

Minutes of Environmental Concerns Subcommittee  
Sept. 29, 2010  
Submitted by Kathy Shea, Curator of Natural Lands

Present: Diane Angell, Gene Bakko, Katie Halvorson, Paul Jackson, Alan Norton, Tyler Refsland, Kathy Shea, Judy Stromayer

#### Welcome, Introductions

New committee members for this year were welcomed and introduced. The members of the committee for 2010-11 are:

Chair: Kathy Shea, Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies and the new Curator of Natural Lands

Diane Angell, Assistant Professor of Biology

Gene Bakko, retired Professor of Biology and former Curator of Natural Lands

Jim Fisher, Grounds Manager

Paul Jackson, Associate Professor of Chemistry and Chair of Environmental Studies

Alan Norton, Vice President and Treasurer

Pete Sandberg, Assistant Vice President for Facilities

Judy Stromayer, Director of Recreation and Faculty Life Representative

Students:

Katie Halvorson, Student Naturalist

Zephyr Mohr-Felsen, Student Naturalist

Tyler Refsland, Student Naturalist

This committee reports to the Faculty Governance Committee and our minutes are posted on the Faculty Governance Committee page. At this time Alan Norton sits on both committees. Alan recommended that we also have a faculty member from the Faculty Governance Committee as a liaison to the Environmental Concerns Subcommittee. Kathy will check with the Chair of Faculty Governance, Jim McKeel, to see if someone is available.

#### Summer Activities on the Natural Lands

Four students worked on Natural Land's projects this summer under the supervision of Kathy Shea. The students were Christina Herron-Sweet, Jon Henn, and Tyler Refsland from St. Olaf, supported by the Natural Lands Endowment, and Amy Kendig, from Georgia Tech, supported by the new St. Olaf National Science Foundation funded Research Experiences for Undergraduates program. They focused on three research projects: growth patterns of trees in the 1990 forest restoration, a comparison of biomass and soil characteristics in a chronosequence of prairies of different ages, and nesting success of bluebirds in the bluebird trail boxes. They also worked on removing invasive species such as garlic mustard and buckthorn. They were teaching assistants for one week in the Young Investigators Program for high school students and helped with a tour for the YMCA summer camp.

Also this summer the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sent a student crew to spray herbicide on trees in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife easement prairies. They used an herbicide called Element, similar to Garlon 4. Most of the trees they sprayed are now standing dead. Between the weather, wind, other U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service obligations a burn did not occur last spring. There is a possibility of a fall burn (which occurred on Oct. 13). While we make sure to notify Public Safety, the hospital, and the Rice County Fire and Police, Alan also suggested that an email be sent to stolaf-all to notify faculty and staff of the upcoming burn. We often do not know until the afternoon before or even the day of the burn if it will happen.

Gene Bakko and Don Skluzacek worked on a variety of maintenance projects, including mowing the outer trails and thistle in the prairie. They put a culvert under the trail by the wetlands below the Regents Parking lot.

Gene Bakko reported that he contracted Lyme disease this summer, almost certainly from the St. Olaf Natural Lands. He was treated with antibiotics and has recovered. We need to warn all workers to check for ticks and associated rashes.

### Fall Projects

With the flooding in Northfield over the weekend of September 24, 2010, many of our recent environmental concerns have focused on water management. St. Olaf was relatively unharmed by the flooding compared to the flooding of Carleton's athletic facilities and buildings along the river in downtown Northfield. There was some flooding in the basement of Mellby, in part due to the drainage pattern of the new parking lot and leaves clogging a drain. A new drain cover has been installed to prevent these problems from occurring again. The Soccer Bowl flooded and games had to be played at Shattuck in Fairbault.

The drainage ponds below Regents saw a rapid rise in water level. With 7 inches of rain the water rose 3-4 feet, went above the sensor head measuring environmental parameters in the parking lot pond, and then over the edges of the ponds below the parking lot. We could use another drainage pond with a berm to the southeast below the parking lot.

We have several projects planned for fall. We discussed how best to let people know about projects. Either Kathy, as the Curator, or the Student Naturalists will send out emails to Biology and Environmental Studies faculty and students, Environmental Coalition and the stolaf-extra alias. The suggestion was also made to put a notice in the Northfield News if we know far enough ahead of time.

Activities include

1. River Clean-Up with Cannon River Watershed Partnership on September 18. We had about 17 students and cleaned along the bank from Hwy 3 toward Sechler Park and Dundas.
2. Buckthorn Pull on September 24. We removed Buckthorn in Norway Valley along the Hwy 19 side. With about 10 students and weed wrenches we were able to remove many larger buckthorn.
3. Tree Planting on October 8. Leif Knecht Nursery donated trees in 5-7 gallon containers for the 2005 tree seeding area along Hwy 19. We also plan to plant trees in a grassy area along Hwy 19 just south of the 1990 tree planting. The grounds crew stopped mowing there this summer, in part due to tree falls.
4. Building two more deer exclosures in the 2009 tree seeding area. Gene and Don will organize this with student help. They will lead to student research projects to help determine the effect of deer browsing on the establishment of trees in forest restoration areas.
5. Weekly nature walks starting Oct. 9 and led by the Student Naturalists.

### Update on Mayo Building

Construction started this fall on the Mayo radiation treatment facility on the Natural Lands prairie just southeast of the hospital in Rice Co. The goal is to finish the building by June 2011 with Leed Certification, probably at the silver level. Geothermal heating and a stormwater retention pond are part of the facility.

Questions were raised about connections with the work of the college. There has been talk of a possible internship there for physics students. Mayo has mentioned displaying student artwork in the building. Many would be interested in tours of the building.

Pete Sandberg has more information on the stormwater retention pond and how it connects to wetland areas to the east.

### Other Concerns

Kathy expressed concern about a large tree that had fallen over the trail at the northwest entrance to Norway Valley. Requests to the Physical Plant staff to remove it had not been acknowledged (however it has since been removed).

Anne Walter and others pointed out St. Olaf's low ranking in a listed of green campuses by Sierra Club Magazine for the Sept-Oct 2010 issue. The main reason for the low ranking was incomplete information when the Marketing and Communications Office filled out the form. Concern was expressed that most of us don't have time to fill out multiple surveys and environmental issues are not high on the list of priorities for the college as this time. However, some of us feel that the environment should be a high priority and taking the time to find out the information for the survey would have raised St. Olaf's rank from 79 to 12 out of 162 colleges. A number of people have noticed this low ranking and we ask that in the future Pete Sandberg or others on this committee be given the option to respond to the survey.

Judy asked about the status of the Art Barn, whether StoGrow will be moving over by the wind turbine and if there are plans to use the field by the wind turbine for additional athletic fields. No one knows of plans to do any of these in the near future. A case needs to be made for additional fields.

### Next Meeting

The next meeting will be toward the end of the semester.