

MINUTES

CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COUNCIL (CNRAC)

March 22, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT

Rocco Ali, Member
Silas Chamberlin, Member
Matt Gabler, Member
Greg Goldman, Member
Meredith Graham, Secretary
Sarah Hall, Member
Bob Kirchner, Vice Chair
Marcus Shoffner, Member
Geraldyn Singer, Chair
Dave Trimpey, Member
Jerry Walls, Member
Ephraim Zimmerman, Member

DCNR

Cindy Adams Dunn, Secretary
Gretchen Leslie, CNRAC Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR

Katrina Harris, CNRAC Administrator

GUESTS PRESENT

Mike Walsh, DCNR (presenter)
David Maher, DCNR (presenter)
Eric Nelson (presenter)
Nicole Faraguna, DCNR
Joseph Kellert, DCNR
Jake Newton, DCNR
Meredith Hill, DCNR
Deb Bigley
Brad Smith
Donna Fabry
Kailee Glock, PA House
Arline LaTourette
Clayton Leibold
Dr Jack Clark, PA SnowATV Committee
Jennifer Burden, PA Oil Heritage Region
Bob Stoudt, Montour Area Recreation Commission
Chuck Lombaerde
Pat Henderson, Marcellus Shale Coalition

WELCOME

Gretchen Leslie opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to CNRAC's hybrid meeting for March 2023. 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. Ms. Singer welcomed back Ephraim Zimmerman as a returning council member. Mr. Zimmerman re-introduced himself and stated he is the Science Director with the Natural Heritage Program for the Western PA Conservancy in Pittsburgh.

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 summarized a letter received from Dennis Lynch regarding safety and noise concerns he has with the ATV pilot program. She advised the letter would be forwarded to Council members, as well as the Bureau of Forestry, and a response will be sent to Mr. Lynch.

Jerry Walls shared recent comments he had received from several individuals regarding trails, e-bikes, and other DCNR policies and staffing concerns.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Singer asked for a motion on the January 2023 minutes. Council unanimously approved the January 2023 minutes.

COUNCIL REPORT

Geralyn Singer, CNRAC Chair

Ms. Singer provided an update on Council appointments, noting there is one vacancy under the Governor's membership slots and Silas Chamberlin is awaiting re-appointment. She stated there is one vacancy within the House membership slots, and Sarah Hall and Ted Tharan are awaiting re-appointment. Ms. Singer advised all six Senate membership slots are filled.

Bob Kirchner gave an update on the ATV/snowmobile registration fee work group he has been serving on for the past eight months. Mr. Kirchner advised the committee seems to have arrived at fee amounts per ATV or snowmobile and is close to engaging in the preparation of legislation.

Mr. Kirchner also gave an update on activities of the Recreation Engagement Coalition which he serves on along with Marcus Shoffner and Silas Chamberlin. He noted nine regional stakeholder meetings will be held to provide information and gather input as the new Office of Outdoor Recreation is being structured. Ms. Leslie listed the dates and locations of the meeting and said she would provide the information on the regional meetings in a follow-up email to

Council.

Mr. Kirchner stated he had also attended DCNR's budget hearing the previous day with the Senate Appropriations Committee. He advised the hearing gave good insight into different Senators' priorities. He stated questions included several on outdoor recreation and invasive species. Mr. Walls advised he had also listened to the hearings. Mr. Kirchner, Mr. Walls and Mr. Chamberlin commented on the strong job done by Secretary Dunn and her staff on presenting information to the committee and answering questions. Matt Gabler commented on some of the questions posed at the hearing, noting that it is important to meet the citizens where they are on the topics of outdoor recreation and shared use of public lands. Mr. Gabler said it is also important to provide education to the Commonwealth's citizens on land management issues and commended Secretary Dunn on her responses to several questions on these issues.

Meredith Graham noted she has been working with Matt Gabler and Gary Kribbs on a potential two-part webinar for CNRAC Conversations on carbon capture and storage.

Ms. Singer stated the Council is working on its priorities for the next year and will be discussing them further in their working sessions.

DCNR SECRETARY REPORT **Cindy Adams Dunn, Acting Secretary**

Secretary Dunn advised she had attended the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania meeting earlier in the week and had spoken with Council Member Ted Tharan and County Commissioners from across the state. She said the Commissioners she interacted with were very positive about working with DCNR on projects in their county. She noted that as the largest public lands manager, DCNR should expect to have robust dialogue of how best to use those lands for the benefit of the citizens at both the county level and as was had during the budget hearing.

Secretary Dunn added to the previous discussion about the budget hearing, noting priorities include infrastructure repairs and advancing outdoor recreation. She said the infrastructure improvements will better serve the public and support the outdoor recreation economy and will include investment in the public-facing side. She noted \$112 million has been requested from the Oil and Gas Fund for these purposes.

Secretary Dunn reminded Council she is currently Acting Secretary and has begun nomination visits with legislators which have included hearing concerns and needs they have heard from their constituents.

DCNR DEPARTMENT REPORT **Gretchen Leslie, DCNR Senior Advisor**

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

Ms. Leslie advised DCNR has received information that a draft final Duke Low MOA Environmental Assessment will be released soon, along with a Finding of No Significant Impact, and there will be a 45-day public comment period.

Mr. Chamberlin asked if DCNR is engaged with the pump storage facility proposed along the Lower Susquehanna. Secretary Dunn responded that DCNR staff are aware of the project. Secretary Dunn noted it is being proposed in a highly regulated area of the Commonwealth given it is in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and DCNR will be asked to provide a perspective on the impact should the project go forward.

DCNR LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Eric Nelson, DCNR Director of Legislative Affairs

Mr. Nelson advised confirmation hearings for Secretary Dunn are going well, and it is anticipated Secretary Dunn will be confirmed in April. He stated the one bill his office is following is Senate Bill 429 regarding benefits for law enforcement officers, and DCNR is supportive of this bill.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

Ms. Singer said the only item is the annual election of officers which will take place at the May meeting, and a motion is needed to approve a Nominating Committee. Ms. Singer stated Mr. Kirchner, Mr. Gabler and Janet Sweeney have offered to serve on the Nominating Committee. Ms. Singer asked for any other members who might be interested, and no additional members expressed interest in serving on the committee. A motion was made and unanimously passed to have the three individuals elected to serve as the Nominating Committee.

PRESENTATIONS

DCNR PROPOSED BUDGET

Mike Walsh, DCNR Deputy Secretary for Administration

Mr. Walsh noted the Commonwealth is in the middle of the budget process and provided an overview of DCNR's proposed budget. He displayed a chart showing DCNR's proposed budget for July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024 and noted the proposed budget is for \$621 million from various funds which is a 9% increase over the current year.

Mr. Walsh highlighted the following about DCNR's budget:

- The Commonwealth budget totals about \$44 billion with the investment in DCNR being less than half a penny of every dollar spent.
- Last year \$56 million was appropriated from the Oil & Gas Lease Fund dedicated to three new state parks and a motorized recreation park. The proposed budget requests \$112 million for infrastructure investment and investing in the outdoor recreation economy, including funding for new positions to manage the investment of these funds into projects.
- DCNR operates out of 179 locations so filling vacancies is more difficult than if all employees were in a few locations.
- State park visitation is still higher than pre-COVID visitation levels.
- Budget maintains funding for forest pest management and park/forest infrastructure

projects.

Mr. Walsh showed charts of three-year comparisons of the Keystone Recreation Park & Conservation Fund and the Environmental Stewardship Fund, as well as a comparison of payment in lieu of taxes funding and restricted and other funds.

PA's Heritage Areas Program

David Maher, DCNR's Heritage Areas Coordinator

Mr. Maher displayed a map showing the heritage areas and stated the program was established in 1989 through legislation which authorized DCNR to manage and direct the program. He advised it is a line item in the state budget.

Mr. Maher stated there are 12 heritage areas in 57 counties covering 80% of Pennsylvania, a leader in the nation and a model for other states. He said there are six national heritage areas in Pennsylvania, more than any other state. He noted the newest national heritage area is the Susquehanna National Heritage Area in York County.

Mr. Maher explained there is a non-profit organization, Heritage PA, which has a board of directors consisting of the executive directors from each of the heritage areas. He continued explaining that Heritage PA offers administrative and technical support to the heritage areas' managers.

Mr. Maher reviewed the background and focus of the heritage areas program, noting the "Keystone State" has a rich natural, cultural, agricultural and industrial heritage that contributed to the growth and economic progress of the Commonwealth and the nation. He stated the heritage program was started to identify and protect Pennsylvania's unique cultural, natural, scenic landscape, and recreational resources as well as to stimulate community revitalization and economic development in rural and urban areas.

Mr. Maher explained the five primary goals of the program: partnerships, economic development, cultural conservation, recreation and open space, and education and interpretation. He stated the program contributes to more than 25,000 jobs, as well as the tourism industry.

Mr. Maher continued explaining that heritage areas were initially built around the Commonwealth's industrial heritage theme including iron and steel, coal, textures, machinery and foundries, transportation, oil, lumber, and agriculture.

Mr. Maher stated each heritage area has a strategic plan which includes public input from various public surveys done every few years.

Mr. Maher reviewed some recent projects across various areas which have included campaigns to showcase natural assets, bicycle tourism, trails and to spur local economic development.

WORK GROUP REPORTS

Ms. Singer asked if any of the work group chairs had any updates to convey, and none were offered.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No additional comments were offered.

MEETING ADJOURNED

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 12:02 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.