

Natural Heritage Committee Annual Report 2019

Committee Members: Nancy Weiss, Christine Putnam, Emily Luebke, Lonnie Murray, Michael Rodemeyer, Kennon Williams, Peggy Cornett, Mary Tillman (resigned 9/19)

Meeting Frequency: The committee met monthly during 2019. There were eight full committee meetings. There were a few sub-committee meetings held concerning education and evaluating our Important Sites. Several site visits involving multiple committee members were also conducted.

Summary: The Natural Heritage Committee (NHC) is proud to report on the goals it met and other achievements during the calendar year of 2019.

We continue to review and update the original list of Important Sites developed by the Biodiversity Work Group in 2004 to reflect the status of those sites. We have added seven important sites as listed: Biscuit Run South, Preddy Creek Park, Preddy Creek Park Grassland, Preddy Creek Park, Blenheim Grassland, Mill Mountain, and Brook Hill River Park and Salamander Crossings.

Using Google Docs, we have created templates and a system to organize information concerning the important sites and other matters of importance to the NHC. Links to important site data gathered by the Center for Urban Habitats have been included.

Completed formalization of ecosystem assessments and biological inventories so the Committee's treatment of county level data aligns with state and national level conservation ranking and recommendation schemes.

Worked with Dan Mahon and other staff of the Parks and Recreation Department to provide input on development of Biscuit Run Park, the Charlotte Humphris Park, and county-owned lands in the three conservation focus areas, particularly the Rivanna River corridor. Members of the committee have visited Biscuit Run Park and provided input on the woolly adelgid treatment for the stand of eastern hemlocks found there.

The Comprehensive Plan was amended to include biodiversity strategies. The NHC supported the BoS budget request to create the Albemarle Conservation Assistance Program, ACAP.

Continued our own education with presentations from various organizations. Devin Floyd from the Center for Urban Habitats shared his knowledge of the natural history and ecological importance of grasslands. Scott Clark, Senior Planner for Albemarle County, gave a presentation about planning and zoning in the Rural Area including a description and discussion about Ag/Forestal Districts. Andrea Terry of Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority (RWSA) made a presentation about land that RWSA owns in Albemarle County. Andrea also discussed a wetlands creation and restoration project by RWSA on Franklin Street.

Members of the NHC have attended several of the Conservation Roundtable meetings hosted by the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC). Other members have met with Repp Glaettli about updating the county's approved plant list for site plans. We have responded to public

interest in light pollution and its impact on the natural ecosystems. The NHC signed a letter of support for state legislation to provide safe corridors for wildlife across highways.

David Hannah, Albemarle County Natural Resource Manager and staff liaison for the NHC, retired in November of 2019.

Goals for 2020

- Develop a prioritized workplan 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 implementation of the BAP.
- Strengthen the NHC and support for its work by:
 - Recruiting additional members to the committee to increase input from a broader range of competencies.
 - Maintaining existing relationships and developing new ones with members of the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and Community Advisory Committees (CAC).
- Promote improvement of water quality and stream health throughout the County by developing strategies and providing recommendations for 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.
 - Reaching out to educate and develop relationships with landowners of Important Sites.
- Continue ongoing efforts and explore specific projects on specific biodiversity-related issues, in support of Goal 9 of the BAP and Objectives 4 and 8 of the Comp Plan, including:
 - Light pollution and updating the lighting ordinance.
 - Native plant salvage projects.
 - Climate Action Plan
 - Wildlife corridors, tunnels and crossings
 - Comprehensive Planning/Conservation Zones