

Environmental Concerns Committee Minutes

September 21, 2017, Regents Hall of Science 300, 4:15-45:15 p.m.

Submitted by Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands

Present: Diane Angell, Annika Fredrickson, Mark Gelle, Paul Jackson, Kevin Larson, Leon Narvaez, Nic Nelson, Nick Partington, Kathy Shea, Judy Tegtmeyer

The meeting began with introductions. Nic Nelson was hired in June as the Natural Lands Manager. He is working half time and has an office in the 4th floor Regents Hall of Science stock room, 441. Students on the committee are Student Naturalists Annika Fredrickson '18 and Nick Partington '19.

Summer and Fall Activities

In reviewing summer and fall activities, Judy noted that we had an increase in visitors to the Natural Lands after the article on the Blue Bird Trail appeared in the travel section of the Star Tribune. The article featured the St. Olaf Natural Lands and the Carleton Arb as places to visit for a one day outing and discussed seeing blue birds, as well as swallows and chickadees coming in and out of the nest boxes if you visited during nesting season. Both the bookstore and Tostrud needed extra Natural Lands brochures with maps for visitors. These visitors pointed out to us that it is not always clear how to access the Natural Lands. The main kiosk is on the south side of Big Pond, accessible by driving to Tostrud Recreation Center. Paul suggested that we think of putting up GPS coordinates or QR symbols on signs or the web site. People could find nest box location as if they were geocaching.

During the summer four students worked on Natural Lands projects, two doing full time research through the CURI program and two doing full time Natural Lands maintenance work. This fall Student Naturalists are planning to sponsor seed collection and buckthorn pull activities and asking for student volunteers. They also plan to have a photo contest and write short articles for the Student Naturalist and Biology Facebook pages. Several of the Student Naturalists meet monthly with Open Door Preschool students. The preschoolers come to St. Olaf three times a year to tour the Natural Lands. Diane Angell organizes visits each semester for students from Greenvale Elementary School to visit the Natural Lands. Joe Kellogg '18 made an online storybook of the Natural Lands. We will set up a link to it from the Natural Lands webpage.

Other activities include the MIAC Cross Country Championship at St. Olaf on Oct 30 and the State Cross Country Meet the following weekend, on trails in the Natural Lands. We also plan to plant tree seeds this fall on the St. Olaf farmland accessed through the Sechler Park. Unlike last year this is a good year for tree nuts, seeds.

Mark reported that agricultural drainage problems were addressed with additional tile lines on the St. Olaf agricultural field along 320th St. Removal of overhanging trees in the spring caused ruts in the field that had to be plowed over and smoothed out. Some of the trees were removed along the Shea driveway and a strip of prairie grasses, forbs will be planted this fall. Additional overhanging trees still need to be removed next winter.

Current Issues

Diane reported that the rusty patched bumblebee was found in the St. Olaf Natural Lands by Scott King (who studies dragonflies). This is a federally endangered species and Kathy reported this to US Fish and Wildlife Service because we jointly manage the land in the prairie permanent easement.

Kevin Larson informed Paul and Kathy that the composting facility would be moved off-campus this fall to the Mulch Store in Rosemont. This was disappointing because of the educational value of the composter in having students see a closed loop cycle, with waste being used to fertilize St. Olaf land and STOGROW. It is much more expensive to upgrade onsite facilities than truck the compost 23 miles each way to Rosemont twice a week. Several of us suggested that this might be an opportunity to have composting in the dorms, although it would be an additional duty for custodial staff.

Kathy expressed concerns about the future of STOGROW, the student organic farm. Students moved the STOGROW farm to the area across from the Art Barn last summer. Because of the debt of STOGROW from paying student wages in previous summers, the students this summer had to volunteer their time. Paul and Kathy would like to see the college sponsor several student internships with a general focus on sustainability that would at least pay room and board. The students could then put the internship on their resume. Two of the internships could go to STOGROW students. In addition STOGROW needs a shed to store equipment.

Judy talked about use of the playing fields. The field used for Christmas Festival Parking can no longer be used for soccer and softball because of ruts caused by parking cars on the field. She also mentioned that the area about the wind turbine has been suggested for additional softball fields. Most of it is currently rented to one of the St. Olaf farmers.

We plan to have another meeting before the end of the fall semester.