

Environmental Concerns Committee Minutes

October 31, 2016, 4-5 p.m. Buntrock 143

Submitted by Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands

Present: Diane Angell, Gene Bakko, Jim Fisher, Annika Fredrickson, Mark Gelle, Abdulai Iddrisu, Kendra Klenz, Kevin Larson, Kathy Shea, Judy Tegtmeier

In reporting on summer activities on the Natural Lands, Kathy shared that after a visit to inspect our prairie easement this summer a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative sent an email saying it looked wonderful and we should keep doing what we are doing. Gene supervised a student working full time on maintenance this summer and most of his work was on removing or spraying invasive species. Wild parsnip was found for the first time along Hwy 19 and was treated with herbicide. Other invasive species that required work were garlic mustard around the Old Main area, reed canary grass around the Big Pond and in the prairie, and buckthorn and ginnala maple in forest areas. Fall work with students has included more work on removing buckthorn, grape vines, and locus trees along the path behind Regents Hall. Gene and Don mowed a fire break to prepare for a spring burn in the prairie north of the Big Pond loop trail.

The paths improved last year by student Liam John (now graduated) in the Heath Creek Forest area along Hwy 19 are being used as single-track bike trails and walking trails. Unknown persons have improved the trail along Heath Creek starting from the Sechler Park entrance to St. Olaf land. The trail from Sechler Park has been improved most of the way across Post property to connect with the trails in the Heath Creek Forest area. A local bicycle club may be working on the trails. No one seems to know or be too worried about how the trail became more accessible. There is a locked gate across the Sechler Park entrance, but walkers and bikers can go around it. A key can be checked out from the Physical Plant office if one want to take a vehicle past the gate.

The plan to plant tree seeds on the St. Olaf farmland accessed through the Sechler Park entrance was postponed because this was a poor year for oak seed production. Not enough tree seeds could be collected so we have postponed the planting until next year. We need to discuss with Dave Legvold what to plant in the field next year.

Mark Gelle shared that Dave Legvold who rents some of the St. Olaf farmland to the north reported problems with trees overhanging crop areas and problems with tile drainage that need to be addressed. Mark will work with Dave about how to address these issues.

Jim reported that the 40 acre solar farm is nearing completion and that as many as 65 people are working out there to get the solar panels set up. The committee wanted more details about how St. Olaf is now carbon neutral for electricity. The wind turbine supplies 25-28% of electricity directly to the St. Olaf grid, the solar panels will make up about 40% and credits from other programs make up the rest.

Jim also reported that they used a machine to mulch underbrush around Rand Hall and then planted a mix of forbs and grasses. They also mulched trees overhanging the road

along Big Pond to the composter. The soil piled up near the composter is from the renovation of the football field and will be used as needed around campus.

Land north of the hospital and along Kathy Shea's property was recently sold to Lawrence Schweich. He plans to farm the land and removed some trees on his land, but not on the adjacent St. Olaf property.

Student Naturalists Kendra Klenz and Annika Frederickson shared what student naturalists have been doing this fall

- Teaching Open Door Nursery School lessons on the Natural Lands
- Greenvale second graders activities on the Natural Lands
- Buckthorn pull
- Prairie seed collection
- Spooky nature walk with treats for Halloween
- Trash pick-up after State Cross-Country Meet
- Photo contest

During summer the STOGROW hoop house, funded by the M.A. Cargill grant to Environmental Studies, was installed in the new location next to the Art Barn. Because the ground inside the hoop house was so difficult to turn over the students made raised beds on one side of the hoop house. The soil used was a combination of compost and black soil from the football field. Jim recommended that future raised beds be smaller, 4 x 25 feet so that one can work better on three sides of the bed. The tomatoes planted grew and produced green fruit, but the fruit never ripened because they were planted so late. Next year the hoop house can be used to start things growing earlier.

The ten pollinator boxes made by the student naturalists were installed throughout the Natural Lands. They provide nesting spaces for wild bees and a small sign to explain their purpose was placed on each box.

As part of a cost sharing agreement with Leif Knecht of Knecht Nurseries, located on land leased from the college, about 30 five to eight feet tall sugar maples were planted in the restored forest southeast of Regents Hall. Knecht Nurseries staff planted the trees and installed trees tubes around the tree bole and a mat around the tree base. St. Olaf student landworkers watered the trees this fall. The goal is to increase tree survival by adding extra protective measures. Leif will plant additional trees as requested in the Natural Lands. We need to think about what species we need and where we need them. Although Emerald ash borer has not yet been found in Northfield it is in the Twin Cities and will likely kill ash trees in this area in the near future. Therefore we need to think about species to plant to fill in where ash have been growing.