

DRAFT MINUTES
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ADVISORY COUNCIL (CNRAC)
November 16, 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

GUESTS PRESENT

John Norbeck, DCNR (presenter)
Nathan Reigner, DCNR (presenter)
Jason Albright, DCNR (presenter)
Nicole Faraguna, DCNR
Aara Vinsh, DCNR
Chris Novak, DCNR
Wesley Robinson, DCNR
Glendon King, PA House
Jack Clark, PA SnowATV Committee
Dave Hess, PA Environmental News
Sandy McHugh, Minichi, Inc.
Arline LaTourette, PSSA
Elizabeth Krug, PSSA
Randy Green, PSSA
Debra Bigley, Tioga County
Sarah Corcoran, Sierra Club
Eric Rensel, Parker Dam State Park
David Kurecian, Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau
Jeremy Wimpey, Applied Trails Research
Emily Eyster, PA Senate
Bob Stoudt, Montour Area Recreation Commission

DCNR

Cindy Adams Dunn, Secretary
Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

Mike Kuhn, PA Interscholastic Cycling League
Richard Martin, PA Forest Coalition
Griffin Caruos, PA House, ERE Research
Jim Laird
Heather Empfield
Bradley Smith
Katarina Platt
Robert Swift

WELCOME

Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's hybrid meeting for November 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. No comments were offered.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Singer asked for a motion on the September 2022 minutes. Matt Gabler requested a change on page 4 in the top paragraph, and Bob Kirchner requested a change on page 3, line 11. Council unanimously approved the September 2022 minutes with the incorporation of the changes from Mr. Gabler and Mr. Kirchner.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Chair

Ms. Singer asked Mr. Kirchner to give an update on the motorized recreation registration fee work group. Mr. Kirchner advised the registration fee work group has held about 10 meetings and has been working on a document for the legislature to address a snowmobile and ATV registration fee increase. He said the group hopes to have something available for the next legislative session.

Secretary Dunn thanked Mr. Kirchner and the Motorized Recreation Work Group for their past work in giving DCNR concrete recommendations and blueprint for moving forward for motorized recreation.

Ms. Singer advised that Steve Stroman would not be seeking to continue on Council after his terms ends this year. Ms. Singer thanked Mr. Stroman for his service on the Council.

Ms. Singer and several Council members expressed their thanks to Secretary Dunn and Ms. Leslie for their leadership, service, expertise and strong working relationship with CNRAC and their hope they would be continuing in their roles in the new administration.

Secretary Dunn expressed appreciation for CNRAC members and commented that this has been one of the best-performing Councils.

DCNR SECRETARY REPORT

Cindy Adams Dunn, Secretary

Secretary Dunn stated DCNR has been busy during the winding down of the Wolf Administration, including the launching of three new state parks and the new ATV recreation area. She referenced several other key initiatives over the past years, including installing riparian buffers to enhance watersheds and state forests in addition to the timber value that forests bring to Pennsylvania's economy. Secretary Dunn mentioned several significant tree planting events she recently attended and the value they bring to the reforestation of Pennsylvania. She asked Deputy Secretary John Norbeck to add any other thoughts to the discussion of forests. Mr. Norbeck stated the Bureau of Forestry is going through a strategic planning process, and while core values and the mission has not changed, recreational use of state forests has emerged as a key topic. He added that Jason Albright would be discussing motorized recreational use later in the meeting, including the value of having a pilot program as part of the evaluation process.

Secretary Dunn advised she had been at the Geological Survey office the previous day for discussions regarding the critical role they play in carbon capture/storage and climate change initiatives.

Secretary Dunn referenced the transition document prepared by CNRAC which discussed the importance and value of continuing to grow outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania. She mentioned recent meetings with township officials who emphasized the importance of outdoor recreation for their local economies.

Secretary Dunn announced that \$90 million was made available for grants on September 6.

Secretary Dunn mentioned diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives DCNR has already completed and the plans for future initiatives to ensure all feel welcome. Secretary Dunn discussed the success of the Outdoor Corps program which has put hundreds of diverse young adults to work and given them a set of skills in conservation and recreation.

NEW OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY DATA

Dr. Nathan Reigner, PA Outdoor Recreation Director

Dr. Reigner highlighted some recently released information on the size and scope of Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation economy and the industry behind it. He explained the relationship among the outdoor industry, the outdoor economy, and the outdoor sector and noted the information he would be sharing was specifically about the outdoor industry. He stated the data comes from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Industry Satellite Account. Dr. Reigner explained that in Pennsylvania, the Outdoor Industry Satellite Account divided the sector into three broad areas: conventional outdoor recreation activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, motorized recreation), other outside activities (e.g., golf, gardening), and the

supporting activities (e.g., construction of parks and trails, tourism and government expenditures). He continued explaining that in Pennsylvania about one-third of the economic productivity comes from outdoor recreation and half of the productivity comes from supporting activities.

Dr. Reigner advised that in 2021 about \$14 billion in value from outdoor recreation was added to Pennsylvania's GDP, 1.6% of Pennsylvania's economy; this sector generated 152,000 full-time equivalent jobs in Pennsylvania. He advised the data also shows Pennsylvania as having the sixth largest outdoor recreation economy in the U.S. Dr. Reigner showed comparison tables for other industries, many of which receive greater investments than outdoor recreation by the Commonwealth.

Dr. Reigner provided information on a webinar being held on November 29 to further discuss the information he had just highlighted.

Silas Chamberlin commented on the importance of the data reviewed by Dr. Reigner, including seeing which industries have grown over the past five years and which have slowed down. He added that some of the work done in York County where he works has shown the economic value of outdoor recreation, including having more than 5,000 people from York County engaged in outdoor recreation. He mentioned the wages for those employed in the sector tends to be low which is related to part-time work, the age of the workers, and the type of jobs so opportunities for workforce development exist. Mr. Chamberlin noted the numbers do not include the benefits outdoor recreation assets provide for enticing businesses and potential employees to move to or expand within a state.

Jerry Walls stated he agreed with Mr. Chamberlin's comments and gave an example of the growth of the hospitality industry in Williamsport due to outdoor recreation opportunities.

Matt Gabler said he agrees the outdoor recreation economy is essential, and the data is very helpful. He urged some caution with some of the numbers, in particular how resources are being allocated and whether the results desired are being generated. He noted that he did not agree with including government expenditures as part of the GDP, with the government expenditures being a liability on the balance sheet and the outcome of the expenditure being an asset. Mr. Chamberlin added that he also had a similar thought, particularly since one of the categories is construction which may have been funded by the government and may be double counted.

DCNR ADVISOR/DEPARTMENT REPORT

Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

Ms. Leslie advised the dates of CNRAC meetings for 2023 are January 25, March 22, May 24, July 26, September 27, and November 15.

Ms. Leslie stated CNRAC has a new member who will be joining starting January 1, Marcus Shoffner from the Outdoor Inclusion Coalition, located in the Pittsburgh area.

Ms. Leslie noted the new online forest camping reservation system went live on November 3, and approximately 500 permits have been issued since the system went live.

Ms. Leslie advised the master plan is under development for the Catawissa Recreation Area, the new motorized recreation area, and there is a public comment period open now through

December 16 for what the public would like to see at this site. She stated she would send Council members an email with a link to the public comment form.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

Ms. Singer advised a response is being finalized to the questions asked by a representative of the Friends of the Loyalsock group at the last meeting.

Meredith Graham reviewed the changes made to the latest version of the transition document. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to finalize the document and distribute it.

PRESENTATIONS

DCNR's Infrastructure Plan for American Rescue Plan Act Funds John Norbeck, DCNR Deputy Secretary for Parks and Forestry

Mr. Norbeck noted there is almost \$1.5 billion of infrastructure needs, and DCNR is working on breaking down the number so it is more easily understood and to match with different funding streams and opportunities. He stated the \$75 million in ARPA funds will be helpful, but is truly a down payment.

Mr. Norbeck advised there are 138 dams in state parks and forests, with 10 of them being hydraulically or structurally insufficient as evaluated through a DEP program; the estimated cost for the work on these high-hazard dams is approximately \$76 million, and DCNR will allot about \$30 million of the ARPA funds for this purpose.

Mr. Norbeck stated there are 963 bridges in state parks and forests, with 148 of them being structurally deficient per criteria used by PennDOT; the estimated cost for the work on these 148 bridges is about \$90 million; about \$7 million of ARPA funds is targeted for work on bridges.

Mr. Norbeck next discussed needs for administrative and visitor support, noting most of the infrastructure was built between 1930 to 1970. He stated there are 4,400 buildings within DCNR, and about \$15 million of ARPA funds will be used to address needs with these buildings.

Mr. Norbeck reviewed the needs related to sewer and water infrastructure, with many state parks having their own systems. He stated there are 85 water treatment plants that DCNR operates, with 10 of those also providing services to local communities and municipalities; 18 of the 85 are structurally insufficient. Mr. Norbeck said about \$11.5 million is needed to address these infrastructure needs. He advised there are 173 water systems, 19 of which are deficient, and about \$12 million is needed to address these needs. Mr. Norbeck stated about \$2 million of ARPA funding will be used for sewer and water infrastructure needs. In response to a question about whether the water treatment plants providing services to local communities generate revenue for DCNR, Mr. Norbeck advised the services are provided at or below cost.

Mr. Norbeck discussed recreational support projects which include swimming pools, beaches, and playgrounds with a need of about \$18 million for infrastructure needs. He advised there are infrastructure needs related to overnight accommodations in parks and forests, with more than 7,000 campsites, 400 cottages and cabins. He stated about \$5 million in ARPA will be used towards accommodations.

Mr. Norbeck stated \$1 million will be used to add ADA accessibility features to boating water access facilities; he noted DCNR is working with Tim Schaeffer at the Fish and Boat Commission on these projects.

Mr. Norbeck reviewed DCNR's prioritization process with projects initially proposed by DCNR managers who work with Facility Design and Construction staff. Where projects might be funded within three to five years, an engineering estimate is also prepared and then sent to Mr. Norbeck's office. He noted the prioritization starts with public health and safety projects and is followed by regulatory requirements and mandates, such as regulatory responsibilities related to water treatment plants. Mr. Norbeck said the third priority is operational needs which includes looking at trends and recreational uses of parks and forests, such as the desire for electrical hook-ups for overnight accommodations. He stated the next priority is visitor service needs, followed by facility and material lifespans.

Mr. Norbeck explained the list is reviewed every year and priorities change from year to year.

Mr. Norbeck advised funds other than ARPA funds will also be used to address some of the infrastructure needs discussed above.

In response to a question about any deadlines associated with ARPA funds, Mr. Norbeck responded that the funds have to be encumbered by December 2024 and spent by December 2026. Mr. Norbeck added that for projects exceeding \$10 million, the reporting process is significantly more involved so that requirement is also being taken into account.

In response to a question about how much of the infrastructure backlog will be addressed by all potential funding sources currently available, Mr. Norbeck advised DCNR is also partnering with DEP who is receiving Federal funds for projects such as well plugging and closing abandoned mines, which are projects on DCNR's list. Mr. Norbeck said once all the numbers are confirmed, there will be an updated number that a plan can be developed around.

Northcentral Regional Connector ATV Pilot Program Results Jason Albright, DCNR, Bureau of Forestry, Assistant State Forester

Mr. Albright stated the pilot program was a full team effort with several other state agencies and local governments involved in the program. He advised the 2022 program was primarily in Potter County, the western half of Tioga County, and a small portion of Clinton and Lycoming counties. He noted the program started Memorial Day weekend and ended the last Sunday in September. Mr. Albright said 477 miles were connected, with the preferred route or actual connector being 230 miles. He stated 30 businesses were connected to the route.

Mr. Albright discussed permit sales and noted 3,650 permits were sold for the May through September season; last year the season started in mid-July and about 1,800 permits were sold.

Mr. Albright showed a chart of the top 10 areas where permit buyers were from with many coming from local region; the second highest area was southeast PA.

Mr. Albright summarized observations for the 2022 season including an increase in usage, positive feedback from businesses, only minor negative feedback regarding dust which was resolved with local municipalities, and some enforcement issues which mostly occurred on

weekends. He noted that further consideration is being given to what can be done to assist with enforcement in this area, with most of the violations having to do with permits and using undesignated areas.

Mr. Albright discussed monitoring conducted by district staff for potential environmental, social and management concerns on the state forest. He stated there were no significant environmental impacts; however, wildlife and other aspects will continue to be monitored.

Mr. Albright reviewed some changes for 2023, including extending connections. He also reviewed differences between the Sproul State Forest and the Tiadaghton State Forest findings in terms of potential and actual road trails, as well as sensitive areas.

Mr. Albright next discussed social monitoring. He mentioned an economic study being conducted by Penn State University with preliminary results from users outside of the local area showing 10,250 trips to the local area in 2022 with the ATV pilot program being the reason they were in the county. He added that about 75% stayed at a campground or private home. He advised a survey is also being developed by Penn State for local residents to gauge their level of satisfaction and any changes to their quality of life. He added the Bureau of Forestry also has a survey open to all after each season regarding the pilot program. Mr. Albright noted Penn State is also conducting a sound survey to establish the “annoyance level.”

Mr. Albright discussed the preferred route for 2023 as well as improvements to include additional signage.

Mr. Albright noted some of the key activities that will take place when the pilot ends on September 24, 2023, including a report due to the legislature by December 2023.

Mr. Gabler stated he would like to underscore the importance of expanding opportunities not creating a zero loss in another area, e.g., access by loggers and timber harvesters due to the ATV program. He recognized DCNR for having a pilot program and carefully evaluating the results, benefits and impacts.

WORK GROUP REPORTS

Ms. Singer asked if any of the work groups had any information to convey. Mr. Kirchner stated Gary Kribbs and Rocco Ali had attended a briefing on the Catawissa area mentioned earlier. Mr. Ali stated it was mentioned at the meeting about the public comment meeting which is currently underway. Mr. Ali mentioned use of the trail had already been an economic boon to several small communities, and he hoped to see this expanded.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No additional comments were offered.

MEETING ADJOURNED

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 12:19 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.