

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES – 9 December 2019

NATURAL AREAS TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

Attending:

Dr. Christopher Tyrell (Chair)...Research Curator, Milwaukee Public Museum
Dr. Thomas Slawski (Secretary)...Chief Biologist, SEWRPC
Dr. Daniel Carter...Principal Specialist-Biologist, SEWRPC
Jill Bedford...Land Conservation Consultant, Tall Pines Conservancy
Brian Russart...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
Meghan Wersel...Stewardship Manager, Waukesha County Land Conservancy
Cheryl White...Development Volunteer, American Bird 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
Steve Henkel...Director of Land Protection, Ozaukee Washington Land Trust
Stephen McCarthy...Landscape Architect, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
Greg Rajskey...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
Andrew Struck...Planning and Parks Director, Ozaukee County
Jerry Ziegler...Mukwonago Land Steward, The Nature Conservancy

Meeting called to order at 9:05 a.m.

Several edits/corrections were suggested to amend the September 9, 2019 meeting minutes. A motion was made to approve the minutes as amended, seconded, and approved unanimously.

Dr. Carter gave a brief description of the after meeting field trip for native vs. non-native phragmites identification at Scuppernong Prairie State Natural Area.

Dr. Carter gave a review of work completed so far. Most work in Racine and Kenosha counties has been completed. Many sites have been severely degraded by the invasion of phragmites, hybrid cattail, buckthorn, oriental bittersweet, and woody encroachment. A review of impacts to biodiversity, physical structure, and nutrient dynamics was given. Wetlands of diverse types are being homogenized as they transition from wet prairies, sedge meadows, and emergent marsh communities into essentially mono-specific stands of phragmites and/or hybrid cattail. Oak ecosystems and prairies are being replaced by thickets. Buckthorn is having biodiversity and nutrient impacts. Oriental bittersweet is now a widespread problem. Extremely high deer tick abundance is one symptom of shrub encroachment in community types that need frequent fire to maintain structure. Jerry Ziegler mentioned that interns working in the Upper Mukwonago / Lulu area had contracted Lyme disease. Examples were given of some good things encountered thus far during the site review, including intact, native-dominated wetlands at the Cherry

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Lake Sedge Meadow State Natural Area, Rainbow Springs, Chiwaukee, and Crooked Creek Sedge Meadow; and new uncommon species occurrences. Site information for Racine and Kenosha counties has also been put into forms in the new database.

Based on review, Dr. Carter recommended 24 sites for removal from the plan (ten in Racine County, ten in Kenosha County, and four in Waukesha County). In addition, Dr. Carter recommended several sites for rank downgrades (two in Kenosha County, six in Racine County, and one in Waukesha County). Specific area are listed in the slides provided for this meeting.

Dr. Carter proposed changing the name of Center Lake Woods and Wetlands in Kenosha County to Center Lake Woods, due to boundary revision to exclude the wetlands, which had degraded in quality. A new, large population of rare Kentucky coffee tree had also been discovered at the site. Jill Bedford proposed calling the site Coffee Tree Woods.

Dr. Carter also proposed consolidating several separate sites falling within the Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area into two sites: Kenosha Dunes and Low Prairie, and Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area.

A discussion of the various issues affecting these sites and restoration potential ensued. Invasive species dominance and associated biodiversity loss is the primary driver behind the losses and rank changes. Sites like Benedict Prairie need frequent fire. Dr. Rogers mentioned that the site had been burned a couple of times several years ago, but not recently. Dr. Tyrell asked about the process for making management/restoration recommendations. Dr. Carter responded that we should be able to incorporate recommendations for doing so for remaining sites would be through the site profiles that will be developed, but sites that no longer have an intact core may not be worth the investment of limited resources. Dr. Carter also passed around a migratory bird stopover site planning document which profiled sites in a way that could be emulated. Dr. Reed described some Scuppernong sites where restoration of sites by shrub removal was successful from the seedbank and good nearby seed source. Dr. Carter mentioned that there were differences in seed banks between wetland and upland sites that limit potential at upland sites where plants aren't still present vegetatively. Further discussion ensued regarding the continued recognition of sites proposed to lose their natural area designation, specifically how to continue to recognize where they did exist, which may be useful when assessing restoration potential; the rate at which invasion/degradation is occurring or has occurred; stewardship resources; and implementation considering whether sites of management plans that address the issues under discussion. Dr. Carter showed pictures and provided descriptions of several sites recommended for removal from the plan or rank downgrades. Further discussion focused on ecological consequences, the acreage of total loss and that boundary adjustments would also need to be included into acreage loss, and how the SEWRPCs natural areas align with State Natural Areas.

Jerry Zeigler asked about archaeological sites. Dr. Carter responded that the plan does enumerate some sites, and that was something that could be addressed when supplementary materials are assembled next year. Zeigler also brought up The Nature Conservancy's restoration efforts on a property immediately west of Chiwaukee Prairie where Blanding's turtle had returned and whether it might be included within the natural area designation. Dr. Carter responded that would likely at least qualify for critical species habitat designation and that they could have further discussion regarding natural area boundary adjustment.

Jill Bedford requested that ownership information be provided with sites recommended for loss or change. Dr. Carter agreed to provide that in the future, and provided that for some of the sites under discussion. Dr. Reed added that marsh sites below the ordinary high water mark fall under public trust doctrine.

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Dr. Leitner made a motion to accept the proposed designation removals, rank downgrades, the site name change (Coffee Tree Woods), and consolidation of the Chiwaukee Prairie sites. This was seconded by Jill Bedford. The motion was approved unanimously.

Three new sites were approved for new natural area designation. Heide Prairie in Kenosha County was proposed as a new natural area of statewide or greater significance. Hamilton Woods in Kenosha County, formerly designated as critical species habitat, was proposed as a natural area of local significance. North Beach Dunes in the City of Racine was proposed as a natural area of local significance. Recommendations for ownership were private conservancy organization Heide Prairie and Hamilton Woods and City of Racine for North Beach Dunes (already owned by the City).

Dr. Carter provided descriptions of the proposed sites. Dr. Leitner added that Hamilton woods had been borderline between natural area of local significance and critical species habitat designations. The reason for the latter had been due to the presence of *Trillium recurvatum* (prairie trillium), but that species is no longer special concern. Dr. Carter added that the site was also the Walworth County site for forked aster described by Swink and Wilhelm's Flora of the Chicago Region.

Dr. Rogers made the motion to accept these new designations as proposed. Dr. Leitner seconded. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Dr. Carter proposed continuing to track and map critical species habitat. This proposal included maintaining attributes and recommendations of previously designated sites that still meet the designation requirements, but maintaining future changes to critical species habitat as a generalized layer due to its rapidly increasing spatial extent. Polygons in this layer will be drawn based on habitat around occurrences for each species (hence areas with multiple species will have overlapping polygons), and taxonomic group (e.g. bird, plant, herptile, etc.) will be included as polygon attributes. Critical species habitats would be mapped independently of natural areas such that natural area sites that support critical species would also be mapped separately as critical species habitat.

Dr. Carter briefly discussed issues of data sharing and statutory constraints on NHI as well as sharing data with NHI, so that there could be a centralized repository, not just for conservation purposes, but also so impacts of proposed development projects are known.

There was discussion on how these critical species habitats are included in corridors. Wildlife habitat does provide a point value, but corridors also include other open space attributes. Dr. Slawski suggested we invite SEWRPC Land Use to a future meeting to explain corridor designation.

Dr. Reed expressed concern over mapping critical species habitat separately from natural areas—specifically that not including the entire natural area could lead to impacts to natural area sites. A discussion ensued around some hypothetical situations. Ultimately, Dr. Tyrell asked whether critical species habitats in natural areas would be mapped by simply copying the natural area polygons. Dr. Carter's answer was yes.

Andrew Struck asked about how sites were defined. Dr. Carter responded that they aren't based on occurrences alone. Occurrences have to occur within or adjacent to something that can reasonably be considered to be habitat. Dr. Reed added that for birds, this is restricted to nesting habitat. Dr. Carter showed an example of an occurrence that could be mapped and one that could not. Andrew Struck also asked if point occurrences could be provided. Dr. Tyrell mentioned that new maps would start with historical information. Dr. Carter added that SEWRPC's existing data was in the form of mapped polygons. Most SEWRPC rare species occurrences were databased with reference to the public land survey system.

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Dr. Reed brought up the issue of rare species being used for restoration (e.g. prairie plantings) and the potential problem of discerning natural populations vs. planted ones. Dr. Carter responded he was confident that he could generally tell the difference based on context.

Dr. Carter gave some background on regionally uncommon species, which are rare in the Region, but are not listed at the State or Federal level. This list has only included vascular plants in the past, but the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan (2015-2025) provides a starting point for expanding this list to include other taxonomic groups, and committee members may nominate some others. Steve Henkel and Andrew Struck have brought up the issue of incorporating species of local conservation interest, which is relevant here, but that designation is not based on rarity alone. This is a discussion that will need to be continued in the future.

There was also some discussion of SEWRPC's wildlife mapping as it relates to this topic. It was last updated in the 1980s.

Dr. Reed made the motion to accept the proposal for critical species habitat mapping. Mark Jenks seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Carter requested that committee members provide information on monitoring/citizen science efforts they are aware of that pertain to natural area sites, because he would like to incorporate them into site profiles. These are also opportunities to track site health. The example of the Eagle Centre iNaturalist Project was shown. There was brief discussion by Andrew Struck and Dr. Carter around the utility of setting up monitoring/projects in conjunction with restoration to track progress.

Dr. Reed raised the issue of funding for stewardship and monitoring and funds raised for work at Scuppernong. Dr. Carter added that informal monitoring efforts like iNaturalist are free and often provide information like invasive species or rare species occurrences that can guide management.

Dr. Tyrell added that museum records may be used too.

Dr. Carter mentioned community monitoring tools under development by the WI Department of Natural Resources that may be available in the future or which could be adapted.

Dr. Reed made the motion to adjourn, Brian Russart seconded.
The meeting adjourned at 11:36 am.