



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

March 6, 2024 – 6:00 p.m.

Lakeside Conference Room 430, City Hall

I. Call to Order

Chair Lindgren called the meeting to begin at 6:03 PM.

II. Roll Call

Present: John Lindgren, Judy Gibbs, Andrew Streitz, Pam Foster, Mike Schrage, Lori Dando, Mike Raichel, Kate Kubiak, Allison Brooks

Absent: Nancy Schuldt, Tiffany Sprague

III. Approval of the Agenda

Jim Filby Williams was not in attendance. Director's Report was removed from the agenda. Commissioner Schrage made a motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Commissioner Foster. Unanimously approved.

IV. Approval of the February 7, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Streitz made a motion to approve; seconded by Commissioner Schrage. Unanimously approved.

V. Old Business

None.

VI. New Business

A. 2023 Arrowhead Bowhunters Alliance Hunt Summary [Informational]

Phil Lockett from the Arrowhead Bowhunters Alliance (ABA) provided an informational update on the annual Duluth deer hunt. The ABA placed 319 hunters throughout Duluth hunt areas, which is in line with the five-year average for participation. A total of 176 deer were harvested, which is an increase from 166 harvested in 2022. The average number of deer harvested per hunter has declined significantly in the past 10-15 years. In total, 189 placed hunters did not observe, nor harvest, a deer during the hunt.

Secretary Gibbs asked about the hunting success given the weather. Lockett responded that the extensive snow last year did make it challenging, but the total number of deer harvested was not much different. Conditions were favorable and deer are in good condition with the mild winter.

Lindgren asked for more information about the results of the change in the "earn a buck" restriction. "Earn a buck" was a requirement, prior to 2022, where hunters used to be required to harvest a doe or antlerless deer before harvesting an antlered buck. 2023 was the second year where the "earn a buck" restriction was not in place. It does not seem to have had a noteworthy influence on harvest success. ABA expects to continue without the "earn a buck" restriction.

Lindgren asked about neighbors that are feeding deer. Lockett responded that feeding deer is illegal and that people can provide information to Officer McShane who would be able to provide information about why feeding deer is a problem.

Commissioner Schrage asked what ABA's approach will be regarding allowing hunting with crossbows. Lockett responded that ABA will not be opening the hunt to crossbows, other than allowing them for hunters with disabilities. Kubiak responded that City staff are working with the ABA and the MN Department of Natural Resources regarding restrictions and allowances for crossbows.

Secretary Gibbs asked about the service area for ABA. Lockett responded that ABA serves only the City of Duluth. Commissioner Schrage asked what proportion of hunters are City of Duluth residents. Lockett responded that some hunters are from outside Duluth. There are no requirements that hunters be a resident.



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B. Buckingham Creek Restoration [Informational]

Tim Beaster, a conservation specialist from the South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District, provided an overview of the planned restoration work for Buckingham Creek, which is a trout stream that runs through Enger Park Golf Course. Buckingham Creek is the coldest trout stream in Duluth and has a high potential for supporting quality habitat for brook trout. There are three impoundments and undersized culverts that interrupt natural processes and prevent fish passage. There are two groundwater springs within the Golf Course that feed Buckingham Creek with cold water. There is a bypass around the irrigation pond, which does prevent warm water from entering the Buckingham, but all of the impoundments still prevent passage. The two ponds that do provide warmed water inflows significantly increase the stress to the trout and can be fatal to the trout populations. Multiple portions were also historically ditched that limits cover, eliminates opportunities for pools, and necessary habitat. Fish surveys that have been conducted on Buckingham show that the impounded sections are problematic and could be classified by the MN Pollution Control Agency as an impaired water.

The restoration project will be completed in conjunction with the City of Duluth's Enger Park Golf Course construction project. Buckingham Creek restoration will begin as soon as permits are secured and is expected to be complete by the end of 2024. The total budget for the project is \$1,160,000. It is funded through an array of state and federal sources, including the MN Department of Natural Resources, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

The goal of the restoration is to maximize the ecosystem and recreational services that Buckingham Creek, including the Twin Ponds, provides to the community by reducing stream stressors, thereby improving the stream aesthetics, recreational opportunities, and resilience to climate change. The restoration of Buckingham will include eliminating two unnatural impoundments, replace undersized culverts, restore and daylight 3,500 feet of stream, and reconnect approximately 4,500 feet of improved trout habitat. The project will deliver colder water to the Twin Ponds, but there is no direct work associated with the Buckingham restoration at the Twin Ponds.

Commissioner Schrage asked about the limitations of the trout window. Beaster responded that there will be restrictions on construction if trout are found within the project area. If there are rainbow trout in the stream, then work cannot begin until July and if there are brook trout present, then work must be completed before September.

Chair Lindgren asked what sections will be open to angling. Beaster responded that Buckingham is a public water and is accessible. There are multiple access opportunities. The Golf Course will likely influence the level of use by anglers in some areas.

VII. Staff Reports

A. Natural Resources Coordinator's Report – Kate Kubiak

Commissioner Streit asked for an update about the Hartley Pond and Tischer Creek Feasibility Study and the proposed alternative solutions. Secretary Gibbs commented that there will be a presentation at a future Natural Resources Commission meeting. There are an array of alternatives that have been studied. Hartley Stewardship Committee is likely going to recommend removal of the dam or transition of the dam to an open bottom culvert. Chair Lindgren asked what the Commission's role will be regarding the Feasibility Study. Kubiak responded that both the Natural Resources and Parks & Recreation Commissions will have the opportunity to review the Study and provide their recommendation for next steps to the Duluth City Council, which will be responsible for deciding the path forward.



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Kubiak provided the following written report:

- Beginning the process for designating certain parcels acquired through the public lands realignment process as "Designated Natural Area."
- Coordinating with The Nature Conservancy, Clark and MN Land Trust to map out a potential 5-10 year forestry restoration/native Plant Community mapping vision for the natural areas and the newly acquired forested tracts.
- Continued support of MN Point and Section 111 erosion study with US Army Corps of Engineers.
- Writing Requests for Bids and Requests for proposals for 2024 natural resources work.
- Working with the Stream Corps at Kingsbury Forest and Hartley to remove and treat invasives under our SOGL grant.
- Working with the Duluth Fire Dept on cross-departmental controlled burns training and implementation.
- Continued support of CISMA and future planning.
- Hartley Dam Feasibility Study - draft report complete. Reviewed with Hartley Nature Center Stewardship Committee; held internal City meeting March 1; planning commission meetings and public survey and meeting for April and May.
- Working with City staff and Arrowhead Bowhunters Group on rules for 2024 hunt.

B. Forester's Report – Clark Christenson

The City Forester provided the following written report. Pruning has continued on with nary an interruption. We are done with Hunter's Park and will soon move down the hill between Lakeside and Tischer Creek. This is making up for lost ground from last year and puts our pruning cycle closer to what we want.

Stump grinding has been going extremely well. Except for several snow-covered weeks, we have had a crew grinding stumps most of the winter. Our inventory shows they have removed 270 stumps.

We will soon start ash removal projects in Lincoln Park. The entrance to the park and the area around elephant rock have an abundance of small ash trees that we will remove this winter and plant next year with a prairie mix and some trees.

We also spent some time removing and treating buckthorn on City property. This has given us the upper hand on buckthorn in certain locations and shown us where we need to bring a bigger hammer. We have some potential volunteer groups that could do some control work but, in either case, we'll follow-up next year by retreating these areas.

VIII. Announcements

None.

IX. Public Comment

John Ramos commented his appreciation for the considerate ABA hunters that he has encountered in Duluth.

X. Adjournment

Commissioner Schrage made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Dando seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:14 PM.

Next Meeting – May 1, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. Lakeside Conference Room 430, City Hall