



ANACORTES PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

**P.O. BOX 547, ANACORTES, WA 98221
(360) 293-1918 / (360) 293-1928**

**Anacortes Community Forest Lands Advisory Board
May 7, 2020**

**Due to the Covid-19 virus threat, all city boards and
commissions have been cancelled indefinitely.**

ACFL Forest Advisory Board Minutes

March 5, 2020

(Please note this March 5th meeting occurred just days before the City of Anacortes began implementing COVID19 pandemic response protocols. Mention of future actions and activities is a reflection of this timing.)

Attendees: Board Members: Sandra Starbuck, Chair, Brian Wetcher, JoAnn York-Gilmore, Nick Stowe

Staff: Steve Phillips, Bob Vaux, Jonn Lunsford

Public: Asa Deane, Friends of the Forest Executive Director, Dan Senour, ACFL Trail Committee, Stacey Curtis

I. Meeting called to order at 6PM

II. February Minutes Approved as Submitted

III. Public Comments: S. Curtis submitted a letter dated Feb. 7, 2020 from the Department of Ecology regarding the closed city dump site. The letter is a notice that DOE is rescinding its previous position that the dump site required no further action. Curtis explained that the proposed bicycle skills park is the reason she comes to the Forest Advisory Board meetings. She asked that the City's website be updated to reflect the information contained in this letter, and hopes the FAB will discuss at its April meeting.

Wetcher: it is unclear what DOE wants.

Vaux: hopeful that Skagit County Health Dept water test results of the site will be shared with the COA by April FAB meeting.

Lunsford: have other dump sites in Skagit County and beyond also received updated opinions from DOE?

IV. Communication/Correspondence: Deane/FOF states the FOF had a good annual meeting last week, 50 folks in attendance. Announces FOF Naturalist Melissa Courtney is leaving her job, should be working through the month of June. The job has been posted, and they are hoping to bring on the new Educator mid-May. Vaux is scheduled to attend the next FOF Board meeting. There are two hikes coming up: March 20 at Little Beaver Pond and March 28th at Little Round Top.

Lunsford: working on the Mt. Erie cell tower lease terms with the Kiwanis Club. We have reached out to a King County evaluator to assist us with discussion with Puget Sound Energy.

Wetcher: would it be possible to work with the Police Department to impound motorcycles being illegally operated in the ACFL? He would like to reach out to the City Council and work on ordinance language in order to impound the motorcycles of repeat offenders.

York-Gilmore: regular Parks Commission meeting will be March 10th.

V. Ebikes: Vaux; I have reviewed some of our initial trial ideas with City Attorney Swetnam. She is looking further into how the ADA component may or may not work for this. Vaux then reviewed York-Gilmore's email with FAB regarding ideas for a trial Ebike period in the ACFL. Various ideas

were shared about a permitting process, who qualifies for said permits, how many might be issued and who would qualify.

Wetcher: would prefer the COA not coming up with new criteria for ADA eligibility. "This is not something we want to engage in as a pioneer."

York-Gilmore: likes an Ebike permit process related to ADA criteria.

Senour: are we seeing motorized skateboards in the ACFL, and do we have any policies regarding same?

Stowe: opposed to this permitting system.

Starbuck: shall we stay with our current policy of regarding Ebikes the same as motorcycles?

Stowe: yes.

Wetcher: need to be wary of the proverbial camel's nose.

Starbuck: this is why we are discussing a trial period.

Vaux: the FAB may simply decide against any consideration that differs from current policy.

Lunsford: we need to make sure we continue to emphasize our work of balancing environmental impact with outdoor recreation.

Deane: the FOF Board supports the status of Ebikes being the same as motorcycles, but would be open to exploring a trail period.

Phillips: the COA may be ahead of the curve to really get a sense of a trial period. We should wait for Ebikes to become more common.

VI. Staff Reports: Phillips explains motorcyclist in his report photo has not been identified. Heart Lake Road clean up work party was successful.

Lunsford reports that the AHS Green Club worked with he and Parks Manager Nicole Johnston on a 32nd Street Swamp native planting project recently: 50 alder and 50 twinberry were planted.

Starbuck: very happy with the COA website.

Lunsford: ACFL Management Plan could be on a City Council agenda in May or June.

Wetcher: any updates on the Conservation Easement Program?

Lunsford: COA and Skagit Land Trust attorneys working on language updates.

Wetcher: emphasizing this is a clean up process of the easement documents. Cost of the easements needs to be updated. SLT wants to look further into what defines commercial use.

VII. Other Business: None.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:07PM

ACFL Maintenance Report APRIL – 2020 by Steve Phillips

May 1, 2020

In our second entire month of taking action in response to COVID-19, we continued to see heavy use. It became apparent early in the month that our lakes, trails, vistas, and cliffs have become a regional destination for people who are still longing for outdoor experiences but are experiencing closures closer to their own homes. We have done all that we can to keep our facilities open to local residents, while gradually placing restrictions to encourage social distancing. The fortune of Anacortes Citizens to have so much open space within walking and biking distance from their front doors is highlighted in these times of statewide “stay home, stay safe” orders.

At the time of this report, here are **some** of the incremental measures we have been taking in the ACFL in the face of the pandemic.

- Continuing increased sanitation and disinfection (daily or every-other-day) at restrooms.
- Erie Mountain Road closed to civilian traffic on April 6.
- April 7: Parking limited to 10 vehicles at major trailheads: Whistle Lake Parking Lot, Heart Lake, Ray Auld Drive, Trail 10/Old City Dump trailhead, Little Cranberry Lake Parking Lot.
- April 17: Additional parking limitations (5 vehicles) posted at turnoffs on Heart Lake Road.
- April 17: Little Cranberry Lake Parking Lot closed Friday afternoon through Monday morning.
- April 17: Heart Lake parking lot closed to horse trailers for weekend.
- April 20: Heart Lake parking lot reopened to horse trailers Monday through Thursday, 6am-12pm.

Violations

In early April, the Anacortes Parks crew teamed up to disassemble an elaborate shelter made of naturally sourced materials in a hidden but fairly accessible location on the west side of town.

There have been several reports of a boisterous rooster seen in various locations in the forest near Heart Lake. I spoke with Officer Nybo regarding the fowl, but she is currently unable to capture strays, owing to the fact that no shelters are currently accepting animals. Although she was not particularly concerned about the rooster, she took the opportunity to inform me to spread the word that animals are considered “surfaces” where the Coronavirus can survive for an undetermined amount of time. Therefore, the public should be aware not to touch dogs from other households.

With the above in mind, I’m encouraged to have noticed an apparent decrease in off-leash dogs on our trails.

The split-rail fence at the “Bat Cave” has been mostly disassembled and neatly stacked onsite.

Compliance

I mowed the grass on the Cranberry Lake dam on the 13th.

Trails – Drainage, erosion, bridges, fallen trees

I spent some time de-mucking the trails north of Heart Lake mid-month. Increased users, and likely increased users with less experience, have probably contributed to widening the trails in muddy places. Many such places simply need to be scraped down to the hard gravel substrate. In some cases, I added duff and natural debris to the areas outside of the single track after scraping to gravel. Hopefully this will put a stop to trail widening and allow some revegetation to naturally occur.

There were about 5 trail-blocking trees to cut this month.

Bob and I have been looking at the bridge on Trail 126 and considering options for repair/replacement.

Invasive Species

I've begun to notice European mountain-ash leafing out, and now I am getting a sense of how prevalent it is. I'd like to get a sense of how fast it is spreading in the ACFL before taking action to control it. Thanks to Denise Crowe for the help in identifying this.

<https://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/animals-and-plants/noxious-weeds/weed-identification/european-mountain-ash.aspx>

Miscellaneous Good News

The Heart Lake vault toilets will be pumped sometime between today (May 1) and Monday, May 4.

On April 29, WDFW stocked Heart Lake with 5,849 rainbow trout from the Arlington Hatchery. There will likely be another release in June.

State Parks will reopen to some uses on Tuesday, May 5, which will help release some of the pressure on our lands. Fishing will therefore be open at our lakes on the same date.

Flowers are blooming. Birds are singing. Today I heard a Wilson's warbler and a black-headed grosbeak; and you go should see all the fawn lilies on Mount Erie, if you haven't yet.

Forest Manager Report – April 2020

Bob Vaux, APRD Assistant Director

Attached with mine and Steve's reports this month are the draft minutes from the March Forest Advisory Board (FAB) meeting. These were not available last month as our parks and forest lands management protocols were changing quickly, and I did not have time to get them ready for distribution. There was no April meeting, and there will be no May meeting. If anyone has any questions regarding FAB process at this time, please call me any time.

We have all been facing a very unique series of challenges in our work and lives since early March. In the face of all of this, Mayor Gere and Director Lunsford have diligently worked to keep our forest lands and parks accessible for our local citizens. While we have been forced to reduce our usual level of service to all of our user groups, we have remained open every day. This has required an extensive team effort from the Parks & Recreation Department, and every one of us has contributed to the management and care of the ACFL during the on-going pandemic. I am very grateful for the women and men I work along side, and for so many of our recreating public for working hard to practice necessary healthy protocols while continuing to enjoy the mental and physical benefits of our woods and trails.

I would like to thank ACFL Trail Committee member Geri Rubin for going above and beyond, and helping us communicate with the equestrian community over the last few weeks. Geri has represented this group on our committee for decades, and has improved our trail maintenance practices significantly. During the current health crisis, she has selflessly helped me communicate with the equestrian group, often taking the heat for some unpopular decisions we have had to make as a staff. Geri's on-going commitment to her user group as well as the over-all health of the ACFL is an inspiration to many.

While we have maintained access to the ACFL, we have had to make some tough decisions. These are contrary to our mission, and our very unique standing in the state of Washington as a shared use recreational trail system. Due to the many challenges of maintaining proper social distancing, we have had to reduce our trailhead parking capacities, the road to the top of Mt. Erie is closed to motorized vehicles and the Little Cranberry access road has seen the same, but on weekends only. As the days get longer, and the weather warms, these challenges will increase. We ask all of our visitors to be patient with our temporary restrictions, and please do your best to honor them so we are not pressed to expand them.

On a very positive note, opening day of fishing at Heart Lake was a great success. Many smiling faces catching fish and enjoying some beautiful, quiet, and almost normal hours. We appreciate very much the fishing public working with us to make this uptick in lake visitors work out for all.

We have had a major staff change at Parks & Rec in April. Our Office Manager, Valora Sandstrom, has retired after spending 33 years as part of the team. We thank you so much, Valora, and wish you all the best. Joining the team on April 1st is Victoria Wong, who came through a very competitive hiring process and has dug in deep, already becoming a key figure for all of us, and the many diverse projects, programs and resources in our department.

As we now move into May, I will continue to be part of our staff presence in the ACFL, encouraging responsible social distancing for the recreating public. While opinions on what to do next and how to do it vary widely, please remember the Corona Virus is the enemy. We can put our biases aside and work together to enjoy our woods, as well as improve our communal health.

