

## Natural Resource Commission (via Webex), November 4th, 2020

**Hartley Native Plant Community Management Plan** Doug Mensing, of Applied Ecological Services, presented a PowerPoint overview. Detailed maps of existing vegetation, ecological quality, and past management were used to define nine management units. Draft recommendations prioritized three tiers (high quality vegetation, previous management areas, and connecting areas) comprising roughly half of the NA's 600+ acres. Work would include removal of buckthorn, reed canary grass and invasive cattail; pine thinning; weed pulling; and tree planting. A detailed draft proposal for phased implementation of 120 prioritized acres showed restoration and management subunit investments over 10 years at \$100,000 per year. Jim Filby-Williams expressed concern that only half of the "Natural Area" was part of the plan, suggesting that either a lower quality plan be added for the remainder, or the "Natural Area" be reduced. He also stated that the \$100,000 annual investment from the city was probably unrealistic, and could not be scaled to other DNAs. Doug presented a list of funding opportunities, and Commissioners and Hartley Nature Center Executive Director Tom O'Rourke added other possibilities

Several commissioners emphasized that Hartley is "special" (6% of Duluth's green space, 200,000+ users annually), and that "showcasing" Hartley might be worth this "special" focus, resulting in many volunteers and community-wide education. Jim responded that \$800,000 over 5 years might be possible.

NRC will consider the plan over the next month, with possible finalization at their December meeting. For background, see the Minnesota Land Trust Nov 2019 [Management Plan for the Hartley Natural Area](#), one of several NAs which make up the Duluth Natural Areas Program.

**Natural Resource Coordinator** Diane Desotelle limited her report to the Hartley plan.

**City Forester** Clark Christenson noted:

- Pine Management Plan will be communicated next spring (too much data for zoom).
- An Urban Forest Management Plan is being developed.
- Ash removals continue, and show that Emerald Ash Borer is more widespread than expected. Clark recommends that if you have an ash in your yard, plan for removal - sooner rather than later.

**Director of Parks, Properties, and Libraries** Jim Filby-Williams announced that acquisition of \$7.4 million of tax forfeited land is nearing final steps. Funding is in place, and goals for parcel selection have been approved. Memoranda of agreement with the county to establish process should be concluded by the end of this month.

Submitted by Barb Akre

## Natural Resources Commission (via WebEx), October 7, 2020

**Natural Resources Management Program Plan (NRMPP):** Jason Naber reported initial steps toward a first-ever comprehensive plan for Duluth to manage our natural resources. Jason is a Biologist/Lead Ecologist for Emmons & Olivier Resources, Inc. ([EOR](#)), contracted to help define strategies, priorities, funding mechanisms, and how best to work with existing partners, such as [One Watershed/One Plan](#).

John Swenson, of UMD's Department of Earth & Environmental Sciences, presented "**Bluff to Beach: Sand sources, sinks, and pathways in far western Lake Superior – implications for the genesis and evolution of Minnesota Point**", adding depth to Anna Hess's September Dune Restoration report. Park Point is a 1000-year-old barrier island, which separates Lake Superior from the St. Louis River Estuary - the river mouth "drowned" due to post-glacial Lake floor rebound. South Shore bluff erosion is the dominant source of natural sand deposition today, offset by storm erosion. Current problems result from Increasing lake levels and storm severity and frequency, which increase erosion, and breakwaters (primarily the Superior entry), which trap sand flow and "starve the barrier". John described barrier islands as "one of the most dynamic/ephemeral landforms on earth", and noted that "geologic literature is replete with examples of barrier systems reaching 'tipping point' from which there is no recovery." Beach nourishment with dredged sands, riprap, etc. can help, but partial armoring "will simply shift the locus of erosion towards the center of the barrier". Other options include taking sand from the Lake floor, and piping sand across the Superior entry. A comprehensive long-term plan is needed to preserve Minnesota Point.

### **Natural Resource Coordinator Report:** Diane Desotelle

Invasive species control projects, including restoration and replanting, continue. Public virtual overview of Hartley Native Plant Community Management Plan set for October 21.

The city's deer hunting season has begun.

Hawk Ridge is seeing lots of raptors and people, despite COVID-reduced education.

### **Foresters Report:** Clark Christensen

Addition of two park maintenance workers brings number of full-time staff to the most ever.

Community Forestry and AmeriCorps members help tree inventory, outreach & education.

Tree planting is wrapping up with about 20 trees to be overwintered in a gravel bed.

Ash removals will continue into winter.

### **Directors Report:** Jim Filby-Williams

Property parks & libraries layoffs will end by January 1st.

Three different approaches to shoreline restoration are taking shape:

Ledges: surrender eroding trail, no plans to reconstruct, land resorts to Ledges

Brighton Beach: obliterate infrastructure close to shoreline, naturalize paved space, construct new road couple hundred feet inland

River: resiliently rebuild in same location (not subject to same forces as lake)

\$300,000 from FEMA (early 2021) will help identify vulnerable shoreline, potential solutions.

**Announcements, Questions:**

Trout Unlimited invested thousands of dollars in Coffee Creek restoration, so opposes Enger Golf Course development due to potential harm to the creek's cold water fishery.

US Steel and Federal partners will add 1.6 miles to Heritage Trail. An interpretive plan (cultural, ecological history) is being developed, though community engagement and identifying priorities and resources are difficult without being together in person.

Submitted by Barb Akre

## Natural Resources Commission (via WebEx), September 2, 2020

New City of Duluth Sustainability Officer Mindy Granley spoke about her vision and first six months of work. She sees economy and society as existing within and dependent on a sustainable environment, and sees her own role as threefold: demonstrating, measuring and communicating, and inspiring projects for sustainable change. Her work to date has included:

- Developing climate change mitigation metrics
- Securing \$450,000 in grants, scholarships, collaboration, and support workers from Greencorps,, Americorps, UMD, and LSC
- Creating a Climate Action Work Plan using existing city documents (e.g. Imagine Duluth 2035)
- Working on the July 2020 Mayor's Climate Letter
- Exploring existing projects and opportunities (city solar site survey, Energy Plan Commission, statewide building energy standards, internal energy policy)
- Communications, including a soon-to-launch portal [duluthmn.gov/sustain](http://duluthmn.gov/sustain)

In response, the NRC welcomed Mindy's "working across the silos" in Duluth.

Duluth Natural Resources Coordinator Diane Desotelle presented an overview of the Park Point Beach Nourishment project, which addresses erosion of residential property due to increasingly severe storms. This multi-agency project will place 120,000 cubic yards of dredge materials (89% sand) between the ship canal and about 10<sup>th</sup> street during 2020. Safety testing is still a concern, but data so far show low levels of heavy metals, dioxins, and turbidity. Diane described this project as "helpful, but not a permanent fix", and the NRC agreed that a longer term strategy - and perhaps a 20-year plan - is needed.

**MN DNR District Manager Anna Hess** followed with discussion of **Park Point Dune Restoration**. Another multi-agency effort, this project develops guidelines for the public on dune ecology and best management (and "backyard") practices related to water and vegetation. Although owner placement of riprap is legal, this group discourages it because it increases blowout. The NRC asked about related problems on the rocky North Shore. Anna agreed they are serious, but very different and outside the work of this particular program.

**Natural Resource Coordinator** reported:

- A Hartley Native Plant Program timeline, looking toward NRC finalization in December
- A signed contract to enact Duluth's Natural Resource Management Plan
- St. Louis River land acquisition parcel list, to be finalized by the end of 2020, with public meetings and hearings the first half of 2021
- The *E. coli* streams report, now final and available on the NRC website

**City Forester Clark Christenson** reported that the COVID-reduced staff will prioritize (for safety reasons) the removal of 500-600 ash trees due to the Emerald Ash Borer. Ultimately, the goal is 1 on 1 replacement, but that may not happen immediately due to staffing issues. If ordered trees cannot be planted, a tree sale to the public may be considered.

**Director of Public Administration Jim Filby Williams** reported:

- Storm Damage remediation plans for Brighton Beach
- Saint Louis River Natural Area Plan to be announced next week
- A “very preliminary” agreement with a multifamily housing developer for a part of Enger
- EPA funded acquisition and protection of Pontlana Woods on Park Point

**Announcements:**

- National Water Trail Maps are newly available and free at the DeWitt Seitz building.
- Arbor Day in Duluth is the 3rd Tuesday in September. This year will be virtual, focusing on Ash with perhaps a video, probably hosted on the city’s website, and maybe social media.

Submitted by Barb Akre

## **Duluth Natural Resources Commission - June - July 2020**

Due to COVID-19, April and May meetings were cancelled, and summer meetings were held virtually via WebEx. The report below summarizes the work of the NRC over the summer.

### **City of Duluth Guidelines for Selecting Tax-Forfeit Open Space Parcels for City**

**Ownership and Protection** (<https://duluthmn.gov/media/WebSubscriptions/196/20200702-196-11944.pdf>) were introduced at the June 3rd meeting, discussed in detail at a special meeting June 22nd, adopted July 1st, and then sent to Planning Commission .

**St. Louis River One Watershed One Plan:** The NRC agreed to submit city-specific comments to this program, which is coordinated by the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources and parallel to the MN Pollution Control Agency's 10-year major watershed assessment program, by the June 26th deadline.

**Duluth Natural Resources Management Plan** (<https://duluthmn.gov/media/9849/20-12aa-rfp-duluth-natural-resource-mgmt-program-plan.pdf>): Duluth Natural Resources Coordinator Diane Desotelle announced in July that 10 proposals have been received, and grant applications have been submitted for EPA/GLRI (Great Lakes Restoration Initiative) funding.

**Duluth Natural Areas** (<https://duluthmn.gov/parks/natural-resources/dnap/>). Both St. Louis River and Hartley Natural Area Designations have been approved by the NRC and sent to City Council. The August 5th NRC meeting will serve as the initial public meeting for an updated Hartley Native Plant Community Management Plan.

### **Duluth Streams Bacterial Source ID Study:**

In July, Steve Gruber of Burns & McDonnell reported that investigations of Keene and Tischer Creeks implicated birds, but not dogs, as sources of *E. coli*. A small number of tests for human sources suggested further monitoring might be advisable. His final report will recommend priorities, additional monitoring, and best management practices.

**Duluth Urban Area Streams TMDL report** (<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/duluth-urban-area-streams-watershed>) was open for public comments June 22nd through July 22nd, the NRC noted.

**Potential Sale of City-owned Lands:** Director of Property, Parks and Libraries Jim Filby Williams reported in June that the City Council had requested options for adding funds by selling properties, and recommended that this response to the COVID-19 budget emergency would present a good opportunity to set up guidelines and process for now and in the future.

In July, he reported his intent to bring to the Commission a draft, drawing from the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, a 2012 Mayor's Task Force report, and Guidelines for Tax-Forfeit Parcel Selection. Commissioner Krumwiede suggested additional consideration of National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System.

**Forestry:** City Forester Clark Christiansen communicated that crews have been sharply cut due to COVID-19 budget concerns so that work on ash tree removal, pruning and tree removal from the Thanksgiving storm, tree planting, pine thinning, and tree inventories for boulevards and parks was severely curtailed. In June, he reported that planting of 500 boulevard trees had begun and was on track, but by July, the drought required watering trees 4-5 days per week. Crews were falling behind on the 2020 goal of removing 400-500 ash trees, but still hoped to finish planting new boulevard trees.

Submitted by Barb Akre

## **Natural Resources Commission: February 5th, 2020**

All 9 members of Duluth's NRC, including new member Tiffany Sprague, attended the regular monthly meeting in City Hall Room 330 from 6:00 to 7:45 PM. Four city staff persons and four audience members were present.

Audience member Louise Levy encouraged NRC participation in the MN Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture's annual meeting, to be held in Duluth October 8-9.

Member Beth Kleinke will resign, leaving a vacancy which may be filled from past applicants.

Duluth's NR Coordinator Diane Desotelle presented a draft of a comprehensive Natural Resources Management Plan.

Commissioners submitted comments, including the suggested addition of a section on staff and funding requirements for implementation of priorities, which will determine how much can be accomplished. Diane expects this plan to require 12-18 months' work for completion. |

Revisions of the DNAP (Duluth Natural Areas Plan) Ordinance will govern specific plans currently under development and approval for Hartley and the St. Louis River, as well as future Natural Area plans. The latter have been approved by NRC and are making their way through the Planning Commission and City Council. Access the plans at <https://duluthmn.gov/parks/natural-resources/dnap/>.

City Forester Clark Christianson discussed a proposed tree inventory, an upcoming tree planting initiative, updating of the 2003 Magney-Snively Plan, Emerald Ash Borer management, and invasive species control.

Director of City Administration Jim Filby Williams' report focused on land transfers and acquisition.

Current negotiations with the county related to \$4.8 million tax forfeit land will address parcels with recreational value, ecological value, and sustainable development. Two Golf Course parcels will be developed according to preliminary plans and developers expected to be selected in March. NRC members proposed that NRC should have a role in city land sales, some of which could be significant to their mission. All agreed that such a procedure might be included in the developing NR Management Plan.

The audience was invited to comment at the end of the meeting; LWV's Myrna Matheson suggested the use of microphones so that the public could more easily hear the proceedings.

Submitted by Barb Akre and Myrna Matheson

## **The Natural Resources Commission**

The Natural Resources Commission meets the first Wed. of every Month - 6pm in Rm. 330. Barb Akre, Myrna Matheson and Sally Munger attended the Nov. and Sally Munger attended the Dec. meeting. The major topics of discussion were the Tree Count and the St Louis River Natural Areas plan. A final vote on the plan will occur sometime in January 2020.

Submitted by Sally Munger

## **Natural Resources Commission, January 8, 2020**

Because the first Wednesday was New Year's Day, the NRC met at 6:30 pm Jan 8th in Rm 155.

Discussion of a Dec 2019 report from Duluth CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) focused on known plantings or populations of black locust, non-native Phragmites, and Norway maple, all watch-listed for Early Detection and Rapid Response.

It was noted that Sarah Foltz Jordan, Senior Pollinator Conservation Specialist for the Xerxes Society, represents Duluth on the Governor's Committee on Pollinator Protection.

The St. Louis River Natural Area Management Plan was finalized, approved and directed to the Planning Commission, together with the Hartley Plan.

Upcoming revision of the 2002 DNAP (Duluth Natural Areas Plan) Ordinance will address timelines for land acquisition and scale levels of ecological value/protection.

Work on Merritt Creek headwaters, Amity Creek road restoration, Kingsbury invasive species control, and Munger Landing remediation is planned and funded.

The recent vacancy on the Commission will be filled by Tiffany Sprague, who has worked with water resources and urban watersheds. At least one other position will soon open up.

Submitted by Barbara Akre and Myrna Matheson