

Minutes of meeting of Natural Area Advisory Committee: 9 December 2004

Thursday, 1:00 to 2:30pm, Room 1014, Entomology & Nematology building. Members present were Mark Brown, Don Dickson, Sandra Garrett, Susan Jacobson, Doug Levey, Erick Smith, Jeff Smith, Tom Walker (chair), and Sally Wazny. Also present were Clay Montague (representing LVL Chair van Blokland) and Linda Dixon (Manager, Planning Office, Facilities Planning and Construction) and Eric Lewis (Senior Planner, Facilities Planning and Construction).

LONG-RANGE PLANNING

Chair Tom Walker summarized the context for preparing long-range plans for NATL, including the completion of NATL's first ten years, the emphasis on conservation areas in the 2005-2015 update of the UF Master Plan, substantial funds for conservation areas expected in fiscal year 2005-2006, and a new Provost expected during Spring Semester 2005. Linda Dixon summarized how the five-year update of the conservation element of the UF Master Plan is being prepared.

1. Land-use categories in the 2005-2015 Master Plan

What NAAC defines as NATL has always included all of what was designated as Preservation Area 1 in the Conservation Element of the 2000-2010 update of the Campus Master Plan. In addition NATL has always included areas assigned to other land-use categories, such as Passive Recreation (e.g., the area which is now Natural Area Park) and Wetlands (e.g., some of the area that is now SEEP).

In preliminary discussions of land-use categories for the current Master Plan update, the category of Outdoor Academic was suggested, mainly to differentiate areas for outdoor agricultural teaching from areas intended for academic buildings. This seemed a category that might be appropriate for the parts of NATL that were not part of Preservation Area 1. However, in a recent meeting of the Conservation Study Committee of the Master Plan update, planning staff proposed, and the Study Committee tentatively approved, a list of Conservation uses that would allow all of NATL to be designated Conservation. This led to the NAAC Chair's recommendation that "all of NATL be assigned to Conservation Uses, provided that the allowed usages include natural habitat preservation, water resource protection, teaching/research resource development, stormwater facilities, and nature parks (with public foot-trails/pathways/boardwalks, interpretive signage and picnic areas)." [The allowed uses are from the planning staff's proposal.]

In the discussion of this recommendation, concern was expressed that some uses allowed in the Conservation category would not protect Conservation lands from major intrusions, such as a large storm water storage facility for an adjacent area. Linda Dixon pointed out that *all* construction projects are thoroughly vetted by UF's four land-use committees, including the Lakes, Vegetation and Landscaping Committee (LVL).

In view of what has always been permitted in NATL, it was suggested that Conservation uses explicitly permit collecting of invertebrates and plant materials for academic purposes. The committee endorsed the Chair's recommendation with the stipulation that this concern be addressed.

2. Relationship of Surge Wetland to NATL

In May 2004, NAAC voted to make the Surge Wetland easily and invitingly accessible to academic users of NATL and recommended that a NATL-type corral fence with a

pedestrian gap be erected to help accomplish this. The fence was funded by Provost Colburn and will soon be in place.

As part of its long-range planning initiative, NAAC should decide if it wants the Surge Area to become a formal part of NATL. This led to the Chair's recommendation that the Surge Wetland be made a formal part of NATL "provided that the University substantially increases its support for NATL's management and maintenance." Action on this recommendation was combined with the next agenda item.

3. Adjustment of Surge Area boundaries

The Surge Area is about 12 acres that lies between the Surge Wetland and the south two-thirds of NATL. It is home to an aggregation of support and academic buildings, with most of the latter dating from a post-WWII surge in research activities. In July 2004, the Conservation Area Land Management (CALM) Working Group proposed that the Surge Area boundaries be changed as indicated on the attached map. This and the prospect of the Surge Wetland becoming a formal part of NATL led to the Chair's recommendation that NAAC go on record in support of this proposal.

To aid the discussion of this recommendation, Erik Lewis passed out a map showing a November 2004 revision of the CALM proposal for review and comment. Unlike the original CALM proposal, the new map showed most of Natural Area Park and SEEP as within a proposed conservation area to be named "Natural Area Teaching Lab." If the conservation area does not include all of what is currently NATL then what was approved in Agenda Item 1, might not be appropriate after all. Furthermore, if the Surge Wetland becomes a formal part of NATL, designating the western conservation area of NATL the "Natural Area Teaching Lab" conservation area could be confusing. The Committee voted to support the Surge Wetlands becoming a part of NATL if the University substantially increases its support for NATL's management and maintenance and to support any adjustments to the Surge Area boundaries that would benefit the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory.

4. Future management and maintenance of NATL

The 9 Dec 2004 draft of "Proposed future management and maintenance of NATL was the basis for the discussion of this agenda item. [The current draft is at <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/NATLmanage.pdf>.]

The three preliminary assumptions were accepted.

There was a wide-ranging discussion of the Help Needed section. The advantages and disadvantages of having the bulk of the essential tasks done by a Teaching Assistant (graduate student with certain benefits) as opposed to OPS help (need not be a student; no benefits) were discussed. It was pointed out that a NATL Teaching Assistant (TA) could do NAAC-assigned tasks that were important to NATL's information infrastructure and could do preparatory work for classes that make use of NATL and introduce them to NATL's facilities. The total costs of hiring a TA were said to be substantially higher than the \$12,000 (or more) starting pay.

A suggestion that seemed to have broad support was that for routine tasks, especially those that are janitor-like or grounds-person-like, an OPS position was needed to free the TA to work on more academically demanding tasks.

In the discussion of the "Supervision Needed" section, no one other than the NAAC Chair was identified as a potential supervisor of the TA and/or OPS person who would be doing the bulk of the tasks needed to maintain NATL. It was suggested that if both positions were involved, the TA could help the Chair by checking whether the OPS person was doing the tasks assigned.

5. Future improvements to NATL

The 9 Dec 2004 draft of "Future improvements to NATL" was the basis for the discussion of this agenda item. [The current draft is at <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/NATLimprove.pdf>.]

The item, "Establish a place to store NATL-related equipment and fluids on site or conveniently close," was changed to "Establish a place to store NATL-related equipment and fluids conveniently close to NATL," because of the need to store herbicides.

Linda Dixon handed out sheets specifying that the next session of the Florida Legislature will be asked to allot \$500,000 from the Capital Improvement Trust Fund for UF to use to promote environmental stewardship through development of a strong Conservation Area Land Management Plan. The sheet proposing how the allotment is to be spent (posted at <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/CITFmoney.pdf>) lists four initiatives, one of which is "Expanded natural area teaching resources and facilities."

OTHER

6. Minigrant awards

No later than 13 Dec 2004, NAAC members are to rank the two proposals for \$500 minigrants and to indicate whether one or both should be funded. Paper ballots were distributed at the meeting and electronic ballots will be emailed on 10 Dec 2004. The award(s) will be announced on 14 Dec 2004.

7. Signs for NATL and Surge Wetland

The committee critiqued drafts of signs to discourage the public from entering the Surge Wetland and to reduce the amount of trash being thrown into NATL from the Regency Oaks parking lot. The committee approved the text for four signs as shown on the attachment. Before the signs are made, suggestions will be sought from LVL for the Surge Wetland sign and from the management of Regency Oaks Apartments for the anti-trash signs.

8. Planting plan for east and south of Southwest Chiller Plant

Erick Smith led the group to Natural Area Park, where he explained the planting plan for the interface between NATL and the Southwest Chiller Plant.

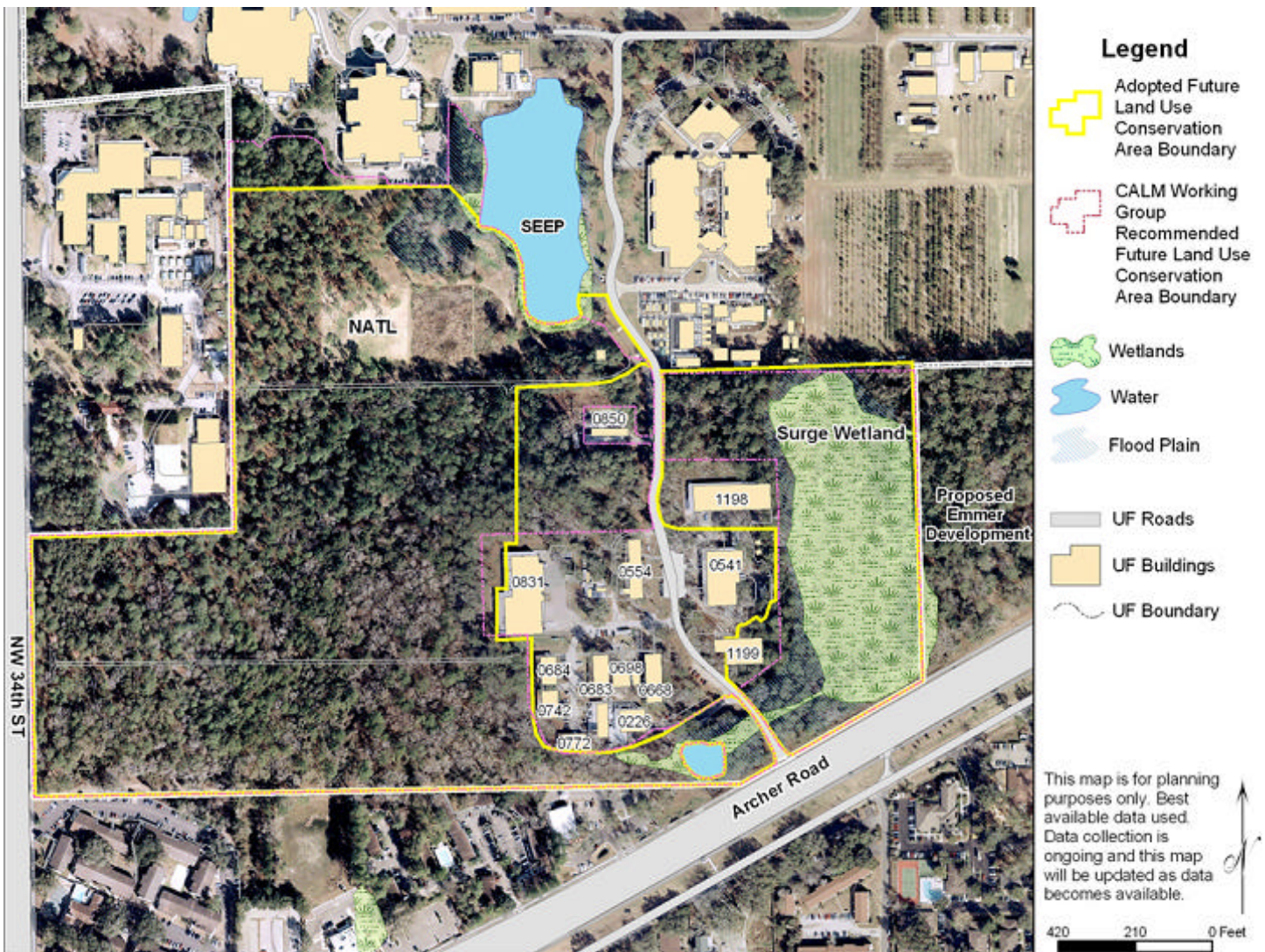
9. Group photo

A photo was made of those attending the meeting (<http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/naac2004.htm>).

Possible boundary adjustments for NATL and Surge Wetland

Recommended by the Conservation Area Land Management (CALM) Working Group

Presented to UF's Ecology, Conservation and Stewardship Committee (ECOS) on 12 July 2004
and to the Lakes, Vegetation and Landscaping Committee on 9 August 2004



One sign for entrance into Surge Wetland
6 x 12 inches, white Helvetica letters on dark green
background. Mounting hole at center, top and bottom

Academic use only
Closed to public

Two signs for fence along Regency Oaks parking lot.
6 x 12 inches, white Helvetica letters on dark green
background. Mounting hole at center, top and bottom

Please put trash
in dumpster →
Help keep NATL clean!

One sign for fence along Regency Oaks parking lot.
6 x 12 inches, white Helvetica letters on dark green
background. Mounting hole at center, top and bottom

Please put trash
← in dumpster
Help keep NATL clean!