

Minutes of meeting of Natural Area Advisory Committee: 25 March 2004

Thursday, 1:00 to 2:30pm, Natural Area Park. Members present were Don Dickson, Shane Hill, Linda Jones, Marilyn Roberts, Erick Smith, Carol Stiles, and Tom Walker (chair).

1. SW 24th Avenue

Tom Walker described the current situation regarding the proposed extension of SW 24th Avenue through NATL. The Final Report of the SW 24th Avenue Focus Group was presented as an information item at the March 18 meeting of the Faculty Senate. The following motion was made and seconded and will become an action item for the April 15 meeting of the Faculty Senate:

"Based on the SW 24th Avenue Focus Group Final Report dated February 25, 2004, the Faculty Senate requests the Administration to formally drop consideration of a proposed amendment to the UF Campus Master Plan to accommodate transfer and/or dedication of an 80 ft right-of-way to Alachua County for the stated purpose of a 2-lane extension of SW 24th Avenue from 34th Street to Archer Road."

It is important that senators vote overwhelmingly for the action item. To ensure that this happens NAAC needs to (1) send informative email, with links to important web documents, to all Senators and (2) distribute a one sheet handout summarizing the academic importance of NATL on one side and the detrimental effects of the road on the other.

2. Natural Area Park

Marilyn Roberts reported on recent improvements in NAP, which included installing seven tree identification signs and moving the north fence of the Southwest Chiller Plant 15 ft to the south to make room for a new walkway between NAP and the main portion of the Cultural Complex. She showed the Committee a proposed route for a low fence along the north and east edges of the Park. A gap on each edge would allow pedestrian and essential vehicle access to the Park. The northern portion of the east fence was about 4 ft farther from the Natural Area Drive than the southern portion to allow school busses to conveniently unload their passengers and goods. Don Dickson suggested that the trash pickup vehicle should not drive through the Park, and the driver of that vehicle said he could park his vehicle outside and walk into NAP to pick up the trash. Marilyn stated that three more picnic tables were needed for NAP and proposed that they be funded jointly by FLMNH and NAAC.

The Committee was asked about Ken Osfield's proposal that the walkway from the Cultural Complex be extended south and east across NAP to improve access to the NAP kiosk. The vote was unanimously against the extension.

3. Fiscal report

An audited report of expenditures from the NAAC expense account showed credits of \$1188.72 and debits of \$300.62, leaving a balance of \$888.10. No single expenditure was more than \$85. The Committee approved the following future purchases: \$490.50 to pay half the cost of three tables for NAP, \$90 for 300 wire grass plugs, and ca. \$75 for additional trail signs in NATL's public area. Those purchases will leave a balance of ca. \$230 for miscellaneous expenditures.

4. Membership and chair for 2004-2005

Two changes in NAAC membership were discussed. Daniel Herrera will be asked if the Ethnoecology Society intends to maintain an interest in NATL that will justify its president being a voting member of NAAC. Carol Stiles, who represents Plant Pathology and has actively participated in NAAC since 2000, will seek to be replaced by Jim Kimbrough. Tom Walker was re-elected as chair.

5. Future needs of NATL

Tom Walker described a need for changes in the status and administration of NATL. He noted that UF Administration has an improved understanding of the academic value and uses of NATL because of the SW 24th Avenue controversy and that this fall, when a new Provost is named, may be a propitious time to seek the needed changes. In the discussion that followed, Linda Jones suggested that NATL might be made the responsibility of some department with a position and money given it and earmarked for that specific purpose. Erick Smith pointed out that all natural areas on campus were currently being surveyed and management plans developed. He thought it possible that a supervisor for all natural areas would be named. He also pointed out that David O'Brien viewed NATL as primarily an IFAS responsibility even though PPD has been doing most of the maintenance there since Spring 2001.

6. Walking survey of NATL's public area

On its tour of the public area the Committee noted these problems and took these actions:

Don Dickson suggested that a martin house be erected in the mowed area west of SEEP trail. The Committee approved the idea, and Don volunteered to see that the house is put in place.

The Committee admired the view of SEEP's open water from the academic kiosk and voted to have a similar vista from the academic pavilion. The Wetlands Club will be asked for its input before any vegetation is cut or trimmed.

When it was pointed out that the list of potential student projects posted on the kiosk had failed to find takers, it was suggested that the availability of projects be advertised in a freshman course that includes community service projects [can someone make this more specific?] and in NAAC's annual letters to department chairs.

The successional plots and the eastern edge of the adjacent upland pine had large patches of cogon grass that need to be eradicated to prevent the grass's further spread. Erick Smith noted that there is a grant program that might be tapped for the resources needed to eradicate this and other invasive exotic plants from NATL.

The restoration of the upland pine had advanced as a result of last summer's bush-hogging and of February's prescribed burn. Most of the long-leaf pines transplanted last summer had survived the burn and several patches of wiregrass that had grown from plugs transplanted in May 1997 were in evidence.

A large air conditioning unit in the DPI compound near the fence at grid segment D6 to D7 might be made less obtrusive with noise-attenuating shielding.

Some patches of the invasive exotics coral ardisia and climbing tree fern were noted along the eastern half of Division Trail.

The Committee agreed that several additional trail signs are needed to help persons find their way while using NATL's public area.