

Minutes of Environmental Concerns Committee  
October 18, 2013  
Submitted by Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands

Present: Diane Angell, Gene Bakko, Carlos Gallego, Jim Fisher, Mark Gelle, Sonja Helgeson, Paul Jackson, Kathy Shea, Judy Stromeyer

#### Welcome and Introductions

The committee met at 8 a.m. in the Regents 426 conference room.

Members of the committee for this year are

Chair: Kathy Shea, Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies, Curator of Natural Lands

Diane Angell, Assistant Professor of Biology

Gene Bakko, Retired Professor of Biology and former Curator of Natural Lands

Jim Fisher, Grounds Manager

Paul Jackson, Associate Professor of Chemistry and Chair of Environmental Studies

Carlos Gallego, English and Faculty Governance Representative

Mark Gelle, Assistant Vice President and Chief Investment Officer

Pete Sandberg, Assistant Vice President for Facilities

Judy Stromayer, Director of Recreation

Nora Flynn, Student Naturalist

Sonja Helgeson, Student Naturalist

Hannah Marti, Student Naturalist

Kate Seybold, Student Naturalist

Ellen Squires, Student Naturalist

Minutes for this committee are posted on the Faculty Governance Committee webpage.

#### Summer Activities

Four students, Zaq Baker, Sonja Helgeson, Maureen Palmer and Kate Seybold were hired through the CURI program and worked full-time for 10 weeks this summer on research and Natural Lands maintenance. One student, Jordan Hiller, worked part time on maintenance activities. We planted 100 3-4 ft tall trees in the 2005 tree seeding area. The trees were a mix of sugar maple, oak, and black cherry. We watered the trees on a regular basis during the summer and fall from a large plastic container on the back of the black pick-up truck. For research projects the students studied growth and survival in the 1990 tree restoration plots and nitrogen fertilizer levels in local corn fields. In the restoration study all trees planted in 1990 were measured and new trees more than 2.5 cm in diameter at breast height were added to the inventory, providing a measure of natural succession. For the agricultural studies, termed On Farm Research, students compared soil characteristics of cornfields farmed with different levels of nitrogen fertilizers and two different cultivation methods, strip till and a modified conservation till. The goal was to find the optimum fertilizer levels in given fields by measuring corn yields at harvest. Students also continued the long-term study on blue bird nesting and fledging of young. During the summer invasive species control consisted of garlic mustard removal from areas around Old Main, cutting of reed canary grass seed heads both by tractor and by

hand along the edges of ponds, and the use of spot herbicide to remove trees from the prairie.

### Fall Activities

Over 50 students signed up to help with the Cannon River Clean-up on September 21. This was part of the Cannon River Watershed Partnership cleanup at multiple sites along the Cannon River. Our group worked in the Sechler Park area from Dundas to the Hwy 3 bridge in Northfield. Student Naturalists led buckthorn removal projects around the Baseball Pond area, with good help from other Natural Lands workers and volunteers. We also had a prairie seed collection day. A group of St. Olaf students led by Diane Angell did projects on the St. Olaf Natural Lands with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders from Greenvale.

Dave Legvold gave the committee with a tour to show us areas that could benefit from pattern tiling with drainage control structures to regulate the water level and runoff rate in tiled fields. Some areas of St. Olaf land are too wet every year for crops and pattern tiling could be used to improve the soil quality or the areas could be abandoned and no longer farmed.

The Student Naturalists and Curator gave a tour of the Natural Lands for Homecoming/Parents weekend for about 50 people. Those who attended were interested and asked many good questions despite the threat of rain.

Student groups, Environmental Coalition, and the St. Olaf Band, have focused on reducing our carbon footprint. Environmental Coalition is developing plans for a carbon-neutral campus, based in part on the thesis, "Envisioning the Carbon-Neutral Campus" by Elizabeth Turner (2013, Master of Science in Architecture: Sustainable Design Track). Some students from Environmental Coalition attended a Power Shift Youth Gathering in Pittsburg. Environmental Coalition The St. Olaf band group STOCarb raises money to pay local farmers carbon credits for no-till farming practices. They buy back twice as many carbon credits as they use for travel. If a trip to the west coast emits about 65 metric tons of carbon, they pay farmers to sequester 130 metric tons of carbon by no-till farming.

More water bottle refilling stations have been installed in Tostrud and the Ellingson renovation, in part in response to the student campaign of the last two years to reduce sale/use of bottled water on campus.

### Other Issues

Don Nelson farm – Don Nelson, the major benefactor for the St. Olaf Natural Lands and Curator position, wants to donate a 160-acre farm near Nerstrand to St. Olaf to enhance the education programs at the college. The farm would offer the opportunity for experimental agriculture and silviculture based on oak and walnut trees already planted by Don. It also has forest, oak savanna, grasslands, wetland habitat and two intermittent streams. The plan is to place the land under a conservation easement allowing agriculture, education and low impact recreation uses. Much of the farm is now rented to a local farmer for corn-soybean agriculture and the college wants to convert agricultural

practices to no-till methods, the same as is required on other college agricultural lands. Income from the rental pays for the taxes on the land and would also provide some additional funds. The college gift committee and lawyers are examining the details.

STOGROW – Due to the late spring, the crops at STOGROW were planted later than planned. They earned some money selling produce to Bon Appétit, but not as much as hoped. Once school started in the fall they had a hard time keeping up with the need to harvest. A St. Olaf alum, Lissa Legge '87? plans to have a feature on STOGROW in a new environmental studies book she is writing.

#### Prairie Burns

Prairie burns around the Coyote and Eaves Ave. ponds were attempted by Gene Bakko and Don Skluzacek? in the fall, but the areas were too wet to burn well.

#### Combined Environmental Concerns and Sustainability Task Force

Conversations with Dave VanWylen, Sustainability Coordinator, Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands, Pete Sandberg, Facilities Director, and Paul Jackson, Environmental Studies Chair led to a proposal to combine the two groups into a standing committee appointed by the President. While the Environmental Concerns Committee has been more focused on education and management of land issues and the Sustainability Task Force has been more involved with broader visions and goals, the two groups have overlap in intensions and membership. A presidentially appointed standing committee would create more visibility for environmental projects and avoid some of the duplication of the two groups.