

WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES

June 18, 2024

Committee Members Present: Evan Padua, Bill Dudko, Al Henry, Fred Peckham (Zoom), Jim Rodgers, Christine Martin (Zoom)

Committee Members Absent: Pat Jeffer

Staff: Laurie Ramie, Kerry Engelhardt, Stephanie Driscoll

NPS Partner: Lindsey Kurnath, Andy Weber

Guests: Ginny Dudko, Rebekah Creshkoff

The UDC’s Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, June 18, 2024. Chairperson Evan Padua called the meeting to order at 6:29 pm. Ramie welcomed Rebekah Creshkoff to the meeting. Creshkoff is the new Alternate Representative for the Town of Delaware.

Approval of the May 21, 2024 meeting minutes: A motion by B. Dudko seconded by Henry approving the 5/21 meeting minutes carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

New Business:

Brief Presentation: “Longitudinal Inventory of Freshwater Turtles in the Delaware River at UPDE and DEWA” by NPS Staff: A PowerPoint presentation was shown on the inventory being done at the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River and the Delaware Water Gap area on freshwater turtles. Weber said UPDE and DEWA applied for this project funding through the NPS Inventory and Monitoring Division (the same funding source for the snail inventory done in UPDE). There isn’t a lot of information on freshwater turtles and it made sense ecologically to include DEWA in the study. There has never been a study done like this at either UPDE or DEWA. The project goals are to determine which turtle species are present in the Delaware River system within each NPS unit, determine the upstream limit of some species, and whether the Northern Map Turtle is native to the Delaware drainage.

NPS Seasonal Biological Science Technician Jeff Smith is working with Penn State University’s Dr. Julian Avery (Principal Investigator), Dr. Franny Buderman (co-PI), Dr. Leilton Luna (post-Doc; genetic work), and Master’s student Sarah Broadway. Just today they set up traps at Ten Mile River and Lackawaxen. The traps are called “hoop nets” and there will be about 10 traps per location. There will be labels on the traps asking people to please leave them alone. Weber displayed a photo of Broadway holding a large snapping turtle caught in Narrowsburg. There are a few other species of turtles in the Delaware River the team plans to inventory.

It is unknown if the Northern Map Turtle is native to the Delaware River or not. The “turtle team” will conduct genetic work comparing the Delaware River population of Northern Map Turtles to known native populations through bloodwork. Currently, they are unsure of the upstream extent of their range in the Upper Delaware region.

The Eastern Spiny Softshell turtle is non-native to the Delaware River drainage and they are unsure of the upstream extent of their range here. B. Dudko asked how large these turtles can get; they look very similar to Snapping Turtles. Weber said female Eastern Spiny Softshell turtles can grow up to 18 inches.

The Eastern Musk Turtle is native to the Delaware River, but the upstream limit range is unknown. The team will be working to find out how far upstream the Eastern Musk can travel.

The Wood Turtle is a species of special concern in both Pennsylvania and New York, considered endangered by the International Union of Concerned Scientists. Weber added that they are also considered threatened in the State of New Jersey at the state level and are considered endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Weber thinks they may have a hard time finding a lot of these turtles in the Upper Delaware since they spend part of the year in the water and part on land. The Wood Turtle is also heavily poached for the black-market pet trade, so it’s great that they are here. A lot of turtle species have been declining over the last several decades through habitat loss, poaching, road mortality, etc. Creshkoff asked if the turtles may be going to China for the medicines? Weber said it’s for pet trade, food markets in Southeast Asia, and medicines.

Painted Turtles are more likely to be found in a pond or standing water, but can be found in slower areas in the river. There are a few other introduced species that they may come across like Red Eared Sliders that are not native to PA or NY, but have been dumped here. The Red Eared Slider Turtles will get aggressive and push native Painted Turtles out, competing for the same food sources and nests in the same areas.

B. Dudko asked if the Snapping Turtle is the most common species to be found in the Delaware River? Weber said he thinks that it will vary by site; as they move up north and the water gets colder there will be Snapping Turtles, Painted Turtles, and Wood Turtles. There are places in DEWA that Northern Map Turtles are pretty high in numbers. Snapping Turtles will definitely be found in areas of standing water. Engelhardt asked how long the study will be going on? Weber said two summers, they are figuring out their methodology currently for trapping. Ramie asked how much funding they received for the project? Weber said approximately \$270,000. Henry asked what information they are gathering from the turtles they catch? Weber said they are getting a few different measurements of the turtle, checking gender, and giving them a notch with a coding system. G. Dudko said her aunt used to catch and eat Snapping Turtles. Weber said in PA you can still get a commercial permit with a small game license. G. Dudko said from June 15th through September 30th you can “hunt” turtle with a license (info from the NYS DEC website). Padua asked Weber to have Broadway reach out to him for some photos he has of turtles he’s seen while working on the river. Weber will forward her email to the committee. He asked if anyone has seen any Spiny Softshell Turtles? Padua said he mainly sees Snapping and Painted Turtles, sometimes a Wood Turtle.

Weber announced that he will be leaving the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River for a tentative start date of July 28th to Assateague Island National Seashore. Kurnath added that the position Weber is taking is a promotion and that he will be missed at UPDE. The committee congratulated Weber on his promotion and wished him the best of luck. Rodgers asked how long he’s been at UPDE? Weber said almost six years.

Delaware River Flow & Storage Report: Included in the packet for review. Padua asked Ramie if we got a reply from the letter the UDC sent about the river gage at Barryville Bridge? Ramie said USGS Chief of NY Observing Systems Branch is giving a presentation at the August 1st full council meeting and plans to address the status of the Barryville gage then. Kurnath added that UPDE NPS reached out through the Regional Office as well. Padua checked the Barryville Gage online and the temperature and the gage height still works, but the CFS doesn’t work. Ramie said they took away certain parameters but it is not completely dysfunctional. Padua said the gage height is in direct correlation with the CFS, so it doesn’t make much sense.

Padua said the river will be getting a little bit higher with the requested release by NYS DEC from the 2017 FFMP Thermal Mitigation Bank due to the unusually warm weather conditions. Engelhardt asked if they always release at night? Padua said he isn’t sure, but it will be over a 12-hour period. 300 CSF isn’t a lot of water, so it may cool down the water closer to the East Branch.

Other: Padua noticed a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) truck at the Damascus Access. Are they shocking for the Northern Snakehead? Weber said he didn’t think so. Padua said they were here around the same time last year to shock Snakehead out of the cove around that access. Weber asked if it was NYS DEC and not PFBC? Padua checked later in the meeting and verified that it was NYS DEC, not PFBC. Weber and Kurnath said the DEC may have been shocking for Snakeheads.

Old Business:

5/20 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Meeting: A copy of the minutes is included in the packet. Ramie said UDSB had a lot of national publicity after winning a Partnership Award for the Shadfest where the UDSB website was shown with an error message, since it’s been down for some time. Not only is the domain out of the byway’s control, but a site from Singapore appears to have taken over the URL.

One grant application was received from the Tusten Heritage Community Garden located behind the library in Narrowsburg, seeking funding to put on four once-a-month educational workshops from June to September on pollinators, how to create environments to counter the loss of native habitat, harmful pesticide use, changing climate conditions, and other things of that nature. The Tusten Heritage Community Garden will be partnering with Delaware Valley Job Corps for their vocational students to provide labor to maintain the garden and to build some seating for it. They were approved for a \$1,000 grant from the UDSB for additional garden supplies and the workshops program.

The National Scenic Byway Foundation award was presented on May 3rd in Colorado. The byway sent John Pizzolato to represent the UDSB. Pizzolato gave a PowerPoint presentation on the sessions he attended and lessons he took away, as well as photos of him accepting the award. The committee would be interested in hosting that national conference in the Upper Delaware at some point.

A comment letter on the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge was approved that was similar to the UDC's letter supporting rehabilitation and restoration of the historic bridge.

An opinion was received by the Chief Counsel of the Association of Towns of the State of New York about whether there was any conflict of interest for the UDSB to contract with an elected Supervisor of a member town to provide grant writing and fundraising support to the board as Program Manager. Newly elected Town of Highland Supervisor John Pizzolato previously held the Program Manager position for the UDSB for a 6-month period and is interested in potentially holding that position again. The Chief Counsel said there are no inherent, inevitable or systemic conflicts of interest. If anything did happen to come up, it can be addressed by disclosure and recusal. The Program Manager position job description is being refined with what the job truly entails.

The 2024 Shadfest was a scaled back version that happened on May 18th in Barryville, with morning activities at the Barryville Farmers' Market, followed by a dinner at River's Edge with an after party. The national award the UDSB received for Shadfest was celebrated and framed certificates were given to several recipients. Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, who is stepping down from office after 20 years, received a certificate for many years of support for the byway. Shadfest founder Debra Conway from The Delaware Company received recognition for conceiving the idea of Shadfest. Chefs Annika Sundvik and Michael Abato were both recognized as well.

The UDSB Visitor Center at The Callicoon Depot President Darko Hreljanovic reported that there had been cost estimators at the site that day. They are going to compile estimates with all of the work that needs to be done on the building. Once those are available, they will be compared to the funding they have to see what the difference is and decide what needs to be prioritized. The roof will likely need to be replaced, as well as structural damage and other things. The Callicoon Depot has also started having monthly open houses with various themes, opening up the station for tours and a slideshow. There will be one on June 29th with an art-oriented theme.

Rosie DeCristofaro from the Town of Delaware asked what the status was of the downed guide rail along Rt. 97 in the Callicoon area. She is interested in applying for another Vista Enhancement Grant, but doesn't want to do that until that section of the roadway is fixed. The DOT is aware that the guiderail is down due to collisions but has higher priorities on more heavily trafficked roads and a limited crew. They will get to it eventually.

Ten thousand more placemats featuring the UDSB map were ordered and received from St. Clair Graphics in Honesdale. They are being stored at the UDC building and can be picked up whenever convenient. The byway was sourcing a new vendor for the reusable rag bags. They found a company that can make larger bags (13x16 in).

Planning is underway for the 10th Annual Narrowsburg Honeybee Festival, and perhaps the last. Organizer Joan Santo is partnering with the UDSB this year to host a Pollinator Ball dance party in the evening. The Honeybee Festival will be from 11am – 5pm with the Pollinator Ball at Fort Delaware in the afternoon followed by a dance party at 6pm – “after dark”. There will also be a Butterfly Bike Ride; a bike ride to throw “seed balls” filled with milkweed and other pollinator friendly plants made by kids guided by a local potter. Rodgers asked if he heard correctly that this may be the last Honeybee Festival? Ramie said yes, that's what we've been hearing, that the original organizers want to end it on the 10th anniversary. It used to be on Main St. in Narrowsburg every year, but this year it's moving to Fort Delaware. Padua said he assumes parking is an issue for the Honeybee Festival, similar to the parking at The Callicoon Depot. He read in the minutes that there have been people running into the guiderails and structures with their cars. Unfortunately for most of the river towns there aren't any parking options. Ramie said The Callicoon Depot has been putting the barriers out further and further from the building. Eventually it will be a landscaped seating area with benches. Henry asked if there will be any parking at that location for the Visitor Center? Ramie said they have to have a couple handicapped parking spots, but it's not part of the current plan to add parking. Creshkoff said she remembers there were talks about putting in a parking lot in Callicoon. Ramie said there was a parking study done, but the plan lies with the town board and hasn't moved forward.

The next UDSB meeting is Monday, June 24th.

5/29 Sullivan County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Committee Meeting: Ramie attended this orientation meeting for the new master plan in the works, funded by a NYS Climate Smart Communities Grant through the Environmental Protection Fund administered by the NYS DEC. The contract isn't back yet, so the project can't really start in earnest yet. When the contract is returned, they will issue RFP to secure a planning consultant. The 5/29 meeting was held at the Cornell Cooperative Extension office in Liberty where they invited a speaker, Ian Thomas with America Walks (a walkability promotional non-profit), to give a two-part seminar via Zoom. The first part was an overview of different concepts and policy regarding walkable communities. After lunch he gave a presentation on case studies that illustrated similar planning efforts that have gone on in rural communities in Batesville, AK and Katy Trail State Park in Missouri that showed before and after photos of improvements within the communities. The meeting got a group together of interested parties within Sullivan County to start gearing up for this project. If anyone is interested, she has links to the presentation. The objectives of the master plan are reducing greenhouse gas emissions, helping disadvantaged county residents overcome transportation barriers, supporting healthy and active transportation by creating safer and more convenient routes for walking and biking, promoting equity by focusing on disadvantaged and underserved communities, and fostering meaningful public engagement throughout the formulation of the plan. They will go out to underserved communities that will be highly affected by this plan. Ramie thinks it's important the UDC stays involved to represent the river towns.

6/4 Sullivan County Local Emergency Preparedness Committee Meeting: Ramie said when the Commissioner of Public Safety Scott Schulte gave his presentation to the UDC, he mentioned interest in resurrecting the Sullivan County Local Emergency Preparedness Committee. This meeting on 6/4 took place at the Sullivan County Emergency Services Training Center in White Lake where they also house the 911 Dispatch Center and Training Center. At the meeting everyone introduced themselves, what organization they are representing, and if they had any topics to discuss. Representatives attended from the NYC Department of Environmental Protection, NYSEG, NYS DOT, Orange and Rockland Utilities, Sullivan County BOCES Vo-tech, the Department of Homeland Security, Bethel Woods Security, NY Department of Health, Sullivan County Public Health Department, DEC Forest Rangers, Sullivan County Sheriff's Department, NYS Police, American Red Cross, and Resort World Catskills Security. UPDE NPS was represented by law enforcement officer Ron Babus, and she was there for the UDC. Babus mentioned the Spill Response Plan for which they plan to have a fall drill, and that they are working on dispatch, emergency towers, and getting ready for the recreational season. Ramie brought up the cellular service issues along the river, the hazmat situation with the railroad, and the fear of dam failure with the NYC reservoirs in terms of downriver notifications. They decided to have these meetings twice a year with the next one this fall to talk about concerns, emergency issues, and other emergency planning topics. The committee had been on pause with some personnel changes within the county, but now Schulte has committed to these meetings twice a year. Schulte said that Sullivan County has a Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan Committee that meets frequently as well as a group that meets about Domestic Terrorism. John Hauschild reviewed the assets Sullivan County has at the Emergency Ops Center. They include a Search and Rescue UTV, six portable light towers, variable message boards, and other equipment. G. Dudko said she is impressed by the representatives that were present. Rodgers said a lot of those people probably interact with each other outside of this meeting.

6/11 Delaware Sojourn Committee Meeting and Update: Engelhardt said the final planning meeting was last Tuesday 6/11. The Sojourn kicked off with a clean-up on Friday 6/14 that was eventually rained out. She attended Saturday and Sunday and commented that everything went very well. There was camping on the Zane Grey Museum lawn and they launched from there on Saturday, paddling to Cowen Farm for lunch where Historian Bill Merchant gave a talk on the D&H Canal, then paddled to the Silver Canoe Pond Eddy base where they took out and camped. On Sunday morning everyone packed up their camping gear to drive to West End Beach in Port Jervis. The buses drove everyone back up to the Kittatinny base in Pond Eddy. The staff at Kittatinny were surprised to see the Sojourners, not knowing they were coming due to an apparent miscommunication. The staff was still very gracious and it didn't affect the trip. Lunch on Sunday was at the Mongaup River Access where they were sent off to paddle the rest of the Sojourn. The final day of the Sojourn is on the Tidal Delaware, launching, paddling downstream, have lunch, and paddle back from where they launch from coming back in on the tides. On Saturday the High Admiral Award went to Andy Boyar, and on Sunday the award went to Heather Jacksy of Sullivan County Planning for her work on the Highland Access and her general work on the Delaware River. At next month's meeting they will discuss the lower registration numbers this year. There were a lot of questions from the public on car share services and public transportation.

Padua said they probably took out at the Siver Canoe Pond Eddy Access because there is no place further north to take out. It is a hard take out, since you have to carry your boat out just like you have to at the Highland Access. Engelhardt said at the Mongaup Access, they had to leave their boats at the river to go have lunch. It's hard to plan where to put in and take out since every access has their challenges and it's such a large group, but the committee tries to switch it up every year. Kristen Bowman Kavanagh and Beth Brown from the DRBC paddled the Sojourn and told Engelhardt that they appreciated that they switched it up every year. Padua thanked Engelhardt for the work she does on the Sojourn committee. Henry asked how much it costs to participate in the Sojourn? Engelhardt said \$100 a day, and that includes your campsite, a boat/personal boat shuttle, the programs, meals, and safety. She said she was impressed last year with the National Canoe Safety Patrol. They guide you along the whole way making sure you safely get down the river. Kurnath paddled this year, and commented that it struck her how much of an investment it is and how much planning goes into it. She said it was a beautiful day and she enjoyed paddling.

6/14 Upper Delaware BioBlitz Committee Meeting: Engelhardt said they are still working on planning. The funding has been coming in, including grants and \$800 through "NEPA Gives". There will be swag for people during the public hours on Saturday 6/29 from 10am-4pm with programs people can join. Henry asked if you need to sign up to attend. Engelhardt said no. If you'd like to volunteer, you can sign up. There will be trees handed out during the event as well. Kurnath asked what kind of trees? Engelhardt said Pin Oak, Persimmons, Bitter-wood, and Black Willows.

Lordville Road County Bridge Closure Update: The UDC approved a letter to the Hancock Town Board on 6/6 supporting their position asking for more time to come up with alternatives to closing down the county bridge from 7/8-8/16. There was frustration that the town board wasn't involved with making the plan for emergency services, mail delivery, and that it is in the peak of tourism season. The Delaware County Department of Public Works Committee had scheduled a meeting for the day after the town board meeting to address the concerns. Supervisor Jerry Vernold will get back to us about how that meeting went. The *Hancock Herald* published an article with a photo of a crowd of people at the town board meeting. Delaware County Public Works Commissioner Jim Thomas gave a presentation where the public disputed the year that Thomas said the bridge was built and why it needs to be replaced. According to Thomas, the bridge is a 29-foot span bridge that was built in 1986 and has never been replaced, sustaining minor damage in the 2006 flood. He says now it needs new steel beams, a new deck, and guiderails. The whole project will cost about \$250,000. They tried to time it to not affect the school bus season. The public suggested that they could put in a temporary bridge, but that would cost another \$100,000. Town of Hancock Councilman Pat O'Brien said, "What's cheaper? The bridge or defending yourself? People have less confidence in your plans than before they came in this room. You need to put the temporary up and go back to the committee and re-hash this." The Hancock Town Board passed a resolution requesting more time to figure everything out. Thomas had said the road and bridge are too narrow for one-way access. There is another way in, referring to the PA access to Lordville, but the Emergency Service providers said that would add too much time to their emergency response.

Peckham said it turned out that they are moving forward with the original plan, closing the bridge in July and August. The signs are up saying "road closed". He said if the people in Lordville need an ambulance, it's going to be an issue. They plan to use the Equinunk Fire Department for any emergency. There are a few people that get their Cancer treatment medications via mail and they are concerned they won't get them on time. There are only 2 kids that go to school from Lordville, so it would have been much easier to close the bridge during the school year, in his opinion.

Other: Henry said he visited Seminary Hill Cidery in Callicoon this weekend. They have a map mural painted on the side of one of the buildings where he saw a cemetery was or is near the location of where the NYS DEC is looking to put the new boating access in Callicoon on the old campground property. Were all the bodies there exhumed and moved or was the campground built on top of the cemetery? Creshkoff said the cemetery is still there. Rodgers said yes, the cemetery is next to the campground and Ramie agreed, it is next to the Riverside Park property. Padua said he's been to the cemetery, it's still there. Henry said it seemed strange; it appeared that the campground is on top of the cemetery. Rodgers said the cemetery was always very close to the campground.

Henry said he thought the UDC had put their logo on the NPS's "Wear Your Life Jacket" yard signs. It would be nice to have it added on there for future prints. Ramie said the UDC and NPS have their logos on the Life Jacket Return Stations, but agreed that they could be added to the yard signs. Kurnath took a note.

Creshkoff asked the UDC if they would take a stance on artificial turf installation fields and rubber matting in playgrounds? They are huge sources of toxins; 15% of microplastics in rivers comes from artificial turf. Microplastics aren't just physical. They are leaching chemicals that make the plastics. Towns around here will eventually get funding to test and combat against PFAS chemicals. It seems to her that the UDC would be an appropriate body to take a stand on artificial turf. Padua asked if artificial turf is being used around here? Creshkoff said Eldred Central School is putting in an artificial turf field currently, as is Monticello School District. Henry said Honesdale School has had one for a while now. Padua said he's not sure where that falls in the UDC's jurisdiction. Ramie said the UDC looks to our member towns and townships to come to us with any concerns that we then debate. It may be frustrating that the UDC isn't generally an activist organization, unless something is a clear and direct threat to the corridor. Kurnath said she wonders if there is something within the DRBC's Special Protection Waters that could help. If we ever got to a point where we could amend the River Management Plan, and we have the science to support that it's affecting water quality, it can be added to the RMP as incompatible potentially. Weber said that there was a study a number of years ago on Microplastics in the Delaware River. He can send that around or you can probably find it online. B. Dudko said there are far more injuries with artificial turf. Henry said Honesdale switched their field to artificial turf because they were having to cancel more sports events due to weather and field conditions. We need to let the people funding the field installations know about microplastics and how they will affect the river. Creshkoff said FIFA won't play on artificial turf, if it is an artificial turf field they make the stadium change it temporarily to real turf. Rodgers asked if UPDE NPS tests for lead in the river? Weber said it's not tested for in the river. Lead is typically tested for in drinking water. Rodgers said he's noticed some of the clay (possibly lead) birds in the river. Doesn't that affect the fish, turtles, and other things in the river? Weber said certainly eagles. Henry said Rodgers should reach out to NYS DEC Environmental Conservation (Encon) officers.

Public Comment: None.

Adjourn: A Motion by B. Dudko seconded by Rodgers to adjourn the meeting at 8:09 p.m. was carried.

Meeting minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 6/25/2024