

**SUMMARY NOTES OF THE OCTOBER 18th, 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 October 18th, 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 10:01 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

Julie Anderson Director of Public Works and Development Services, Racine County
Peter Duerkop Southern Kettle Moraine State Forest 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
Rory Klick Executive Director, Kettle Moraine Land Trust
Todd Levine Senior Lecturer in Biology, Carroll University
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
Kristin Shultheis..... Senior Project Planner, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
Matt Smith..... Land Manager, Riveredge Nature Center
Andrew Struck..... Director, Planning and Parks Department, Ozaukee County
Kiera Theys Geneva Lakes Conservancy
Meghan Wersel Executive Director, Waukesha County Land Conservancy
Marc White..... Director of Conservation, Schlitz Audubon Nature Center
Tom Zagar Conservation Coordinator/City Forester, City of Muskego

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. Lindsay Motl replaced Fay Amerson as the Walworth County representative. Rory Klick replaced Greg Rajsy as the Kettle Moraine Land Trust member. Kristin Shultheis replaced Steve McCarthy as the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District Representative. Kiera Theys sat in for Karen Yancy representing The Geneva Lakes Conservancy.

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 9TH 2019 AND MARCH 23RD 2021 MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Kron opened the discussion regarding meeting minutes. No edits or changes were offered by the attendees for the meeting minutes as posted. No edits or comments were received by the Commission before the October 18th meeting regarding the December and March Meeting Minutes. Marc White moved to accept the December 9th and March 23rd Meeting Minutes as presented. Dave Rogers seconded the motion to accept. Mr. Kron called the committee to vote on the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent.

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 shared with the committee during the March 2021 meeting. Mr. Kron then provided the committee an updated site profile template which included a site profile map. Two site profile examples and associated maps were shared with the committee. Mr. Kron then asked the committee for comments on the general layout and contents of the map. In addition, he asked the committee to provide feedback regarding the potential inclusion of the map in a publicly available document. The discussion ended with a brief look at work completed to date and next steps.

Mr. Duerkop commented that the term protected, referring to protected lands, should not infer the site is being managed according to best management practices. He went on to add that protected sites have often been managed inappropriately considering the remnant natural communities that were historically present.

Tom Slawski responded that these maps were simply meant to relay the protected status of a given area for the purpose of protection, and information regarding management would be included within the site profile narrative for clarity and simplicity.

Todd Levine stated that an additional layer within the profile maps could be added that identifies areas that are managed according to a site management plan or best management practices. This way management activities could be tracked spatially as well as temporally.

Mr. Kron commented that the Natural Areas database tracks whether Natural Areas have a management plan in place, and if they are being implemented. Mr. Kron added that the map itself may not be the best place to indicate if a management plan was in place, as this information is already included within the site profile narrative.

Steve Henkel commented that if the label 'protected' is used on the maps then the areas should be protected via a legal agreement whether it is a deed restriction or conservation easement. Mr. Henkel then

shared several examples of areas that would have qualified as 'protected' under the Commission's definition but were later sold, subdivided, and/or developed.

Tom Slawski conceded that the use of the term protected was problematic and gave additional examples of area considered protected that were eventually lost. He went on to add that the definition is consistent with the Commission's Land Use Plan. Mr. Slawski added that the intent was to provide a detailed site profile map that would be used to protect and buffer the unprotected portions of Natural Areas. He added that County representatives requested Natural Area maps during meetings in 2019. Counties wanted to better understand the Natural Area Boundary and what remained to be protected. He went on to add that Commission staff have historically been concerned that maps will encourage the public to access sites, even if there is no official public access.

Andrew Struck asked if the Commission could include another overlay on the maps that indicates legal protection, such as a fee simple or conservation easement layer.

Tom Slawski responded that he did not know if all organizations would approve of a publication of the easement or fee simple ownership layer. He then posed the question to the Committee at large.

Andrew Struck responded that the Commission should follow-up with individual land trusts to determine if that was appropriate and did not violate any agreements between land trusts and private landowners. He mentioned that easements are public record, so these types of agreements are already public knowledge.

Mr. Slawski stated that it was possible to overlay a legal protection layer on the site profile maps as described by Mr. Struck and share this with the Committee at or before the next Advisory Committee meeting.

Brian Russart stated that he had reservations about sharing maps of Natural Areas without designated public access and trails. He went on to add that illegal activities already occur in Natural Areas, and this could exacerbate existing issues in Milwaukee County Sites. He had no concerns about sharing maps for sites that already had public access points and trails. Mr. Russart added that there is a measure of protection afforded to sites due to the ambiguity of their location and ownership.

Mr. Kron shared another example of a site profile map for Cudahy Woods State Natural Area. He asked if sites such as this, which have public access and trails, should include public access points and trails on the maps.

Mr. Russart commented that he would not have an issue sharing profile maps for Natural Areas that already had established public access and trails.

Mr. Kron responded that any access or trails information could be included in the profile narrative.

Tom Zagar commented that the Profile Map, as presented, was sufficient for the objective of the Plan. If needed, additional information could be gleaned elsewhere.

Peter Duerkop concurred that the information found in the map was sufficient. He added that maps would also be helpful from a planning perspective when considering developments adjacent to existing natural areas. Mr. Duerkop went on to add that these maps could include sensitive natural resource areas outside

of Natural Areas that act as buffers to proposed development. He added that a natural area buffer would help protect the integrity of the Natural Area and lessen the impacts of adjacent developments.

Tom Slawski asked if Milwaukee County Staff would like to provide a list of sites without public access that should not include a public map within the site profile. Mr. Slawski added that any County or NGO is welcome to reach out to the Commission if they do not want a profile to include a map.

Mr. Kron added that the Commission is tracking public access via the database and would be happy to provide a list of sites to Brian Russart that would not include a profile map due to the concerns expressed previously.

Brian Russart commented that he would be happy to review public access information for individual sites and provide comment.

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. Kron discussed upgrading Wood Creek Woods from its current Critical Species Habitat designation to a Natural Area of Local Significance (NA-3).

There were no additional comments or questions regarding Wood Creek Woods.

Mr. Kron discussed upgrading Grant Park Woods from its current Natural Area of Local Significance designation to a Natural Area of County or Regional Significance (NA-2).

There were no additional comments or questions regarding Grant Park Woods.

Mr. Kron discussed removing the NA designation from one Milwaukee County Site, Franklin Oak Savana State Natural Area. The site would be retained within the plan as a Critical Species Habitat site.

Peter Duerkop asked if the site would be retained as a CSH site, and if so, what species guilds triggered that designation.

Mr Kron answered that there are rare wildlife and plant species utilizing the area as habitat. He went on to share that there would be no changes in the site boundary from its current configuration, only a change in designation. Rare species are known from throughout the site.

Brian Russart commented that these proposed changes had been discussed at length between the Commission and Milwaukee County. He went on to state that he was in support of the changes as proposed.

Marc White asked if there was a restoration and management plan in place and if the site was restorable to pre-settlement conditions. He went on to ask if management goals were achievable with passive restoration or if site conditions would necessitate the use of more active methods.

Mr. Kron responded that the Oak Opening is restorable but requires a multi-year active restoration effort to return it to a Natural Area quality. Mr. Kron added that restoration had occurred historically, and that a management plan was in place for the site.

Brian Russart commented that the site-specific management plan needs to be updated and confirmed that previous management activities in the northern section of the site included prescribed fire and brush control. In the previous 13 years, the northern portion of the site has been burned once, and completely cleared of buckthorn 3 times. Mr. Russart added that many rare wildlife species utilize the site, most of which are not savanna species. He added that the first Commission led vegetation inventories (1990s) were unable to locate savanna species in the southern portion of the site.

Kristen Shultheis raised concern over the protection and management implications for the site if it was downgraded.

Mr. Kron responded that the plan would recommend the site as a lower priority for acquisition and management. He went on to add that the site would go from the second priority for acquisition to the third priority for acquisition. Mr. Kron added the site was already fully under protective ownership by Milwaukee County. He stated that the plan would recommend retaining protective ownership.

There were no additional questions or comments regarding changes in plan recommendations for Franklin Oak Savanna State Natural Area.

Mr. Kron shared the remainder of the sites planned for review in Milwaukee County and shared a timeline for completion with the Committee.

Mr. Kron transitioned to proposed rank changes for Waukesha County. There was one site proposed for a rank downgrade.

Vernon Tamarack-Fen was proposed as a downgrade from an NA-2 to a NA-3. Mr. Kron provided findings from a recent site visit and the justification to downgrade the site to a Natural Area of Local Significance.

Marc White asked if there was a restoration and management plan in place for Vernon Tamarack-Fen.

Mr. Kron responded that the Wildlife Area had a general management plan, but he was unaware of a restoration plan specific to the site. He added that he would investigate and share any findings with the committee.

Mr. White added that shrub removal would be a management technique to improve the floristic integrity of the site.

Mr. Kron stated that he reviewed two other fens in DNR ownership within Vernon Marsh Wildlife Area, both of which were higher quality remnants than Vernon Tamarack-Fen. He added that all the sites suffered from shrub invasion, but the negative impacts were most visible at Vernon Tamarack-Fen. Perhaps due to the extent of hydrologic alteration within the surrounding area.

Marc White added that the restoration and management plan for the site needs to adequately address hydrologic restoration.

There were no additional question or comments regarding Vernon-Tamarack Fen

There were no additional rank changes proposed in this section.

Mr. Kron went on to introduce three new proposed Natural Areas of Local Significance.

Mr. Kron discussed Holiday Road Fen and Oak Woodland, a 16-acre Natural Area in Waukesha County. The natural communities present within the site include Calcareous Fen, Southern Sedge Meadow, and Oak Woodland.

There were no questions or comments regarding the proposal of this Natural Area.

Mr. Kron discussed Basset Creek Wetlands, a proposed Natural Area in Kenosha County. The 35-acre wetland complex includes several natural communities of local significance including calcareous fen, southern sedge meadow, emergent marsh, and shrub-carr.

Marc White commented that areas to the SE of the proposed boundary looked comparable to the proposed boundary based on aerials. Mr. Kron agreed and stated that the area was excluded as it was not surveyed. Mr. Kron added that a survey was planned for the area, and it would be included within the site boundary if high quality natural communities were present.

There were no additional questions or comments regarding Basset Creek Wetlands.

Mr. Kron discussed Hoy-Anderle Woods, a proposed Natural Area in Washington County. Situated on complex glacial topography, the 35-acre Southern mesic Forest contains ephemeral pools and emergent marsh. Several uncommon and one Special Concern species were present. The Commission plans for additional surveys in Spring 2022.

There were no questions or comments regarding the proposal of this Natural Area.

Marc White moved to accept the proposed changes to the plan as presented. Dave Rogers seconded the motion to accept the changes. Mr. Kron called the committee to vote on the motion. All members present voted in favor of accepting changes as presented. There were no votes against.

CRITICAL SPECIES HABITAT SITE MAPPING UPDATES

Mr. Kron briefly discussed updates to the Critical Species Habitat (CSH) Sites mapping effort. He began the discussion by briefly summarizing the information discussed in the previous meeting. Mr. Kron stated that Milwaukee County CSH mapping was nearly complete. The Commission plans to complete CSH mapping in the remaining Counties over the winter season. No comments or questions were received in this section.

AQUATIC ASSESSMENT SCHEME UPDATE

Mr. Slawski discussed updates to the Aquatic Assessment Scheme. He shared that a draft ranking scheme was complete and in the refinement phase. Mr. Slawski shared that the Commission had selected test watersheds and was implementing a trial run of the Aquatic Assessment Scheme. The Aquatic Assessment Scheme will be based on a 100-point scale, like the Natural Area ranking scheme. The Commission plans to share a more detailed update at the next meeting.

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 prioritize field reviews in Waukesha, Ozaukee, Washington, and Walworth Counties. Mr. Kron stated that SEWRPC plans to hold another virtual Advisory Committee Meeting in June 2022. 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 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Zachary Kron
Recording Secretary

ELECTRONIC COMMENTS RECEIVED PRIOR TO OR FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 18, 2021 MEETING

Comments for Waukesha County Sites from Mr. Duerkop received via email on 10/18/2021.

Ms. Duerkop noted that there are two sites in Waukesha County that should be reviewed by the Commission for inclusion in the plan. Those sites were described as follows

- Wetlands north of Beaver Dam Lake, Waukesha Co
- Sand Prairie on WDNR property near the SKMSF Headquarters, Waukesha Co

Comments for Committee Meeting Topics from Kristin Schultheis received via email on 10/20/2021.

- The Site Profile maps and descriptions are appropriate as presented
 - Include Floristic quality assessment results (Mean C and FQI) within the Site Profile narrative
 - The site profile maps should not include additional information; they are appropriate as presented
- All site profile maps should be available so they can be used in planning and management
- Hoy-Anderle Woods – Please provide a site profile and map of the NA to MMSD