

Natural Heritage Committee Annual Report 2020

Committee Members: Nancy Weiss, Christine Putnam, Emily Luebke, Lonnie Murray, Michael Rodemeyer, Kennon Williams, Peggy Cornett, Kate Mallek, Leah Jung, and Bruce Gatling-Austin

Meeting Frequency: The committee met monthly during 2020. There were ten full committee meetings. In the fall, two working groups were formed, one to address education and outreach and the other on policy. These groups began regular monthly meetings in October.

Summary: The Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) is proud to report on the goals it met and other achievements during the calendar year of 2020.

In April, we welcomed our new Natural Resource Manager, Kim Biasioli. She has been instrumental in supporting the progress made by the NHC this year. The NHC added three additional members, Kate Mallek, Leah Jung, and Bruce Gatling-Austin.

A prioritized work plan for the NHC was created, based on the proposed actions, goals, and recommendations of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). This goal is supported by Strategy 4a of the Natural Resources Chapter of the Albemarle Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan), which focuses on the implementation of the BAP.

The NHC has created three working groups to focus on education, wildlife corridors, and conservation policy.

The education workgroup has identified and continues to develop opportunities for biodiversity-related education and outreach. We have worked with the County's Department of Communications and Public Engagement (CAPE) to update and expand information on the new County website and to post educational material as part of the "Every Day is Earth Day" campaign. The NHC is working with the ACPR to develop educational material and signage for Charlotte Humphris Park including signage for the meadow restoration stormwater facilities near the park. We continue to collaborate with area organizations like the Blue Ridge PRISM and Piedmont Environmental Council to develop ways to communicate and encourage landowner stewardship practices. Several meetings were held with Blue Ridge Prism and ACPR personnel about developing a park ambassador program as a way to recruit volunteers to assist in invasive plant removal. County policy for pesticide application and how it applies to volunteers was reviewed and summarized. The group has reviewed and provided feedback for the [James River Streamside Program Report Landowner Tool](#).

The policy workgroup has created a list of policies for study which include the County Outdoor Lighting Ordinance, transfer of development rights, and strategies to reduce parcelization and fragmentation of habitat.

The NHC heard presentations by Grant Connette from the Smithsonian Institute: Mapping Wildlife Corridors and Bridget Donaldson from Virginia Transportation Research Council, VDOT. The newly formed NHC wildlife corridors workgroup continues to work in partnership with [Virginia Safe Wildlife Corridors Collaborative](#). Potential riverine wildlife crossings in Albemarle County along Rt. 29 South have been identified by examining data on vehicle collisions with wildlife and culvert and bridge specifications.

The following is a list of other actions taken by the NHC in 2020.

- Provided recommendations for updating the County plant list for site plans.
- Provided a recommendation for the Virginia Outdoors Plan to include the creation of a wildlife management area in Albemarle County.
- Met with members of the Albemarle Solid Waste Alternatives Advisory Committee (SWAAC) to provide feedback on the use of artificial turf on County land.
- Provided feedback to the TJPDC on the Rivanna River Corridor Plan.
- Provided feedback to the BOS concerning the protection and future development of Sugar Hollow.
- Provided feedback to ACPR about mowing frequency and management of open grassy areas.
- NHC Chair regularly attended the Conservation Roundtable meetings hosted by the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC).

Goals for 2021:

- Maintain a prioritized work plan for the NHC, based on the proposed actions, goals, and recommendations of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). This goal is supported by Strategy 4a of the Natural Resources Chapter of the Albemarle Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan), which focuses on the implementation of the BAP.
- Promote improvement of water quality and stream health throughout the County by developing strategies and providing recommendations for the protection of water resources, in support of Goals 14-18 of the BAP and Objectives 1 and 6 of the Comp Plan.
- Identify and develop opportunities for biodiversity-related education and outreach, in support of Goal 20 of the BAP and Strategies 4f and 4j of the Comp Plan, including:
 - Educating landowners through the new County website, social media, and other outlets.
 - Educational outreach targeted for landowners in coordination with other local organizations like PEC and the Blue Ridge PRISM. This will include webinars and a welcome letter to new residents with an informational flyer about land stewardship practices that promote biodiversity.
- Promote the management of county-owned lands in ways that conserve and enhance biodiversity and other natural resources. (BAP GOAL 5)

- Encourage County staff to manage grassy areas located in the right of ways, along roads, and in areas that are not part of active playing fields. This action supports wildlife and reduces GHG emissions through targeted and reduced mowing similar to the Virginia State Parks [Letting Grass Bee Program](#).
- Organize park ambassador volunteers to help remove invasive species in County parks (BAP Goal 8)
- Minimize and reduce habitat fragmentation county-wide. Maintain existing habitat connectivity and establish connectivity where possible and appropriate. (BAP Goal 3)
 - Provide recommendations/feedback to Comprehensive Plan update to include Conservation Zoning or other differentiation of Rural Areas for wildlife buffer zones & corridors
 - Evaluate potential wildlife corridors in NW Albemarle County using expert knowledge, wildlife science, and maps
 - Continue investigating improvements to riverine road crossings along USHwy 29S
 - Educate county planners, zoning & transportation planners to consider/incorporate wildlife corridors & buffers in development & infrastructure planning
 - Monitor activities & coordinate with VA Safe Wildlife Corridors Collaborative (VSWCC)
- Continue ongoing efforts, explore specific projects, and provide recommendations to the County on specific biodiversity-related issues, in support of Goal 9 of the BAP and Objectives 4 and 8 of the Comp Plan including:
 - Providing recommendations for updating the Outdoor Lighting Ordinance