



ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COUNCIL

City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation
Regular Meeting

Cascades Golf Course - Clubhouse
Wednesday, February 14th, 2024
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

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I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:33 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Denise Gardiner, Kevin Tungesvick, Marne Potter, Dave Parkhurst, Angie Shelton, Dave Rollo
Staff: Joanna Sparks, Rebecca Swift, Steve Cotter, Chloe Meredith

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 2023

IV. AGENDA

A. Public Appearances

A-1 Public Comment Period

None.

B. Old Business

B-1 Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Deer Cull Results

Griffy Lake Nature Preserve is a designated Deer Reduction Zone. This designation allows hunters to harvest additional deer during the hunt. The total number of deer removed from Griffy was 33 in 2023. Since State funding is no longer available the program is now funded out of the Natural Resources non-reverting fund. The

results of two 2023 hunt weekends are: Nov. 18/19 - 23 deer, Dec. 2/3 - 10 deer. The goal of the program is to improve plant communities' ability to reproduce by reducing deer browse pressure within the Preserve.

The Council discussed strategies to increase participation of hunters in the Griffy deer cull. Some programs have subsidized the deer processing fees. Another possibility would be a raffle. Sparks questioned if expanding the time allotted to the hunt into the weekdays would increase participation. Members had differences in opinion and concerns on security and likelihood of hunters taking advantage of weekday availability.

Rollo questioned if all of Bloomington is a deer reduction zone, to which Cotter replied only the Griffy Lake Nature Preserve is designated. Swift added that there has been some confusion on what Griffy Lake Nature Preserve as a deer reduction zone means. With Griffy being listed on the DNR website, some have mistaken that to mean it will be open for hunting during the whole deer season, not just the designated weekends. Hunters must pass a proficiency test, and be assigned an area, to qualify for the hunt at Griffy. Gardiner requested the deer numbers from 2023. In 2019 the total was 26, in 2020 there were 40, 2021 had 47, in 2022 there were 46, and 2023 had 33.

Counting deer at Griffy would be difficult due to the steep topography and the ability for the deer to come and go from the preserve. The plant height data gathered will determine the future of deer culls at Griffy. Sparks questioned if allowing more modes of hunting, such as archery, may be considered. Cotter replied that the method takes longer to kill the deer making it less effective.

Gardiner questioned how long it took for DNR properties to see vegetation recovery with their deer reduction programs, considering Bloomington began 5 years ago. Cotter replied that he will attempt to find the answer.

C. New Business

C-1 Election of Officers

Swift asked if anyone would like to step up and be Chair and Vice Chair for 2024. The Chair is responsible for proctoring the bi-monthly ERAC meetings and presenting ERAC's Annual Report to the Park Board once a year. The Annual Report is drafted by the Staff Liaison and reviewed by the Chair prior to the presentation.

Denise Gardiner volunteered to be Chair and Angie Shelton volunteered to be Vice Chair. The motion was brought to a vote and ERAC unanimously agreed to elect Gardiner as ERAC Chair and Angie Shelton as ERAC Vice-Chair for 2024-2025.

C-2 Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Deer Browse Study

Swift gave the floor to Tunesvick to discuss the results of the Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Deer Browse Study. The 2023 data indicate that plant heights have stagnated for the past two seasons. There was increased growth between 2019-2021, but since then heights have remained relatively unchanged. There may not have been enough deer harvested yet to make the desired difference for plants. Increasing the efficacy of the cull may be necessary for a resumption of improvements. Woody sapling growth had increased from 2018-2020, but since then has been relatively unchanged, with a slight decline. Woody sapling root collar diameter refers to the diameter at the base of the saplings that shows the same trend of growth until 2021 when stagnation begins. The average Jack-in-the-Pulpit height was steady for three years until a jump in 2021 with continued stagnation since. Jack-in-the-Pulpit is not a favored browse plant but is negatively affected by compaction of soil by deer hooves. In the last few years, the deer began browsing the flowering Jack-in-the-Pulpit plants, influencing the data. Solomon's Seal height has steady improvement from 2019 through 2022 with a slight drop in 2023 making it closer to the 2021 report. It was noted that the sample size for Solomon's Seal is smaller than the Jack-in-the-Pulpit study, as it is a more palatable species to deer.

Tunesvick provided a summary of the 2023 study, reporting all metrics have stagnated so there are no statistically significant trends since 2021. While browse has moderated since the culls began, browse remains locally heavy in certain areas, especially those with a dense shrub area. Woody plant growth rates are affected by dry soils from recent summer flash droughts independent of deer browse, there are other variables impacting growth rates. Jack-in-the-Pulpit height has been nearly level for the past 3 years. The Griffy Creek valley was mentioned for its dense shrub concentration of invasive species and native shrubs that attract a lot of deer browse. The deer like to browse invasive privet in the winter and native species such as greenbrier and mapleleaf viburnum are heavily favored. Deer are benefiting from invasive shrubs in the Griffy Creek valley and are contributing to the spread of invasive plants such as Japanese stiltgrass. Considering there were 33 deer culled and there were likely more than 33 fawns born annually meaning the herd is likely steady instead of declining.

Tungesvick opened the floor for questions. Swift requested elaboration on the invasive species threat to Griffy Lake Nature Preserve. A map was shown on a slide depicting the range of invasive species in Griffy from little to none, medium, and high. The Griffy Creek valley upstream of the reservoir and some areas in the southwestern section of the park have higher rates of invasive species. The Griffy Creek Valley is a big wintering habitat for deer and many deer have been seen in the southwestern section as well. In the northwestern section, greenbrier and mapleleaf viburnum are present and show a lot of browse. Swift asked Tungesvick if based on his professional opinion, should Bloomington Parks and Recreation continue to manage deer? Tungesvick responded that it would be beneficial. Tungesvick pointed out that there had been a decline in the past, but it seems the deer have hit an equilibrium with new fawns based on the browse data. Cotter requested information on the trajectory of the state parks, if Tungesvick is aware of that history. Tungesvick was unaware of specific data gathered but anecdotal substantial improvement in the shrub and herbaceous layers in parks such as Brown County and Pokagon.

Sparks asked Tungesvick where he would recommend beginning the invasive species management of Griffy. Tungesvick recommended two areas of focus; invasive shrubs in the southwestern section with autumn olive, honeysuckle, and multiflora rose and Griffy Creek floodplain with mostly multiflora rose and privet. Cotter recognized Sparks and her team for working on invasive plants in the southwest section for a trail route, and brought up looking into a potential land and water conservation fund grant. Parkhurst has suggestions for Tungesvick on statistical hypothesizing and statistical difference because it may confuse people. Statisticians currently recommend using "statistical confidence" instead of "statistical significance." Tungesvick thanked him for the suggestion. Rollo questioned the legacy effects of the deer browse and the plants growing, Tungesvick did not think that was an issue at Griffy. Based on the flora inventory all the expected plants are present, though many in limited numbers, meaning full recovery is possible with an appropriately-sized deer herd. Swift and Cotter mentioned that the prescribed burn and trail construction at the park may have also contributed to the outcome of the deer hunt. Swift announced the addition of a trail counter at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve and that the Department is looking into Placer AI technology to help track visitation. Rollo questioned if there have been instances of poaching to which Cotter replied that deer stands have been found and miscellaneous shots heard. Swift added sometimes people with rifles arrive, but likely due to confusion with the DNR Deer Reduction Zone designation. Cotter and Swift

mentioned working with the DNR on the wording of the website to limit confusion.

C-3 Education Update

Swift said Nature Days are just around the corner and the opening of the boathouse in April will occur on the weekend before the Eclipse. Swift added Bloomington is expecting hundreds of thousand visitors to Bloomington and mentioned an internal planning committee that has been working towards a weekend of events. Considerations on travel time and congestion in Bloomington were discussed, which is a large consideration for the planning of these events with the goal to get people to a location, and keep them there for a while. Other considerations for that weekend are gas and cell phone coverage. The City of Bloomington is preparing multiple emergency action plans and working with Bloomington Police Department and the Fire Department. Local schools, Indiana University, and Monroe County Parks are all closed. The city is expecting visitors to every greenspace and is scheduling full-time and a seasonal employees to multiple parks. Bloomington is working on getting the word out to social media and informing the public about the eclipse events. The city of Bloomington is selling branded protective eyewear for \$2 cash or \$2.25 with a card.

The annual Bike to Earth Day Event will take place on April 20 at Switchyard Park, partnering with ESD. There will be climate action talks, an Eco-Heroes award ceremony, and a volunteer recognition ceremony for Adopt-a-Stream, Adopt-a-Trail, Adopt-a-Greenspace, and weed wrangle volunteers. Swift recognized there is competition with Little 500 that weekend, but this event is a great opportunity for those who want to do something away from campus and the stadium. There will be native tree seedling give-aways, and an e-bike raffle.

Bloomington Parks and Recreation is partnering with ESD for Climate Action Workshops. Last year's event focused on tree pruning and species selection for Climate resilience. The most recent Climate Workshop Meeting discussed IRA tax incentives for individual property owners. The workshops are free and open to the public either in-person at the Switchyard Park Pavilion or online via zoom. Next month will be gardening, discussing species selection for produce gardening and drought-resilient plant species for a proactive response to climate change and food insecurity. Battery-powered tools and equipment will be at the event for demonstrations. Partners and other outside organizations will be encouraged to join and learn about the equipment. The goal of the

workshops is once a month from 12:00-12:45 at Switchyard Park on Wednesdays during lunchtime so more people have an opportunity to join.

Summer programs will come out with the summer program guide which is currently being drafted. Bloomington Parks and Recreation will be co-hosting a Hoosier RiverWatch instructor training and getting ready to do the adopter orientation for this year at the end of March. Gardiner asked if hunters could be recognized as volunteers. The group agreed that is something to discuss, but the department does not get hunter's information. Sparks mentioned invasive plant management through weed wrangles continues to happen. In 2023, volunteers spread across 22 properties for invasive species and native plant management. This project will be submitted for The Governor's Award of Environmental Excellence. Sparks continued and suggested Covid and people wanting to get outside as a factor in the increase of volunteers. Sparks reported the volunteers seem to have fallen in love with the greenspaces which encourages them to continue volunteering with the Parks and Recreation Department. Sparks is eager for the partnership with the Winslow-Crestmont Wildlife Corridor project and working with community groups, adjacent landowners, and educating people on our parks and invasive species. Sparks informed the group on the process of building a relationship with the Boys and Girls Club and Habitat for Humanity. Sparks continued to report to the group a study on a green corridor to make a safe route for wildlife and people to navigate Bloomington's urban spaces.

Swift announced a free Buds and Bark program will take place soon with Ray Major to discuss tree identification. Sparks mentioned additional tree identification programs and mentioned how it is important for people to be aware of the species around them. Swift mentioned how the box may be checked for native planting, but there can be a disconnect on the oversight regarding whether or not the plant will survive and then what would take its place. The group continued and discussed how climate change will also impact species survival and specifically brought up Callery pear infestations on private properties.

C-4 Project Updates (Gateway, Hopewell, Griffy Loop Trail Project Phase III)

Project updates. Tim Street, the director of the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department, shared the updates with Swift to present. The City is moving forward with the Gateway project with a new rendition with limestone blocks and is in the process of soliciting artists. That project includes the removal of Callery pears,

sidewalk improvements, and additional work. Swift opened the floor for questions that she can present to Street and asked members to email her if they think of anything.

Hopewell East has begun and includes putting 120 trees and developing a 1-acre park that will be a gift to the Parks and Recreation Department with an estimated completion date by October of 2024, meaning portions of a new park may be added by the end of the year. Sparks questioned how the contractor will fund the maintenance of that for a year or two of the native plants and invasive species. Cotter discussed the Griffy Loop Trail project and the finalization of the Meadowood - Griffy Loop Trail connectors. Many accessibility improvements are desired for the Boathouse side of Griffy Lake Nature Preserve such as accessible restrooms, additional accessible parking, wheelchair guards on the fishing bump-outs. An accessible wetland trail from the boathouse parking lot is also under consideration.

Gardiner requested information on the status of the South section of the Griffy Loop Trail. Cotter replied a final walkthrough will be conducted, but it is open to the public. Gardiner asked for the timeline on the North Shore and Cotter replied it is dependent on whether a Land and Water Conservation Grant, which is not due until August, is received. The hope is to have it done sooner, but the timing will depend on funding. It will probably not be completed until 2025. A comment was made about the muddy conditions on the new sections of the South side of the Griffy Loop Trail. Cotter responded that new trails tend to have that problem and there are other factors at play as well such as time of year of construction and use. Cotter suggests posting trail conditions on OuterSpatial.

Swift reported that the department is in the process of updating trail signage. There are yard signs posted along the trail to keep people informed about the re-routing of the trail. At every trail access point and intersection a sign is posted with a "you are here" marking. The Department is working on updated trail signs and trailhead maps with color-coordinated routes. Trail naming ideas can be opened up to the Environmental Resource Advisory Council.

C-5 Rosvall Lab Research Activities

The Rosvall Lab Research activities. Cotter mentioned this is the fourth year of working with the lab run by Kimberly Rosvall with a report sent each year. The Rosvall Lab is looking at behaviors related to hormone levels in birds. Swift will be sending the report with a follow-up email to the group. The report from 2023 discussed how animals use behavioral and physiological changes to adapt to

the changing environment responding to global change and other stressors. There are 360 nest boxes up, mostly on Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources properties, some on private property owned by the IU Research and Teaching Preserve, and Bloomington Parks and Recreation's Clear Creek Trail. Cotter reported the lab's findings of 188 tree swallow nesting attempts, yielding 1017 eggs and 844 nestlings. 764 chicks survived to be banded at 12 days old and 86% fledged. They have taken blood and DNA samples from each tree swallow and collected a few rump/breast feathers from adults, and they hope to see if feather color relates to other behaviors. Aggressive behavior is a big focus of the research on territorial intrusions and found simulated territorial intrusions (STI) for nearly all female tree swallows, robins, bluebirds, and prothonotary warblers.

C-6 2024 Initiatives and April 2024 Meeting Agenda Items

Swift opened the floor to the group to discuss 2024 Initiatives and April 2024 Meeting Agenda Items or to text or email them to her by the next meeting to be added to the agenda.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

**NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2024
OLCOTT PARK– Young Pavilion**