

MINUTES

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

September 28, 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

DCNR

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

GUESTS PRESENT

Nicole Faraguna, DCNR (presenter)
Tom Ford, DCNR (presenter)
Nate Lotze, DCNR
Meredith Hill, DCNR
Aara Vinsh, DCNR
Peter Spadaro, DCNR
Nate Reagle, DCNR
Chris Novak, DCNR
Ali Bowling, DCNR
Elizabeth Sechoka, DCED
Glendon King, PA House
Jack Clark, Snowmobile/ATV Committee
Dave Hess, PA Environmental News
Rachel Fussell, People for Bikes
Barbara Jarmoska, Friends to Save the Loyalsock State Forest
Barb Sexton
Jim Laird
Ralph Kisberg
Heather Empfield
Donald Horn

WELCOME

Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's hybrid meeting for September 2022. She stated virtual audience members are muted, but can be unmuted to receive any public comments or they can put comments in the Q&A and chat features of the virtual call. 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 and reviewed the meeting agenda. Ms. Singer invited Council members present in-person and virtually to introduce themselves.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Ms. Singer noted the first public comment period is primarily for anyone wishing to make a comment on a topic not on the meeting agenda. Ms. Singer advised a second comment period would be held at the end of the meeting for comments on today's agenda items.

Ms. Singer invited Ms. Barbara Jarmoska to offer her comments.

Ms. Jarmoska advised she is associated with Friends to Save the Loyalsock state forest and creek. She thanked the Council and DCNR for their work to make Pennsylvania a better place for all. Ms. Jarmoska referenced PGE's gas development project in Lycoming County near the creek and state forest. She reminded CNRAC of some meetings and communications from a number of years ago regarding the project. She noted her group also has had frequent meetings and communications with DCNR advocating for the creek and state forest. Ms. Jarmoska asked Council for assistance with obtaining answers from DCNR on two questions related to the project. She advised the first question is a request to obtain in writing confirmation of verbal statements made in the past by DCNR that PGE would not be able to access the mountaintop by using Butternut Grove Road; however, PGE has begun to use the road since starting construction in July. She stated the second question relates to the gas gathering line that they want to run up and down the mountainside alongside the Loyalsock Creek and what happens if the technology PGE plans to use fails, particularly in light of the area geology. She asked if the technology fails whether DCNR is going to provide a clear cut right of way on state forest land.

Ms. Singer advised Council will discuss Ms. Jarmoska's questions and comments and respond to Ms. Jarmoska.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Singer asked for a motion on the July 27, 2022 minutes. Council unanimously approved the July 2022 minutes.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Chair

Ms. Singer gave a brief summary of Council members' recent activities. She advised Council's annual report is available on the CNRAC website. Ms. Singer stated Council had discussed

having another CNRAC Conversations webinar in the fall but has decided to hold off until early 2023. She said Meredith Graham has updated a draft transition document for the next administration which Council members continue to review. Ms. Singer mentioned Rocco Ali had attended the opening of a new ATV recreation area at Catawissa. Mr. Ali advised the event was well attended, and participants viewed it as a good step for advancing motorized recreation.

Ms. Singer asked Bob Kirchner to give an update on the motorized recreation registration fee work group and the Recreation Engagement Coalition spearheaded by Nathan Reiger, the state's new Outdoor Recreation Director. Mr. Kirchner advised the registration fee work group is driven by the Snowmobile/ATV Advisory Committee and has had a number of meetings. He advised the last fee increase was in 1995. He stated the group is looking at how to use about \$12 million dollars in the gas tax refund to offset fee increases. Mr. Kirchner said more information should be available in the next month, followed by some decisions. Mr. Kirchner stated the Recreation Engagement Coalition consists of about 45 members and had their first meeting on September 14. He advised the next meeting will be mid-October and will focus on strategic planning and how to engage others in the process. He added that Silas Chamberlin, another CNRAC member, is also serving as a Coalition member.

DCNR ADVISOR/DEPARTMENT REPORT **Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor**

Ms. Leslie advised Secretary Dunn could not be present at the meeting as she is participating in an event at one of the new state parks. Ms. Leslie discussed the locations of the new state parks on the eastern side of the state, as well as a new motorized recreation area already discussed by Mr. Ali which is located in Schuylkill and Luzerne counties. She said in addition to providing motorized recreation opportunities, it also allows DCNR to achieve a number of conservation goals, protect water quality, restore degraded mine lands, conserve area ecological resources, and educate visitors.

Ms. Leslie stated this past weekend was the last weekend for first full season of the ATV pilot project in north central Pennsylvania. She noted 3,600 permits were sold which is double the number sold last year. She advised overall reports have been positive, with only a few complaints related to dust issues; DCNR is working with townships to reimburse them for dust suppression. Ms. Leslie said DCNR is working with PennDOT and local townships to begin planning for 2023 and making any needed adaptations.

Ms. Leslie noted DCNR had announced the largest grant program in DCNR history with \$90 million allocated for 330 community conservation partnership program grants across Pennsylvania. She stated \$430 million had been awarded for 2,300 projects over the last seven years. Ms. Leslie advised due to the availability of Federal funding, a new round of fall grants has been announced with a lower match requirement.

Ms. Leslie stated \$75 million had been received for state parks and forests infrastructure. She said Secretary Dunn and Deputy Secretary Norbeck are doing site visits in the field at parks and forests where infrastructure projects are being funded, and several Council members have attended these events.

Ms. Leslie advised DCNR had announced last week its intent to purchase 100% of needed electricity from renewable sources by 2030. She explained the sources will be split between DCNR's generation of its own green energy and purchasing green energy. Ms. Leslie noted DCNR can communicate this practice to the 42 million state park visitors each year and be a

leader in renewable energy. She added that DCNR has 23 solar installation projects on DCNR land with 18 under construction, as well as green buildings throughout the system. Ms. Graham asked what percentage is currently from renewable sources, and Ms. Leslie said she would check. Matt Gabler said he appreciates DCNR's nuanced approach because solar presents land use issues that could create negative consequences when land is converted from forests to develop solar fields. He stated there are places where it makes sense to install solar, including roofs of buildings and elevated parking lots. Mr. Gabler said it is Important to have discussions about solar options such as DCNR is going prior to making decisions.

Ms. Leslie discussed other activities such as fall foliage, the first Pennsylvania sustainability summit, and the walks in Penn's Woods.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Nate Lotze, DCNR

Mr. Lotze discussed DCNR's participation in several hearings the previous week related to carbon capture and storage and plans for spending Clean Stream funding. He advised the Senate had passed House Bill 1823 which transfers Washington Crossing Historical Park to DCNR. Mr. Lotze stated there is a parks and recreation caucus meeting on October 6 at which Secretary Dunn will talk about the use of funding for infrastructure and grants and Nathan Reiger will be presenting on the outdoor recreation economy.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

Ms. Singer said at the July meeting there was a presentation on concessions at state parks, and some members would like to send a follow-up email encouraging DCNR staff to move forward with looking at ways to improve the concessions program. She stated this topic will be further discussed in the working group session.

PRESENTATIONS

Policy for Solar Siting

Nicole Faraguna, DCNR Policy Director

Ms. Faraguna stated DCNR has been working on developing conservation considerations related to solar siting guidance. She explained large-scale solar siting does not occur on DCNR land, so the guidance is intended for individual landowners, municipal governments, private industry, and developers. She continued explaining that some of these stakeholders had . approach DCNR for guidance. Ms. Faraguna said the guidance will be provided to these entities as a resource. She stated the guidance will be released on October 3 at the Sustainability Summit previously mentioned by Ms. Leslie.

Pennsylvania's Three New State Parks

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

Ms. Leslie provided an overview of the three new states parks which are being added to the state park system through the recently passed budget. She advised this is the first time in several decades that this number of parks are being added in the state park system.

Ms. Leslie stated the first new park is the Susquehanna River State Park located in York County. She added that it is about 1,100 acres and adjacent to about another 1,000 acres of

land already conserved by the Lancaster Conservancy. She noted this park's features include multiple outcrop vistas, miles of Susquehanna Riverfront, and numerous outdoor recreation activities, including campgrounds and cabins. Ms. Leslie advised it is important for the Chesapeake Bay watershed to protect these lands along the River. Ms. Leslie showed several pictures of the park.

Ms. Leslie discussed the second new park, Big Elk Creek, and noted Secretary Dunn is at this park today. She advised it is the largest of the new parks with more than 1,700 acres including 3.5 miles of Big Elk Creek, a tributary that flows into the Chesapeake Bay. She stated the acquisition is significant in that it offers protection for natural resources including 190 acres of floodplain, 600 acres of woodlands, 800 acres of native grasses, 800 acres of farmland, many miles of hiking trails, and more than 690 plant species of which 15 are considered endangered or rare in Pennsylvania. Ms. Leslie advised the new park is part of a larger system of nearly 8,000 acres of conserved public space in Chester County and Maryland. Ms. Leslie showed pictures of the park.

Ms. Leslie explained the reason for adding these parks, particularly in the eastern part of the Commonwealth, is to help address the overloaded existing state parks since there are many cities within a short driving distance and to provide more opportunity for recreational amenities, including overnight spaces and hiking trails.

Ms. Leslie discussed the third new park consisting of 669 acres in Wyoming County. She advised this park offers hiking and significant public access to the north branch of the Susquehanna River. She noted this park will be a day park only and feature public access to water, cultural and historic resources. She added that it is the first state park in Wyoming County. Ms. Leslie showed pictures of the park.

Ms. Leslie noted the parks are open to the public with staff in place, initial signage posted, and websites. She stated the next step will be to develop the parks through a public process, and to fill recreational gaps. She advised the master planning will begin as soon as a consultant is under contract. She explained the final naming of the parks will be determined based on research and stakeholder engagement.

Mr. Ali asked if the Fish and Boat Commission had been engaged in discussions about the possibility of grants to enhance streams at the York County park. Ms. Leslie responded they have been closely involved.

Update on PA Trails Program **Tom Ford, Director, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation**

Tom Ford reviewed the current grant program and stated \$90 million in grants had been announced, as well as a supplemental round which will close on October 22. He advised more information can be found on DCNR's main website home page. Mr. Ford also mentioned the semi-annual grant rounds for the ATV and snowmobile grant program, with a supplemental round closing soon.

Mr. Ford reminded everyone that September is trails month. He stated DCNR is working to provide a trail within 10 minutes of every Pennsylvanian. He said the 2022 trail of the year is the Delaware Canal Towpath. Mr. Ford noted the 2021 annual trails report had been released the previous week.

Mr. Ford reviewed the trail network strategic plan which guides processes and the program. He noted the Trails Advisory Committee helps with policies and developing the plan. Mr. Ford reviewed the recommendations in the plan and discussed in detail the recommendation to close priority trail gaps in Pennsylvania's statewide land and water trail network. He explained a priority trail gap is one where bridges or tunnels are needed to connect, with the gap occurring along a major greenway or regionally significant trail. He noted that closing the gap would connect two existing segments of trail or connect an existing trail to a state park, state forest, or key community within five miles. Mr. Ford displayed a map showing the 112 priority trail gaps and the top 10 trail gaps. He advised closing the gaps are large projects with costs exceeding \$10 million and requiring interagency coordination. He stated two had been closed in 2018, one in 2021, and several will be completed in 2022. Mr. Ford discussed the difference between maintenance versus rehabilitation funding, noting maintenance is not covered by legislation but rehabilitation can be performed.

Mr. Ali asked if there are plans for additional motorized trails. Mr. Ford mentioned the new connector in north central Pennsylvania will connect trails and the new ATV recreational area in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Mr. Kirchner asked about the difficulty of getting railroads to respond; he suggested CNRAC might be able to further discuss and research this issue.

Dave Trimpey asked for an update on the e-bike policy. Ms. Leslie responded that more than 700 public comments were received, and the response document will be shared within the next month with CNRAC. She added that DCNR anticipates a few clarifications to the policy but not significant changes.

Ms. Singer asked about a previous discussion of having CNRAC and the Trails Advisory Committee form a joint sub-committee. Mr. Ford stated he would discuss at the next Trails Advisory Committee

WORK GROUP REPORTS

The chairs for the Motorized Recreation, Strategic Planning, and DEI Work Groups advised they did not have anything new to report. Sarah Hall-Bagdonas said the Communications Work Group encouraged those attending the meeting who were not already receiving CNRAC's newsletter to sign up through CNRAC's website. Ms. Singer stated that the Infrastructure Work Group continues to meet monthly with Marci Mowery from PA Parks and Forests Foundation.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jim Laird commented on the potential of increasing private easements if legal fees could be covered for any claims filed. Matt Gabler agreed with Mr. Laird's comment and noted such indemnification would be a significant tool for expansion if landowners were ensured they would not be subject to liability.

MEETING ADJOURNED

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 11:56 a.m.

Notice of the September 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.