

Minutes of meeting of Natural Area Advisory Committee: 23 April 2003

Wednesday, 3 to 4:15pm, Natural Area Park and successional plot B. Members present were Michael Bond, Don Dickson, Don Graetz, Shane Hill, Susan Jacobson, Jack Putz, Marilyn Roberts, Erick Smith, Carol Stiles, and Tom Walker (chair).

1. Natural Area Park

Marilyn Roberts, Chair of the Natural Area Park Subcommittee, reported on improvements to the Park and received input from the Committee as to future changes and additions. The five tables are to remain where currently located (in a shady spot about 40 feet south of the sidewalk on the north border of the Park and about 80 feet north of the gateway to SEEP). The tables will not be tied down as long as none is stolen and local displacements do not become a problem. The Committee agreed on a site for a trash receptacle. Erick Smith volunteered to see that PPD installs it. The boulders along the north park border will be moved to the south side of the sidewalk; those on the east side will be moved westward approximately in line with a 5×5 ft steel-covered utility access. This will leave more space for buses to load and unload. Shrubs will be planted along and between the boulders to further deter vehicles from entering the park.

2. Ethnoecology garden

Mike Bond reported that the Ethnoecology Club was still interesting in developing an ethnoecology garden within Natural Area Park. The Committee reaffirmed its approval, and the Tom Walker noted that all details should be settled in Fall Semester so that nothing would interfere with a successful start during the 2004 growing season.

3. Upland pine restoration

The Committee discussed Alan Long's proposal (attached) to accelerate the restoration of NATL's upland pine by using a heavy duty mowing machine to reduce the depth of the fuel bed (shrubs, sprouts, vines, etc.) and pulverize much of the dead logs and branches on the ground. This would increase the opportunities for burning by reducing potential smoke problems and fire intensity. Mowing in the middle of summer would reduce the future sprouting of at least some of the hardwoods and perennials that have been boosting fire intensity. The Committee approved Long's proposal but specified that great care be taken to avoid damage to the live trees that have been left standing (chiefly longleaf pines and turkey oaks. Similarly, the four pairs of experimental poppy mallow plots should be left undisturbed.

4. Proposed four-lane extension of SW 24th Avenue through NATL

Tom Walker reviewed relevant events since 31 Jan 2003, when the Administration first publicly announced that it intended to donate campus land for a four-lane extension of SW 24th Avenue. He noted that the Administration had thus far avoided open discussions of the costs and benefits of the proposed donation. Furthermore, the Administration has not set a time-certain for such discussions. On 26 March, President Young named six-persons to a "focus group" to consider the academic impact of the extension and how the impact might be mitigated. That group still has no chair, and its first meeting is 6 May. On 17 April, Vice-President Poppell assured the Faculty Senate that the advisory committees that are normally consulted on changes in land use would be asked for input once the Administration had prepared an enabling amendment to the Campus Master Plan. The earliest that could occur is Fall Semester, but the experiences of this Spring Semester

suggest that the Administration will avoid open discussion of the costs and benefits as long as possible.

Jack Putz suggested that NAAC should draft a letter to President Young detailing concerns about the University's proposed donation of ROW for SW 24th Avenue and get enough faculty signatures to give the letter clout. He also suggested getting the press and environmental groups involved.

Tom Walker suggested that the Administration should be made to defend its proposal in departmental faculty meetings. He reported that he would give a PowerPoint presentation on 24th Avenue issues at an Entomology and Nematology faculty meeting in about two weeks and that Poppell would be invited to give the other side (to an informed faculty) at a subsequent meeting. He will post the PowerPoint presentation on the web and would be pleased for others to use it. He is also willing to give it at meetings of other faculties.

The Committee concluded that mounting a publicity campaign should be postponed until the start of Fall Semester. Tom Walker promised to keep the Committee informed about the success or failure of having the Administration explain its proposal at a meeting of informed faculty.

5. Financial report for 2002-03 fiscal year

Tom Walker reported on the NAAC expense account for the period 14 Mar 2002 to 23 Apr 2003. The one credit was \$1,000 from Provost Colburn. Expenditures totaled \$1,133. Two items cost more than \$100: 2.5 gal. Garlon herbicide (\$189) and half the cost of four tables for Natural Area Park (\$619). A balance of \$188.72 remains in the account.

6. NAAC membership and chair for 2003-04

Tina Gurucharri will be replaced by the new chair of the Lakes, Vegetation and Landscaping Committee. Mike Bond will probably be replaced by Daniel Herrera as the representative of the Ethnoecology Club. Tom Walker will be NAAC chair for another year.

7. Group photo

Those attending were photographed. The picture will be posted at <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/NAAC2003.htm>

8. Plot B live oak

The Committee walked to the south edge of successional plot B and viewed the 17-inch DBH live oak that is the only living broadleaved tree remaining in the plot. A proposed change in NATL's long-range plan would leave the tree for shade and to increase plot B biodiversity. The Committee gave the proposal unanimous initial approval. If it receives another favorable vote at the next NAAC meeting, the proposal will become part of the long-range plan.

[page appended to the minutes]

NATL Upland Pine Area
Prescribed Burning Issues
Alan Long
April 18, 2003

Restoration of the upland longleaf pine area presents several significant issues. One of the most important is the reintroduction of fire to the ecosystem. Unfortunately, it had gone so long without fire that ecological succession to the mixed oak/shrub/vine understory presented many sources for regenerating understory plants after each prescribed burn. And that is exactly what has happened. The ability of all these plants (and a few others that have snuck in since burning was started) to recover after burning presents a situation where fire alone will probably not restore the desired end condition in a reasonable period of time without some hot growing season fires. But such fires run the risk of eliminating a few more pines each time they are conducted, and there are not enough pines left in the area to assume that risk.

A second related issue is smoke management, and we are very limited in terms of direction of winds for burning prescriptions. Northerly or northeast winds are most preferable, and they tend to occur most often during the winter months and much less frequently during the growing season, compounding the problems with finding adequate burn days during the growing season. One other complication for smoke management at this point in time is the abundance of large (> 2" diameter) dead fuels laying on the ground – they represent a significant source of smoke during the smoldering phases of the fire, which potentially means a lot of smoke along 34th St and Archer Rd. Again, that is a risk I am not keen on assuming. We can wait a few years for those materials to decompose to a point where they are no longer a problem, or we can try to reduce them more quickly and increase opportunities next winter.

One solution to these two issues would be to use a heavy duty mowing machine to reduce the depth of the fuel bed (shrub, sprouts, vines, etc) and essentially pulverize much of the dead logs and branches on the ground. This would reduce both potential smoke problems and fire intensity and increase the possible burn days next winter. I suggest we arrange such a mowing this summer, either with UF Physical Plant equipment or one of the Division of Forestry Wildland-Urban Interface fuel mitigation teams (using their positrac mulching machines). By conducting the mowing in the middle of summer we will also reduce the sproutability of at least some of the hardwoods and perennials that have been such prolific sprouters. The positrac is a very low ground pressure system and should present no problems in terms of soil impacts.