

MINUTES

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

March 23, 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT

Rocco Ali, Member
Silas Chamberlin, Member
Matt Gabler, Member
Meredith Graham, Secretary
Greg Goldman, Member
Sarah Hall-Bagdonas, Member
Bob Kirchner, Vice Chair
Joanne Kilgour, Member
Gary Kribbs, Member
Geraldyn Singer, Chair
Steve Stroman, Member
Dave Trimpey, Member
Janet Sweeney, Member
Jerry Walls, Member

GUESTS PRESENT

Stacie Amsler, DCNR (presenter)
Rachel Reese, DCNR (presenter)
Mike DiRinaldo, DCNR (presenter)
Eric Nelson, DCNR
Nicole Faraguna, DCNR
Nate Lotze, DCNR
Chris Novak, DCNR
Cindy Thomas, DCNR
Derek Eberly, DCNR
John Norbeck, DCNR
Aara Vinsh, DCNR
Shea Zwerver, DCNR
Jake Newton, DCNR
Wesley Robinson, DCNR
John Hallas, DCNR
Mike Kern, DCNR
Mike Piaskowski, DCNR
Ellen Shultzabarger, DCNR
Bob Shughart
Richard Allan, Pugliese Assoc.

DCNR

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary
Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

Julie Brennan, Clinton County Tourism
Jack Clark, SAAC
Sarah Corcoran, Sierra Club
Elizabeth Krug, PSSA
Charles Lombaerde, Pike County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
Josh Zucal, Cameron County
Jen Quinn, Sierra Club
John Confer
Tom Kase, Collins
Amy Shields, Allegheny Hardwood Region
Barbara Jarmoska
Susan Murawski
Donald Horn
Arline LaTourette

WELCOME

Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's hybrid meeting for March 2022. Ms. Leslie read a list of Council members present for the meeting. 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.

Geralyn Singer, Chair, welcomed everyone. She asked two new members (Matt Gabler and Jerry Walls) to introduce themselves. Mr. Gabler noted he had served as a member of the State House of Representatives from 2009 to 2020 and then moved to his current position as Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Forest Products Association. He stated the Association represents the whole supply chain, and he is excited to talk about being good stewards of these resource. Mr. Walls said he is a certified professional planner and retired after 38 years with the Lycoming County Planning Commission. He noted he has been active with trail development and revitalization along the Susquehanna. Mr. Walls stated he is also involved with the PA Wilds planning team.

Ms. Singer 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.

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.

The following comments were offered during this time:

Mr. Chuck Lombaerde, President, Pike County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs

Mr. Lombaerde discussed proposed changes by the National Park Service at the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DWGNRA) and the potential impact on the future of

outdoor recreation use at DWGNRA. He stated the Service's 2030 vision document calls for a conversion of DWGNRA into a new National Park and preserve and could curtail or even eliminate many activities now available and enjoyed at DWGNRA. He advised sportsmen and many other interests wish for the DWGNRA to remain as is with present uses continuing. Mr. Lombaerde reviewed the history of outdoor recreation legislation and the creation of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission and the Federal Recreation Advisory Council, whose missions are to create national recreation areas to meet outdoor recreation demand, such as DWGNRA. He noted the primary purpose of DWGNRA is for outdoor recreation benefits for the public.

Ms. Singer thanked Mr. Lombaerde and advised Council would review the comments and be back in touch with Mr. Lombaerde.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Council unanimously approved the January 26, 2022 minutes.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Chair

Ms. Singer advised Council has 18 seats and 16 seats are filled. She noted several re-appointments are being worked on, as well as the two Senate-appointment vacancies.

Ms. Singer stated CNRAC Conversations—Economics and the Outdoors, Part 2, will be held on April 27, 10:30 a.m. until noon. She noted it would be a virtual webinar focusing on funding and partnering to maximize funding dollars and resources.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Cindy Dunn, DCNR Secretary

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

Secretary Dunn congratulated Rocco Ali for his many years serving as a Fish and Boat Commissioner.

Secretary Dunn discussed the recent budget hearing, noting it was 3-1/2 hours and covered many topics. She stated there were no complaints about ATVs so it would seem recent actions taken are seen as meeting the need. She advised topics with extensive discussion included leasing of State forest land for natural gas, carbon capture and storage, and broadband. Secretary Dunn explained there is a current moratorium on additional broadband towers on State forest lands except for public safety. She said there were many positive comments about the economic value of recreation and the essential nature of recreation during the pandemic. Secretary Dunn discussed current pending legislation including the Governor's Growing Greener 3 proposal. She stated this funding would help with DCNR's infrastructure backlog as well as increasing grants to local communities to help meet their needs. Secretary Dunn said the Governor's proposed budget would include 31 new staff positions in DCNR, including three positions for carbon sequestration. Mr. Gabler asked about the three carbon sequestration positions, and Secretary Dunn responded two of the positions would be geologists and one would be an administrative position. She added that the demand for information is growing, including requests from the private sector. Secretary Dunn said forestry staff could discuss carbon sequestration in forests at a future meeting.

Secretary Dunn discussed her recent travel across the state to honor the good work being done by DCNR staff and partners, as well as speaking at several conferences. She mentioned a snowmobile trip with CNRAC member, Bob Kirchner, as well as members of the St. Marys Snowmobile Association.

Mr. Walls mentioned local advocates for trail projects often run into issues with county commissioners on the spending of money for trails. He suggested having stronger documentation on the economic return on trails and other outdoor projects would be helpful. Secretary Dunn mentioned CNRAC member, Silas Chamberlin, has authored a number of documents on the topic, but DCNR could also look at putting together a document. .

DCNR ADVISOR REPORT

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

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

Ms. Leslie provided an update on DCNR's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion activities, noting 24 young individuals across the Commonwealth have been selected for DCNR's NextGen Council. She noted she is hoping CNRAC and the NextGen Council can attend each other's meetings. She stated other activities include advancing a grant to research untold stories and hiring a researcher to provide educators with training. Mr. Walls offered to connect the researcher with some knowledgeable local individuals.

Ms. Leslie advised the 60-mile Delaware Canal Towpath has been named the Pennsylvania 2022 trail of the year.

DCNR LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Eric Nelson, Director of Legislative Affairs

Eric Nelson noted DCNR is following Senate Bill 1020 which would add land to two state parks, as well as monitoring Growing Greener bills and the Governor's budget.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

Ms. Singer stated members should have received email from Katrina Harris regarding officer elections at the May meeting. She reminded Council nominations are due to Ms. Harris by April 15 and will be passed on to Ted Tharan, Chair of the Nominating Committee.

PRESENTATIONS

DCNR's Proposed Budget

Stacie Amsler, DCNR Director, Bureau of Administrative Services

Stacie Amsler discussed DCNR's proposed budget for FY22-23. She showed a comparison to the current fiscal year budget, and noted the proposed budget reflects a large increase from Federal funds, as well as a General Fund increase of \$29 million. She also discussed a breakdown of the source of funds. She noted DCNR's General Fund receives 40 percent of a penny of all General Fund dollars.

Ms. Amsler advised some of the highlights of the Governor's proposed budget for DCNR include 31 new positions across parks, forests and General Government Operations (GGO); \$5 million for forest pest management appropriation; \$27 million for operations; and, \$135 million in new Federal appropriation for parks and forests rehabilitation work.

Ms. Amsler stated park user fees increased over the pandemic, while timber sales decreased but are slowly increasing again.

Ms. Amsler showed a three-year comparison of parks, forests and GGO funding, as well as a chart showing DCNR salaried positions. She stated the proposed 31 new positions would put DCNR's staff at 1,358.

Ms. Amsler displayed charts showing a three-year history of the other sources of funding—heritage and other parks, oil and gas lease fund, Keystone Recreation Park and Conservation Fund, and the Environmental Stewardship Fund. She also discussed payment in lieu of taxes for General Fund and Gaming Fund Dollars, and a two-year comparison of restricted and other funds.

Greg Goldman asked where additional and new expenditures would be directed, and Ms. Amsler responded she did not have that information but could present it at a future meeting.

Bob Kirchner asked whether the \$1 million added for snowmobiles is still part of the Governor's budget, and Ms. Amsler responded that the \$1 million from the fuel tax is still available for annual drawdown and is in the snowmobile/ATV restricted receipts account. .

State Parks Forest Stewardship
Rachel Reese and Mike DiRinaldo, Bureau of State Parks

Rachel Reese introduced herself as Resource Manager and Mike DiRinaldo as Resource Management Specialist with the Bureau of State Parks.

Mr. DiRinaldo advised he would be giving an overview of dynamic forest restoration which has a goal of restoring forests and natural resources.

Mr. DiRinaldo noted Pennsylvania hosts near 16.8 million acres of forest, which serves as a significant part of our economy and natural heritage.

Mr. DiRinaldo stated that early conservation and preservation needs of the Bureau evolved into a hands-off management approach. He added that there are state park lands that still need to develop stewardship plans. He noted that climate change makes all of the present threats to forests worse.

Mr. DiRinaldo discussed several charts showing the current canopy composition and the forest age class distribution. He noted it is important to be better positioned for forests in the future.

Mr. DiRinaldo reviewed several charts showing how birds, such as the Eastern Forests birds, are an indication of forest health and diversity. He stated 170 million Eastern Forest birds have been lost since 1970. He stated DCNR wants to provide suitable habitat for a number of species of birds for many years to come. He noted addressing threats and balancing age

classes are not only important to forest-bird conservation, but they are also goals of foresters and forest managers in general. Mr. DiRinaldo referenced several state Forest Action Plans, including Pennsylvania, Vermont, West Virginia and Maryland.

Mr. DiRinaldo stated inaction is not the solution. He said science-derived evidence for forest bird population trends and species habitat relationships demonstrate that conserving and recovering these species, and many others, will require stewardship of the forests.

Mr. DiRinaldo next discussed why forest ecosystems are in trouble and current forest conditions. He advised the key conditions impacting forests are low species diversity, low structural diversity (disproportional distribution of age classes), declining plant communities and wildlife populations, and low resilience to climate disruptions.

Mr. DiRinaldo gave an overview of how the Bureau plans to restore biological forest function through the implementation of various management practices. He stated some of the practices include forest stand improvements, ecological forestry operations, mechanical low shade removal, deer exclusion fencing, prescribed fire, herbicides, and continuous assessment and inventory.

Mr. DiRinaldo advised funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation had kicked off restoration plans for dynamic forest restoration which will include increasing diversity (species, age and structure), an active management philosophy of ecological forestry, and education of visitors, the general public and landowners.

Mr. DiRinaldo showed graphics of the age of Pennsylvania forests in years. He also discussed a part of the grant funding bird monitoring and providing real-time feedback from biologists in the field. He noted that public forests can serve as anchor points for sustained landscape scale bird conservation.

Mr. DiRinaldo discussed four key components of ecological forestry: provide continuity, create complexity, use ecologically appropriate timing, and take silvicultural interventions in the context of objectives developed at larger (landscape) spatial scales. He displayed a map of Pennsylvania showing dynamic forest partnership and current focal areas.

Mr. DiRinaldo noted that sustainably managing forests is not an easy task, but now is the time.

Ms. Singer asked how many state parks are impacted, and Mr. DiRinaldo said about 95% of state parks are forest, and 116 have large enough forest blocks.

Mr. Dave Trimpey stated the Bureau is moving in the right direction and he fully supports their efforts. He asked if commercial timber sales would follow the same process, and Mr. DiRinaldo responded that Bureau of Forestry staff would handle if available or a forestry consultant would be used to put out the sale to the market.

Mr. Ali asked if other hardwoods such as cherry would be regenerated. Mr. DiRinaldo said he did not have an answer as there is not yet a dynamic plan for the northern part of the state, but the Bureau will look at what will do best in that area.

Mr. Gabler commended the Bureau on the work being done, particularly how different stakeholders can partner to receive benefits and also to communicate to the public about timber

harvesting which needs to happen regardless of where timber is located.

Ms. Meredith Graham noted it is important to educate the public about timber harvesting in general, and the signage in parks needs to be on point.

WORK GROUP REPORTS

MOTORIZED RECREATION WORK GROUP

Bob Kirchner, Chair

Bob Kirchner advised DCNR is looking at the issue of registration fees and planning to reach out to various stakeholder committees to participate on a joint committee.

Mr. Walls suggested a future CNRAC meeting have a presentation on more detailed findings on the ATV pilot study. John Norbeck advised the report is due December 2023. Mr. Norbeck said a presentation could be given during the upcoming year.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH WORK GROUP

Sarah Hall-Bagdonas, Chair

Ms. Sarah Hall-Bagdonas invited anyone not currently receiving the newsletter to send a request to be added to the mailing list. She also noted the work group is coordinating with the Infrastructure work group on the next CNRAC Conversations.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION WORK GROUP

Joanne Kilgour, Chair

No report was provided for the work group at the meeting.

INFRASTRUCTURE WORK GROUP

Geralyn Singer, Chair

Ms. Singer advised the Work Group is working on the next CNRAC Conversations—Economics and the Outdoors, Part 2, for April 27, 10:30 a.m. to noon.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Singer asked if Council members would still like to have administrative meetings after public meetings, and Council members were in favor of having the meetings.

Ms. Singer discussed the preparation of a transition document for the next administration and noted it would be an opportunity for CNRAC to highlight DCNR priorities. She noted Ms. Hall-Bagdonas had offered to organize the document, but other members are needed to help develop the document. Mr. Ali suggested the May administrative meeting be devoted to discussing the transition document.

Ms. Singer asked about the interest in Council members again going on field trips, and members noted they were in favor of field trips.

Ms. Singer invited Council members to let herself, Ms. Leslie or Ms. Harris know of any ideas for future meeting topics.

MEETING ADJOURNED

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 12:23 p.m.

Notice of the March 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.