environmental Assessment is out for public comment during a 45-day comment period; CNRAC and other organizations have officially requested additional time for public comments and public meetings in impacted counties to give people in the region more information.

Ms. Faraguna advised DCNR is in the process of preparing extensive comments, including requesting an Environmental Impact Statement and more public involvement opportunities. She stated comments can be submitted through the National Guard's website at:

<https://www.175wg.ang.af.mil/Duke-MOA-Low>. She said comments are due by December 15 although there have been requests to extend the comment period.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Katrina Harris read comments that had been submitted prior to the meeting and where the person requested the comment be read on their behalf:

Comment from Robert Copp, Cameron County

In my opinion there is no reason to not allow the Maryland Air National guard to allow A10 or other jet flyovers. I live in this area, and spend a lot of time in the woods. Contrary to what the DCNR states, having seen heavy trucks, logging, and ATV/Snowmobile activity in the woods, these planes will have a MUCH lower impact on the environment than anything I have listed, and those things have almost no impact. I'm a veteran, Let them Fly.

Comment from John Rosenberg

I am a resident of Cameron County and I fully support our military's ability to conduct flyovers over our county. I am a hunter, fisherman, hiker and mountain biker and these flyovers will not affect me. I recall these flyovers about 30-35 years ago and they posed no problems. The arguments against these flyovers are ridiculous!

Comment from Patrick Walker

I am on Mason Hill in Cameron County. Personally I like seeing the military aircraft overhead or flying through the valleys. I have seen deer totally ignore them the same as they do cars and trucks. We need a strong well trained military. Let them fly!

Comment from Dan Kensky

As a landowner in Tioga County how is it acceptable to impact my property for the Air National Guard for another state? Why doesn't the Maryland Air National Guard impact Maryland residents or lands?

Comment from Alison Wefling

I live in West Branch Township. I have lived in Potter County for most of my life, born and raised here. Also, I have lived in urban places such as Brasilia, DF and Pittsburgh, PA. I have seen a change in ATV/UTV usage on Township roads. The noise impact from these vehicles is annoying and saddens me. ATV/UTV usage through and around Lyman Run State Park has changed the park. What will the noise impact be from MOA flying as low as 100 feet above the ground?

I live here because I love the peace and quiet. I see more nature everyday than most people get to. And I hear more nature than most people get to. I appreciate that I can hear nature without hearing machinery. People need spaces where they can go to enjoy nature both by sight and sound without human impact whether it be construction, recreation, aviation, and normal day to day traffic. Why the change now? Where was MD practicing this type of terrain flying before?

While the majority of the property in Potter County might be Commonwealth owned and much of it consist of hardwood, what about the impact on the rest of our natural resources? And I'm specifically considering the natural resource of "serenity" which is so hard to put a value to but with its loss comes a severe cost.

This area is known for its dark night sky resource. Part of that reason is because so much of the land is undeveloped because it is owned by the Commonwealth. What about our "undeveloped" airspace? This undeveloped airspace needs to be considered as a natural resource worth conserving for our future generations.

Ms. Singer noted Council will be considering what actions it will be taking with respect to the proposed action.

WORK GROUP REPORTS

MOTORIZED RECREATION WORK GROUP

Bob Kirchner, Chair

Mr. Kirchner advised the Motorized Recreation Work Group continues to work on following up with DCNR on the recommendations in the original and updated reports.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH WORK GROUP

Sarah Hall-Bagdonas, Chair

Ms. Sarah Hall-Bagdonas stated the work group continues to issue the e-newsletter and anyone who would like to be added can contact CNRAC by emailing Ms. Harris or through the CNRAC website.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION WORK GROUP

Joanne Kilgour, Chair

Ms. Joanne Kilgour said the work group met this week and began planning goals for next year. She noted the work group continues to work with Emily Hendrickson on DCNR's initiatives including the Untold Stories Project in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and the recruitment of members for a new Next Gen Council. She stated the work group is also suggesting each CNRAC meeting include an update from Emily.

INFRASTRUCTURE WORK GROUP

Geralyn Singer, Chair

Ms. Singer reported on the recent CNRAC Conversation on Economics and the Outdoors. She noted there was a great panel of speakers and good engagement with various groups including economic development organizations and tourism agencies.

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORK GROUP

Meredith Graham, Chair

Meredith Graham advised the work group did not have any updates.

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 11:57 p.m.

Notice of the November 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.