

SUMMARY NOTES OF THE DECEMBER 13th, 2024, MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL AREAS

INTRODUCTION

The December 13th, 2024, meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Protection and Management of Natural Areas was held virtually via Microsoft Teams. The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m. by Zachary Kron, Senior Specialist Biologist, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC). Attendance was noted by SEWRPC staff via the Microsoft Teams participant listing.

In attendance at the meeting were the following individuals:

Advisory Group Members Present

Jill Bedford.....Land Conservation Consultant, Tall Pines Conservancy
Mandy Bonneville..... County Conservationist, Walworth County
Emilie Burmeister.....Conservation Biologist, Milwaukee County Parks
Peter Duerkop ... Southern Kettle Moraine State Forest Ecologist, WDNR
Sharon Fandel..... District Ecologist for South Central Wisconsin, WDNR
Mark Jenks ... County Conservationist (Retired), Kenosha County
Adrian Koski.....Research Assistant, Racine Health Department
Dr. Larry Leitner Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy Board
Dr. Todd Levine Senior Lecturer in Biology, Carroll University
Brian Miner.....Southeast Wisconsin Stewardship Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy
Paul Meuer Land Protection Manager, Tall Pines Conservancy
Julia Robson.....Conservation Biologist, Waukesha County Parks and Land Use
Brian Russart..... Natural Areas Supervisor, Milwaukee County Parks
Chad SampsonLand Resources Manager, Racine County Land & Water Conservation
Kristin Schultheis.....Senior Project Planner, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
Debora SielskiDirector, Community Development Department, Washington County
Andrew Struck..... Director, Planning and Parks Department, Ozaukee County
Dr. Neal O'Reilly President, Waukesha County Land Conservancy
Tom ZagarConservation Coordinator/City Forester, City of Muskego

Guests and Staff Present

Zachary Kron, SecretarySenior Biologist, SEWRPC
Dr. Tom Slawski Chief Biologist, SEWRPC
Dr. Justin PoinsettePrincipal Biologist, SEWRPC
Benjamin JohnsonSenior GIS Specialist, 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 Microsoft Teams 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.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 19TH 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 meeting date regarding the October Meeting Minutes. Tom Zagar moved to accept the October 19th Meeting Minutes as presented. Larry Leitner seconded the motion to accept. Mr. Kron called the committee to vote on the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF THE PRELIMINARY DRAFT AMENDMENT

Mr. Kron provided a summary of draft plan, Chapters 1-9. This included a presentation summarizing the proposed changes to date. This presentation is available under the Past Meetings tab found on the [Technical Advisory Committee Website](#).

Peter Duerkop asked for additional clarification and discussion on the justification for the acquisition and management of large tracts of grasslands and forest interior sites.

Mr. Kron responded that the initial justification was to encourage acquisition of large tracts of habitat for declining area sensitive species such as grassland or forest interior breeding birds.

Dr. Leitner confirmed that this was the initial justification for the forest interior and grassland sites, and added that the hope was that these recommendations would restore large tracts of habitat that would support an array of declining species.

Mr. Kron added that many of the forest interior restoration sites include a matrix of old fields and woodland. Restoration of the old fields adjacent to or included within existing woodlands would restore large areas of interior woodland habitat preferred by area sensitive species.

Mr. Duerkop stated that the inclusion of these sites is appropriate, but the criteria for selection need to be identified or reiterated within the plan.

Dr. Leitner stated that initial justification may be found within the Technical Advisory Committee meeting minutes associated with the development of the original publication.

Mr. Kron stated that most grassland and reforestation sites were identified in other plans, such as DNR plans.

Mr. Duerkop stated that it is essential to reiterate the goal of these sites not as existing grassland or forest interior sites, but as areas of potential re-establishment for those community types.

SITE PROFILE TEMPLATE DISCUSSION

Mr. Kron provided a summary of the site profile template shared at previous meetings. Mr. Kron then provided the committee with an updated site profile template which included a site profile map. One site profile example and associated map was shared with the committee. Mr. Kron 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.

Dr. O'Reilly asked if the Commission needed a copy of the site management plans for development of a site profile.

Mr. Kron Responded that it was not necessary for the Commission to have a copy of the plan but would be happy to look at the request of the landowner. Mr. Kron was more so interested in whether sites had management plans, and if they were being implemented.

Dr. O'Reilly asked if an organization has a preserve name that differs from the Commission's Natural Area Name, can that name be included in the site profile.

Mr. Kron replied that the inclusion of additional preserve names would not be an issue.

Mrs. Robson stated that she had initial concerns with some of the information found in the profiles being made public, specifically references to rare or uncommon species. Mrs. Robson asked if references to local or county ordinances could be included within the profiles specific to the protection of natural resources.

Mr. Kron noted that the profile maps already include a statement noting that individuals are responsible for determining whether access is allowed to the site and must follow all applicable rules and regulations. Mr. Kron added that he would be happy to edit profiles to address any specific concerns from the County.

Dr. Slawski mentioned that any ordinances could be included more broadly as a mechanism for protection in later chapters of the Plan.

Mr. Duerkop recommended that profiles contain a link to an organization's website, if available. In this way the general public accessing profiles can get more detailed information on access and allowable activities.

Mrs. Sielski wondered how long organizations have to review the plan and provide additional comments.

Mr. Kron stated that the 30-day public comment period opened today.

Mr. Duerkop asked how much of the plan is open for comment.

Mr. Kron responded that Chapters 1-8 were open for comment, and that Chapter 9 would be drafted after the public comment period.

The discussion ended with a brief look at work completed to date and next steps.

AQUATIC NATURAL AREA DISCUSSION

Dr. Poinsett provided a summary of the revised aquatic area assessment scheme via a PowerPoint presentation. This presentation is included within the meeting presentation already noted above.

Dr. Levine stated that there has been much discussion over threats to and the intrinsic quality of aquatic natural areas. And if there are any thoughts on how the current model accounts for or prioritizes one aspect over the other. Dr. Levine went on to share that he was concerned that areas of excellent quality with

degraded buffers might rank lower when compared to areas with an intact buffer, even though the degraded areas are at higher risk.

Dr. Poinsett stated that the majority of highest scoring areas have degraded buffers, scoring no to few points in that category. And that Chapter 7 reiterates recommendations for improving and restoring buffer habitat.

Mr. Struck asked if the new aquatic ranking accounted for restored stream sinuosity.

Dr. Poinsett stated that recent stream re-meandering was likely not accounted for in the base layers used to rank streams. But if organizations are aware of restoration efforts, these could be sent directly to Commission staff, and we could update the model accordingly. But otherwise, model calculations were largely based on a preexisting layer from WDNR that has not been updated in a number of years.

Mr. Kron asked if there were any additional follow up questions or comments regarding the preliminary draft amendment. There were none.

Dr. Leitner proposed a motion that the Technical Advisory Committee accept the preliminary draft amendment to be revised following public meetings and a 30-day public comment period. Mr. Jenks seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent.

NATURAL AREAS WEBTOOL

Mr. Johnson shared a brief review of the Natural Areas Webtool for Committee members including some of the basic functionality and features.

Following the brief review, Mr. Duerkop stated that the webtool is a great planning tool and expects it to be used regularly. One comment was that the archeological mapping tool greatly underrepresents the number and complexity of sites present in the Southeastern Wisconsin region.

Mr. Kron agreed and reiterated that Archeological Sites recommended for protection within the Plan are only the sites found on the National Register of Historic Places. The webtool would be edited to reiterate those selection criteria found in the Plan for Archeological Sites.

Dr. O'Reilly stated that organizations such as land trusts interested in acquisition and protection may want copies of the shapefiles found on the webtool.

Mr. Johnson replied that the shapefiles are not accessible directly from the webtool but are available for download from the Commissions Enterprise or ArcGIS online account.

Mr. Duerkop stated that it might be useful to allow users the ability upload an Area of Interest to the webtool.

Mr. Johnson replied that user shapefile uploads require another widget that will need to be explored by Commission staff. There is also the option to draw a boundary on maps, but these are in development.

Mr. Koski asked if the webtool would support links to other organization's webpages with additional information on natural areas.

Mr. Kron stated that this could be explored. Mr. Johnson confirmed that links could be imbedded within site profile pdfs which could link to organization websites related to natural areas ownership or management.

Mr. Kron asked if there were any additional follow up questions or comments regarding the preliminary draft Natural Areas Webtool. There were none.

Mr. Duerkop proposed a motion that the Technical Advisory Committee accept the draft webtool with the understanding that the Commission would continue to refine it based on Committee comments and public comments. Dr. O'Reilly seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent.

NEXT STEPS FOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kron discussed the next steps for plan development which included two public meetings in the coming month. Then Mr. Kron discussed the upcoming public comment period. Following public comments, the Commission will produce the final plan recommendations incorporating comments.

Mr. Kron asked if there were any additional follow up questions or comments. There were none.

Mr. Duerkop proposed a motion that the Technical Advisory Committee adjourn. Dr. O'Reilly seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 12:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Zachary Kron
Recording Secretary