

# SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

## MEETING MINUTES – 23 SEP 2019

### NATURAL AREAS TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SEWRPC Office Building, W239 N1812 Rockwood Dr, Waukesha, WI

#### Attending:

Dr. Daniel Carter...Principal Specialist-Biologist, SEWRPC  
Dr. Christopher Tyrrell (Chair)...Research Curator, Milwaukee Public Museum  
Jill Bedford...Land Conservation Consultant, Tall Pines Conservancy  
Emilie Burmeister...Assistant Natural Areas Coordinator, Milwaukee County Parks  
Peter Duerkop...SKMSF Ecologist, WDNR  
Sharon Fandel...Southeast Ecologist, WDNR  
Shannon Haydin...Deputy Director, Walworth County Land Use and Resource Management  
Mark Jenks...County Conservationist, Kenosha County Division of Planning and Development  
Nathaniel Kinney...Land Protection Manager, Waukesha County Land Conservancy  
Cheryl White...Executive Director, Waukesha County Land Conservancy  
Dr. Larry Leitner...SEWRPC, retired; Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy Board  
Dr. Julie Kinzelman...Laboratory Director / Research Scientist, Racine Health Department  
Adrian Koski...Research Assistant, Racine Health Department  
Dr. Todd Levine...Senior Lecturer in Biology, Carroll University  
Karen Yancey...Executive Director, Geneva Lake Conservancy  
Stephen McCarthy...Landscape Architect, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District  
Greg Rajsky...Executive Director, Kettle Moraine Land Trust  
Dr. Donald M. Reed...SEWRPC, retired; President, Kettle Moraine Natural History Association  
Julia Robson...Conservation Biologist, Waukesha County Parks and Land Use  
Dr. David Rogers...Associate Professor in Biological Science, University of Wisconsin-Parkside  
Debora Sielski...Deputy Planning and Parks Administrator, Washington County  
Matt Smith...Land Manager, Riveredge Nature Center/Milwaukee Audubon  
Andrew Struck...Planning and Parks Director, Ozaukee County  
Marc White...Director of Conservation, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center  
Jerry Ziegler...Mukwonago Land Steward, The Nature Conservancy

Meeting called to order at 9:02 a.m.

Kevin Muhs, SEWRPC Executive Director, made a few opening remarks and thanked the committee for volunteering their time and knowledge.

Carter presented the need for periodic amendments to the natural area plan. The position that, “a natural area without adequate stewardship (management) is not ‘protected’ regardless of ownership” was stated and supported by the committee. A brief discussion of current natural area management concerns (e.g., invasive species, allelopathy, loss of natural disturbance, etc.) followed. It was suggested that SEWRPC should have management plans for natural areas in Planning Report No. 42. This was stated to have been an original intent but was precluded by a lack of resources. The point was also raised that planning is not implementation. Lack of resources was identified as a major obstacle for stewardship. Education and citizen engagement was suggested to help raise funds to support stewardship. The suggestion was made that the plan should provide an estimate for management of each site to help landowners better understanding what is needed. This was determined to be difficult because a site may have multiple competing options or priorities. This led to a challenge of using “pre-settlement condition” as a priority and a call to be “more realistic” about maintaining native biodiversity rather than maintain a site free of

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exotic species. Another call was made to consider future possible priorities: by 2070 oaks will probably be a critical species in southeast WI.

Dan Carter presented 15 parcels that he recommended be added to or reclassified in the list of natural areas in Planning Report No. 42, A Regional Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin. These were: Army Lake Lowlands upgrade to NA-2, rename to Army Lake Wetlands and Oak Woodlands; Beulah Bluff Oak Woodland and Tamaracks new NA-3); Natureland Park Fen new NA-3; Kestol Prairie upgrade to NA-1, rename to Kettle Moraine Oak Opening - South; Badger Knoll new NA-3; Faulkner Road Fen new NA-3; Party Island (new NA-3); Stephenson Shrub-Fen upgrade to NA-3; Utica Lake Tamaracks upgrade to NA-3, rename to Utica Lake Wetlands; Saylesville Road Fen new NA-3; Sydney Woods new NA-3; Mee-Kwon Park Woods upgrade to NA-3 \*this unit required modification of the GIS layer from what was presented to remove a residence the parcel; Anawa Road Lowlands new NA-3; Port Washington Clay Banks upgrade to NA-3; Sauk Trail Road Ravine new NA-3; Combine Silver Lake Woods and Silver Lake Swamp critical species habitats, rename "Silver Lake Fen and Tamaracks. Two *additional* proprieties were initially presented for consideration but were withdrawn at the meeting: Radio Station Fen, this site has been severely damaged by off-road vehicle use; Kohlsville River Woods, the wetland has been excavated and shoreline rip-rapped by landowner for use as a pond.

Several questions were asked regarding the rating and methodology behind natural area classifications: Is floristic quality index considered? Not directly, but it is calculated for each site. Is watershed and geologic context considered? Yes, but biological communities tend to influence ratings more.

The question was asked "what do SEWRPC 'recommendations' mean?" Recommendations refer to suggested ownership or easement for protection of the natural area. The only real discussion centered around whether Army Lake Lowlands should be upgraded to NA-2 as proposed or NA-1 due to the high quality oak woodland presented. Carter reported that his photos were from the best 1 acre portion and his NA-2 recommendation was based on the small size of this excellent quality patch.

A motion to approve, in whole, the addition or reclassification of 15 properties in Planning Report No. 42 as outlined by Dan Carter was made by Don Reed, seconded by Dave Rogers, and passed unanimously by verbal vote.

Carter introduced his growing concern regarding the recognition of Critical Species Habitats (CSH) in the region. More species are being recognized as critical, green space in the region continues to decline, and technology has led to an enormous increase in the number of observations of critical species. These factors result in essentially every open space in urban areas as hosting at least one critical species for at least some portion of the year. A map was presented comparing the city of Oak Creek in 2010 to 2018 and the CSH parcels went from being isolated patches to nearly continuous corridors. Carter said tracking CSH has become a data management challenge and is requiring an untenable portion of his time. The suggestion was made to stop doing it but Carter pointed out that this was not possible as CSH is a primary objective of Planning Report 42. A comment was made having so much acreage as CSH may cause overconfidence in the level of protection for critical species. It was also pointed out that these results might demonstrate that the environmental corridors are working as intended for maintenance of biodiversity. Counter examples of corridors as invasive species conduits and source/sink population dynamics were made. A suggestion was made to redefine CSH to be only those parcels that were isolated from corridors. Further discussion did not allow for elaboration of this suggestion. The question was asked if the observation data has been discussed with the Natural Heritage Inventory at the WDNR? Not specifically but their database does track it. Information sharing agreements with NHI precluded presentation of those data. The suggestion was made that more sharing should be discussed with NHI. The overall discussion related to this concern identified two main issues: 1) volume of observations/data and 2) assessment of how meaningful the observations were for designation of CSH. The committee

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agreed that whatever the solution, the data used for CSH needed to be high quality and able to justify the CSH designation.

Carter reported that a natural area field trip will be planned in association with this and future Technical Advisory Committee meetings to help foster understanding of concerns or areas among the members. There was a brief discussion of the logistics for the day's post-meeting trip to Martin's Woods SNA.

A motion to adjourn was made by Don Reed, seconded by Cheryl White, and passed unanimously by verbal vote.

Meeting adjourned at 11:43 a.m.