

Environmental Concerns Committee Minutes

December 13, 2017, Regents Hall of Science 300, 4:00-5:00 p.m.

Submitted by Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands

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

Fall Activities

Student naturalists Annika Fredrickson and Nick Partington reported on fall activities. The wreath-making event on Dec. 10 was very popular. Greens were collected from conifers around the Natural Lands and tied together with twine so that the wreaths are compostable after the holidays. Students also organized a couple buckthorn pulls, prairie seed collection, a spooky walk in the Natural Lands for Halloween, and a photo contest. Several of the naturalists led monthly natural history lessons with preschoolers, either at Open Door Preschool or on-campus with a walk in the Natural Lands, using the Art Barn as a meeting place.

The big project on the Natural Lands for fall was a tree seeding of the ten acres of agricultural land along Heath Creek, across from Sechler Park. This is the last major planned addition to our forest restoration projects. The 2007 the St. Olaf College Non-Core Lands Study by Boldt Consulting recommended that land south of Hwy. 19 along Heath Creek be a permanent natural resource, preserving its natural character. The area was seeded according to methods recommended by the MN DNR with trees seeds purchased from Brad Gatzlaff at Zumbro Valley Forestry in Northfield. Student researchers will monitor tree growth over time.

Other projects include discussions with Knecht's Nursery about providing additional trees where needed in restoration areas. They plan to use tree tubes, weed mats and mulching to enhance the chance of success of larger newly planted individuals. Flatten House and its stairway will be torn down in the spring and we will need trees from Knecht's to reforest the area. We need to make requests known a year or two ahead of time so they have time to grow seedlings. We also planted prairie along the edge of Legvold's field and the Shea driveway where overhanging box elder were removed last winter. An Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) FaCe grant was submitted (and subsequently awarded) to expand cooperation among ACM schools in managing and using natural areas for educational purposes. Initially St. Olaf will be working with Grinnell, Carleton and Knox Colleges. More signs are needed at entrances to the Natural Lands. The addition of a QR code to Natural Lands signs was discussed.

Facilities is working on working on changing the composting system. Instead of on-site composting it will be stored and picked up twice a week and taken to the Mulch Store in Rosemount. They are working with students in Environmental Coalition to have composting available throughout Buntrock Commons. People will have three choices when throwing something away: compost, recycling or trash. Paper towels will go to compost, as will disposable coffee cups (lids go to recycling). Some plant waste will be composted for STOGROW in an 8 ft x 4 ft frame near the hoop house.

Questions about energy use for the new ice area on campus revealed that much of the energy needed will be renewable: solar and thermal. Heat from compressors will keep the subsoil warm. The ice will be insulated and the building will have two-inch insulation. Waste heat will heat water and plant steam will heat space. St. Olaf subscribed for three % of the solar subscription of the new solar farm on Armstrong Road. Overall 104-106% of electrical energy at St. Olaf is provided by solar and wind. Wind averages 22% and can carry the entire sewer and electrical line.

We discussed options for continuing STOGROW as a student educational opportunity. Funding as a student organization is no longer available due to the debt accumulated. That debt will be paid by student organizations, but we need to find another funding source. Last summer students volunteered to keep STOGROW running. We cannot continue to find students unless we have some compensation. The committee stressed that students need to clean up the James Farm area and put equipment away at the end of every growing season. The program also needs to be tied to a permanent part of the college and students need regular supervision. Becca Carlson a former St. Olaf student and manager of SEEDS Farm has offered to help with STOGROW. We are also talking with the Piper Center, the Grants office, Development for possible donations, and Bon Appetite.

Agricultural land issues include the need to trim overhanging box elder and willow trees. They need to be trimmed, as some were last winter, or the farmland rented needs to be reduced. Dave Legvold reported that people have been driving on St. Olaf farmland via the driveway on Thye Ave. They compress the soil and make it more difficult to farm. However this committee felt we need to maintain driveway access via Thye Ave.

The Benedictines will build a long-term care unit next to the hospital. This will be on land already rented from St. Olaf by the hospital. There will be 94 units in the first phase and 70 units in the second phase.

We will meet again second semester.