

Minutes of Environmental Concerns Committee  
October 21, 2009

Present: Gene Bakko, Paul Jackson, David Mitchell, Alan Norton, Rebecca Rand, Pete Sandberg, Kathy Shea, Judy Stromayer

With the change in the structure of faculty committees, the Environmental Concerns Subcommittee, formerly a subcommittee of Review and Planning, is now a subcommittee of the Faculty Governance Committee. The make-up of the committee is as follows for 2009-10:

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

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

Jim Fisher, Grounds Manager

Steve Freedberg, Assistant Professor of Biology and Director of Weaver Dunes Field Station

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

James McKeel, Associate Professor of Music and Faculty Governance Representative

Alan Norton, Vice President and Treasurer

Pete Sandberg, Assistant Vice President for Facilities

Judy Stromayer, Director of Recreation and Faculty Life Representative

Students:

David Mitchell, Student Naturalist and Environmental Coalition representative

Rebecca Rand, Student Naturalist

Name of the committee:

We discussed whether the committee should continue to use the name Environmental Concerns or whether Land Use would be more appropriate because many of the issues discussed concern St. Olaf land. We decided to continue to use the name Environmental Concerns because it broadens the range of issues that we may want to consider. It is also more appropriate for considering issues related to the curriculum. An overarching goal is to manage the natural lands to enhance curriculum opportunities at St. Olaf.

Report on Summer and Fall Projects:

Summer

Gene Bakko officially ended his term as Curator of Natural Lands at the end of August 2009. He and four students, and occasionally Don Skluzacek, worked on a variety of projects over the summer. A major focus of the summer work was invasive species control of garlic mustard, reed canary grass, and buckthorn.

Two 10 x 10 m deer exclosures were constructed in the 2005 direct seeding area as part of a long-term study to examine the effects of deer browsing on tree seedling establishment. Two more exclosures will be constructed next year in the new six-acre tree seeding area on the south side of Hwy. 19. Putting exclosures in a newly seeded area will enable us to examine browsing levels on tree seeds the first winter after they germinate.

Herbicide was sprayed around oaks seedlings in the 2005 planting to decrease competition around tree seedlings.

Blue-bird houses were surveyed for eggs and young. Twelve blue-bird houses were moved to decrease competition with house wrens.

Fall Projects:

Kathy reported on fall activities.

We worked with the Cannon River Watershed Partnership to sponsor a speaker, Chad Pregracke, on river-cleanups. Pregracke is founder and president of Living Lands and Waters and

author of a book Kathy donated to the St. Olaf Science Library. He was jointly sponsored by the CRWP and St. Olaf (Land Stewardship Endowment, Biology Department, Environmental Studies Department, CEL). He gave an exciting talk on Thursday evening, September 17, in Viking Theater. On Saturday, September 19, we had ten St. Olaf students, including the student naturalists David Mitchell and Rebecca Rand, for the Cannon River Cleanup. St. Olaf has adopted the river stretch from Dundas to Northfield and this time we started on the west side of the Cannon River at the Hwy. 3 bridge and walked towards Dundas. In three hours, from 9-noon, we filled half a small dumpster with about 1400 pounds of glass, cans, tires, bedsprings, miscellaneous sheets of metal and other things.

As part of Homecoming/Alumni Weekend, we organized a buckthorn pull as an Alumni/Student/Faculty Event on Saturday, September 26. Kathy gave a short talk in Viking Theater at 8:30 Saturday morning and then we walked to the woods near the softball field. Dan Hudson from the bookstore brought additional weed wrenches. Kelly Hawley was the student-Alumni representative. We had a good group of about 10 alumni and 15 students and collected several truckloads of buckthorn to take to the compost site in Northfield.

On October 16 we planted over 140 sugar maples in the area southeast of Regents Hall. The potted sugar maples were donated by Leif Knecht's Nursery. Gene Bakko and students planted some additional maples the following week.

We plan to do tree seeding this fall as soon as the soybeans are harvested in the six-acre field on the south side of Hwy 19 (planting was done on Nov. 10). This planting will extend the Natural Lands on the south side of Hwy 19 on land around Heath Creek.

Student workers continue to work on collection of prairie seeds and buckthorn removal during the fall semester. Seedlings of a new nonnative species, black locust, are growing on the south side of Regents Hall, the result of locust trees cut down when Regents Hall was built. Student workers have been asked to remove the small trees.

Parts of the prairie need to be burned. For a burn to happen there must be appropriate weather and wind. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to take over burning of the land in the easement, but so far has not found the time/conditions to burn. We will discuss with them the need for burns in the coming year. Mowing may be an option if scattered trees are not too large.

### Student Naturalists Reports

David and Rebecca have set up a Naturalist Bulletin Board outside of the ecology lab, Regents 440. It is near the Environmental Studies Board and gathering area on the northwest side of the Regents fourth floor.

Rebecca and David organized an evening to count chimney swifts (they didn't see any, but reported their results).

They have organized natural walks and a tour of the natural lands for first year corridors.

David and Rebecca attended the Sustainability Conference organized by St. Olaf for the Midstates Consortium for Math and Science on Oct. 2-4. They gave a tour of the Natural Lands with stops at the wind turbine and STOGROW. Kathy gave a talk on "Use of St. Olaf Natural Lands to Promote Sustainability". Rebecca and David reported on the conference for the Biology newsletter "Biomass" and the Environmental Coalition student organization.

David reported on other Environmental Coalition activities such as promotion of a revolving fund to support student initiatives on projects that may require initial input of funds, but that will save energy and money in the future. Some students are learning about home weatherization and propose to weatherize one of the honor houses.

### Art Barn

Pete Sandberg brought plans and reported on the progress of the Art Barn, a building to be a gathering space for users of the Natural Lands. It will be located near the wind turbine but must be at least 365 feet away, out of the fall zone. It will be an 1000 sq ft. building off the grid. It will have solar panels, active solar radiant heat, a composting toilet, insulated walls, 5-6 foot footings and a slate floor. Construction is planned for next spring.

### STOGROW

STOGROW long-range planning includes the goal of relocating near the Art Barn. However a well would need to be drilled and soil organic matter would need to be improved. Soil tests from this summer showed lower organic matter and nutrient levels in the land by the turbine than in the current STOGROW location. Students also feel they would need additional staff help to expand the size of the garden, so the move will not occur in the immediate future.

### Other Issues

Other issues this committee should be aware of:

Dave Legvold, a farmer renting St. Olaf lands and a driver for the band tour, sent us an article on how students in the band had calculated carbon offsets, to offset the carbon emissions due to the band tour. The article was in the Nov. issue of Corn Soybean Digest.

We should be aware that a task force for the city is looking into master planning and industrial development possibilities for the land recently annexed northwest of Northfield and adjacent to St. Olaf property. Environmental impact statements may be needed.

Friends of Lashbrook Park have invited students to help with park activities. There were some differences between this group and the Northfield Park Board. Arlene Kjar and Gloria Kiester are both active in working to improve this park and would be happy to have student volunteers.

### Next Meeting

We plan to meet once more this semester, on Dec. 3, at 4:15 in Buntrock 222.