

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission
March 6, 2024

7 Commissioners Present. 2 Not Present.
Kate Kubiak and Alison P. Staff Present
Called to Order at 6:06.
February 7, 2024 Minutes Approved.
Meeting closed at 7:00.

City Deer Bow Hunt report from Arrowhead Bowhunters Association President Phil Lockette:
176 deer harvested in 2023. No safety issues and fewer deer-car crashes since herd is now at a maintenance size. All local hunters. No crossbows.

Buckingham Creek Restoration Project report from Tim Beaster:
SLSSWD grants for renewing this cold-water stream as it meanders through Enger golf course. The work will be done this spring and summer to be finished before trout spawning season, and in coordination with city golf course renovation construction this summer.

Hartley Dam Project will be presented at a public hearing in April and a vote for best plan will be in May. More information about storm water runoff from Woodland Avenue, and Woodland neighborhood needs to be added to project plans.

Substantial meetings coming up in April and May.
No Public comment

Submitted by Margaret West

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission February 7, 2024

The meeting started and ended as scheduled. All nine commissioners attended. Two staff were present.

Agenda and reports room copy were provided to the public.

The bylaws were read by Chair Lindgren opened up for discussion.

N R Coordinator Kate Kubiak presented work plans for 2024. Written copy available to public.
Highlights:

1. Tree planting at Amity and Mission Creek land tracts – over 160 acres -at no cost to the city, will be planted in partnership with The Nature Conservancy
2. Buckthorn removal by contract crews, funded by an EPA grant in Hartley Park, Chambers Grove, Hartley Nature Center will replant with native species under their own grant.
3. Prescribed burns in 4 locations will be conducted by Duluth Fire Dept
4. Continued support of MN point and Section 111 erosion study with US Corps of Engineers
5. Hartley Dam feasibility plan will be taken up in April and May

Forester's report-given by Kate Kubiak for Clark Christenten:

1. Substantial tree pruning has been accomplished during this mild winter, including preventative pruning of White Pine on MN Point for prevention of blister rust.

Director Jim Filby Williams report/plans:

1. Payment of Land acquisition of tax forfeited lands complete
2. New Mayor 's priority for developing more single-family homes. NR Department has not been informed of direction from the new administration. Director asked for information gathering and reflection by Commissioners. The Commission would like opportunity for input to NR Department and Planning Dept. concerning stormwater management, etc.

NR Commission 2024 meeting schedule and tentative topics provided.

Submitted by Margaret West

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission Meeting December 6, 2023

Called to order at 7:00

All Commissioners in attendance except Lori Dando.

New commissioner added: Micheal Raichel, a professional forester who has lived in Duluth one year.

Staff in attendance: Kate Kubiak, Clark Christenson Absent: Jim Filby-Williams

Agenda and Nov. 1 minutes approved.

New business:

1. Application by Superior Vista complex for tree removal on city property to open view of Lake Superior. City forester will grant application. No action required by commission.
2. Presentation on EAB and Climate change by Chippewa National Forest researcher Brian Palik. Black Ash wetlands cover 1.2 million acres in MN. The Black Ash is a foundational species, so loss of this canopy would disrupt the entire ecosystem. Research is underway for the best replacement species; may be Swamp White Oak, Balsam Poplar, Silver Maple natives.
3. Proposed Forestry projects; Kate Kubiak: Tree planting in Mission and Amity creek watersheds and Riley Road hayfields. There is money through the IRA for tree planting. Hartley pond reconstruction project meeting had good public attendance/input. Timeline has been extended.
4. City forester report: EAB removal on boulevards nearly completed. Replanting with diversity. Pruning into March.

No new announcements

Public question by citizen: asking for more bike lanes. Rain garden storm water plans and street tree plantings in Lincoln Park district. Staff have those items in the reconstruction plan.

Meeting adjourned at 7:20 Email received on Dec 15 that January meeting has been cancelled.

Submitted by Margaret West

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission

October 4, 2023

City Staff present: 3, Commission members present :8, Absent:1

Meeting length:1 hr. 10 min

September meeting minutes were approved Agenda was approved.

Issues covered: Old Business: Three watersheds that the city of Duluth will prioritize in supporting the Natural Resources Management Plan are: Amity, Tischer and Keene, which will be done within the existing budget. No extra money will be requested. The Commission voted unanimously to approve.

Guest speaker from SSSLWCD, Tim Beaster updated 2 projects: 1: removal of derelict culverts at Maryland street - Bagley nature area. Abandoned for 70 years, the culvert inhibited sediment transport and fish migration. Trout can now access 2.5 miles of stream into Hartley Park. 2: Miller Creek restoration between Haines Road and Sundby - by Kohls. This is the largest flood plain in the city of Duluth. This was ditched in the 1930s for a celery farm, which in past decades has eroded, measured higher stream temperatures, and ruined former trout stream habitat. Funds from Legacy Fund (823K,) GLRI (115K,) Coastal Program (95K.) The city approved cutting of poplar trees to be used on site in bank construction. Higher value trees were planted. Native vegetation is filling in and native shrubs will shade creek to cool stream temperatures. Area will be monitored for big rain/flood events.

Future projects of City Natural Resources:

Buckingham Creek, as it flows through Enger golf course. The city is partnering with DNR to rehabilitate creek and ponds to enhance fish life, as Buckingham Creek measured as the coldest water of any stream in Duluth and has best chance of supporting fish with climate change. City is partnering with MN DNR to apply for 400,000\$ for project.

East branch of Amity Creek: PA Federal Grant was issued of 300,000\$ for every two years to repair sediment and erosion problems. Partnering with Trout Unlimited group, as this is the best Trout stream and largest watershed in Duluth.

Kingsbury Creek near Proctor ball fields project, which has been impacted by floods and sediment, is a high priority NRDA at creek as it flows into Kingsbury Bay. A300K grant plus 200K to be matched by DNR was just awarded. Also, a match from Fish and Wildlife Service was sought. City of Proctor also on board.

A Coastal grant was awarded to fill out culvert inventory. Trout stream habitat will take priority for repairs.

Several commissioners commended the restoration work being completed and future projects.

Hartley Park DNAP partnered with Wild Ones chapter to remove invasive plants and create a new demonstration garden with native plants on September 27.

Kate Kubiak gave the forester's report in absence of the city forester. City street tree planting is finishing. Plans to plant more trees in Mission and Amity/Lester areas. Bids for thinning trees have been posted, but no bids are in. A need to strategize for more funding.

Grant was awarded for the Magney/Snively Natural area to the MN Land Trust by Sustain our Great Lakes Program \$500K. There is an updated management plan to survey invasive species and restore the 120-acre forest area. A commissioner asked why use money to survey invasives, as they are known, rather than looked at.

Ongoing project of acquiring and protecting the upper reaches of Amity Creek, 400-500 contiguous acres that are partly private owners and Park Hill cemetery offered for sale. State and Federal grants are likely to get approval as this affects 1500 feet of Amity Creek habitat. This matter may go to the City Council on October 30.

Public Comment: 0

Meeting adjourned on time.

Report Submitted by Margaret West

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission

October 5, 2022

Only Commissioner Allison Ray was absent. After approving the agenda and the 9/7/22 meeting minutes, a new Commissioner, Lori Dando, was introduced.

Jim Filby Williams gave an update on the Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project, which involves two initiatives: the purchase of tax forfeited parcels with funds from an EPA grant and the conveyance of tax forfeited parcels to the City that is of equal value to Potlach lands deeded to the County. A detailed set of criteria were used to select the parcels for acquisition within 5 areas of the City, balancing development potential with land protection. In total, roughly 700 parcels covering about 2,400 acres (of 2,800 available acres) were selected for transfer from the County to the City. The acquired parcels will either be: added to existing park areas, included in designated Natural Areas, or used for storm water management. The financial transactions must be completed by the end of 2022, but other follow-up actions may take up to three years. They hope to get the DNAP designations completed first. About 400 acres of remaining tax forfeited land could either be put up for auction by the County or some of them could conceivably be acquired for other uses by other departments, such as green infrastructure development. For those acquired parcels platted within water, the City will except out the open water and the riparian areas in the property deeds.

Kate Kubiak gave updates about the Miller Creek Restoration, where the first phase has been completed, and Tischer Creek where two corrugated culverts near Hartley Nature Center were replaced by an arch culvert to improve fish passage.

A letter of support for the Park Fund levy referendum is being prepared that will be shared at public information events and may be submitted as a letter to the editor.

In Kate Kubiak's staff report, she noted that Commissioners of 10 state departments recently toured the Chester Creek restoration project, participants in the national Natural Areas Conference took a field trip of Duluth's Natural Areas, City staff participated in an Arbor Day celebration, and about 100 yellow lady slipper plants were moved at Brighton Beach to prevent their destruction from construction. The 1st annual Natural Resources Management Program Plan meeting will be held on 10/7.

Several announcements were made:

1. The City and the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve are hosting a neighborhood engagement event to highlight river restoration on 10/5.
2. A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Hartley Nature Center expansion on 10/17.
3. The Essential Spaces Parks and Recreation Plan will go before the City Council on 10/10.
4. The Natural Resources Resource Institute will be leading an effort to audit storm water ordinances for Duluth and the surrounding communities to determine how their ordinances might be inhibiting the development of green infrastructure. A request was made for a presentation to the NRC about how the City is already expanding green infrastructure.

Submitted by Barb Huberty, LWV-Environmental Action Committee

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission

August 3, 2022

Six members were present and two were absent at this in-person meeting. The agenda and the June meeting minutes were approved. Sophia Green was introduced as a new commissioner. She is currently a graduate student at the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs and her project work on community wellbeing in the St. Louis River Estuary is being conducted under the auspices of the Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes Ecology and Toxicology Laboratory. It was announced that Brandon Krumweide is stepping down as an NRC member, effective at the conclusion of the meeting. Officer Nominations were made: Nancy Schuldt was nominated to be the Vice Chair and John Lindgren was nominated to be the Chair. Judy Gibbs will stay on as secretary. These nominees will be voted on in September.

Kate Kubiak gave an update on two, parallel planning processes for the Tischer Creek Watershed. By the end of December 2023, GEI consultants will complete both a roadmap to climate resilience and an engineering-based feasibility study to evaluate how to mitigate thermal impacts from the Hartley Pond. These projects being let by the MN Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), with assistance from the cities of Duluth and Rice Lake and a technical team. The climate resilience effort is being done because Tischer Creek is a cold-water stream and it has the potential to heat up to a temperature that is lethal for trout (77 degrees). For this projects, existing data will be collated, strategies to reduce thermal increases will be identified and prioritized, and potential funding (such as infrastructure funding) sources for the projects will be identified. The feasibility study will evaluate four strategies to reduce thermal loading specifically from Hartley Pond: (1) No action, (2) remove the dam & make a new stream channel, (3) divert Tischer Creek around Harley Pond, and (4) convert the Hartley dam into a rock arch rapids. The feasibility study will evaluate flood storage, impacts to wetlands, and sediment transport. Examples of similar successful projects will be shared.

Jim Filby Williams explained that the Council will receive an ordinance and a resolution at their August 15th meeting to set a November referendum to increase the Parks & Recreation levy. The referendum will ask voters to change the Park Fund levy from a fixed amount to a fixed percentage of property value, as is done with other funds. This will enable the Park Fund to grow over time in order to sufficiently fund the programs. The proposal should increase the fund from \$2.6M/year to about \$4.2M/year. It will be important for people to understand that this funding would be for park assets (including lands, not just structures.) It would be the intent to increase the annual capital budget for the natural resources program from \$55K/yr to \$270K/yr. A special NRC work group was created, as per their bylaws, to develop a letter of support for this effort.

Kate Kubiak gave the Natural Resources Coordinator Report:

- The City obtained a \$100K grant to protect community forests and a \$150K grant to address emerald ash borer. In the last 2 months, 150 ash trees have been removed.
- As part of the National Natural Areas Conference that will be held @ the DECC this fall, the City will give tours of the Magney-Snively Natural Area, Hawk Ridge, and Grassy Point.

- The public lands transfer is moving forward and should be complete by end of year.
- The 2nd annual Natural Resources Management Program Plan (NRMPP) meeting will be held in September, at which time the first annual state of the NRMPP will be given.
- An application has been made to the Outdoor Heritage Fund for a stream restoration project at Buckingham Creek in Enger Park, which, if approved, would be coordinated with the planned golf course reconfiguration. A presentation about the project was made to the Outdoor Heritage Council in September and the project is ranked 14th out of 54.
- The Goose Management Plan was not brought to the City Council yet because of some logistical uncertainty associated with it being part of the wild rice restoration work. If the edits are significant, the plan may need to come back to the NRC.

Jim Filby Williams obtained a \$400K grant to purchase 80 acres of Forest Hill Cemetery property, but the other needed grant was not awarded, so a funding application will be submitted to NOAA's coastal program). This property is an important headwaters area for Tischer Creek. There was one public comment of support for the NRC's work on the public land transfer.

Submitted by Barb Huberty, LWV-Environmental Action Committee

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission Meeting City Hall, June 1, 2022

Five of eight members were present, along with two staff members and Council Member Tomanek. The meeting began with **public comments**. The first commenter requested that the Emerald Ash Borer management plan be updated to include perpetual treatment in lieu of removal. The second commenter requested that the NRC advocate to local and state road authorities for more vegetation in road projects (medians and boulevards) and that the NRC review road projects. The third commenter asked that the forthcoming contract for tree thinning contain language about protecting trees near those being removed, along with a payment for damages clause.

The **Goose Management Plan** has been finalized and the DNRC voted unanimously to adopt it. Consideration for adopting it will be on the Council's June 13th agenda. Once approved, the MN Dept. of Natural Resources will undertake the next steps to obtain a permit. However, there are many outstanding issues that need be resolved that may preclude obtaining a permit before the roundup being scheduled by the WI Dept. of Natural Resources. Those issues include: coordination with the involved agencies (including the USDA Wildlife Services in MN), addressing avian influenza precautions, finding an outlet for the carcasses if the Duluth Zoo doesn't want them for mammal feed, deciding who will submit the permit application to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and expected permit approval delays due to USFWS's backlog of permit approval requests.

The **July meeting has been cancelled** due to the Fourth of July holiday.

Kate Kubiak and Jim Filby Williams discussed the process used to **fill DNRC vacancies**. There is a candidate to consider for the current vacancy with whom staff will meet soon. NRC member Brian Frederickson submitted his resignation last week, so now there is a new vacancy to fill. Three current NRC members have terms that expire on 8/31/22. If they choose not to extend their service for another term, there will be more vacancies. Duluth staff inform local natural resource agencies and organizations when they need to fill vacancies. A DNRC member requested that efforts be made to retain Tribal representation as well as a cross-section of gender and race on the Commission.

Kate Kubiak is developing an application for Outdoor Heritage Funds to **restore Buckingham Creek's hydrologic connectivity** through Enger Golf Course. This is a cold-water trout stream that supports native Brook Trout, but there are currently three impoundments that limit upstream migration during the spawning season. The goal is to conduct this work when Enger Golf Course is being rehabilitated in 2023. Kate is also busy working with the CISMA organization on **invasive species management**.

There being no other staff reports or announcements, the meeting adjourned at 6:40 pm.

Submitted by Barb Huberty, LWV - Environmental Action Committee

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission Virtual Meeting, Wednesday, April 6, 2022

All members, staff, and speakers were present, including the new Natural Resources Coordinator, Kate Kubiak. She is a long-time resident with experience as environmental staff for MnDOT and as a conservationist with the South St. Louis County Soil & Water Conservation District (SSLCSWCD)

The 4/6/22 agenda and the 3/2/22 minutes were approved. There was no old business.

Commissioners heard from Tim Beaster about the **Miller Creek Realignment Project** that SSLCSWCD will undertake downstream of Haines Rd adjacent to Hwy 53. This ~\$1M project will convert the straightened ditch into a meandering stream with shoreline vegetation to help address a temperature impairment and improve water quality and aquatic and terrestrial habitat. It will be the largest project of this type in Duluth. The SWCD requested that the NRC approve harvesting of a nearby balsam poplar stand because they need a lot of large woody material to create shoreline habitat and grade controls. The proposed stand is appropriate for harvesting because it is aging; part of it will be impacted by MN Power's Duluth Loop Reliability Project; it will be affected by a rise in water table due to the project; and it will save ~\$50K in project costs. A cedar swamp community will be established as part of the project. The NRC approved the harvesting of the desired trees west of Tributary 1 for this project.

Tom Keefe, a licensed goose management professional, made an informational presentation about the **development of a goose management plan** for the City. This is desired so permits can be obtained to harvest geese in Duluth to help reduce depredation of wild rice stands that are being seeded as a St. Louis River Area of Concern project. The plan will identify non-lethal and lethal methods to manage goose populations. Jim Filby Williams said this plan is strongly supported by staff and the Mayor, so the City is paying for the plan and MNDNR is helping prepare it. The City won't cover the cost of actual goose control efforts. A draft plan will be presented to the NRC for endorsement in May, after which it will be shared with the public and brought to the Council for approval. Hopefully, this can be accomplished by June, in time for a 2022 round-up. The plan can also be applied to other areas with goose problems.

Jim Filby Williams explained that, in order to adequately implement the Natural Resources Management Program Plan, **the current budgeting methods for natural resources need to change**. The primary funding source for this work is the Parks Fund which was established in 2012. The intended purpose of the Park levy was to provide a floor below which the parks budget could never fall, but, instead, it has been treated as a ceiling. Since 2012 the natural resources budget has been significantly cut all but one year. This is because the Parks budget is not allowed to automatically account for annual personnel cost increases (~\$70K/yr), as other Divisions and Departments do. To compensate for Parks personnel cost increases, the capital budget is reduced by that amount. What used to be a \$1M/yr budget is now about \$450K/yr. If this continues, staff cuts will result. The Executive Committee will develop a resolution supporting a budget process that is equitable with all other City budgets and present it in May.

Clark Christenson reported that they are **moving forward with tree planting plans** but need the

snow to melt.

The City requires that **tree contractors are licensed, but does not make a list of licensed contractors available to the public.** This makes it easier for unlicensed contractors to work in the City. A meeting attendee asked if the NRC can recommend that such a list be made available at no cost to the public. This will be discussed with the Executive Committee and a plan discussed at the May meeting.

Also at the May meeting, the NRC will discuss restructuring how the agenda is developed so it can be done more efficiently and in a manner similar to other Boards and Commissions. The May meeting will be in person without a simultaneous virtual option.

Submitted by Barb Huberty, LWV Duluth Environmental Action Committee

February 2, 2022

The meeting was held virtually and began at 6 p.m. The primary items on the agenda were the Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project and the Natural Resources Management Program Plan.

Natural Resources Management Program Plan Updates – Diane Desotelle provided an update on the plan and provided an overview of the implementation chapter, which lays out 3 proposed implementation levels (existing, baseline, and preferred) with varying levels of staff time and budget. The current level of funding for the work is \$55,000 and 1 FTE; the preferred level of eventual funding is 2 FTEs with a budget of \$350,000 - \$500,000. The **existing** implementation level includes nurturing projects already in process, reactive operations & maintenance costs, and administrative tasks. **Baseline** implementation level would include land protection work, assessment work, and repair projects; **preferred** implementation level would include the ability to take on new projects. Annual coordination activities will include a spring partner meeting, solicitation for new projects in late summer, data collection in the fall for project evaluation, and a winter partner meeting to rank priorities. The completed plan will be sent to the NRC and posted to the website by February 23, to allow for review before a vote on it at the March 2 meeting:

<https://duluthmn.gov/parks/parks-planning/progress-in-the-park/natural-resources-program-plan/>

Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project – Jim Filby Williams shared and reviewed a memo he is drafting which outlines the Public Lands Strategy. There were suggestions from the Commission members on the need to clarify the percentages of the 2400 acres of land proposed for protection that fall into the various categories (park lands, St. Louis River natural area, and neither). There was also discussion of how to build public support for permanent land protections and mention of the need to make the parks fund whole. A small working group will work with Diane Desotelle to finalize the strategy for final review and approval at the March meeting. There were several requests that the draft be shared, and a response that it will be made available on the website: <https://duluthmn.gov/planning-development/public-lands-realignment/>

Natural Resource Coordinator Report – Diane Desotelle reported that the land acquisition process is moving forward. The Natural Resources Coordinator position has been posted and will close February 6th. Invasive species management work across the City is proceeding, with a focus on getting contracts in place for projects planned for 2022. The Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) has a grant to conduct native plant assessments across the City. Diane recommended that MLT provide an information session on the work they have completed at Hartley and the Brewer/Piedmont area for the NRC. The Army Corps of Engineers is planning a charrette in March to lay out work on the study that will look at federal structures on Minnesota Point and whether they are contributing to the erosion problems.

Forester's Report – Clark Christensen reported that the revitalization project will be open for bidding in April. Bidding is out for ash removal on City streets; grant funds are being sought ash removal. Some outreach is happening to homeowners with ash trees on private property, but funding is not available to assist with removal. In response to a question regarding clean-up in the 2016 blowdown area (Hartley over to Howard Gnesen Rd.) Clark reported that The Nature Conservancy has done some brush removal in the area and planted a mix of trees in those area.

Director's Report – Jim Filby Williams reported on the City's purchase of private lands for

protection. City Council authorized an application to the USFS for federal funds to purchase 72 acres in the Amity Creek watershed. About 500 acres of high quality contiguous forest parcels have been identified and efforts to protect them in various ways are in the works. 50 acres of land will be transferred from U.S. Steel to the City to be added to the St. Louis River Natural Area (does not include Boathouse Point).

Announcements - Mindy Granley will be presenting the City's Climate Action Plan to the City Council on February 16th.

Public Comments – there were several comments from members of the public two comments – one expressing concern about the need for permanent protections for the tax forfeit properties being transferred to the City; a question about the process for approving proposed trails; frustration with the platform used for the NRC meetings which does not allow members of the public attending to see other individuals attending, among other issues.

Submitted by Julie O'Leary
Natural Resources Committee

City of Duluth Natural Resources Commission Meeting, January 5, 2022

The meeting was held virtually and began at 6 p.m. The primary items on the agenda were the Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project and the Natural Resources Management Program Plan.

Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project – Jim Filby Williams reviewed the public lands strategy, which proposes a 3-pronged approach to protect approximately 2400 acres of tax-forfeit open space. Lands are divided into 3 categories – 75% of the identified lands will be designated as parklands; another 16% will fall into the Duluth Natural Areas Program (DNAP), with 60% of these parcels being in the St. Louis River corridor. Williams stated that these lands will have “adequately robust protections” because a supermajority of both the City Council and the Planning Commission is required to change the designation. The remaining 9% of identified lands are smaller, isolated parcels in otherwise developed areas that are on steep slopes, are wetlands, or important for water management but do not meet the requirements for parks or the DNAP designation. State statute limits protections to 30 years for lands conveyed for less than market value; after that, another strategy would be needed for these parcels. Staff is considering a recommendation to create a third category for long-term protection of lands important for stormwater and floodwater management. Commission members indicated support for this, and would like to see a stronger statement in the plan about a commitment to pursue this. Concerns were also expressed about protections for Hawk Ridge and wildlife corridors within the City.

Revisions to the strategy will be made in January, with a return to the Commission for discussion at the February meeting. More information about the Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project is available here:

<https://duluthmn.gov/planning-development/public-lands-realignment/>

Natural Resources Management Program Plan – Diane Desotelle solicited feedback on the plan, which had been presented to the Commission at the December meeting and available for review on the City website. Issues brought forward included problems loading maps, the format and appearance on different types of devices that might be used to view it, the intended audience, how to make it more accessible, and the feasibility of integrating summaries since the plan is dense. The intended audience is primarily City staff and project partners, not necessarily the public.

New Business – The 2022 meeting schedule was discussed. Meetings will remain on the first Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. and decisions about need/cancellation will be made on a month-to-month basis.

Forester’s Report – Clark Christensen presented a year end update on 2021 activities. Below is a summary.

455 trees were removed in 2021, mostly ash, due to emerald ash borer (EAB)

387 trees planted – lower than normal due to EAB and the pandemic

2125 trees were pruned

Trees planted included 25 genera and 40 different species.

56 trees were ordered but not received

EAB continues to be a driving force for removal – 1620 ash trees remain on City streets

Senescence of silver maple is also an issue

Replacement and succession of trees in parks needs to be a priority, with emphasis on parks that lack trees. Enger Park is a particular concern. Some trees were planted on Indian Point in the last year and a half.

Upcoming in 2022:

Sourcing trees through an RFQ, contract growing and growing a limited number themselves;
Developing an urban forest management plan – Rochester has just completed one at a cost of \$85,000.

Director's Report – Jim Filby Williams had no formal report. In response to a question about how the Commission can stress to the City the importance of filling the Natural Resources position when Diane leaves, Williams responded that the position is fully funded in the budget, the position description is written and the process is lined up and ready to go. The hope is to have someone in place before Diane leaves.

Submitted by Julie O'Leary

Duluth Natural Resources Commission Meeting, December 1, 2021

The meeting was held virtually and began at 6 p.m.

The primary item on the agenda was the review of the Natural Resource Management Program Plan. Natural Resources Coordinator Diane Desotelle and contractor Sarah Evenson gave an overview of the plan, which is in the form of a story map and will be presented virtually. Sarah reviewed the plan elements, which include an introduction to the process and program elements; a section defining the program lands and areas included in the plan; a section on natural resource values and needs, which identifies the four lenses used to quantify values – environment, economy, program, and government; a section on program coordination which addresses implementation parameters and a process for prioritizing projects; a section on goals, recommendations and current projects; and a section on funding. A meeting to be held December 14 with the City technical team and partners will introduce a decision support tool to be used for prioritizing projects for 2022.

A draft of the plan /will be posted on the City website approximately December 10 and Commission members were asked to review the plan, identify gaps, and provide comments. Comments and questions from Commission members included a recommendation to include a section on how other cities fund projects, concerns about access for people with disabilities, a suggestion to include video to make the plan more engaging for the public, and suggestions of individuals who could provide photos for the report.

The plan can be viewed here: <https://duluthmn.gov/parks/parks-planning/progress-in-the-park/natural-resources-program-plan/> and the public may submit comments through December 30th. The plan will be discussed again at the January Natural Resources Commission meeting.

Forester's Report – Clark Christensen reported on a proposal by residents on Skyline Parkway to remove trees in the 1300 block of East Skyline that block their view. Neighbors within 200' of the site were invited to a meeting on the issue. Removal is requested by the residents above Skyline. One person expressed displeasure and concern about run-off to properties below Skyline. Other issues raised were regarding use of the parkway by bikers, walkers and joggers, not just residents, and a suggestion that replacement tree planting be required. Discussion that issues with tree removal have been a problem in the past and progress has been made making people aware of the need to consult the City before removing trees. A motion to allow tree clearing in a specified area passed. Christensen will meet with the residents to approve a plan and mark specific trees for removal and a post-cut plan will be required to address erosion.

Natural Resource Coordinator Report – Diane Desotelle reported that St. Louis County approved approximately 1600 acres at Hartley, Piedmont, and Lester as part of the land acquisition process the City is working on. Diane will be departing her position April 1 and her goal is to get the Natural Resource Management Program Plan launched by then. Monthly meetings of the Commission may not be needed in the spring. There was a request to provide updates to the Commission members if meetings are not held. Commission members and one member of the public expressed concern that the public is interested in the Commission's work and the plan and needs to know what is happening, so some kind of information needs to be provided.

Director's Report – no report – director was not present.

Submitted by Julie O'Leary

Duluth Natural Resources Commission Meeting, November 3, 2021

The meeting was held virtually and began at 6 p.m.

Natural Resource Coordinator's Report – Diane DeSotelle reported on several items.

Invasives control contract work is underway at various sites, including Hartley Nature Center, where pollinator gardens are being established. Buckthorn is re-emerging at some sites where control activities have been undertaken and this will be an ongoing issue.

Diane provided an update on the schedule for the Natural Resources Management Program Plan. The plan includes approximately 70 projects, about half are ongoing. Staff will be ranking projects for prioritization at a meeting on December 14th. The anticipated schedule for moving the plan forward is:

- Public information meeting - November 8, 2021
- Preliminary draft of the plan - December 1, 2021
- Presentation of plan to Parks Commission - January 12, 2022
- Final review by Natural Resources Commission - February 2, 2022
- Approval by Natural Resources Commission - March 2, 2022
- City Council approval – March 2022

Diane also provided a brief update on the Public Lands Project, emphasizing inclusion of a total of 2000 acres, of which 1900 are parklands, 3 acres of trails, and 588 acres of St. Louis River lands.

Forester's Report – Clark Christenson reported on a number of activities including:

- The LIDAR project the City is working on with the MN DNR - data is being updated for processing by the U.S. Geological Survey. This process will take 18 – 24 months to complete.
- Buckthorn removal is taking place at Magney-Snively.
- Data compilation is underway for the forest revitalization project.
- A letter is being prepared for property owner(s) along Skyline Parkway regarding tree removal (no specifics provided regarding the particulars).
- Cedar cones are being stratified for planting to provide new seedlings for projects

Director's Report – Jim Filby Williams did not have a report.

There were no comments from the 4 members of the public in attendance.

The issue of increasing problems with dumping along Skyline Parkway was raised as a concern; graffiti along trails was also mentioned by a member of the public. Staff shortages and funding limits make it difficult to address this problem. Jim Filby-Williams reported the City has one staff person doing graffiti removal 3 days/week. The park fund is capped at a significant percentage less than the historical budget and DNR funds available for other projects are restricted from maintenance use. Suggestions from other Commission members included a public awareness campaign about dumping and possible use of cameras at commonly used dump areas. Staff will look into the possibility.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 7 p.m.

Submitted by Julie O'Leary

Natural Resources Commission Meeting June 2, 2021 Submitted by Barb Akre

1. Update on **Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project:**

Link to City website at <https://duluthmn.gov/planning-development/public-landsrealignment/>

Planning and Parks approved quickly; most discussion came from NRC (in August), as it should have. City Council and County Board approval of first set of parcels should follow in September. More information on second set of parcels will be presented and discussed at NRC's October 6th meeting. See more under Director's Report.

2. **Climate Action Work Plan & Sustainability Updates** (Mindy Granley, City of Duluth Sustainability Officer).

Mindy sees her tasks as Sustainability Officer to include (1) addressing environmental challenges and creating a culture of sustainability within the City, (2) measuring and sharing progress on sustainability and carbon reduction goals, and (3) inspiring change through projects and partnerships.

The City Sustainability Advisory Team (CSAT) is charged with developing high-level goals and strategies for climate action and sustainability. CSAT coordinates climate action across city departments - "flow between the silos".

Commissioner Lindgren suggested functional integration through Minnesota Land Trust/Fish & Wildlife's LCD (Land Conservation Design) program. John also recommended building plans for migration to Duluth/population growth into any projects at the local level.

The Climate Action Work Plan must address climate change based on local greenhouse gas emissions inventories and climate vulnerability assessments. A GLISA (Great Lakes Integrated Sciences and Assessments) grant, partnered with MN Lake Superior Coastal Program staff, will help to carry out the plan.

Duluth's current emissions goal, via the Energy Plan Commission, is an 80% reduction by 2050 in municipal emissions, which are just 4-5% of the community total. Municipal emissions have been reduced nearly 50% since 2008.

Now, especially in light of the 2021 IPCC report, we must address the entire community; a Climate Action Work Plan covering the next 3-5 years is due before the end of this year. Timing is good; hopefully we can use monies from the federal infrastructure bill to accomplish goals. Additional funding will be sought, and the Plan must use limited resources efficiently.

Most of Duluth's energy use serves heating, power, and transportation. Pumping water across the city uses 50% of city electricity.

Mindy gave examples of projects planned to reduce emissions and mitigate effects of climate change: a large-scale solar project, the Natural Resources Management Program Plan, shoreline erosion restoration, tree canopy work, thermal district upgrades, city fleet vehicle replacement with electric/hybrids, and partnership projects with existing green infrastructure and equity organizations such as the Great Lakes One Watershed (GLOW).

The Plan will include energy and sustainability standards to guide design of City-owned buildings.

Overall strategies will address buildings, utilities, water quality and flooding, transportation, public health, renewable energy, economic growth, solid waste, carbon sequestration, and community engagement.

3. **Duluth Citizens' Climate Action Plan** (Lora Wedge, Brett Cease). addresses work Duluthians do to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Full presentation available as PowerPoint slides at

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1I_nbaF5q3zrHXME7VRTHkOmzOWbzPgpMR8ESVDiBz0I.

See also <https://www.ecolibrium3.org/DuluthClimateAction/>.

4. **NRC Officer Elections**: Mike Schrage will serve as Chair, Brandon Krumweide as Vice-Chair, Judy Gibbs as Secretary. New Commissioner introduction: Allison Ray.

5. **Natural Resource Coordinator Report** (Diane Desotelle) Brief updates on ongoing development of the Natural Resource Management Program Plan story map, and a Project Survey on the Decision Support Tool (with the EPA).

6. **Foresters Report** (Clark Christenson)

The Arbor Day event requirement for the 3rd Tuesday in September has been waived this year; at best, it will be virtual.

Commissioner observations regarding public safety concerns related to diseased ash on city property are requested.

A public document detailing the process by which the Izaak Walton group can accomplish their volunteer work on Knowlton Creek Forest should be released within a week or two.

7. **Directors' Report**: (Jim Filby Williams)

Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project: The 9/13 deadline may be delayed by isolated parcels with storm water value but no recreational benefit, because proceeds from the voter-approved parks levy cannot be used for these purchases.

Infrastructure Bill: A summary provided by a lobbyist, indicates a competitive process, with large sums for resilience, clean water, contaminant removal, and potentially urban forestry.

Coastal Resilience: About 5 miles of city shoreline along Congdon Blv has been studied = halfway complete. A similar multiyear initiative studying the entirety of Minnesota Point will lead to a long-term plan for the Point.

8. **Announcements**: Virtual meetings will continue at least through next meeting, October 6th.

Natural Resources Commission throughout Summer 2021

June 2, 2021

Diane Desotelle continued presentation of Duluth's first **Natural Resource Management Program Plan (NRMPP)**. The Project defines Management Units based on sub watersheds and neighborhoods. Lands include 12,000 acres to set aside based on natural resource values such as "sensitive lands, trout streams, wildlife, biodiversity, and climate-resiliency; previous work by state and other entities (DNR, MN Biological Survey, Nature Conservancy) provided a foundation. Program Projects fall within four categories: Preservation, Repair, Nurturing, and Assessment.

Sarah Evenson presented results of a survey seeking to learn what is currently being done in the City. The survey found that Repair projects were the most heavily funded: stream restoration, erosion control, invasive management, and planting of native species received the most, with shore and wetland restoration receiving least.

Assessment projects, which received the second most funding, included ecological monitoring, watershed and water quality assessment, infrastructure inspections, and database management from bird banding to forest inventories.

Nurturing efforts included budgeted monies and both staff and volunteer hours for floodplains, flood control, fish and wildlife, forest management, education, and public engagement.

Preservation projects include the Duluth Natural Areas Program and **City-County Tax Forfeit Land Agreement**, to be detailed during upcoming meetings.

In conclusion, lots of people, professionals, and agencies are working on NR in Duluth, but coordination is essential. Only two staff - a forester, the Natural Resources coordinator -are currently funded, but the NRMPP seeks to identify, prioritize and implement projects to be embraced by the City and coordinated and funded by the City and through grants. Stay tuned!

July 7, 2021

The primary purpose of this meeting was presentation and discussion of an **EPA Decision Support Tool**, to be used by Duluth and its partners for project prioritization and implementation of Duluth's (NRMPP). Participants included Commissioners, the NRMPP advisory Technical Team, MN Land Trust, the City's NRMPP contractor (Emmons Olivier Resources with the Hoisington Koegler Group). The process will review each project through lenses of environment, governance, economic, social and resilience lenses. Funding, staff, and natural resource components will guide City and the City partner decisions.

The **Bow Hunt Ordinance Amendment** approved by the NRC had first and second readings at City Council during July.

The [Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project](#) (protecting over 2500 acres of tax forfeit lands which have significant environmental, recreational, and/or storm water management value) was presented to City Council June 21st, and public meetings were held June 29th and 30th. A Map, PowerPoint presentation, video, Development Suitability GIS Analysis, Parcel Selection Guidelines, and detailed list of 2500 acres of parcels proposed for preservation are available at the above link and at [July 26th memo](#).

A USF-GLRI (US Forest Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative) **Grant Application to Plant Trees for EAB** (Emerald Ash Borer infested) **Areas** intends to build a diverse, resilient native plant community for affected areas, a joint effort of the MN Land Trust, Community Action Duluth, and the City.

Natural Resource Coordinator Diane Desotelle will be part of a **City Sustainability Advisory Team** which will contribute to City initiatives related to energy and climate mitigation, climate adaptation and community resiliency, natural resources, sustainable buildings, and waste reduction. High-level sustainability goals with priorities and a climate action work plan are expected by the end of the year.

City Forester Clark Christenson reported continuing “spring” plantings in the midst of drought, 2 dozen extra trees and 20% nondelivery due to strong consumer demand and poor overwintering. Ash injections for EAB will continue, as EAB is generally spread throughout the city with the exception of Gary/New Duluth and Fond du Lac. Eighteen male Amur corktrees (*Phellodendron amurense*) located along 4th street will be removed this summer and replaced next year because the MN Department of Agriculture has found that “not all trees stay within their given sex” and they can therefore become invasive.

August 4, 2021

The first “in-person” meeting of the NRC in over a year was held at the Evergreen Senior Center in West Duluth. Two and a half hours of discussion centered almost entirely on the **Strategic Public Lands Realignment Project**, with Director of Parks, Properties and Libraries Jim Filby-Williams requesting that the Commission approve the total of 2500 acres of over 1000 tax-forfeit parcels, each designated by City-County consensus to be either “protected” (purchased by the City at minimal cost) or “developed” (sold by the County to private ownership). See above (July 7) links for details.

Commissioners felt that the one-week lead time given them to review the parcels and details was insufficient, mentioning several instances of specific parcels which seemed to them to be glaringly misclassified. Moreover, they felt that after they had had considerable input on guidelines to be used in making decisions, they had not been able to see how those guidelines were applied in final parcel designation. They needed, but did not have indication of reasons for the “preserve” or “develop” designation.

City staff, in turn, emphasized the difficulty of working with the county to surrender significant income from the “preserve” parcels, the fragility of the agreement, the need to get NRC approval before timely Planning and Parks Commissions and City Council approval, and the lack of staff to do the work. They also expressed concern that the principle of manageability was lacking but needed in criteria for evaluation. Moreover, permanent protection, even after purchase, depends on establishment of signage, trails, and/or other evidence of “use”.

Both groups agreed that NR Commissioner expertise and additional engagement would be welcome and extremely helpful, and also that GRLI funding might be available for the remaining six areas of parcels which have yet to be analyzed. Yet the need to approve the first five remained urgent. An impressive compromise was reached: the Commission approved the first parcel list presented by city staff for the five project areas, and Director Williams listed seven specific points describing a closer, integral relationship between City staff and NRC for the selection of future parcels; all approved. In addition, Commissioners requested that they receive information about actions required for permanent protection of acquired parcels.

September’s NRC meeting (Wednesday, September 8th, 6:00 PM) will feature **City Sustainability Officer Mindy Granley** speaking about **Duluth’s Climate Action Plan**.

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION (via WebEx) 6:00 PM May 5, 2021

The Commission discussed and voted unanimously to approve the two Amendments to the **Hunting Deer by Bow** Ordinance presented in April:

- Decreasing required setback from active structures from 400 to 250 ft, and
- expediting “hotspot” determination to better react to changes in deer patterns.

Much discussion explored the original ordinance and the overall hunt, from its inception to tracking deer population changes. There was general agreement that the Arrowhead Bowhunters Alliance has done a good job planning and carrying out the hunt over the past sixteen years, and that deer numbers are declining.

Natural Resources Coordinator Report (Diane Desotelle)

The City has contracted with Northern Ecological Services and Boreal Natives for **Invasive Species Control** work. Diane detailed multiple projects in Hartley, Lincoln Park, the Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific Trail, and along the Waabizashikana Trail and Knowlton Creek related to Buckthorn, Barberry, Amur Maple, Wild Parsnip, Siberian Pea, Canada Thistle, Reed Canary Grass, and Knotweed. Goals include:

- Building on past successful efforts
- Eventually, involving neighborhoods in care

The **Natural Resources Management Plan Project** technical team is moving forward with a tool involving both qualitative and quantitative criteria to add accountability and transparency in decision-making, efficient use of staff time, prioritizing, and assessing NRMPP work. Equity and social justice are important components of the tool.

Forester’s Report (Clark Christenson)

Emerald Ash Borer control remains a priority; the EAB Plan goal was to stave off removal of larger trees by injecting now to buy three years’ time before removal, but second injections may be required, as the City will not get to them all because workers will soon transition to tree planting. Considerable effort is going into encouraging homeowners to act on options regarding their ash trees - inject or remove. Homeowners must use licensed tree care professionals; there are about ten currently in Duluth.

Director’s Report (Jim Williams)

Efforts continue to finalize **acquisition of tax forfeit property**; current estimates are that a final set of parcels will be presented to Planning, Parks, and Natural Resources Commissions in mid to late summer.

Perhaps the meeting’s most interesting discussion focused on Commissioner Bryan Fredrickson’s announcement that Sustainability Coordinator Mindy Granley might talk with the NRC regarding her charge to develop a response to Duluth’s recently declared **Climate Emergency**. Bryan cited national attention on Duluth as a potential destination for climate refugees and proposed that the NRC and Duluth be proactive regarding this possibility. Jim Williams agreed that the temptation to sell off green space would be strong, highlighting the

need to secure and protect these properties. Commissioners were advised to think ahead before the meeting with Mindy; her role is to align efforts and to catalyze more effective action, elevating the importance of the NRC, but not to do the work. Further discussion will follow at the June meeting and beyond.

Natural Resources Commission - April 7, 2021

After last month's concern about Commissioners' access to full comments from the public meeting regarding the City's **Forest Revitalization Project** (<https://duluthmn.gov/media/WebSubscriptions/196/20210204-196-12464.pdf>), Commissioners were sent complete unedited comments, and this will be standard procedure for all future meetings.

Discussion related to FRP comments concerned:

- Goal (forest sustainability rather than profit), and making that clear to the public
- Preservation of riparian habitats
- Possible private group management of stands by the zoo
- Relationship of this project to the new Natural Resource Management Plan re: process, messaging, staffing, and funding

Commissioners reaffirmed last month's **unanimous approval**, with the caveats that the work be carefully observed, and that penalties for failure to meet standards be built into the contract.

Natural Resources Coordinator Diane Desotelle reported on:

- Amendments to the **Hunting Deer by Bow Ordinance**: changing setback from an occupied dwelling or active commercial structure from 400 to 250 ft, and expediting "hotspot" determination to better react to changes in deer patterns and problems.
 - Concern was expressed about homeowner liability; Diane will look into this.
- Grant Applications related to **data gaps** for Brewer-Piedmont Native Plant Community and other Natural Resource Management Plan Program (NRMPP) areas, and development of bird conservation plans for the estuary and woodlands.
- A **timeline for NRMPP development**, including current work with the EPA on a ranking system for city and partner projects. Two Community engagement workshops are planned for July and August.

City Forester Clark Christenson reported on:

- Amazing new **Treeplogger Inventory** software which can pull up plantable space and individual trees in 25,000 sites across Duluth. Data entry is proceeding and could include Emerald Ash Borer info. Eventually this could be shared with the public.
- **Ash removals** continue; calls are at least a month ahead due to weather and COVID.
- **Planting** will begin as trees arrive.
- With Commissioner Sprague's expertise, **EAB outreach education** to homeowners is getting out the message that decisions to remove vs. inject trees must be made as soon as possible, so that brittle diseased trees do not become hazardous.

Director Jim Williams reports that the City and County are negotiating **two tax-forfeited land projects**. Agreement on parcels along the St. Louis River is expected this spring, and those along Mission Creek, Lester-Amity, Hartley, and Piedmont are in process.

Submitted by Barb Akre

Natural Resources Commission (via WebEx) - March 3, 2021

Duluth's Forester Clark Christenson described two changes to the City's **Forest Revitalization Project** presented last month (<https://duluthmn.gov/media/WebSubscriptions/196/20210204-196-12464.pdf>) - responses to concerns about slash remaining on the ground and the potential for deer browse on young white pine. He showed slides which illustrated regrowth over slash, and the intent to seed white pine rather than use nursery specimens. Evidence shows deer do not seem to browse in-seeded trees. Clark also reported 10 public comments received, 7 supporting the plan, 2 neutral, and one strongly against. The most significant suggestion was a Project Proposal put forth by the Isaac Walton League, asking to take on management of the stand at Spirit Mountain. A meeting with affected groups was scheduled for March 9th, with Clark's feeling that the City would like to make the Proposal a reality. Reasons include wetter soils requiring more difficult harvesting techniques and consequent cost savings and timeline ease for the City. After some discussion, the NRC **unanimously approved** support for the City's plan, with strong encouragement to work with the Isaac Walton League on the Spirit Mountain proposal.

Clark's **Emerald Ash Borer** update focused on expanding publicity strongly encouraging homeowners to make a decision to remove or inject their ash trees sooner, rather than later. Once a tree becomes heavily infested, it becomes very brittle and dangerous.

Natural Resources Coordinator Diane Desotelle recapped and updated Duluth's first **Natural Resources Management Program Plan**. Points included:

- Encouraging public participation: support at City Council and County Board meetings
- GLRI funding to set the foundation for priorities, strategies, and alternatives
- Collaboration between the City and Minnesota Land Trust; example is planting natives with consideration of bird species above the zoo
- Acquiring Critical Tax Forfeit Land from the county *at or below value* will equal 1/3 of 12,000 acres of priority land to be *permanently protected*
- June (tentatively, and still online) Community Engagement seeking citizen ownership
- Using story maps, citizens can know what's happening, and propose projects that fit in
- Five project areas will gain parcels of land worth \$3.8 million (Hartley - 80 acres, Lester-Amity - 450 acres, Piedmont - 50 acres, Mission-600 acres, and St. Louis River 250 acres).
- Commissioner Brian Fredrickson suggested calling the Historic Preservation Office for help identifying cultural sites.

Diane's monthly report highlighted extra funds to fill data gaps in **Native Plant Community Management Planning**,

focusing on understanding Brewer Creek/Piedmont and St. Louis River natives and Kingsbury restoration. Diane has given a presentation related to this work to Wild Ones, and is looking for other groups to present to; League was mentioned. Additional monies from the Soil and Water Conservation District for pollution control in the Amity Creek area would provide \$250,000 every four years if approved by the EPA. The DNR is doing the same for Tischer Creek area and for temperature reduction for Hartley's pond.

Commissioner Brandon Krumwiede announced grants available from the \$34 million National Coastal Resilience Fund for erosion protection, community building and planning, site assessment, restoration, and monitoring. Pre-pre proposals due to the National Fish and Wildlife Service April 7th, full proposals June 1st.

Commissioners thanked Brandon Van Tassel for his years of service to the NRC, as this meeting marked the end of his term.

Submitted by Barb Akre

Natural Resources Commission (via WebEx) - February 3, 2021

The Natural Resources Commission will provide science-based guidance on the protection and enhancement of the ecological health of city owned and city managed lands and the regional ecosystems of which they are an integral part and will advise on the Duluth natural area program established to designate, protect, and manage lands of special environmental value. The commission members shall be residents of the city of Duluth and should broadly represent all geographic areas of the city. Collectively, commission members should have broad experience and expertise in areas such as natural resources management, ecology, forestry, botany, water quality, invasive species and wildlife.

The **Hartley Natural Area Native Plant Community Management Plan** (64+ pages of maps, methods, priorities, funding sources, partnerships, and thoughts about monitoring/reporting/volunteering) is available online.

The NRC meeting of February 3rd spanned at least two hours and focused almost entirely on two lengthy reports, one by City Forester Clark Christenson and the second by Natural Resource Coordinator Diane Desotelle.

The **Forestry Revitalization Project** will be funded by overlapping grants from the EPA (for invasive species cleanup) and the Minnesota Land Trust (for migrating birds). Clark's presentation discussed:

- Identification and classification of Native Plant Communities (NPCs)
- Evaluation and prediction of NPC health, needs, and future
- Analysis of need for and methods of NPC restoration and/or perpetuation, including
 - Invasive species control
 - Thinning 1/4 to 1/2 of aspen and pine, especially within old plantations
 - Sowing and/or planting of missing species
 - Site preparation for natural regeneration
 - Browse protection
 - Monitoring
- Resulting Plans for thinning, replanting, reseeding, and invasive control are detailed for 108 total acres (Duluth has 10,000 acres of greenspace) including:
 - Never-thinned **Amity Creek** red pine plantation
 - **Hawk Ridge** red pine plantation, plus white spruce/Scot's pine areas
 - 3 **Hartley** red pine plantations, some previously thinned and some not
 - 3 areas of **Enger along Skyline** (red pine plantation, aspen/ash, white/Scot's pine)
 - Multiple areas of red pine and aspen within the **Enger Golf Course** white pine and aspen stands
 - Spirit Mountain hardwoods, cedar, white pine, spruce, and aspen

The proposed **Forestry Revitalization Project** is available online, was presented at a public meeting February 11th, and - after online discussion within the NRC - will be voted on at their March 3rd meeting.

Your observer regrets that she was unable to hear the Natural Resource Coordinator's equally detailed report due to the unexpected length of the meeting; stay tuned for follow-up in March. She remains extremely impressed with the expertise and dedication of Duluth's NRC members and staff.

Submitted by Barb Akre

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

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 10th 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