Minutes of Environmental Concerns Committee  
May 12, 2015  
Submitted by Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands  

Present: Diane Angell, Gene Bakko, Mark Gelle, Sonja Helgeson, Pete Sandberg, Kathy Shea  

The committee met at 11:30 a.m. in Buntrock 143.  

**Spring Activities**  

Prairie burns, phenology walks and making pollinator boxes highlighted spring activities. Burns were conducted on non-conservation easement land by St. Olaf staff and students. Gene Bakko organized the trucks and filled the water tanks. Kathy Shea handled permits and notifications about the burn. We burned the 2001 and 2002 prairies east of Campus Drive road and up to the easement line west of the road. We also burned the prairie area east of the James Farm. Next year we hope to work out a plan with U.S. Fish and Wildlife to burn the prairie last burned in 2010.  

Student Naturalists led weekly phenology walks and noted that spring flowers were a couple weeks earlier than last year when we had a late spring. Participation varied, but those who attended were interested. Student Naturalists made ten pollinator boxes by drilling holes of different sizes for bees and decorating the boxes with wood burning pens. We discussed how to mount them and decided that metal posts would work the best. Students will need to put them up either this summer or next fall. Boxes will have a sign attached to them explaining their purpose. Student Naturalists also conducted a Spring Photo Contest and winners are posted on the Natural Lands web site.  

Student Naturalists and other interested students helped with school visits by Greenvale fifth graders and Open Door Nursery Students. Open Door students came twice – in March and May and used the Art Barn as a meeting place. Diane Angell organized the fifth graders visit in May and had several activity stations for the fifth graders to visit.  

Henry Raether, senior, sent us a report on the successful Maple Syrup Project. They used taps that were half the diameter of traditional taps and set the project up in St. Olaf forest south of Hwy 19. They collected sap for 5 weeks and worked with Randy Clay, St. Olaf Bon Appetit food service, to boil the sap down. They made 4.5 gal of syrup (50 gallons of sap boils down to 1 gallon of syrup in 3.5 hours). They sold 65 bottles of syrup at $10 each and donated all proceeds to a charity, Chloe’s Fight for Rare Disease. Liam John plans to carry out the project next year.  

A hoop house was ordered with funds from the Cargill Grant so that STOGROW could extend its growing season. Pete and Jim plan to level an area, and add compost to it, across from the Art Barn so the hoop house can be set up during summer 2015. In an effort to reduce their debt STOGROW students are planting a greater variety of crops and eliminating expenses, like having chickens, that don’t make money.
Other Issues

The Community Solar Garden planned for 80 acres of St. Olaf farmland east of the hospital is in limbo because Xcel Energy is not supporting the establishment of large solar arrays. Mark Gelle described it as part of a legal process that Geronimo, the solar array company, is fighting. Pete Sandberg is attending meetings about this. Mark also said that the Sorem’s have been allowed to conventionally till the soil this year on the site because St. Olaf thought this was the last year they would be renting the land. The rest the St. Olaf farmland must be farmed with no-till or strip-till methods.

Gene Bakko described the work that he and Don Skluzacek are doing to make a trail through the newer tree plantings south of the Big Pond. The trail will start in the conifers at the trail junction that goes to STOGROW and go south, ending at the trail dividing the two 1990 tree plantings.

Discussions continue about how to memorialize Jim Farrell. A tree was planted in his memory on the main campus. There have also been discussions about a bench in the Natural Lands. Gene and Kathy located a possible site on the south side of the Big Pond. There had also been discussions about having fruit trees in memory of Jim at the new STOGROW site, but committee members discouraged this as deer would likely destroy them without a deer proof fence.

The DNR approved plans to purchase the Nelson Farm near Nerstrand. Once the DNR has its own independent appraisal to determine the value of the land the sale can occur.

Summer students have been hired to work on research and maintenance on the Natural Lands. Invasive species are a priority, starting with garlic mustard. Summer students will study growth patterns in the conifer restoration, blue bird nesting success and cover crops on some of the St. Olaf agricultural lands, working with Dave Legvold.

Sonja Helgeson as representative of the Student Naturalists was thanked for her service.

The next meeting will be next fall. Kathy Shea will be on sabbatical leave for academic year 2015-16 and will still maintain some Natural Lands responsibilities. Her sabbatical is focused on making information on the Natural and Agricultural Lands, from research to natural history, more available to a wider audience. Diane Angell will be Assistant Curator for next year, 2015-16 and will take care of daily responsibilities.