



Upper Delaware Council

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UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES August 5, 2021

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, August 5, 2021 at the Council office in Narrowsburg, NY. Chairperson Dexter 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 Lumberland- Nadia Rajs, Town of Deerpark-David Dean, Damascus Township- Jeff Dexter, Berlin Township-Alan Henry, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson, Delaware River Basin Commission- Kristen Bowman Kavanagh (Zoom), National Park Service- Superintendent- Joe Salvatore. Staff in attendance: Executive Director-Laurie Ramie, Resources and Land Use Specialist- Shannon Cilento, Secretary- Ashley Hall-Bagdonas. Absent: Town of Highland- Jim Gutekunst, Westfall Township- Michael Barth, Lackawaxen Township- Doug Case, State of New York- Bill Rudge, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania- Tim Dugan. Guests: Rich Evans, Camille O'Brien- Director of Legislative Affairs for Senator Mike Martucci, Cody Hendrix- NPS Community & Land Use Planner, Ginny Dudko- Town of Deerpark Alternate, Roger Saumure- Shohola Township Alternate, Buck Moorhead (Zoom). Media: Liam Mayo- River Reporter, Peter Becker- Tri-County Independent.

Presentation: “Climate Change and Our Hemlock Forests and Brook Trout” by Rich Evans: Dexter introduced Rich Evans. He’s recently retired from the NPS Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area after 29 years. Prior to joining NPS he worked for a private consulting firm in Vermont. Evans earned a B.S. degree in Zoology from the University of Wisconsin, and a M.S. degree in Natural Resources and Aquatic Ecology from Cornell University. He has published a number of papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals relating to both forest and aquatic ecology and management. He will be presenting “Climate Change and Our Hemlock Forests and Brook Trout”. Salvatore congratulated Evans on his retirement saying he’s a great scientist and great person. Salvatore was the Deputy Superintendent at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area for six months.

Evans said the issue of climate change is kind of difficult to get your head around because it’s a global issue. It can seem really abstract and distant, kind of overwhelming and complex. It’s also been a highly politicized issue and there’s been a lot of confusing information and frankly misinformation out there. His intent tonight is really to bring the issue of climate change home to our local area, first by briefly reviewing the climate change that’s already happened in our area over the last hundred years or so and by providing concrete examples of natural resources impacted by climate change, specifically hemlock forests and cold-water streams. This is work that’s been done over more than 20 years by involving many different agencies and organizations. Evans quoted Trump’s Fourth National Climate Assessment Report in 2018 saying: “The evidence of human-caused climate change is overwhelming...”; “impacts of climate change are intensifying”; “threats to Americans’ physical, social, and economic well-being are rising.”; “how much (impacts) intensify will depend on actions taken” and “mitigation and adaptation efforts... do not yet approach the scale necessary”. A study was done by NPS looking at each park including the Upper Delaware Unit and their conclusion was that the Upper Delaware River Region is becoming warmer and wetter and they concluded that recent climatic conditions are already shifting beyond the historical range of variability. In particular, the precipitation is becoming more extreme. NPS has a monitoring group for the Delaware Water Gap (DEWA) and the Upper Delaware called the Eastern Rivers and Mountains Network. Every year they track the weather of each year not to be confused with climate. They summarize the weather for each year by month, what the average temperature is, what the total precipitation is each month and how that departs from average. They also look over

about a hundred-year period from roughly 1900 to the current year. Over that time period they also concluded the Upper Delaware's becoming warmer and wetter. Over that period temperature has increased roughly 2.6 degrees Fahrenheit and precipitation has increased by about five and a half inches over roughly 120 years. DEWA has a special project and they had the climate change expert come to their park and do a climate change assessment specifically for DEWA and the Water Gap Recreation Site and very similarly he concluded this area of DEWA is also becoming warmer and wetter between the 60-year period between 1950 and 2010. Similarly, over that 60-year period temperature increased about 2 degrees Fahrenheit and there was a pattern of increasing precipitation, more extreme precipitation and more floods happening.

Evans said Eastern Hemlock is considered a foundation species. That means it provides the template and controls the whole environment by creating a microclimate in stands where it's dominant. It's extremely shade tolerant and creates extreme dark shade. It can be extremely long lived (up to 850 years old). Some people call it the redwood of the east. It was greatly reduced during the 1800s when Pennsylvania and this region of the country was the world's tanning industry headquarters. Evans said even though every species is unique some species are more unique than others and there's really no ecological equivalent for Eastern Hemlock in this region. People have asked him how does this compare to the chestnut blight and the loss of chestnuts. He doesn't want to minimize the loss of chestnut forests but the key role of chestnut forests was mainly providing reliable high-quality masts or nuts for wildlife. The loss of chestnut, as serious as it is, it's been somewhat mitigated by a wide diversity of oaks and hickories that also provide pretty quality masts. In the case of eastern hemlock we don't have anything like that. The important thing for climate change to note is eastern hemlock is extremely vulnerable to drought and vulnerable to being snapped off and uprooted by wind. In this region we have an invasive species called Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA). It's an insect from Japan kind of like an aphid. It feeds only on hemlocks and inserts a really long stylet longer than its body into the base of the needle and once it does that it can't move. It has two generations a year so it has a high reproductive capacity and populations can explode very quickly. Evans said the important thing to note about that relative to this talk is that unlike most insects HWA actively feeds, grows and reproduces in the winter. The main thing controlling HWA populations and its distribution is actually winter kill. Because of that milder winters results in increased, more intense infestations and more spread of HWA. When we get cold winter temperatures that really helps limit HWA. He took a quote from a 2007 study: "rising winter temperatures due to climate change are likely to remove the conditions currently limiting adelgid." The infestations of adelgid are linked to climate change. When you get higher infestations those reduce the growth of eastern hemlocks eventually leading to the death of the trees. Evans provided a summary slide of their 20-years monitoring the health of the hemlock mortality at DEWA. They monitored about 800 trees and there's a range of how fast trees die. From 1993 to 2012 you have more than 60% mortality and less than 40% survival but there is quite a bit of variability. Evans showed stands as they are declining. There's a lot of dead stands, they tend to die from the bottom up. A healthy stand would support unique species like black burning warbler, black throated green warbler and blue headed vireo. These species are somewhat dependent on hemlock habitat or very exclusively dependent on hemlock habitat. When you lose those hemlocks, even if they don't die you've lost that habitat for those birds and other species. Eventually you get regeneration, secondary succession but from the photograph in the PowerPoint you will notice the regeneration is all hardwoods. They usually get a lot of black birch, red maple, occasionally some white pine and including some hemlock but not a lot. That decline in combination with high water they've found results in a lot of widespread stream bank failures. One example provided was Tom's Creek which used to be a great brook trout stream; it's now a brown trout stream. Another example is Raymondskill Falls Visitor Use Area. It used to be a very dark dense hemlock stand that declined pretty rapidly in the early 2000s. Evans pointed out that eastern hemlock is the state tree of Pennsylvania, brook trout are the state fish of Pennsylvania and they are ecologically linked. From their research they found that brook trout are much more likely to occur in streams running through hemlock stands than streams running through hardwood stands. Like hemlock they're dealing with in modern times just a remnant of what used to be here with brook trout. We've lost a lot of brook trout already in history. The important thing to note especially in climate change is that brook trout need cold water (60 degrees Fahrenheit). They are also increasingly impacted by non-native brown trout and they're also affected by floods and sediment. Evans showed a map of Upper Delaware River Distribution of Wild Brook Trout and Introduced Trout. There's a lot more brook and brown trout than brook trout which may mean over time those streams may become only brown trout streams. Because of concern about brook trout historically and with climate change in 2009, NPS started working with USGS Aquatic Ecology Lab in Leetown, West Virginia to study 18 watersheds at the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation

Area. The USGS monitored 107 temperature sites. About half of those sites had air temperature monitors associated with them and they sampled fish at 83 sites. Evans said back in the early days of climate change the easiest thing to do was assume that stream temperatures would change the same as air temperatures but they found in some cases that's true. There's a wide range of sensitivities, even within a stream. They found that impoundments make streams more sensitive but not all streams are sensitive to air temperature. Some are very independent of air temperature. Groundwater input makes streams less sensitive. Groundwater is very important to maintain resistance to climate change so you don't want to deplete your groundwater. The USGS took it one step further to do a prediction of how much brook trout habitat we might lose with certain amounts of climate change or increase in air temperature. Currently at DEWA about 83% of the stream habitat is thermally suitable for brook trout. With climate change they might expect brook trout habitat in the park to be reduced to only 48% to 72% of the streams instead of 83%.

Rusty Crayfish is a new invasive species that's spreading into our region. It was found at DEWA in 2015 in one of the best brook trout streams in the park and one of the best trout streams in New Jersey. The native range of this crayfish is western Ohio, Indiana and northern Kentucky. It's highly invasive and spread mostly by people. It inhabits lakes, rivers and streams and causes major ecological impacts. It reduces native crayfish and alters aquatic habitats and food webs. Rusty Crayfish prefer warm water and are limited by cold water so it's very similar to HWA.

In summary, we can expect increased HWA infestations with milder winters and expansion of HWA infestations into new areas. disintegration of hemlock forest ecosystems, loss of distinctive habitats and micro-climates increased invasive plants, reduced native biodiversity (plants birds, etc.), increased flooding and destabilized stream channels, decline and loss of wild brook trout populations, increased invasive Rusty Crayfish populations, impoundments warms streams and increased sensitivity to air temperatures. Evans said one possible response is to remove impoundments wherever possible to maintain cold stream temperatures. Evans noted again that groundwater is important to keep streams cool. There was a 15-minute question and answer session which can be heard on the UDC YouTube video.

Approval of July 1st Meeting Minutes: A motion by Rajsz seconded by Robinson, to approve the July 1st, 2021 meeting minutes carried.

Public Comment on the Agenda: None.

Dexter said in Sullivan County COVID has been on a rapid increase and triggered a warning level from the CDC which says for indoor activities wearing a mask is advisable. Rajsz said the numbers have gone from 24 to 102 this week. Salvatore said it's mandatory for NPS in government facilities. Rajsz said the Delta variant is transmissible and she encourages everyone to get vaccinated. Ramie asked members if they wanted to institute indoor mask wearing? Rajsz said SUNY Sullivan is requiring wearing masks. It's up to the institution or agency. Dudko recommended staff watch where Sullivan County is at with COVID cases and put out a memo before the next committee meetings and full council meeting regarding mask requirements.

Committee Reports: Committee meetings this month were: July 20th Water Use/Resource Management and July 27th Operations. The July 27th Project Review meeting minutes will be available shortly. Sullivan asked if there was an update on the Ten Mile River (TMR) Access during the Water Use/Resource Management meeting? UDC contacted JHA Companies to see if their engineers may modify the design. We heard back from Structural Engineer Mark Ross who explained why they suggested the profile and materials that they did for this site from an engineering standpoint via a phone call. Ramie suggested he articulate their rationale in a written document. They have the comments from Regional Hydrologist, Peter J. Sharpe from the NPS Wild and Scenic Rivers Steering Committee. Henry said it's at a standstill. Another point was made at the 7/20 meeting of how much more interest does the UDC have particularly since the NPS had talked about purchasing that parcel from the Boy Scouts of America. Salvatore said it's on the budget line but that doesn't mean it will come to fruition. He said it would be 2022 before they could make the land acquisition. NPS Chief of Resource Management Don Hamilton was in touch with Dan Gahagan who is the Chief Engineer with PA Fish & Boat Commission. They discussed plank ramps which can be found at some other NPS accesses. They are fabricated by PA Fish & Boat Commission. Gahagan said he would look into whether they can make the ramps for other agencies. Salvatore said he was at TMR today and it was

a little messy. He said he would get maintenance to clean it up. He said the NPS presence is back and people seem to be happy because it's a popular place to exit the river. He said NPS has a life jacket loaner station at the TMR access which is important. Right now, NPS won't be enforcing the trailered launch ban. They will be using education with the public. Salvatore said he is seeing how the land acquisition goes first because it might play itself out.

Status Reports

Delaware River Basin Commission: Bowman Kavanagh shared that their Third Quarter Public Hearing is on 8/11. She will see if Jake Bransky, DRBC Aquatic Biologist, is available to present on their Microplastic Study for the 10/7 full council meeting. The Hydrologic Conditions Report was provided in the meeting packet.

NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation: Absent. Ramie said Bill Rudge forwarded the Mongaup Access parking lot information and photos today to members. Henry said part of Stage I should have been a parking plan. Ramie asked if the spaces were still going to be striped with firehose? Salvatore said a few different options had been discussed and the project will continue to evolve.

PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources: Absent.

National Park Service-Upper Delaware: Salvatore said he was glad to report that there hadn't been any drownings in the last month. He appreciates all of the life jacket safety messaging that everyone has been putting out. NPS has tried to increase their loaner life jacket program. Upper Delaware hired a new Law Enforcement Ranger. Debbie Seabolt was hired and she will be handling permits. If you need her contact information, feel free to reach out to Salvatore. Salvatore, Dexter, Ramie and Cilento attended the Day on the Delaware today he felt it was very encouraging.

UDC Executive Director's Report: Ramie said the "Day on the Delaware" was at Callicoon Riverside Park today sponsored by the Alliance for the Upper Delaware River Watershed, Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed, Friends of the Upper Delaware River, and NY League of Conservation Voters. A two-year effort is underway to seek a \$1 million line item for Upper Delaware River Restoration in the Environmental Protection Fund of the NYS Budget. The speakers were Senator Martucci, Assemblywoman Gunther, Jeff Skelding (FUDR), Julie Tighe (NYLCV), and NYC DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza (also Francis O'Shea to describe the park project). It was a well-attended, gorgeous day, with supportive speeches, boxed lunches from Early Bird Cookery catering, then the elected officials and media were going out for boat rides, including by one familiar captain, Town of Tusten UDC Alternate Evan Padua. Aileen Gunther said, "I would bet a million dollars that this is going to happen" and declared that she is all in. Mike Martucci said, "It's time for NYS to make a sustained commitment to the river" and joked that if he doesn't deliver, he was worried that the boat he was riding on might not come back. Julie Tighe made the point that it's cheaper to keep water clean than to pay to try remediating it. She also noted that NYS will put a \$3 million Environmental Bond Act before voters next year. Vinnie Sapienza said New York City is aware of its collaborative responsibilities below their reservoirs. He said, "We need to speak candidly, rely on science, and work out agreements." Paul Rush was asked about the system repair bypass shutdown status. That will occur in October 2022 and last for 6-8 months, during which time they will lower the reservoirs in advance and make large releases under Flexible Flow Management Plan (FFMP) parameters to compensate for it. He also said that they are advertising currently for engineering services to anticipate construction of that hydroelectric plant at the Cannonsville Reservoir, but that work is not likely to occur any time before 2026. Salvatore said regarding the funding aspect there was a discussion about federal funding as well as state funding. Whenever it's federal funding it has to be matching money and there was discussion of parallel funding between the two. O'Brien suggested starting early with funding conversations for UDC and town/ships. She said now is the time to start writing letters for the Executive Budget. The executive budget is released in January and that means they are preparing for two or three months before that. Greier said this is nothing new to the states in that they have failed to live up to their agreement. Ramie said as mentioned at the Operations meeting, Senator Martucci has a plan for this and he will be speaking about that at the UDC Awards Banquet.

The Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed shared news that a bipartisan group of Senators has reached a deal on the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which Ramie mentioned because that bill includes \$26 million of supplemental funding for the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program over the next five years. This awaits full Congressional approval.

Dexter, Cilento and Ramie attended the PA Legislative Breakfast on 7/29 that the Pike/Wayne Conservation Partnership sponsored. It was held at the D&H Canal Park at Lock 31 in Hawley. They presented UDC's poster which addresses UDC's mission and its intended financing that has not been fulfilled. While the Wayne County Commissioners were the highest level of elected officials in attendance personally, other state and federal legislators sent representatives. Ramie said worth the price of admission alone was a contact that we made with Tom Caffrey. He is the Northeast Regional Director for PA Governor Tom Wolf and expressed interest in attending a UDC meeting and/or taking a river trip with his fellow staffers. Cilento let Caffrey know we would be thrilled to host him in a follow-up conversation on Tuesday. Dexter said they were able to discuss a wide range of issues from broadband to public safety.

PennDOT's consultant has scheduled the promised 2nd meeting of the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge Project Advisory Committee on 9/23 at 2 p.m. via Microsoft Teams. Ramie will participate on behalf of UDC. The public comment portion of the Planning and Environmental Linkages Study has ended. The next step is development of the Transportation Purpose and Need document that will inform the selection of an alternative to remove, rebuild or replace.

Ramie will have time off tomorrow and next week and will be returning on 8/16. The Delaware River Sojourn gets underway tomorrow with a Day 0 clean-up then continues with four days of paddling in the upper section as indicated on the calendar handout. Cilento is a day planner and will be covering Monday and Tuesday. Courier Printing is due to deliver our summer newsletter on Monday, but it is posted online now. It came up in committee about wondering whether Kittatinny Canoes would continue their "On and Under the Delaware River Cleanup" under the new Northgate Resorts company ownership. We were notified that the cleanup will be 8/9 starting in Barryville and 8/10 at River Beach in Milford. Anyone interested in volunteering can call 1-800-FLOAT-KC to register. Cilento will continue her Project Review Workbook rollout at three local meetings as marked. We received confirmation too late for this meeting packet that Sullivan County has scheduled a meeting to discuss next steps for the Highland River Access project on 8/16, 3:30 p.m., at a location TBD. 8/20 is the deadline both for receipt of applications for our FY 2022 Technical Assistance Grants program, and to complete projects under our current round. We are waiting for the Towns of Hancock and Delaware to submit their final documentation, having paid the \$9,000 award to the Town of Tusten for its Comprehensive Plan Phase 2 Update last week. Please note that the annual special PR Committee meeting to review new TAG applications is on the 2nd Tuesday of September (9/14). The calendar also includes a preview of September meetings, activities, and deadlines.

New Business

Draft Letter to NY Senator Martucci re: Independent Redistricting Commission Comments: A Motion by Henry seconded by Greier to approve the draft letter to NY Senator Martucci re: Independent Redistricting carried with one abstention. O'Brien said this is the first ever Independent Redistricting Committee. They chose two Democrats and two Republicans and those four will choose two more. She said they want to hear comments from people that live there. Senator Martucci is 42nd District goes from Port Jervis through whole Upper Delaware region except for Hancock. Ramie said coincidentally the redistricting process affects PA as well. She said no one from PA has asked us to support that but UDC would be happy to entertain that idea. PA State Rep. Jonathan Fritz said in his email newsletter that the way it's being handled for congressional redistricting is a house/state government committee is holding hearings. They will hold additional hearings through the end of fall throughout the Commonwealth. If you are interested you can go to PAredistricting.com which gives you the opportunity to submit public comments.

UDC 33rd Annual Awards Ceremony Slate of Honorees and 9/12 Reservation Form: Ramie said every year we solicit public nominations for our Annual Awards Ceremony. We did that through 7/28 and presented recommendations to the Awards Subcommittee which consists of the executive members of the three subcommittees: Dudko, Richardson and Dexter. They approved the staff recommendations for the 13 awards for

the 9/12 banquet at Central House in Beach Lake. We feel it's a solid slate that represents a comprehensive geography of the river valley. We have also included the reservation form in the packets and will be taking reservations through 9/3. We will also be honoring our 2020 honorees as our banquet was cancelled last year.

Other: Sullivan recommended Ramie send a letter regarding UDC's operational funding to the NYS governor's office in advance of the preparation of the Executive Budget. A Motion by Henry seconded by Peckham carried.

Bowman Kavanagh forwarded to members additional details on the grant program that the DRBC is working on with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help municipalities in the Upper Delaware advance projects in their Hazard Mitigation Plans to FEMA grant applications. To register, please contact Stacey.Mulholland@drbc.gov with your name, contact information, and preferred session. You will receive the meeting details and confirmation via email. The schedule is Session 1: Wayne County – Monday, August 23rd, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm; Session 2: Pike County – Tuesday, August 24th, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm; Session 3: Monroe County – Wednesday, August 25th, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm and Session 4: Lackawanna County – Thursday, September 16th, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm. The workshops are free, but registration is required. Pre-event handouts will be provided to all registered attendees.

Old Business

8/1 UDC 33rd Annual Family Raft Trip Results: Hall-Bagdonas said we had 77 participants, including 75 adults and two kids. We had great assistance from with Rocco Baldassari and Kyle from Kitatinny/Northgate. We lucked out that day and the weather was beautiful. Henry attended with family. He said all staff members were a great help in this event. Cilento took photos for social media and the UDC website.

7/29 Letter to William Penn Foundation: National Parks Conservation Association Proposal: Ramie said this proposal came through the Operations Committee meeting on 7/27 but members hadn't seen a copy of the letter. The letter of support was requested by Halle Van der Gaag, senior manager for PA & DE programs, National Parks Conservation Association, to support NPCA's William Penn Foundation proposal which will include advocacy for operational funding of UDC. Cilento said they met the new Regional Director for the northeast office, Joy Blackwood today at Day on the Delaware.

Update on UDC Long-Term Fiscal Sustainability Plan: Ramie said UDC's consultant, Michael Crane is in the heart of his research. There is a 12/1 due date for that project. He is going through 33 years of financial records to track how we've evolved to this point, to see what our limitations and constraints are and how long UDC can survive on just the federal source of income at the static level that it is. Crane will be in the Upper Delaware region next week because he wanted to come on his own dime and meet with some local people. He has a meeting set up with Salvatore and Administrative Officer Michelle Blockberger from NPS. The same day he will be meeting with board members of UDC to get the Town/ship perspective on 8/11 at 9:00 a.m. Crane will also be meeting with UDC's audit team and bookkeeper. He will be participating in the Delaware River Sojourn on Monday and Tuesday. The second part of Crane's contract is that he's doing an accuracy check of the 1985 Economic Plan that is an Addendum to the River Management Plan to consider what financial impact the Town/ships would have by the designation of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River.

Other: Peckham said he hasn't had internet or phone since last Tuesday. It took a week for Verizon to come out. He said the line across the river came down and the construction division would have to come out for that. Peckham said he lodged a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). He spoke to someone from Altoona after the construction division said they didn't have the right parts to fix the problem and they told him they are well aware of the poor cell service up here.

Public Comment: Dudko said she was listening to how Cilento is going to all of the Town/ships and presenting, and wanted to thank the UDC staff for their hard work.

O'Brien asked if anyone has Brian Buntz's contact information. She has a birds of prey question for him.

Adjournment: A motion by Dean, seconded by Rajs, to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m. was carried.

Minutes prepared by Ashley Hall-Bagdonas 8-15-2021