

**SUMMARY NOTES OF THE March 23, 2021 MEETING OF THE
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF
NATURAL AREAS**

INTRODUCTION

Because of the recent COVID-19 safety protocols, the March 23, 2021 meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Protection and Management of Natural Areas was held virtually via GoToMeeting. The meeting was called to order at 9:09 a.m. by Zachary Kron, Senior Specialist Biologist, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC). Attendance was noted by SEWRPC staff via the GoToMeeting participant listing.

In attendance at the meeting were the following individuals:

Advisory Group Members Present

Jill Bedford..... Land Conservation Consultant, Tall Pines Conservancy
Emily Burmeister Assistant Natural Areas Coordinator, Milwaukee County Parks
Peter Duerkop Southern Kettle Moraine State Forest Ecologist, WDNR
Sharon Fandel Southeast Ecologist, WDNR
Steve Henkel..... Land Protection Director, Ozaukee-Washington Land Trust
Mark Jenks..... County Conservationist, Kenosha County Division of Planning and Development
Nathaniel Kinney..... Land Protection Manager, Waukesha County Land Conservancy
Julie Kinzelman Associate Lecturer, UW- Parkside
Adrian Koski..... Research Assistant, Racine Health Department
Larry Leitner SEWRPC Retired, Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy Board
Greg Rajsky Executive Director, Kettle Moraine Land Trust
Julia Robson..... Conservation Biologist, Waukesha County Parks and Land Use
Dave Rogers, Chair..... Associate Professor of Biological Sciences, UW- Parkside
Brian Russart..... Natural Areas Supervisor, Milwaukee County Parks
Deb Sielski Deputy Planning and Parks Administrator, Washington County
Andrew Struck..... Director, Planning and Parks Department, Ozaukee County
Marc White..... Director of Conservation, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center

Guests and Staff Present

Zachary Kron, Secretary Senior Biologist, SEWRPC
Tom Slawski Chief Biologist, SEWRPC

Mr. Kron welcomed all attendees to the third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group for the Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan (Plan). Mr. Kron began the meeting with a brief explanation of features of the GoToMeeting platform and how to use the chat feature to submit questions or comments on the material being presented. Mr. Kron briefly reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

Mr. Kron invited committee members to briefly introduce themselves by providing their name and affiliation.

Mr. Kron briefly reviewed changes in Committee Members. Dr. David Rogers replaced Dr. Christopher Tyrrell as Committee Chair. Fay Amerson replaced Shannon Haydin as the Walworth County representative.

No edits or changes were offered by the attendees for the summary notes from the December 9th, 2019 Advisory Group meeting.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW WORK COMPLETED

Mr. Kron provided a summary of the review work completed to date. There were no comments or questions on this section from attendees.

SITE PROFILE TEMPLATE DISCUSSION

Mr. Kron provided a summary of the site profile template. The discussion included a detailed explanation of all component parts of the template to be include in the final version. Mr. Kron then shared an example completed template with the committee. The discussion ended with a brief look at work completed to date and next steps. Next steps include incorporating committee member comments into the template and completing NA profiles. NA profiles compiled using the template will be incorporated into an online data viewer.

Mr. Duerkop asked how rare species information would be displayed in information supplemental to Site Profiles, such as attached/ linked floristic inventories. He asked if we would follow protocols outline, for example, by the WDNR, for sharing rare species information. Mr. Kron responded that rare species information within vegetation inventories would be redacted so the information would not be shared with the public. Mr. Kron went on to add that WDNR does not recommend sharing the locations of certain plants that are not listed as Threatened or Endangered. Mr. Kron stated that SEWRPC would follow those recommendations and would not share species locations for sensitive species that are prone to overcollection.

Ms. Bedford commented that they most usable piece of information for her organization would be the subheading for threats. She continued that an ideal database could track threats through time and could be updated to address current threats and management actions taken to address those issues. Mr. Kron mentioned that common threats are listed and compiled within the Natural Areas Database, and as such are searchable/sortable from a database platform. Mr. Kron went on to state that he would discuss this point with SEWRPC staff as the public database is compiled.

Mr. Leitner asked if public species lists would include all historic vegetation surveys or only those from the recent past. Mr. Kron responded that species lists would include all historic vegetation surveys compiled by SEWRPC. Mr. Leitner went on to discuss that it is possible to prove a species is present by encountering it in a contemporary survey, but problematic to determine if a species is absent. Mr. Kron added that if a rare or uncommon species had not been encountered in several decades or more, it would be redacted. Mr. Leitner added that the method described by Mr. Kron was consistent with other site-specific studies completed by Mr. Leitner historically.

Mr. White recommended adding the acreage public and acreage private for each site to facilitate use to a broad range of end users for this information. Mr. White went on to recommend including the date management plans were created or updated. Mr. White recommended species lists do not include rare

species information, beyond a simple count of the number of rare species and the last observation year. Mr. White added that a revised date and or created date would be helpful. Mr. Kron stated that revision dates could be included on the form.

Mr. Duerkop asked what the requirements were for a site management plan. Mr. Kron stated that there were not currently any specific requirements, but that it should be a written plan that defines management needs and actions needed to meet those goals. Mr. Duerkop added that many informal management plans could meet these requirements and should not be discounted, even if they are not formalized or published.

Ms. Robson inquired about the management history section and how often the profiles would be updated to reflect management history. She added that an annual or biennial review of management actions at sites could be informative to tract history and restoration progress. Mr. Kron responded that the intent was to keep them up to date, as time allows. He added that the intent is to update profiles on a 5-year rotation, staggering updates by County.

Mr. Rogers added that citizen science platforms may be able to facilitate the process of keeping profiles up to date, by utilizing data collected by Site managers and citizen scientists. Profiles could contain links to citizen science platforms. Additionally, a project could be created, and site or volunteer managers could update profile information directly

Mr. Koski recommended adding the site manager or managing agency for the site, with contact information. Mr. Kron stated that those could be added.

Mr. Kron added that he would be reaching out for information on individual sites as site profiles are being developed.

No additional Comments or questions were offered on this section.

PROPOSED DESIGNATION CHANGES

Mr. Kron reviewed the proposed designation changes, organized by County. Proposed changes were first summarized for Milwaukee County.

Mr. Leitner mentioned that Sydney woods was a high-quality woodland in Milwaukee County that met NA criteria. Mr. Kron replied that Sydney Woods was proposed and accepted at a prior meeting, no proposed changes were recommended for that site at this time. Mr. Leitner then replied that he had no issues with the proposed changes to Milwaukee county sites presented here but wanted to discuss Downers Woods (NA-3), also located in Eastern Milwaukee County. Mr. Leitner added that the woods met NA criteria in 1997 and 2010 but should be reviewed. Mr. Kron replied that it was on his list for field review during the 2021 season but has no firsthand knowledge of the site or its integrity. He added that if the site has been unmanaged it may have degraded over time, but a field review was needed. Mr. Rogers stated that conceptually sites may degrade over time, and quantifiable criteria may be needed to remove a previously designated NA. Mr. White replied that he was responsible for management at the site (Downer Woods) for several years. He added that Downers Woods was being managed and used for research purposes related to invasive species control by UW-Milwaukee students and faculty. He added that quality of the site has likely improved since initial SEWRPC surveys. Mr. Leitner added that the site was primarily added as an NA because there were very few natural areas remaining in the area that were already protected. Mr. Rogers emphasized that ownership, even by Universities, does not guarantee protection. Mr. White added that the

University was required to develop a management plan and fund management at Downers Woods as part of an agreement with the State to build a nearby dormitory facility. Mr. White went on to explain that Gretchen Meyer (Director, UWM Field Station) had research plots in the area and would be a good contact for the site. Research is ongoing.

Mr. Kron discussed upgrading Cambridge Avenue Woods from its current Critical Species Habitat designation to a Natural Area of Local Significance (NA-3). Mr. Leitner asked if forested areas to the West or North had been reviewed for possible inclusion. Mr. Kron replied that they had not, but the Urban Ecology Center Woods had been, found to the South. Mr. Kron Added the UEC did not currently meet NA Criteria, but continued restoration actives were improving the quality of the forest in the area. Mr. Kron stated that he could visit the areas adjacent to Cambridge Ave Woods in the spring. Mr. Russart replied that the woodlands being discussed were surveyed by County staff and were found to be of poor quality. While they supported rare animal species, the woodlands being discussed were unlikely to meet NA criteria.

Mr. Kron discussed Removing NA designations from three Milwaukee County Sites; Menomonee River Swamp-North, Mission Hills Wetlands, and Bike Trail Marsh. Mr. Rogers asked how downgraded sites were being tracked. Mr. Kron replied that all downgraded sites are tracked via a geodatabase. Mr. Leitner added that there are many additional areas that were surveyed but not designated as a NA, present as paper files in the SEWRPC archives. Mr. Kron confirmed that those files are being maintained and updated during the regular course of survey work in the region. Ms. Bedford asked if there was a map that could be shared corresponding to those surveys mentioned by Mr. Leitner. Something that was mobile ready, that could be utilized in the field when assessing parcels for protective ownership. Mr. Kron replied that he would need to confirm with SEWRPC staff but thought it was entirely possible since there is already a spatial layer representing survey data. Mr. Kron added that there are no plans at this time to make that data publicly available due to the added administrative burden of maintaining that data. Mr. Kron went on to state that interested parties could always reach out to him to determine if SEWRPC has surveyed a particular parcel in the past.

Mr. Kron discussed other changes in Milwaukee County, including a new CSH at South Shore Dunes. Mr. Rajskey asked, via the chat function, who owns the site. Mr. Kron replied that the site was owned by multiple private landowners and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. Mr. Kron added that the eastern portion of the site was not parceled as it was open water prior to the 1970s.

Mr. Kron went on to discuss proposed changes in Waukesha County. The first proposed designation change was upgrading Eagle Centre Oak Opening to a Natural Area of Regional Significance (NA-2). Mr. Leitner added that Eagle Centre Oak Opening had improved significantly in quality. Mr. Duerkop asked if the site had a management plan in place. Mr. Kinney replied yes there is a management plan and the site was one of their highest management priorities. Mr., Kinney added that Meghan Wersel, the site manager, could be contacted for a more detailed management plan and the plan is available for those would like to review it. Mr. Duerkop replied that he would like to see it. Mr. Kron added that regular prescribed burns at the site are likely to improve diversity overall. Mr. Rogers added that the site represents an outstanding pocket of diversity that could be utilized to restore similar habitat in the local area. Mr. Kron went on to propose upgrading Big Bend Wet-Mesic Woods to a Natural Area of Statewide Significance (NA-1). In addition, the name would be changed to Big Bend Woods to better reflect the diversity of habitats present on the site. Mr. Kron proposed upgrading two Critical Species Habitat sites to Natural Areas of Local Significance (NA-3): Campground Woods and Nashotah Park Woods. There were no additional questions or comments in this section.

Mr. Kron discussed changes in Walworth County. He discussed adding a small remnant wet-mesic prairie to the existing Young Prairie Natural Area of Statewide Significance (NA-1). Mr. Duerkop commented that the addition to Young Prairie was burned in fall 2020. No additional comments or questions in this section.

Mr. Kron discussed changes in Washington County. One new Natural Area of Local Significance was proposed for inclusion in the plan. No additional comments or questions in this section.

Mr. Rogers made a motion to accept all changes as presented. Mr. Leitner seconded the motion. Mr. Slawski called a vote to accept all proposed changes as presented in the presentation. All members present voted in favor of accepting changes as presented. There were no votes against.

CRITICAL SPECIES HABITAT SITE MAPPING UPDATES

Mr. Kron discussed updates to the Critical Species Habitat (CSH) Sites mapping effort. Mr. Rogers asked if there was a distinction between CSH Site quality versus acquisition priority. Mr. Rogers added that it would be very useful to information to determine which parcels would be the higher priority for connecting two habitat areas, for example. Mr. Kron added that the plan currently prioritizes CSH sites occurring within environmental corridors, which could potentially connect higher quality natural areas. Mr. Kron added that CSH are not currently prioritized by quality. Mr. Rogers added that additional criteria that could be considered include potential for development, ecological connectivity, and land value. No additional comments or questions were received in this section.

AQUATIC ASSESSMENT SCHEME UPDATE

Mr. Slawski discussed updates to the Aquatic Assessment Scheme. He discussed a brief history of the Aquatic Assessment scheme and its formulation in previous versions of the Plan. Mr. Slawski went on to discuss elements for consideration in the aquatic assessment scheme, and the current issues the subcommittee is working to address. He discussed several methods used by others to classify lakes and streams in the region and how those methods could be adapted to SEWRPC's Aquatic Assessment Scheme.

[Secretary's Note: Ms. Bedford attempted to share several documents from the Minnesota Department of Natural resources regarding aquatic assessment criteria. These documents were shared through the Go To Meeting Chat but were inaccessible during the meeting. SEWRPC staff contacted Ms. Bedford Following the meeting regarding the documents. Links to documents can be found below in the electronic comments received before or following the March 23, 2021 meeting section.]

There were no additional comments or questions in this section.

MONITORING AND CITIZEN SCIENCE EFFORTS

Mr. Kron called on committee members to share citizen science and monitoring efforts with SEWRPC to inform NA assessment in the region.

There were no additional comments or questions in this section.

NEXT STEPS FOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kron discussed the next steps for plan development. He indicated that SEWRPC staff will work to complete field reviews in Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, Washington, and Walworth Counties. Mr. Kron stated that SEWRPC plans to hold another virtual Advisory Committee Meeting in 2021. No further questions or comments were offered by the Advisory Group for the next steps for the Plan.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 11:36 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Zachary Kron
Recording Secretary

ELECTRONIC COMMENTS RECEIVED PRIOR TO OR FOLLOWING THE MARCH 23, 2021 MEETING

Comments for the Aquatic Assessment Criteria from Ms. Bedford received via email on 03/25/21.

Ms. Bedford noted that the criteria defined within the attached documents were useful for shoreline assessments and education and outreach.

The following is a list of citations of the documents sent by Ms. Bedford.

- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. 2012. Minnesota's Sensitive Lakeshore Identification Manual: a conservation strategy for Minnesota lakeshores (version 3). Division of Ecological and Water Resources, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. 87 pp.
- Perleberg, D., P. Radomski, S. Simon, K. Carlson, and J. Knopik. 2016. Minnesota Lake Plant Survey Manual, for use by MNDNR Fisheries Section and EWR Lake Habitat Program. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Ecological and Water Resources Division. Brainerd, MN. 128 pages including Appendices A-E.
- Score Your Shore Quick Reference. 8/2010 MnDNR Ecological and Waters Resources Division
- Perleberg, D., P. Radomski, and S. Simon. 2012. Score your Shore Citizen Shoreline Description Survey. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Ecological and Water Resources Division. Brainerd, MN. 48 pp. [Score Your Shore: a citizen shoreline description survey \(state.mn.us\)](https://www.state.mn.us/dnr/yourshore/)