

Minutes of Environmental Concerns Committee
October 16, 2014
Submitted by Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands

Present: Gene Bakko, Nora Flynn, Jim Fisher, Mark Gelle, Kathy Shea, Pete Sandberg,
Kate Seybold, Judy Stromayer, Dave VanWylen

Welcome and Introductions

The committee met at 8 a.m. in Buntrock 142.

Members of the committee for this year are

Chair: Kathy Shea, Professor of Biology, 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

Beckie Judge, Associate Professor of Economics, 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

Dave VanWylen, Chair Sustainability Task Force

Nora Flynn, Student Naturalist

Sonja Helgeson, Student Naturalist

Kate Seybold, Student Naturalist

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

Summer Activities

Four students, Karly Boll, Nora Flynn, Jack Inglis 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, Payne McMillan, worked part time on maintenance activities, mainly applying spot herbicide treatment to trees invading the prairie. Invasive species control consisted of garlic mustard removal from areas around Old Main, and cutting of reed canary grass seed heads both by tractor and by hand along the edges of ponds. We planted 75 sugar maples 2-4 ft tall, in the 2005 and 2009 tree seeding areas. We put a mat made from corn stalks around each tree to decrease competition and water loss. 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 finished GPS mapping of trees in the 1990 tree restoration plots, studied agricultural practices on St. Olaf lands and studied bluebird nesting success. A poster on our forest restoration research was presented at the annual Ecological Society of America Meeting in Sacramento, CA in Aug. Students Sonja Helgeson, Kate Seybold and Maureen Palmer presented the poster. For the on-farm research projects we worked with St. Olaf land renter/farmer Dave Legvold to study effects of different levels of nitrogen fertilizer and nitrogen stabilizer on corn yields and soil chemical and physical properties. The goal was to find the optimum fertilizer levels in given fields. A second project compared soil quality in corn grown with different

cultivation practices, in collaboration with the Cannon River Watershed Partnership. Students also collected data on the long-term study on bluebird nesting and fledging of young.

STOGROW students planted late because of the cold spring and harvested beans, radishes, cucumbers and some tomatoes. Many tomatoes did not ripen although some were harvested the first weekend in October before the frost. The committee supported the idea of putting a hoop house with a foundation on the new STOGROW site, near the Art Barn. The cover crop on the new STOGROW site is growing well. The oats were harvested mid-summer for forage by Ray Larson. The committee recommended looking into funding of a local organic farmer from the Natural Lands endowment to give the students advice.

The Don Nelson farm easement was signed by Don Nelson and the Minnesota Land Trust. The trust requires either agricultural or educational uses and no subdivision of the property. With input from members of the Environmental Concerns Committee the easement allows for the possibility of an educational building and an equipment shed. Don planned to donate the farm to St. Olaf with the hope that it could be used for educational purposes. The St. Olaf College administration does not support the idea of using the farm in our educational program. Gene Bakko has been in regular contact with Don and reported that he would be open to compromises. In recognition of all that Don Nelson has done to set up the endowment for the Natural Lands, discussion in the committee focused the idea of St. Olaf accepting the gift of the farm and selling it within a few years to someone interested in continuing to farm the land but who would also allow field trips to the natural wooded areas by local groups such as the Nerstrand Elementary School. Rebecca Otten in Planned Giving will talk with Don Nelson again.

Fall Activities

Over 40 students signed up to help with the Cannon River Clean-up on September 20. 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 have led buckthorn removal projects around the Baseball Pond area, with help from other Natural Lands workers and St. Olaf volunteers. St. Olaf students organized by Diane Angell did projects on the St. Olaf Natural Lands, including buckthorn removal, with 2nd graders from Greenvale. We also had a prairie seed collection day.

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. We also gave tours to a Sociology/Anthropology class interested in forests and a local Girl Scout group who wanted to learn more about trees.

Pete Sandberg has a group of elementary school students coming from the Faribault Charter school to learn about the wind turbine.

A senior biology major, Emily Patterson is using mist nets to conduct an independent research project to prairie birds in areas that have been burned at different times in the past few years. She is certified to band birds.

Another student, Sam Wadell, built the three chimney swift houses installed in the Natural Lands in August. The chimney swift is another bird species, like the bluebird, that has lost natural nesting spots in chimneys and caves due to development. We should

have had a test to check for location of fiber optic cables before installing the houses because they had to dig down to make a cement foundation.

We are using the weir system to slowly drain the Big Pond this fall. It will expose seeds, encourage germination of more aquatic plant species and attract waterfowl, acting like a prairie burn to rejuvenate the wetland.

Other Issues

Prairie Burns

We had a successful prairie burn on May 29, burning the 1989 prairie and the 2001-2002 prairies south of the path by the composter and east of the road. The prairie grasses in the burned area grew taller this summer than in any other prairie areas and look beautiful. Prairie grasses around the Coyote and Eaves Ave. Ponds were burned in October 2014 by Gene Bakko, Don Skluzacek and students.

Sustainability Task Force

A task force to assess Sustainability on campus was appointed by President Anderson to begin work this fall. The goal of the task force is to talk with different departments to determine how they view sustainability, make recommendations for sustainability at St. Olaf, and make recommendations about how to measure sustainability. Several members of this committee are on the task force including Pete Sandberg, Dave VanWynen-committee chair, and Kathy Shea.

Minor Visitors to Campus

Questions have come up about minor visitors to campus. Teresa Lebens, campus coordinator for visitors, has forms on-line that group leaders need to fill out. Groups should also show evidence of insurance. Campus students or employees working with minors must complete the sexual harassment on-line workshop. Background checks are needed if someone is working with minors individually.

Video

Tom Daymont used a drone to film a cross-country race through the Natural Lands. It highlights the runners and the beautiful, trails, prairie they run through. See <http://vimeo.com/106892627> - it is a nice example of multiples uses of our Natural Lands.

The next meeting will be at the end of the semester.