

New River Valley Green Infrastructure, Committee Meeting
New River Valley PDC, February 4, 2009, 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Meeting goals:

1. Receive updates on progress by mapping working groups.
2. Receive update from Grants Sub-committee.
3. Review and approve committee guide.

Attendees:

Chuck Dietz	VA Department of Conservation and Recreation
Joey Fagan	VA Department of Conservation and Recreation
John Eustis	New River Land Trust
David Richert	VA Department of Forestry
Susan Garrison	Town of Blacksburg
Randall Rose	Virginia Tourism Corporation
Beth Obenshain	New River Land Trust
Kim Steika	VT Community Design Assistance Center
Karen Drake	Town of Blacksburg
Melissa Skelton	City of Radford
Jamie MacLean	Montgomery County
Dave Rundgren	NRVPDC

Agenda Items:

1. Welcome and Review of meeting agenda and goals

Regina welcomed the group to this meeting of the Green Infrastructure Steering Committee. The primary goal of this meeting was to hear updates from each of the working groups and the grants sub-committee on new work and on-going projects. Additionally, the group will provide final approval of the committee guide for public distribution via the PDC's website.

2. Working Group updates

- a. Progress made to date

Each working group provided a brief summary of their work since the previous committee meeting. Below is a summary of those comments.

Forests & Farms

John Eustis gave a brief summary of the work of the Forests & Farms working group. To date, this group has collected data from the Department of Forestry that was used in the original forest economics model developed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. There is some concern about this data's age and applicability to the NRV region. Currently, this group is waiting to consult with Karen Firehock regarding these issues.

Water

John also gave a brief update for the water group. This group is in the same position as the Forests & Farms group. They have quite a bit of data, but at this point are waiting on some feedback before making the final determination as to how to proceed with evaluating this particular theme. For example, this group has data on streams and water bodies in the region that are listed as impaired, but there is some question on how to assign values to these water resources. One potential solution for this example is to not value impairment, but rather

create a separate map showing these impairments and the level and types of impairment for future consideration in land use decisions.

Natural Hazards

Joey Fagan briefly discussed the progress of the Natural Hazards working group. This group has gathered data on floodplains, Karst, and limestone layers in the area. It is possible though that some of this data may be represented in other themes, such as floodplains and Karst in with the water resources. Chuck Dietz discussed the work of Friends of Claytor Lake working with Skyline Soil and Water Conservation District to identify steep slopes around Claytor Lake. He is planning on getting in touch with Skyline and FOCL to determine if the green infrastructure initiative can obtain the data and methods for identifying these steep slopes and expand the methods to the entire region.

Cultural

Randy Rose gave a brief summary of the work from the Cultural group. At the last meeting, this group had expressed a desire to get some additional feedback from the New River Heritage Coalition as local area experts. The group contacted Mr. Terry Nicholson with the Coalition and the Blacksburg Museum. After reviewing the DCR model, Mr. Nicholson agreed that it adequately identified significant structures in the region. One shortfall of the model though was its lack of identification of “freshwater heritage” resources. Several examples of freshwater heritage resources include Stroubles Creek, Ingles’ Ferry, and Pepper’s Ferry. At this point the committee discussed how to identify other significant freshwater heritage areas or points to include in our model. It was decided that Regina and the Cultural working group will work with each of the localities to identify a list significant freshwater heritage resources.

Recreation & Health

Jamie MacLean described the work of the Recreation & Health working group since the December committee meeting. In that time, the group met with Parks & Rec staff from Montgomery County, among others. A list of criteria was forwarded to Regina following that meeting, which will be in turn forwarded to Ken at CMI for review. The working group members identified some concern at the lack of expert opinion from outside Montgomery County. In the end, it was decided that the criteria they developed were generic enough to apply equally as well to all localities in the region. At this point, there was some committee discussion as to identifying segments of the New River most frequently accessed for recreation, possibly through discussions with recreation departments and outfitters. The value of number of users and public access were discussed and both were determined to be important in the ranking of these sites.

Ecosystem & Habitat Diversity

Regina updated the committee on the work of the Ecosystem & Habitat Diversity working group. While the group feels fairly confident in the information and data it has on wildlife, the group still feels somewhat uncomfortable making the same assertion about the data on plants. Regina will be contacting Jason Bullock to talk with him about these concerns for any advice he may be able to provide. A question was asked about corridors for wildlife and potential bird migration corridors. Regina indicated that for wildlife, riparian corridors tend to be easily identifiable areas for use by wildlife. As for bird migration corridors, ideally, this initiative is on the wrong scale to identify these corridors. There was some discussion within the committee and it was decided that we should attempt to at least identify those areas within the region that are important for raptor migrations. These discussions led to idea

that riparian corridors could possibly appear in several themes, but with varying distances associated with them. It was decided that for each theme in which riparian corridors were potentially important (water for water quality preservation, ecosystem & habitat diversity for wildlife movement), the ideal corridor would be identified and ranked within the theme. It is entirely possible using this logic that certain distance riparian corridors will end up ranking out as very important because they serve multiple purposes (i.e., water quality and wildlife corridor). In the end, that is exactly what we are working towards, identifying lands that provide significant services through the protection of several important functions.

3. Grants Sub-committee update

a. New grant applications

Regina gave an update on two grant applications that the PDC submitted in December for work related to the Green Infrastructure Initiative. At the beginning of December, Regina submitted a grant application to the Virginia Environmental Endowment to continue work on the mapping of regional green infrastructure. Specifically the grant would be used to contract with CMI to develop a GIS toolbar to be distributed to participating localities. This toolbar would allow the localities to replicate the work of the regional committee while putting a more local emphasis on their evaluation of lands. A decision is expected for sometime in March.

The second grant application was submitted by the PDC and the Virginia Water Resources Research Center from Virginia Tech. This grant was submitted to the National Science Foundation to continue the work started on sustainable land development. Specifically, this grant will focus on creating a process and protocol for communities to use to encourage sustainable land development techniques when their communities might not otherwise qualify to participate in current third-party certification programs (i.e., LEED Neighborhoods, or Earthcraft Communities). Again, a decision on this application is expected in a March timeframe.

b. Radford project update

David Richert gave an update on his demonstration project in the City of Radford. Last year, there was a street tree inventory and analysis of the western portion of town, with the eastern portion being inventoried this coming year. The next phase of the project will include determining an estimation of what each tree provides the city, as well as a snapshot of the costs of maintenance of the trees. This process will update the city's land use cover data. The project will be using the program "City Green" to conduct an urban ecosystem analysis for the city. Also in this phase, there will be some identification of critical Karst areas. While not able to necessarily to determine the value of these areas in dollars and cents, they hope to estimate the costs of the grey infrastructure necessary to replace the services provided by the green infrastructure. The next phase of the project will include the fine delineation of a couple of subwatersheds within the city. Ideally, these will be areas with development planned, to identify a vulnerability threshold and quantify the economic benefits of preserving at least some of the green infrastructure in these areas. The final phase of this project will work with Rick Roth of Radford University to calculate the carbon footprint of the city and determine how much planting and other mitigation strategies are necessary to offset some or that entire footprint. Essentially, this phase will begin to identify how to manage the urban forest to maximize carbon sequestration.

c. Additional work for current grants

Regina updated the committee on some work currently being negotiated by the grants sub-committee. As briefly mentioned previously by John, this group is working on a subcontract with Karen Firehock of the Green Infrastructure Center in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is reprogramming some of its grant money to cover some consulting work with Karen. Specifically, Karen will be assisting the Forests & Farms working group to identify what data may be necessary and potentially more appropriate for our regional analysis. After that consultation, CMI will be provided with the information they need to complete the analysis of that theme. The other working groups will have the opportunity to take the lessons from that group and apply them to their datasets. At this point, the working groups are welcome to continue to gather input on their particular topic, but we will be waiting to see what feedback and advice the Forests & Farms group gets from Karen.

4. Committee Guide

Following the previous committee meeting, the committee guide document was placed on the Basecamp website for input and suggestions to finalize the document. Having received no major comments, Regina suggested that the committee approve this document, acknowledging that it is a fluid document meant to be revised as the work of the committee continues in the future. With no additional comments or changes, the committee approved the document. Regina will work to get the pieces of the document on-line so that the public and those interested in the work of this group will be able to see the structure and goals of the work being done.

5. Recap and Adjourn

At the conclusion of the meeting, Regina mentioned a new ecosystem services model being developed by the Department of Forestry. From a basic understanding, this model will allow for the calculation of the actual monetary value of ecosystem services provided by a given parcel or area. Regina and Paul will be working in the next couple of months to get more information to provide to the group on this application and how it might be useful for the current project.

With no further information or questions, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:30AM.