

May 11th, 2016 Environmental Board Minutes

Meeting called to order at 7pm.

Members Present: Chair Ruth Caputo, Vice-Chair Martha Dahlinger, Catherine Niessink, Jerry Kroehn, Mike Sergeant, Secretary Tim Winslow, David Mayfield, and Director of Transportation and Utilities Christopher Barnes

Excused Members: Jamie McCarthy, Bill Beck.

Mike made a motion to approve the March minutes. Seconded by Martha. Motion passes.

Dave Solberg, Citizen of Portage

He's a citizen of Portage, forester and has a degree in natural resources management. He's just sitting in on the meeting and very interested in helping the board out.

Eagle Scout Candidate, Tyler Borden of Troop 251

Rabbitat piles at the Fulton State Game Area were done as the first part of the overall project. These were piles put together to provide habitat for Rabbits.

The Eagle Project was building a retaining wall on Barton Lake that was ten feet off the shoreline to help prevent erosion that was going into the lake.

The third project is an invasive species pull and he is working with Mark Mills from the DNR on the Purple Loosestrife pull at the Vanderbilt Fen at Oakland and Vanderbilt. Ruth and Martha mentioned that pulling Purple Loosestrife might not be the most productive species to pull. For the Portage Creek cleanup, he is working with Mark Mills and wants to make sure not to affect fish habitat as well. He is more worried about brush alongside the creek and not in the creek itself. He is working with one of his scoutmasters on the mapping that is the owner of KalBlue. He is going to differentiate between the native and non-native species.

The last part of his project is cleaning the Portage Creek from Celery Flats to Millennium Park. Would pick up the debris, trash in that creek and also would map that creek.

His eagle project took over 450 hours or so and included 56 volunteers. He is doing four different projects for the William T. Hornaday Silver Award. He is working with Mark Mills on all four of these projects but he thought he should consult us regarding the projects within the City of Portage.

Catherine made a motion to support Tyler's projects, seconded by Mike. Motion passes. Ruth will write a memo to the Parks Board regarding these projects.

Deer

Ruth talked to Mark Mills. Mark has been in contact with Jackson, which is a city that has been doing a deer cull for many years. Depending on how many deer are within the City of Portage, we could be talking about a cull of hundreds of deer, which would be a significant cost to the city. We're talking tens of thousands of dollars if we are talking about sharpshooters. Larry would handle that if a deer cull was approved by the city council.

Mike remembered from the deer forum that some members of the public mentioned that people did not want their taxpayer dollars going to something that they did not support. Based on car/deer crash data, there might not be a public safety concern. Thus, we may not need to do a cull at this point since we really do not have enough information regarding deer. He would recommend that we recommend to do nothing at this point but continue to gather information.

Ruth would like for the board to decide the criteria for making the decision first and then getting that approved by city council.

Martha is concerned that if we decided to recommend culling deer to the city and a deer cull was completed, this may not solve the problem at all since the problem seems to be very localized. Thus, a deer cull may not help solve our deer problem. She also makes the point that anything we do now needs to be sustained and can't just be a one-and-done thing. Martha will work on writing something up regarding deer deterrent tactics.

Jerry doesn't think the car/deer crash data is worth much since not all the car/deer crashes reported. Jerry thinks the animal removal data could be helpful but would also have issues as well. He does think the straw poll vote was indicative of the public does think something should be done regarding the deer population.

Chris's department does have some data from their animal removal contractor regarding where deer are picked up and how many.

Ruth in her discussion with Larry found out that if city council decided to do a deer cull, then he would put out a bid for these services and then a licensed contractor for removing the deer would be chosen. We would like to discuss with Jackson how their process works regarding their cull.

Tim supports in getting the criteria approved by the city council. He thinks our decision should just be based on science specifically and not public opinion. He also thinks we need much more information before we can make a sound decision based on science.

Chris mentions that it would be okay for our recommendation to mention to city council that they need to spend money to study this issue much more and figure out a population estimate of deer within certain regions of the city.

David mentions that there should be criteria out there with regarding to how to make this decision. Jackson might be a good locale to check out their process and what went into their decision regarding deer management.

Jerry mentions that we could use the survey again as part of our approach. Mike points out that the survey results could be skewed negatively though.

Ruth will survey other cities on their decision processes regarding deer management and will work on finalizing the criteria used to make the decision regarding deer management. Examples of criteria public safety, property values, financial costs, impact on the environment, public opinion, etc. Our decision will then be based on these criteria. Tim suggests kicking the criteria to a subgroup and then discussing at our next meeting the criteria.

Ruth will contact Jackson regarding their deer management. Dave will get a list of cities that we can survey regarding their deer management processes.

Invasive Species Pulls

Ruth and Bill were at the April pull at Schrier Park and they removed a good amount of Honeysuckle with the eight volunteers present.

Tim and Ruth will be at the Garlic Mustard pull on Saturday, May 14th from 9am to 12pm. The pull is at West Lake Nature Preserve.

Greenathon

Catherine was present at the Greenathon on Saturday, April 23 for all four hours. Tim was at the Wastewater Treatment Plant open house and also came for the last couple of hours. Catherine did talk to the Parks Board quite a bit about Friends of the Parks and invasive species. Bill brought two very nice display boards regarding single stream recycling that were very informational and helped people figure out what they could and could not recycle.

New Business

Catherine got some information regarding Thousand Cankers disease, Oak Wilt, and Asian Longhorn Beetle and various other tree diseases. Dave Solberg knows a great deal about these diseases. We should be on the lookout for these within the area.

Announcements

Mike went to the inland lakes and streams conference and found out there was a biocontrol for Japanese Knotweed that can work in 3-5 years instead of 10 years. Mike will get more information on this biocontrol but this might be something to look into.

Ryan Koziatek with the Kalamazoo Nature Center will come talk to the board at a future meeting regarding Barry, Calhoun, and Kalamazoo Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (BCK CISMA).

Martha pulled some garlic mustard last year and put it in a black bag and forgot about it and this year found garlic mustard growing from it this year, which was pretty amazing.

Chris says a study found out that the groundwater table has risen about a foot in the last year and in one area west of US-131 and south of Milham, the groundwater table has risen eight feet. So, he's going to look into that and figure out if that will be an issue at all.

Tim brings up that the City of Portage along with the West Lake Association, Austin Lake Association will be purchasing ten releases of beetles this year that will come near the end of May and early June and he will need help releasing these beetles.

Jerry is doing some experimentation with pulling garlic mustard early in the year and leaving it to see if it will still go to seed or not still. He will let us know his results.

David made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Tim. Meeting adjourned at 8:26pm.

/s/ Tim Winslow