



Upper Delaware Council

P.O. Box 192, 211 Bridge Street, Narrowsburg, New York 12764-0192 • (Tel.) 845-252-3022 • (Fax) 845-252-3359

www.upperdelawarecouncil.org

UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

September 5, 2024

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, September 5, 2024. Chairperson Dudko called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Roll call followed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees:

Town of Hancock- Fred Peckham (Zoom), Town of Fremont- Jim Rodgers, Town of Delaware- Harold Roeder, Town of Cohecton- Larry Richardson, Town of Tusten- Evan Padua, Town of Highland- Christine Martin, Town of Lumberland- Nadia Rajs, Town of Deerpark- Ginny Dudko, Damascus Township- Jeff Dexter, Berlin Township- Al Henry, Lackawaxen Township- Doug Case, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania- Tim Dugan, New York State- Ryan Coulter (Zoom), Delaware River Basin Commission- Kristen Bowman Kavanagh (Zoom), National Park Service- Lindsey Kurnath

Absent:

Westfall Township- Michael Barth

Staff:

Executive Director- Laurie Ramie, Resource & Land Use Specialist- Kerry Engelhardt, Administrative Support- Stephanie Driscoll

Media:

WJFF Radio- Rosie Starr (Zoom)

Guests:

NPS- Alex Garcia-Maldonado, Avery Ohliger (Zoom), NPS- Carly Marshall, NPS- Ingrid Peterec (Zoom), Diana Gonzalez (Zoom), Don Hamilton (Zoom), Joyce Laudise (Zoom), Linda Slocum (Zoom), Dorothy Hartz (Zoom), Town of Tusten Alternate- Cathleen Breen, Town of Deerpark Alternate- Bill Dudko, Conrad Gleber

Presentation: "Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Oral History Project" by Alejandro Garcia-Maldonado, Culture Resource Specialist, and Avery Ohliger, Intern-Cultural Resource Management Program Assistant, National Park Service: G. Dudko introduced both Alejandro (Alex) Garcia-Maldonado and Avery Ohliger. Garcia-Maldonado began his tenure at the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River in May of 2022. He is the manager of the Cultural Resource Management Program at UPDE and the curator of the Zane Grey Museum. He is also the tribal relations coordinator and interdisciplinary historian. Garcia-Maldonado was born in Puerto Rico and has an impressive number of degrees. Ohliger began interning with NPS two years ago through the Wayne/Pike Workforce Alliance. He graduated from Honesdale High School in 2023 and is the son of Lisa and Jason Ohliger. His primary responsibilities at NPS have been transcribing and converting oral history tapes to a web accessible format. He just entered his freshman year at Tufts University with plans to double major in History and Political Science. He aspires to work in archival preservation or to become a Professor of American History or Politics.

Garcia-Maldonado said the Oral History Project started over 40 years ago with his predecessor, UPDE Historian Mary Curtis then continued with Lauren Hauptman. When the pandemic hit, the project had slowed down. After he began his tenure, he started the project back up again. Ohliger will be giving the presentation tonight.

Ohliger thanked everyone for being here. He has been working for over two years on the Oral History Project. He came on this year in person, doing all the work virtually before that.

What are oral histories? They are interviews of first-hand experiences with history and/or culture, recorded in audio or video format used to preserve and interpret the perspective and experiences of people's history or historical views and past events. Oral Histories are meant to give all sides of a story. They are the best way to indiscriminately give

an accurate history. A lot of history prior to the new age were given very few sources; white Americans, etc. Oral Histories highlight everyone's experiences. UPDE uses oral histories to be able to interpret all sides of the stories.

The Oral Histories Association separates the process of preserving oral histories into four steps: preparation; interviewing; preservation; and access and use. Ohliger said he has primarily been focusing on preservation and access and use during his time at UPDE. The preparation phase begins with a pre-interview that determines the relevance of the interviewee to the overall topic and what questions will be asked. It also gathers the formal consent needed. The next phase is interviewing, where the interviewer asks questions so that the narrator can explain their experiences and thoughts on the subject for which they are being interviewed. The job of the interviewer is to record the history as it is. The job is not to uncover the truth about a past event. Asking biased or weighted questions may end up skewing the topic of the oral history. Preservation includes the care and storage of the oral histories in their collection. Access and use are optimizing the oral histories for public research.

How are oral histories stored? All the histories at UPDE were recorded on cassette tapes and are stored in the museum storage facility to ensure the preservation of the audio on the tapes. To prevent the deterioration of the original audio they avoid playing back the original tapes, instead they transfer the audio to an accessible wave file. Then the audio can be played without damaging the magnetic tape. When he digitizes an oral cassette tape, he starts by inserting the audio into an audio manipulation software called Audacity to produce a better final recording. It is then exported as a wave file; a file that mimics the raw audio from a cassette tape, which is better than the MP3 audio format for a project like this. Wave files are the highest quality of audio files. Since they are such large files, they must be saved on NPS's digital collection server. He then enters the audio files into Whisper AI. This software was created to make hyper accurate transcriptions for videos on YouTube. Ohliger said he figured out if you take that software and plug in the audio recordings it will do the exact same thing. He generally uses this software to make a first draft transcription. Prior to using this method, Ohliger said a 2-hour audio tape took him around 20 hours to completely transcribe. With Whisper AI he was able to cut down that time to about 5 hours. After he enters the audio in Whisper AI to get the rough draft, he moves onto the editing phase. He starts by making changes to any discrepancies or errors from the AI transcription, labels speakers, and adds time stamp. He then creates an index of the tape based on topics with linkable timestamps. Linkable timestamps are used primarily for ease of access and public research. Then, the final product is an indexed, transcribed oral history.

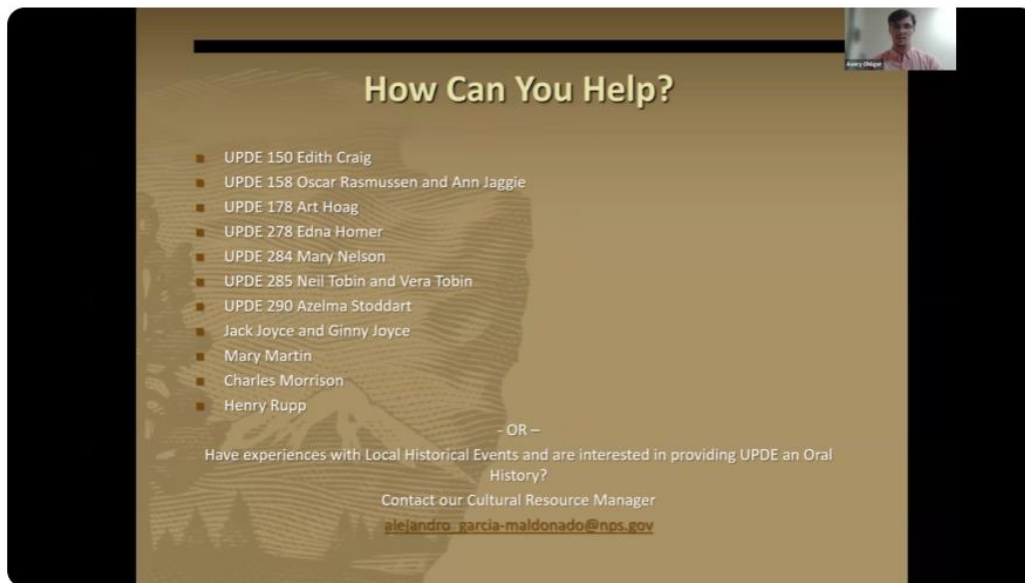
Once the oral histories are completed, they plan to publish them on the UPDE website for public access and researchers, giving anyone who would like to access them a multifaceted archive of the oral histories in their collection.

As technology has been advancing during this project, AI has become better creating accurate transcriptions in a short amount of time. Microsoft has introduced a new transcribe function in Word that creates a timestamped transcript that can distinguish between multiple speakers. He has been experimenting with this program and it has been working quite well. He said AI hasn't replaced him yet; the editing process is something he has to manually do. The use of AI is used to cut down the processing time.

UPDE has completed two oral histories so far; Millie and Richard Turner (UPDE 270), and Floyd Campfield (UPDE 316). The Turners spoke a lot in their oral histories on their experiences with new technologies like going from horse and buggy to the modern vehicle. Mr. Campfield's history was mostly on his collection of artifacts that he found along the river as well as his eel weirs.

There are a number of volunteers working on oral histories. In 2025 UPDE will hopefully be moving on from the Oral Histories Project to a Local History Project.

How can you help? Listed below are names of individuals that don't have releases. In order for NPS to share the information with the public, oral histories require releases. He asked if anyone is able to identify members on the list or can connect to a relative of those people, please reach out to Garcia-Maldonado (alejandromaldonado@nps.gov). If you know anyone who would like to have an oral history recorded, please reach out for that as well.



Dexter asked if Mary Martin was a school teacher at Narrowsburg School? Ohliger said he’s not sure. Richardson added that she was also a teacher in Cochecton. Martin asked if Mary Nelson has any relations to the Nelsons in Barryville? Robinson said he doesn’t think they are related. Martin said it may be worth reaching out to them. Roeder said he knows the son of Neil and Vera Tobin; he will reach out to him to get in touch with Garcia-Maldonado. Robinson said he donated an oral history by Mark Barnes of Barryville; is that being worked on? Ohliger said he has seen it. Peckham said Jack and Ginny Joyce’s son lives in Equinunk, PA and has said they will never give release for their oral history.

Ramie thanked Garcia-Maldonado for helping with publicity in advance of this presentation, going live on Radio Catskill on 8/29. From that and the press release the UDC issued we received a call from Marvin Rappaport, the retired Chief of Staff for Congressman Matt McHugh in the 1970s when the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River was designated. Rappaport called to tell us that Matt McHugh would like to give an oral history. Driscoll has provided Ohliger and Garcia-Maldonado with that information. Ramie also said that Charles Morrison previously worked with the NYS DEC and communicated with the UDC frequently. She reiterated that anyone who has any information on the list above to reach out to Garcia-Maldonado.

G. Dudko offered Garcia-Maldonado and Ohliger UDC lapel pins as a thank you for the presentation. Richardson said the Cochecton Preservation Society was presented with 18 oral history transcripts in 2016, after a lot of encouragement from UPDE NPS. Garcia-Maldonado said the oral histories give perspective on people who experience historic events. G. Dudko said people normally regret when they don’t listen to elders’ stories, so it’s great to have oral history recordings.

Approval of August 1, 2024 Minutes: A motion by Robinson seconded by Padua to approve the August 1, 2024 meeting minutes, carried.

Public Comment on the Agenda: None.

Committee Reports: There were no questions regarding previously distributed minutes for Water Use/Resource Management 8/20 (Evan Padua), Operations 8/27 (Ginny Dudko), or Project Review 8/27 (Larry Richardson).

Status Reports:

Delaware River Basin Commission: The hydrologic report is included in the packet for review. Ramie announced that Bowman Kavanagh has been appointed the Executive Director of the Delaware River Basin Commission, effective December 1, 2024 after Steve Tambini retires. A round of applause for Bowman Kavanagh was had. Bowman Kavanagh thanked everyone. She said the DRBC’s Director of External Affairs Beth Brown told her there is some space available for people to attend the Roundtable paddle on Friday, 9/13. She will send around information on that and how to sign up. The Advisory Committee on Climate Change will be meeting on Wednesday, 9/11 and is open to the public. She let the council know that the DRBC is aware of the funding needed for the USGS Barryville Gage. She doesn’t have an answer yet but wanted to let everyone know it is being discussed.

NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation: Coulter reported that NYS hunting season will be starting soon. Pheasant stocking started on 10/1 along with bow hunting and other small species season. He visited the Highland Access this week with other partners to scope out some locations for new signage. He thanked the NPS for helping maintain river access sites this season. He has been out the last couple of weeks doing trout surveys.

G. Dudko said she and B. Dudko saw canoe/kayak stands at the Highland Access and asked why those are there? Ramie said Heather Jacksy with Sullivan County Planning said the idea was that people could leave their canoe/kayak there safely if they wanted to take a walk, bike, or perhaps get some lunch. Coulter said the plans for the canoe/kayak racks were put in place before he started working on the project. Rodgers asked where they are doing trout surveys? Coulter said they are currently focused on Putnam, Westchester, and Ulster Counties. Rodgers asked if there are any in Sullivan County? Coulter said yes, they are surveying Mongaup Creek as well. All of the technical briefs that result can be found on the NYS DEC's [website](#).

Pennsylvania Dept. of Conservation and National Resources: Dugan said he had emailed the flyer on the spongy moth meeting that took place in Milford last Tuesday night. He reported that there was a good crowd, around 60 people. There have been some severe pockets of defoliation in Pike County. The presentation was recorded by Penn State Extension and he is sure they will post it soon. DCNR recognizes that there is a current spike in spongy moth. Spongy moth has been in Pennsylvania now since the 70s or longer. If you look at the long-term impacts, the acres defoliated continue to decrease over time. They fungal control that was done in the 80s/90s is having more of an affect. He reminded everyone that it's all weather-dependent; a cool, wet spring is good. They are in the beginning stages of estimating what amount of acreage they will apply for this year. There were some other places with significant defoliation in PA as well. The question at the meeting was: What is the state or county going to do, who will pay, and who will coordinate? DCNR will not be. There have been advances in technology for small-lot land owners in urban and suburban areas. They can now fly drones with the pesticide to treat a single tree in a matter of minutes, and the cost is not too bad.

Martin asked how do you measure the fungus and virus productivity? Dugan said DCNR flies over the state and maps the damage from the air and then treats it from that information. There is a wasp that feeds on the egg masses. Martin said that's good, a natural control. Dugan said an introduced control, but yes.

Robinson asked if the state does any calculations on the value lost on timber? Dugan said not the DCNR, but the metrics could be out there. They do adjust the harvest schedule when there is an epidemic. They have pivoted their agenda with oak in the past because of mortality. They just finished focusing on mortality about two years ago and have moved back to some of the older plans. There used to be a cost-share program for spongy moth funded through the U.S. Forest Service. Funds were given to the states to slow the impact and reduce the spread of spongy moths. There are funds being dedicated to spongy moth control. Robinson said it should be an area of priority.

Dugan said like NYS, PA hunting seasons are coming up. They will be releasing gates for increased hunter access; the land will be open to anyone who would like to use it. There is a sheet included in the packet for a [grant workshop](#) on 11/7. He added that Beech Leaf Disease is moving into Pike County, so you may see thinning of the understory of the tree canopy.

National Park Service: An NPS monthly activity report is included in the packet. Kurnath reported that NPS contributed \$21 million to the local economy in 2023. You may notice in the UDC's report on tourism statistics included in the packet that there is quite a jump from the previous year's figures. That is due to better data counters at all of the sites. Visitation numbers are driven back from a model. That calculation had not been updated for quite some time. The model for UPDE is driven by visitation and inflation. Roeder commented that he saw something about economic impacts on the Delaware River on local television.

UPDE NPS is working with USGS to get the Barryville gage working starting 10/1. UPDE expects to be able to fund the gage for Fiscal Year 2025 (10/1/2024 – 9/30/2025).

The American Hiking Society's applications are open if you are interested in hosting next year. There is a volunteer, working hike coming up on the Tusten Mountain Trail to remove the bridge and reroute the trail. UPDE will not apply to host a volunteer hike next year.

Kurnath plans to bring new Natural and Cultural Resources Program Manager Tom Kearns to the next WU/RM meeting on 9/17 to introduce to the committee. Most of the seasonal staff have ended their season or are wrapping up.

Phase I of the Baseline Archaeological Inventory and Evaluation will be starting soon, focusing in Narrowsburg and Lackawaxen to start.

Kurnath said they have made some improvements at headquarters in Beach Lake since so many people end up there due to the misleading signage at the end of the road. They removed a large tree that was across the observation deck so that can be used.

UDC Executive Director: Ramie said this is a particularly busy time for staff besides our regular meeting obligations since we had our 36th Annual Family Raft Trip on August 4th which attracted 76 paddlers, three deadlines for our two grant programs for Technical Assistance and River & Shoreline Clean-ups, the end of the fiscal year is quickly approaching which requires close monitoring of the budget, and all attention now is on preparing for our River Valley Awards with its advance deadlines for the program booklet, reservations, plaque inscriptions, presentation script, and all else that goes into organizing the ceremony after the month-long process to solicit and select our honorees.

PennDOT is removing loose components on the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge, installing warning signs and buoys upstream and downstream, and installing temporary protective netting underneath the bridge, all of which the UDC strongly suggested doing in our Aug. 2nd letter. The end of this summer is when the Project Advisory Committee had been told the Planning & Environmental Linkages Study would wrap up which will inform the selection of a long-term alternative that will be announced publicly for comment.

Tonight's presentation was the last topic that we had scheduled for this year. She asked if anyone has ideas for speakers they'd like to hear from, please let her know so we can invite them. She reminded Project Review Committee members of the annual special meeting on Tuesday, the 10th, at 6:30 to review our 3 applications for FY 25 TAGs. One application was withdrawn, leaving them from Tusten, Deerpark, and Berlin. Engelhardt will send those applications out tomorrow via email. The UDC has shared on our Facebook page the link to the Radio Catskill Community Awards for local environmental contributions that will be held on Sept. 12 in Narrowsburg. Next Friday, Sept. 13, is the deadline for our awards banquet reservations and also when we'll be hosting the DRBC's invitational roundtable discussion. The three final Project Review Road Shows for UDC member municipalities are wrapping up. Sept. 20 is the post-season NPS Water Safety Partners meeting in the UDC conference room at 10am.

Rodgers asked if the NPS and UDC do any outreach to local schools. Kurnath said UPDE has educational programs that go to schools. Chief of Interpretation Ingrid Peterec is in charge of those. He asked if perhaps they could give a presentation on those at a WU/RM Committee meeting.

New Business:

- a. **36th Annual River Valley Awards 9/22:** The reservation form and the list of honorees are included in tonight's packet. Eleven awards will be given during the ceremony. Ramie said three of the awards had submitted nominations; the rest she had to research. A full-page profile is done for each honoree. She thanked the Awards Subcommittee - Dudko, Richardson, and Padua - for their timely response on selecting the award recipients. We send an invitation to the banquet to all elected officials. We received a response via email from Governor Kathy Hochul's Director of Invitations acknowledging the invitation which she read aloud. The deadline to turn over the program to the printer is 9/12, so she is diligently working on that. Rodgers asked if the UDC still gives out a lifesaving award? Ramie said yes, the Robin M. Daniels Lifesaving Award. However, there were no remarkable incidents this year reported by UPDE NPS. We don't just give out the award to fill the slot if there is no specific candidate.
- b. **Orientation/RMP Refresher Session for UDC Representatives & Alternates:** G. Dudko said she has noticed that some members get into lengthy discussions that are sometimes non-UDC related issues. It's our job, as members of the UDC, to follow the River Management Plan (RMP). She said some members are new, while some of the older members may have forgotten what our job is here. We can get passionate about our own views, but that is not our job here. She's not sure if there is a need for a formal session, but thought it needed to be brought up. Robinson agreed that it would be good to revisit. Martin asked if she

was referring to the conversation on climate change? Just because the words ‘climate change’ are not in the RMP doesn’t mean it’s something that should be ignored. It is not a personal issue; it’s an issue for our planet and our corridor, and an issue that needs to be addressed. If the UDC never addresses climate change as an issue, that would surprise her. G. Dudko said there are a lot of things the UDC can do, but there are some we can’t do and one of those things is act as an activist. Rajsz thinks the idea of adding the words ‘climate change’ to the RMP is a good idea, but amending the RMP is extremely difficult. G. Dudko said they made it difficult to amend for a reason. Roders said the RMP does state that the UDC will protect anything that lessens the value of the corridor. Kurnath said if the group does decide to go forward with a “refresher” session she would volunteer Marshall to help plan it. They would be happy to help. Henry said everyone should re-read the RMP. G. Dudko said we can all think about this further.

- c. **Vote on UDC Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Surplus Recommendation:** Ramie said there are currently no firm figures she can give as we are only five days into September. Just today, one of the River and Shoreline Cleanup Grants came back \$1,100 less than what was budgeted, for example. The Operations Committee had suggested any surplus be used for staff bonuses. A motion by Henry, seconded by Robinson to approve the suggestion from Operations to allocate any surplus of money for staff bonuses, with amounts to be decided by the Personnel Subcommittee, carried.
- d. **9/4 Announcement: NYC DEP Improved Modeling and Forecasting Project:** Ramie said she was invited to attend a meeting in person at the NYC DEP Gramhamsville office by (newly titled) Executive Director for Strategic Operations and Research Jennifer Garigliano. Kurnath also attended the meeting. Others in the audience were described as stakeholders from the Delaware and Catskill watersheds and DEP staff members. Attendees were told that by the end of the day there would be a news release issued on the topic of the meeting. That is included in tonight’s packet. The DEP has decided with all of the evolving climate change issues and big projects happening that they want to have more confidence in the decisions they are making, with help from 80 scientists and a “super computer” from the Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes (CW3E). NYC DEP has signed a contract for \$4.8 million for a three-year project to develop the new modeling. The prior operation was to “fill and spill” the reservoirs. Now they have the technology that takes forecasting into consideration. One immediate project that this can apply to is for the aqueduct repairs scheduled to begin October 1st. They could use storm models that this system provides to better determine when to start refilling the reservoir. This all came from stakeholder input, that they need to be better at predictions and calculations. The contract has been signed and one meeting has been held so far.
- e. **Substantial Conformance Review 2024-05: The Kate Project, Town of Highland:** Engelhardt said this is an application that the Project Review Committee deferred voting on at their last meeting since she wanted more information on the riverside greenspace area adjacent to River Road before any decisions were made. There were some concerns with seeding and the makeup of the ramp to the river. She went to the site this afternoon after speaking with Highland Supervisor Pizzolato. Pizzolato deferred to her on the seed mixture. She and Marshall did some research on what seed mix would be best for the ramp; in terms of soil type and location. Pizzolato took that recommendation and passed it along to the highway department. When at the site she saw that there was already some grass coming up and that the ramp is mostly complete. She had sent photos today to committee members as a follow-up. She thinks the project is appropriate. They are just restoring the ramp that was there previously. She recommends that The Kate Project in the Town of Highland substantially conforms to the River Management Plan. Kurnath said she feels this project has morphed a bit since it has begun. She wants to confirm that all of the paperwork is completed now. Engelhardt said yes, she revised her report to clarify that. A motion by Henry to send NPS a letter recommending substantial conformance, seconded by Dexter, carried.
- f. **Substantial Conformance Review 2024-06: Freeman Garage, Town of Lumberland:** Engelhardt said the Project Review Committee voted for substantial conformance. A motion by Robinson to send a letter to NPS recommending that the Freeman Garage in the Town of Lumberland substantially conforms, seconded by Robinson, carried.
- g. **Other:** Ramie said the PA Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) is starting the rebuild of the ramp at the Damascus Access next week. The access and parking area will be closed from 9/9-9/12. Richardson said he

is concerned about a historic rock/Native American artifact that is at the Damascus Access. Maybe we should reach out to PFBC to let them know that rock is significant? Ramie said she will do that.

Ramie reminded everyone that the deadline for River and Shoreline Cleanup Grants is on 9/10. The Town of Deerpark sent their completion paperwork today which was \$1,145.32 less than what they applied for. She reviewed the 20 pages of documentation. Deerpark holds three cleanups at the Hawks Nest after Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day. A motion by Martin, seconded by Case to approve the River and Shoreline Grant revised payment of \$2,800.59 for the Town of Deerpark, carried. Ramie said that the Town of Highland will be holding their cleanup on Sunday 9/8 and submitting the paperwork by 9/10.

Old Business:

- a. **Funding to Restore Full Functionality of the Delaware River Gage at Barryville:** The memo that went out to all possible interested parties to fund the Barryville Gage is included in the packet stating that the full parameters of the gage should be activated again. Any entities interested can let us know by 9/20 if they would like to discuss options further. Since the memo went out, we have heard back from Friends of the Upper Delaware River and Sullivan County. She also sent the memo to our Congressional representatives. Ramie displayed the front-page of the *Tri-County Independent*. She thanked UPDE NPS for providing the stop gap funding, making this issue less urgent.
- b. **NPS Determination, 2024-03: Nectar Juice Bar, Town of Tusten:** The letter from NPS stating that they concurred with the UDC's finding that the Nectar Juice Bar in the Town of Tusten substantially conforms to the River Management Plan is included in the packet, bringing this project to a close.
- c. **NPS Determination, 2024-04: Robinson Convenience Store, Lackawaxen Township:** The letter from NPS stating that they concurred with the UDC's finding that the Robinson Convenience Store in Lackawaxen Township substantially conforms to the River Management Plan is included in the packet, bringing this project to a close.
- d. **Other:** Padua said he recently floated under the Skinners Falls Bridge and noticed metal debris in the water that had clearly fallen off the bridge. He sent pictures to Ramie right before this meeting. He's glad they are coming up with solutions and the netting is a great idea, but said if they plan to use the same caution buoys as they did at the Cochection Bridge, they will just wash away with high water. 10 buoys there would also be a terrible eyesore. Henry asked, if you have netting under the bridge to catch debris, why would you need caution buoys? Kurnath said this isn't something NPS is handling; it's PennDOT. Henry asked if PennDOT has been in touch with NPS about the hazard. Kurnath said yes, they have an Aid to Navigation draft plan, but she can't provide any updates. Henry said whoever the vendor for the buoys are should have to retrieve them if they wash away. Dexter said there is a buoy downstream at Skinners Falls. Padua added that there are some below Skinners Falls and the Cochection Bridge.

Public Comment: None.

Adjournment: A motion by Roeder seconded by Rodgers to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 p.m. carried.

Minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 9/11/2024