

Session: Contemporary Approaches to Natural Resource Stewardship

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Key points from the panel discussion

HT – Hannah Texler

- Biological diversity = the full array of living organisms on Earth; several different levels, from ecosystem through species to genetic diversity
- Ecosystem diversity is defined by native plant communities = areas of natural vegetation that's at least similar to original condition (19th C.)
- Province-level info on native plant communities is available in 2 (3rd coming) field guides
- From CBS we know that forests have changed greatly since 1850s – huge loss throughout state and much of it is much younger than it used to be; also major losses in native prairie and wetlands
- Species diversity – tracked through endangered, threatened, and special concern species; they occur through all habitat types
- Know of 14 extinct species in Minnesota
- About 1% of the area of Minnesota is in large parks (no data on small parks); a lot of those parks have important areas of biological diversity; also educational opportunities
- Habitat destruction is #1 threat to biological diversity, followed by several other major threats; in Minnesota, Texler's opinion is = destruction of natural processes (e.g., fire), fragmented landscapes, fragmented ownership, invasive species, development impacts (even park development), pollutants and encroachments, global climate change
- **Need to find what biological diversity features we have in parks and plan for their protection**
- **Need to restore natural processes**
- **Need to partner to protect and restore landscapes and corridors**

CWK – Chris Weir-Koetter

- Invasive species are biggest threat in MN state parks
- Over 200,000 acres represent best examples of landscape types in the state
- Good surveillance is an important tool; have mapped over 5,800 infestations (often occur along trails)
- Integrated pest management is prime strategy
- Example of Maplewood SP infested with buckthorn; have systematically mapped and treat about half the park so far in the last 7 years
- Burning is not a panacea; only works in some cases; can make things worse with fire-dependent invasive species
- Selective treatment with herbicides and physical removal can also be effective
- Spend over 40% of resource mgmt budget on control measures
- **Established BMPs for DNR to prevent the spread of invasives**
- There's a lot at stake and we are still hopeful and enthused

JM – John Moriarty, Ramsey County Parks

- Deer management in Ramsey County; about 15,000 acres of deer habitat (could support about 400-500 deer in the county), but recent count was 709 deer – might be as many as 1,000 deer – how to remove?

- Culling techniques are: gun hunts (not allowed in Ramsey Co.), archery hunts (volunteers, so it's a less expensive choice), or sharpshooters (who are very efficient) – have to work closely with the municipality
- **BP: Recommends working with Metro Bow Hunters organization and similar groups elsewhere in the state**

CH – Chris Holbeck, Voyageurs NP

- Getting more young people and families, contrary to the overall outdoor recreation pattern
- Paddling is increasing
- No campgrounds, only camp sites
- Mission is to both protect resources and provide a visitor experience
- Camp site plan provides criteria for site selection and to provide resource protection
- **BP: Monitoring and feedback loop for application of site criteria and whether it's working in practice (restoration is it's not)**
- **BP: Seasonal closing of sites near intermittent sensitive spots like loon and eagle nests.**

JP – Jeff Perry, Anoka County Parks

- **BP: Prescribed burning – benefits are ecological, social, and economic**
- Timing (short window – a few weeks spring and fall)
- Urbanization – smoke management
- Policy restrictions
- Politics – fire chiefs' authority – develop a good relationship with them
- Communication / Cooperation / Support
- Available training
- Burn plans
- Alternatives: mowing/mechanical, grazing (e.g., Bunker Hills horse barn), chemicals
- **BP: Land protection and restoration on other lands (outside jurisdictional areas)**
- Benefits = buffers, wildlife corridors, air and water quality enhancements, biological diversity
- Do a local restoration plan, including partners, funding sources, etc. (e.g., Sand Hill Crane Natural Area)
- Challenges are funding gaps; finding willing landowners; staffing to identify, administer, and monitor projects; and local political support

Q&A

Randy Thoreson, NPS – are local communities “getting it” and using this information?

HT response – there's been progress in some places but it's taking a long time and many communities lack staff resources

Bill Tefft, Ely – what about ecological value of burning wetlands?

HT response – depends on type of wetland and plant community

Add to Web site an inventory of who is doing which BMPs and contact info

Use of volunteers – how is that tracked?

CH response – used volunteers on a project that went very well; marks a transition from using volunteers just for maintenance-type work; nonprofit partner can raise funds to help make a project happen

How many people are collecting their own seeds, using native seeds

HT response – more state parks are doing that with volunteers (e.g., Wild River SP); also SNA program

JP – Anoka Co. Parks does it also, using old harvesting equipment

JM – Ramsey Co. has found that volunteers need a lot of training and sometimes their donations have to be discarded

EXISTING BPs / GOOD EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES

Ed Quinn can provide DNR's BMPs mentioned by CWK

JM – get this info/education beyond the resource staff to park directors and facilities staff

Jeff Lee – when he was at Mpls parks, heard from operations division that it was too much work, too hard – agrees with need to educate within the system

Chuck Wolken, Stearns Co. Parks – would be valuable to be able to access some of exotic species mgmt info, prairie mgmt info, burn management, etc. – wants “hot links” to that kind of information

HT – DNR Web site now has info on species and plant communities for restoration – can look at making links with that info

Bill Tefft, Ely – Many small rural communities have no resource staff – could a group of land managers (e.g., public works) be educated out there?

CWK response – regional workshops might be worth considering

JM – rain gardens sometimes raise conflicts with maintenance staff (garbage and Frisbees get caught there too).

TOP PRIORITIES

In a ‘huddle’ following the session, panel members identified the following three main themes coming out of the session.

Education for Policy Makers

There is a lack of resource professionals who are policy makers. We need education for decision makers so that we can create ambassadors for natural resources. When the policy makers are on board, we will have better opportunities to promote effective natural resource management. Future efforts should be targeted to include policy makers in the discussion.

Effective Tools

Many effective tools already exist; we should make them available and easy to find. One suggestion was to make natural resource management tools available on the summit website. For example, it would be helpful to have useful links to DNR web pages on restorations and native plant management. One participant said it would be helpful to have an inventory of people who do prescribed burns; this could serve as a network for sharing ideas and best practices.

Integration and Linkages across Scales

We need to develop a more unified vision for natural resource management among different types of parks and scales. This may include examining ways to cross administrative boundaries, or it may include developing desired future conditions.