



Upper Delaware Council

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UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES October 1, 2020

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, October 1, 2020 at the Narrowsburg Union in Narrowsburg, NY. Chairperson Richardson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and roll call followed.

In attendance: Town of Hancock- Fred Peckham, Town of Fremont- Jim Greier, Town of Delaware- Thomas Dent, Town of Cohecton- Larry Richardson, Town of Tusten- Susan Sullivan, Town of Highland- Andy Boyar, Town of Lumberland- Nadia Rajsz, Town of Deerpark-David Dean, Damascus Township- Steve Adams, Berlin Township- Alan Henry, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson, Delaware River Basin Commission- Kristen Bowman Kavanagh (via phone), National Park Service- Darren Boch. Staff in attendance: Executive Director-Laurie Ramie, Resources and Land Use Specialist- Shannon Cilento, Secretary- Ashley Hall-Bagdonas. Absent: Lackawaxen Township, Westfall Township, State of New York-Bill Rudge, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania-Tim Dugan. Guests: Steve Schwartz- Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR), Jeff Skelding (FUDR), Ginny Dudko, Town of Deerpark alternate, Dan Paparella, Town of Tusten alternate. Media: Linda Drollinger- River Reporter, Peter Becker- Tri-County Independent.

Presentation by Steve Schwartz and Jeff Skelding from Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Inc.

“Knotweed: A Tough Love”: Richardson introduced the presentation of the evening, and Jeff Skelding introduced himself as the executive director of Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR). This non-profit organization has been based in the Village of Hancock for the last seven years. They have successfully applied for and received a grant through the federal 2019 Delaware River Watershed Conservation Fund to address the Japanese Knotweed proliferation in the river valley. Steve Schwartz is the project leader. Skelding introduced Schwartz.

Schwartz said in 2018 when the project started, they had a photographer run a drone up the river when the Japanese Knotweed was flowering, and it was eye-opening how much was there along the river corridor. The federal funding source said it was the first proposal they had ever seen with a video and that it really helped out the proposal. As the video played, it showed Taylor’s Island, above Callicoon, and the flowering phase of the Knotweed had started to senesce and turn red. He said when we start to think about it, we don’t really know what the extent of the knotweed is along the upper Delaware River. We know it’s everywhere, but what percentage of the floodplain does it cover? What percentage of the flood plain is actually crowding out all the native riparian vegetation that provides all kinds of services for wildlife, water quality, pollinators, et cetera. There’s so much knotweed now it’s hard to remember what the native riparian vegetation looked like before the knotweed. When FUDR came up with this proposal, they said, let’s do three things: some original research, some demonstrations about ways to control or manage knotweed; and outreach to riparian landowners to help them understand what is feasible and how they can set some objectives to manage, control, or in some cases they might want to try to eradicate it. Knotweed is so hard to eradicate and is so pervasive. It grows so wildly that many people just give up and don’t do anything. Schwartz said they wanted to come up with a project where they could help people set feasible objectives to do something. They wanted to determine what the distribution of species of knotweed is because when you go to manage it, knowing the species helps you set your objectives. Schwartz said he didn’t know this two years ago, but there are actually three different species of knotweed in the Upper Delaware: Japanese Knotweed (8-10 feet high); Giant (which can be 13-16 feet high; patches of it are locally evident on the county road from Rt. 97 leading to the Cohecton Firehouse); and Bohemian (a hybrid).

Their project is working with university biologists to look at the extent and distribution of the different species of Japanese Knotweed (JK). Schwartz said their hypothesis is that where JK crowds out native vegetation it also is leading to erosion of topsoils. JK doesn't hold sediment. JK has very long radial roots coming from a rhizome at the base of each stock and there are no hair roots except for right on the rhizomes. Where JK grows, all other native vegetation is gone. There is nothing there to keep the soils in place; it may keep a bank together. He said the soils are the things that we don't want in the river. They degrade water quality, habitat, etc. One of the questions they have is what is the extent of the JK, what percentage of the floodplain has it colonized, and what is the impact of that in terms of soils and sediments? Information has been gathered through aerial photography flights and they have now completed five in the last three years. The flights occurred at different times to show the different stages. The Geography Department at Shippensburg University will develop an auto-algorithm to create the GIS maps and are using visible light and infrared cameras. Right now, they are focusing on three stretches to do the prototype of this process. The Stroud Water Research Center will do soil analyses to take samples, and look at the soil elevations vs. riparian vegetation and from that they hope to create a model to help let them know if their hypothesis is true that JK leads to sediment migration. He said the research they are doing hasn't been done before; if they can quantify the problem, they can help make the case that it needs additional resources.

Schwartz said the goal is not to eradicate JK. He hopes this study's findings offer methods to contain, control, and foster succession, meaning what else could be planted or seeded to take its place? Containment is feasible with repeated attention each year. They will develop three test plots at Skinners Falls DEC / NPS boat access which has a solid mature stand of JK, to try out different management techniques, including: maintaining one control plot: repeated mechanical cutting; covering with geotextile membrane; two types of herbicide applications; herbicide injection; and foraging by using goat. The goats will be brought in once a month for five months. They will not be using the burning method. They will set up a similar demonstration at Deposit Village Park; which was a trailer park that got flooded in the 2006 flood. FEMA bought the property out and conveyed it to the Village of Deposit. The Village of Deposit has been working with FUDR and others to turn that into a recreational resource. There's a section that's going to be preserved so that they can do the same six plots there. There will be another demonstration site at Hancock Firemen's Field. They're not going to have a permanent installation there, but will use it for workshops and other forms of demonstration where people will bring in the goats and herbicide applicators to show people how to do it with the people that are actually doing the treatment. Signs will be up all the time so people will be able to find more information from FUDR's website and other sources.

When talking about JK, they also want to recognize that it does have a lot of benefits. Schwartz said a lot of people like JK honey. Bees flock to it for the two weeks it's in bloom and it tastes good. JK is related to buckwheat. Schwartz said that bees would starve if there was only JK to eat whereas healthy riparian vegetation blooms for 4-5 months. It also provides nesting habitat for Red-Winged Blackbirds and cover for deer and bear. Its young shoots are edible. The rhizomes provide a good source of resveratrol to use for medicinal purposes such as treating Lyme disease and other illnesses. Schwartz provided a link to some JK recipes and sources on his Powerpoint.

Schwartz said in their survey of JK, they came across a land owner that had taken a mature stand of JK and decided to turn it into topiary and English box hedges and mazes for the kids. He suggested perhaps a contest next year when doing the project and outreach, for the most creative way of dealing with Japanese Knotweed.

There was a brief question and answer period after the presentation. Richardson thanked Schwartz and Skelding and said UDC can't wait for the results.

Approval of September 3rd Meeting Minutes: A motion Rajsz seconded by Peckham, to approve the September 3rd, 2020 meeting minutes carried.

Public Comment on the Agenda: None.

Committee Reports: There were no questions regarding the following meetings. They were: Sep. 15th Water Use/Resource Management, Sep. 22nd Project Review and Sep. 22nd Operations.

Status Reports

Delaware River Basin Commission: Kavanagh announced that the Hydrologic Conditions Report was provided in the meeting packet. The Regulated Flow Advisory Committee Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 10/7. The Water Management Advisory Committee Meeting is Wednesday, 10/21. The Meeting of DRBC Water Quality Advisory Committee & the Expert Panel - Thursday, October 29, 2020 - 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. The Water Quality Advisory Committee Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 3. The 4th Quarter Public Hearing is Thursday, Nov. 12. Information for those meetings can be found at: <https://www.state.nj.us/drbc/meetings/upcoming/>.

NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation: Ramie said Rudge provided two handouts in the meeting packet. The first is a 9/25 announcement of five-year partnership with New York Invasive Species Institute and Cornell University to address impacts of invasive species. The Agreement targets invasive species research, control, and mitigation. Also included was the 10/1 release, "DEC Seeks Public Input on Proposed Endangered Species Protections." The revised Regulatory Proposal would strengthen protections for threatened and endangered wildlife.

PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources: Absent.

National Park Service-Upper Delaware: Richardson said this is Boch's last official meeting. Boch said Saturday will be his last official day as he will be participating in the UDC retreat. He said it's been a quick four months. He said most National Parks are staff, resources, and partners and he has to say in the degree on can immerse oneself the Upper Delaware has absolutely spectacular natural resource and cultural resources as well. There is a really good, dedicated NPS staff and a set of passionate partners, most of which are in this room. He said it's been a pleasure working with UDC Chairperson Richardson, Ramie, and Cilento. On Monday he will be returning back to Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park and will be bringing back with him some things he has learned while being here.

Boch spoke with the Deputy Regional Director regarding the next Superintendent; a decision has not been made. He believes they have concluded all interviews. The Transitional Management Assistance Program (TMAP) process certainly helped inform them in their process. He said it may be 2-4 weeks away from an announcement. Boch felt it wasn't necessary for another Acting Superintendent to come in during that time with the capable staff. Ingrid Peterec will be the Acting Superintendent in October. It's likely that the start time for the new Superintendent will be sometime in November.

Boch has asked Cody Hendrix, Jennifer Claster's replacement as Community and Land Use Planner, to participate on Saturday via teleconference for the UDC Strategic Planning Retreat. Hendrix is the Director of the Planning Department for the City of Milton, Georgia. He has a great background professional in his education and GIS. Boch said he will likely be starting the first half on November.

Boch said when the clock strikes twelve there is a Continuing Resolution in place for federal government operations until 12/11. Boch thanked UDC members and partners.

UDC Executive Director's Report: Ramie said today is the start of Fiscal Year 2021. Following final expenditures as of 9/30, we ended with \$14 unspent of our \$300,000 Federal allocation. The NPS has approved our 1st quarter budget to take us from today through 12/30/2020, but to access that funding, we need to learn the new software management system that is being implemented on 10/13 for all financial awards coming through the Department of the Interior. That date got pushed back by COVID-19 considerations but the online training for it has been scheduled just three business days before it is deployed. As a first step, Ramie had to sign a "Rules of Behavior" form to create an account with this GrantSolutions program which she returned yesterday. The return message said that account credentials will be provided "within the coming week". Michelle Blockberger, the UPDE administrative officer, has to learn this new system as well. Blockberger described it as "more than overwhelming to say the least" but feels we'll get accustomed to it with use.

Ramie said we spoke here last month and in committee about our River Traffic Public Safety Task force and its focus on the exponentially increasing popularity of the Mongaup Access, particularly this recreational season but even pre-COVID. We had drafted a letter to Eagle Creek Renewable Energy which owns the vacant property across Rt. 97 from the access to explore any interest in leasing that site to the NYS DEC for overflow parking. Before sending that, however, we discovered two facts: first, the Town of Lumberland has an existing \$1/year lease with

Eagle Creek for that former Tri-State Diesel site dating back to 2015 for a park that did not develop. Since the lease pertained to one specific beautification concept and is non-transferrable, the town has asked its attorney to send a letter to Eagle Creek to terminate the lease, according to Supervisor Jenny Mellan. Secondly, we found that the DEC has no interest in that property since it would create a hazard for people to cross the state highway, which was part of the problem we witnessed. The DEC is open, though, to expanding parking on its State lands there at the confluence of the Mongaup and Delaware Rivers. Hearing that, we tore up the Eagle Creek letter and pivoted to write a 9/25 letter to the DEC suggesting that this would be a good opportunity to reorganize the Mongaup Access parking lot space. On Monday, Ramie received a response from Bill Rudge stating in part, "We recognize the increase in public use of this access and are willing to consider a redesign/expansion of the parking area to accommodate more visitors." He sent along survey maps and copied Boch on behalf of the NPS which co-manages the site to say that the DEC welcomes the NPS's assistance in developing a plan for improved and expanded parking capacity. Now a site visit is being arranged to get the ball rolling. In our correspondence, we also expressed appreciation to the NYS Department of Transportation for their responsiveness to our task force's concerns by installing a mobile electronic sign on Rt. 97 toward the end of summer to caution drivers about the approaching Mongaup Access area. That can be done again as needed. Another option is to request the initiation of a formal DOT traffic study that would be necessary for any request to lower the speed limit seasonally. Ramie's recommendation would be to explore this interest in expanding the parking capacity first as we see whether the demand continues to increase beyond this year.

Our Water Use/Resource Management Committee is also overseeing the Ten Mile River Access feasibility study for a new boat launch. Our contractor, JHA Companies, completed half of part one of this three-phase project on 9/29 by providing us with a sketch plan of existing conditions and proposed features. We are next awaiting a preliminary structural design, which will be followed by determining the permitting requirements, and lastly, preparing a cost estimate for final design, permitting, and anticipated construction costs. All information is being shared with the Greater New York Council, Boy Scouts of America, as the property owner, the NPS as co-manager of the access and the Town of Tusten.

Lastly, she said take a look at the UDC's October calendar of meetings, activities and deadlines. Nov. 5 presentation: Upper Delaware Region Geology Maps by the New York State Museum & Geological Survey. Our Nov. and Dec. full Council meetings will continue to be held here at the Narrowsburg Union, while our committees meet at our office.

Paparella asked for the parking issue in Mongaup, was it suggested that the existing parking area that DEC has now be used for dropping off the boats and the majority of the passengers and that the driver can go and park across the street and walk across the street eliminating some of the safety issues? One person crossing vs. a family? Paparella said if it was arranged so people didn't have to cross the road with boats it may be more safe. Ramie said to her knowledge, that hasn't come up. It's still private property that Eagle Creek owns so no one should be parking there. Rajsz agreed that it's private property and they are also parking any which way, there's no rhyme or reason.

Old Business

UDC Oct. 3 Strategic Planning Retreat Update: Ramie said we have 20 participants registered, which includes two facilitators and three staff. We have planned for three extras with our catering order so there is still time to attend if you were on the fence. It opens at 8:30 a.m. with coffee and your assigned muffin and the workshop starts promptly at 9 a.m. Since the Narrowsburg Farmers' Market uses the Union's parking lot from 10-1 with their vendors setting up at 8 a.m., we have been asked to park in the UDC or municipal lot, or on the street if possible. Today Ramie sent out the agenda to the participants.

Other: Peckham said he was reviewing the meeting minutes. He has been attending via phone, which is hard to hear sometimes. There was discussion about the strand and Henry said it pertained to a different situation. Henry said we were talking about NPS jurisdiction up to the Ordinary High-Water Mark, not the public use of the strand. Henry said those are the two separate issues. Henry recommended again, to read 36 CFR. Richardson said there may be more discussion about this in the Project Review Committee meeting.

New Business

Draft Resolution 2020-12: Approving Technical Assistance Grants for Fiscal Year 2021: Cilento said included in the meeting packets are the three applications UDC received this year. All of them were really strong however, all of them requested much more than UDC had available. We had a Special meeting on 9/8 where we met with the applicants and asked them to come back with revised applications lowering their request amounts on their projects to better fit our financial availability. They all delivered and came back with modified proposals. The three potential awards are the Town of Tusten applied for funding to complete their Comprehensive Plan. UDC funded Part I in 2020. The Town of Delaware will be working with Tom Shepstone to do a Recreational Access Study along the river in their Town. This project is not unlike what Shepstone did in the Town of Hancock the previous year for a Technical Assistance Grant. The Town of Hancock is going to be doing Joint Master Plan with the Village of Hancock. The projects total \$25,000, which Ramie has confirmed can fit into our budget for next year. Cilento said pending the approval tonight, she will send out all the award packets to make sure those projects get done. Richardson said we also asked them in the process of reworking their applications to break it into a project that they can start and finish within our timeline and that's the way these grants are now proposed.

Greier asked if the Town of Fremont is not partnering with the Town of Delaware on this project? Cilento said they were partnering in their original applications, but because of the lack of funding Town of Delaware took the lead and then Fremont can potentially work with FUDR next year. A Motion by Henry seconded by Rajszyk to approve the Technical Assistance Grants for Fiscal Year 2021 carried unanimously.

Draft Resolution 2020-13: Approving UDC Social Media Policy: Richardson said as you know, the staff has volunteered and suggested that we should get more involved with the social media platforms and they're going to take that initiative. With that, of course, we need an official policy for the organization. The Social Media Policy was sent out in advance for review. A Motion to approve the UDC Social Media Policy by Rajszyk seconded by Sullivan carried unanimously. Boyar asked how long it was? Ramie said she would send it out again and Hall-Bagdonas said it was 2 ½ pages. Greier said is Social Media just for information purposes or will this bring the outside world into our meetings? Hall-Bagdonas said this would be another place we could put Ramie's press releases and meeting notices like you see in the newspapers. We could share information about the presentation we had tonight. Peckham said many of these social media pages are tools to direct to a business web page. He said staff would be administrators so they would monitor and make sure everything follows the conduct that they set in the policy.

UDC 32nd Annual River Valley Awards "Tribute to 2020 Honorees" Program: Ramie said this was a project we were doing in FY20 with some of our extra funds. We would have done it regardless; it was just rushed to complete by 9/30. A copy of the booklet was provided to everyone. Cilento and Ramie worked on it together. The plan is to provide it to all of the award recipients. There are 27 individuals involved in the awards. The booklet will be posted on our website. A news release will be issued. We will keep copies to distribute at our Awards Banquet next year at which time we will invite these recipients. We also have plaques for them at that time. Rajszyk said she commends Ramie and Cilento on the work and the group agreed.

Letter of Commendation for Acting Superintendent Darren Boch: Richardson said we thank Boch for the time he was here and this is a letter of appreciation. A Motion by Rajszyk seconded by Boyar to approve the Letter of Commendation carried unanimously.

Other: Dudko said Richardson usually does this as treasurer for the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway, Inc. (UDSB). She said we are privileged to thank the UDC for hosting UDSB at the UDC office. UDSB covers from Port Jervis to Hancock and they all thank UDC. She would like to present the UDC with a check for \$1,200 in appreciation for its service to the fellow non-profit organization.

Public Comment: None.

Adjournment: A motion by Rajszyk, seconded by Peckham, to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 p.m. was carried.

Minutes prepared by Ashley Hall-Bagdonas 10-16-2020