

WNY Wilds Trails & Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee
September 23, 2020

Committee Members Present: D. Root (Chair), R. Abraham, P. Burnes, M. Denhoff, P. Gaerte, B. Harris, M. Hopkins, T. Rhett (Absent: R. Buck R. Holding, T. Livak)

Others Present: C. Knapp, M. Washer

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 2:35 p.m. by Legislator Debra Root.

Introduction

Legislator Root welcomed everyone to their first organization meeting and asked that everyone go around the room and introduce themselves. Phyllis Gaerte is the Senior Director of Alumni and Community Engagement at Houghton College and is representing on behalf of Houghton College trails. Matt Hopkins is the Student Services and Work-Based Learning Coordinator at BOCES and is also the Grant Writer/Trail Coordinator for the Allegany County Snowmobile Federation. Thomas Rhett is the current president of Genesee River Wilds. Pauline Burnes represents the New York State Horse Council, Inc. Ron Abraham is a retired forester from the DEC who managed state forest land in Allegany County and still volunteers with trail maintenance. Michelle Denhoff is the Assistant Director of Economic Development and Planning, is a member of the Genesee River Wilds Board, and is currently in charge of the \$50,000 Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. grant that the County was recently awarded that will help to develop a trail from Wellsville to Belfast to connect the WAG trail to the Greenway. Brooke Harris is representing as a legislative member and is also very active in Boy Scouts and the national ski patrol. Legislator Root briefly highlighted the following members who were not able to attend the first meeting:

- Ronald Holding who will represent ATV trails
- Thomas Livak who will represent state parks
- Richard Buck, Jr. who will represent ATV trails

Future Meeting Dates

Ms. Root asked for a brief discussion on when the committee prefers to hold these meetings stating she understands everyone has jobs and meeting in the middle of the workday may not be the best option. Legislator Root continued that if they were to choose to meet during the week prior to 4:00 p.m., they would utilize Confidential Secretary Meghan Washer to handle meeting related tasks; however, if they choose to meet in the evening, they will lose Ms. Washer as a resource. The committee all agreed that meeting at 2:30 p.m. during the week was a good time, and Ms. Burnes noted that it will be nice to utilize Ms. Washer for their needs. Legislator Root noted that realistically, they may have to hold some evening meetings down the road if they want input from the general public. The committee decided to hold their meetings every fourth Wednesday of the month at 2:30 p.m.

Electing Chair and Vice-Chair

A motion was made by Legislator Harris, and seconded by Ms. Gaerte, and carried to elect Legislator Debra Root to act as Chair to the WNY Wilds Trails & Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee. A motion was made by Committee Chair Root, seconded by Legislator Harris, and carried to elect Michelle Denhoff to act as Vice-Chair to the WNY Wilds Trails & Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee.

Allegany County Trail Plan

Committee Chair Root referenced the Allegany County Trail Plan that was created by the previous Planning & Development Intern Nick Arquette. Ms. Root stated there is a volume of very good information that clearly states our purpose, identifies our goals, and is a great resource. Ms.

Denhoff stated this plan was put together by Mr. Arquette last year who obtained his Bachelor's degree in Urban Planning from Illinois. Mr. Arquette came to our County completely unfamiliar with the area, and this was his main project. Ms. Denhoff continued that this is meant to be a draft working plan so if there are things in there the committee doesn't like, they can make changes.

Mission Statement

Committee Chair Root read the following mission statement and asked if anyone agrees to keep it with no changes.

"To foster the development of a County-wide trail system that includes motorized and non-motorized trails while striving to ensure that trails and natural areas shared are sustainable and accessible for all to enjoy for generations to come."

Ms. Burnes stated having worked in ADA, she wondered if "accessible" is the right word to use because there are a lot of trails that a handicapped person wouldn't be able to access, and using the word "accessible" would indicate that all of our trails are handicap accessible. Legislator Harris stated he didn't see it as an issue because the mission doesn't specifically state "ADA Accessible," adding in this case, the word is being used in a broader context. County Administrator Carissa Knapp agreed with Legislator Harris stating the mission statement isn't a legal statement, and the word "accessible" is being used in a welcoming sense. Committee Chair Root stated she has attended many trails conferences when everyone refers to their trails being accessible as in open to all types of people (i.e., young ages, older ages, visitors to the area, those who already live here, etc.). Ms. Burnes asked that they keep those users in mind as they move forward because not every trail is intended for every user. Ms. Gaerte stated they should keep the handicap population in mind which could also be helpful when seeking grants. The committee decided to leave the word "accessible" in the mission statement noting that it can be changed at any time.

Short and Long Term Goals

Committee Chair Root stated they need to discuss what each individual group's goals are so they can create one larger goal as a group to work towards. Ms. Root asked that each person come back to the next meeting with their short and long term goals, concerns, as well as plans for the future so the group can start looking at them and see what can be combined and achieved together and what will take a separate interest to move forward. Mr. Rhett stated the whole reason behind the WNY Wilds rebranding, as well as task forces being formed is because it's the County's last ditch effort to get money into the County. Mr. Rhett continued that it is important that even though each person on the committee represents different aspects of the system, they should focus on the trails that will bring the most economic impact to the County. Mr. Rhett went on to say it is in their best interest to look at all the trails being represented and vote which ones they need to focus on first and which will bring money into the County. Mr. Rhett made his suggestions that ATV, kayaking, and snowmobiling bring the most interest and have people coming into our County spending money. Mr. Rhett indicated that the Genesee River draws people from other states and cities, adding that people also come from all over to snowmobile out in the country. Mr. Rhett noted that ATVs are also crucial and interesting to people. Mr. Rhett stated he believes the trails he has listed are the money makers, and it's important to pick one or two and focus their efforts on those first. Ms. Burnes requested that the equestrian trails also be included in their decision as there have been studies done that show what an economic impact horse trails can bring to counties. Ms. Burnes briefly discussed the different trails our County has as well noted the equestrian programs available at our local colleges.

Mr. Rhett stated another area they need to focus on is shared trails, adding that he recently spent time in Utah and it was amazing to him how shared the trails are. Mr. Rhett continued that around here, people like to regulate and say what can and cannot be done on each trail, adding they need to look for reasons why we can do things together. Mr. Rhett went on to say that in Utah, horses, ATVs, bikes, etc. all share trails with no worries, yet here in Allegany County it's a big deal. Mr. Rhett stated they can trust people more to see each other on a shared trail and be cognizant when they are passing each other, adding they need to change the attitude of why we can't do things together. Legislator Harris stated that the Finger Lakes Trails runs into private land who strictly allow hiking only, adding that the DEC is also strict about no ATVs on their land. Legislator Harris agreed on the need for multiuse trails and working around the things that aren't changeable. Mr. Hopkins stated a lot of private land owners don't mind snowmobilers, but don't want ATVs on their land. Snowmobile trails will get shut down because someone is riding them on an ATV, so the landowner gets upset and shuts them down. Mr. Hopkins continued they offer to buy gates that will protect the land, but there is a disparity among the landowners to not allow certain groups on their land. Mr. Hopkins went on to say they worked with the Office of Parks and Recreation to develop the Greenway between Houghton and Caneadea as a main trail system and it's worked well, but there is a big difference between state, public, and private landowners and what they are willing to allow. Ms. Denhoff stated another challenge for them to overcome is the fact that a lot of the trail systems we have are either privately managed by non-profit or for profit groups, whereas trails in other counties have a recreation person on staff to handle those issues. Ms. Denhoff continued that one of Mr. Arquette's findings when he was working on the plan was that we needed this committee to be created so there was discussion amongst all the groups, and recommended the County hire a Recreation Coordinator to assist with all of the details they will be going through.

The committee briefly discussed permits and regulations for ATVs and snowmobiles. Committee Chair Root stated she recently talked to the Lewis County Manager Ryan Piche who shared their law with us and Administrator Knapp noted that we have obtained some good contacts through this process. Mr. Hopkins noted that Lewis County is a four-season, multi-trail system where most are town roads, noting the tourists are how they survive all four seasons.

Trail Connectivity

Committee Chair Root stated another topic and goal to focus on is connecting the trails within the County and how they get the Greenway all the way down through Wellsville. Ms. Gaerte stated when people are coming in from other areas, they need to be connected once they are here. Ms. Gaerte continued they have tons of people coming to the college for the equestrian center, and they need to create a sense that people don't have to come for one day just to attend an equestrian event; they need to know they can stay longer to camp and enjoy other activities, noting they need to be promoting the trail systems more. Ms. Root agreed that we need to do a better job of promoting, stating she didn't even know we had as many miles as we do of horse trails until now. Mr. Hopkins stated there has always been a disconnect between the southern and northern end of the counties. Mr. Rhett stated the Greenway Trail is the main vein through the whole County, and a lot of our major towns we're proud of follow the river valley, adding when the Greenway Trail gets developed to what they are envisioning, the Genesee River will benefit as well. The Committee briefly discussed the estimated 800,000 people a year who visit Letchworth State Park and have no connection to the County. Ms. Denhoff stated the Greenway State Park is working with Alta Planning on a project to deal with these issues, adding there are several places along the Greenway that are closed that we need better access to, so we should keep their plan in mind as they are talking about it. Committee Chair Root stated that Southern Tier West has been flying over with a drone starting from the northern part of the County down to Wellsville to get a picture of the Genesee River. Ms. Denhoff stated it is a high definition drone with video and picture, and they are flying the Genesee to see the wash outs and will then take

that data and develop some plans to try and mitigate it. Ms. Burnes noted that the more people we draw in the more impact we'll have on the trail, so they also need to think about the operation and maintenance of our trails as well as how it's going to be funded.

Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

Committee Chair Root referenced the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program grant that works with communities along the Genesee River to develop a plan for short-term and long-term projects within a mile of the river, noting these projects can be development or recreation. Jones Memorial Hospital Wellness Committee Chairman Brenda Szabo and Planning Director Kier Dirlam visited each community and asked for buy-in. If awarded the grant, that town or village would then put in \$2,000 to \$5,000 in order to put the projects into play and have this plan developed. Ms. Root continued we were awarded the grant by NYS; however, they have since decided to put a hold on it, so we aren't sure when they are going to get the money. Ms. Denhoff noted that every town along the Genesee River except for Granger signed up.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Grant

Ms. Burnes stated she, along with the Cattaraugus Chautauqua Chapter of the NYS Horse Council, applied for Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. grant and were awarded \$49,200. These funds will be used through the Saddle Dusters to do trail maintenance on one mile of a trail section on Trail 4. The NYS Horse Council is administering the funds for them, and Ms. Burnes is currently working on contacting local and non-local contractors to assist with the work. Ms. Burnes briefly discussed the obstacles she has come across due to COVID-19 in regards to things shutting down and finding materials. Mr. Rhett indicated he knows several contractors and will get their information to Ms. Burnes.

Ms. Denhoff stated that Alfred University was awarded \$25,000 of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. grant for hiking/biking trail work on approximately 40 acres located on Jericho Hill. Ms. Denhoff noted that Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway in Cuba also received \$42,000 of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. grant to do work on the Genesee Valley Greenway in the Village of Cuba.

Ms. Denhoff addressed the \$50,000 grant award the County recently received from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to go towards the 230-mile trail system called the "Triple Divide Trail System," from Williamsport, PA, to Rochester, NY. Currently, they are missing 18 miles in our County to make the needed connection, noting the main markers missing is having no official trail from Wellsville to Belfast. Ms. Denhoff continued that the majority of the \$50,000 was used to hire an easement specialist law firm to look at possibilities for the trail. They have run into a few road blocks that the firm is working really hard on. Ms. Denhoff stated that it's a very difficult project, and while they hope the end result is that it's feasible to create a trail, it's unknown at the moment. Committee Chair Root asked if there is a deadline with this grant. Ms. Denhoff stated they need to have it wrapped up by May 2021.

Genesee River Valley Settlements

Mr. Rhett briefly discussed two settlements specific to the Genesee River Valley that they will be receiving. One settlement in the amount of \$50,000 was received from Kodak, and the funds will be used for signage. Mr. Rhett indicated they will begin their volunteer work marking the river with mile markers, signage, etc. the next day. The second settlement is being received due to the Sinclair Oil Refinery having some oil and chemicals spill into the Genesee River which has raised some environmental concerns. Mr. Rhett indicated they are hoping all of the money will be spent in the upper river basin in Allegany County.

Future Plans for the Greenway

Mr. Rhett indicated he recently spoke to a landowner who established a gravel pit on his land in Caneadea who has inquired about an independent contractor doing work on state owned land. Mr. Rhett stated that as they talk about the future plans of the Greenway, which is a state owned trail, the County does have some individuals who are interested, ready, and willing to put in a bid.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 28, at 2:30 p.m. in the Legislative Chambers.

Adjournment

Committee Chair Root adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

WNY Wilds Trails & Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee

October 28, 2020

Committee Members Present: M. Denhoff (Chair), P. Burnes, B. Harris, R. Holding, M. Hopkins, D. Root (Absent: R. Abraham, R. Buck, P. Gaerte, T. Livak)

Others Present: W. Dibble, C. Knapp, G. Muller, B. Riehle, M. Washer

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 2:39 p.m. by Committee Chair Michelle Denhoff.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Legislator Harris, seconded by Mr. Hopkins, and carried to approve the September 23, 2020, WNY Wilds Trails & Outdoor Recreation Advisory minutes.

Re-electing Chair and Vice-Chair

A motion was made by Legislator Root, and seconded by Legislator Harris, and carried to elect Michelle Denhoff as chair and elect Legislator Root as vice-chair of the WNY Wilds Trails & Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee. It was noted that, Pam Common, Secretary to the Director of Planning, will be taking over the minutes and meeting organization going forward.

Future Meeting Dates and Location

Ms. Denhoff stated the November and December meetings fall during the holiday week and asked if the committee prefers to reschedule them. The committee briefly discussed different days they could hold the meetings as well as the option to offer a virtual and/or tele-conference option. The committee decided to leave the meeting dates for the 4th Wednesday of each month at 2:30 p.m. with both an in person and virtual option for attendance.

The committee briefly discussed moving future meetings to the Crossroads building. Ms. Denhoff stated they have more options at their facility to zoom, conference, etc., adding both she and Ms. Common's offices are located there so it will reduce any overtime or mileage they may incur.

Allegany County Trail Plan

Legislator Root addressed the Allegany County Trail Plan emphasizing the importance of trail connectivity as well as the committee taking what is included in the plan and moving ahead. Ms. Denhoff added the trail representatives on the committee need to think about the things their groups can realistically accomplish as well as things that are hindering them from moving forward. Mrs. Burnes asked if there is a master plan, stating as they look at projects and upcoming grants, there should be a central keeper of that. Mrs. Burnes continued that she hasn't seen a good master plan and wonders if they should have one first before stepping into goals, objectives, connectivity, projects, etc. Ms. Denhoff stated they have discussed a master plan; however, she doesn't believe they are quite ready to move forward with one, adding this committee is a stepping stone for that to happen. Ms. Denhoff continued they need to be more organized with what they want people to assist with as it requires engineering work that the County isn't staffed to do, noting they need to know what they want to accomplish first. Legislator Harris stated the plan they have is well constructed, took a lot of time, is prioritized well, and they need to utilize it as a committee. As far as connectivity goes, Legislator Harris doesn't think there is the demand for large scale trail connectivity county to county, adding a good focus for this committee would be to utilize the areas of expertise such as ATV, equestrian, DEC, and snowmobile and use them in their meetings to brainstorm ideas such as what they want, why don't they have it, what can be done to help, etc. Legislator Root agreed, stating they could be all over the place with how big and broad this could be, and they need to figure out how to dial into a focus and have priorities. Legislator Root went on to say that representatives on this committee know their trails better than anyone to identify

their needs, and then the committee, as a group, can set those priorities and then go after the funding. Mrs. Root noted that she personally thinks ATV needs the most help right now. Mr. Hopkins stated the current plan they have seems like the vision, and they as a committee need to come up with the goals and action steps to get there. Mr. Hopkins suggested that they spend some time during meetings to go through the plan together so there is a good familiarity with it as a whole. Mr. Hopkins also suggested they discuss if a County resolution is needed to promote trail access which would then spark the townships to do more and possibly develop a system for ATV, horses, etc.

Legislator Root stated in April 2019, they had a presentation to the Board of Legislators regarding the economic impact of outdoor recreation and trails. The Legislature was convinced that we needed to focus on it which resulted in Chairman Crandall creating the Allegany County Trails Task Force. The task force existed for a year, and their mission was to see what needed be to done in the County. From there, the WNY Wilds Trails & Outdoor Recreation Committee was born as it became obvious we needed all of the trail systems to come together at the same table. Mr. Holding stated that connectivity shouldn't be their biggest goal, adding while improving connectivity may be good, they need to focus on economic impact and bringing people into the County.

Legislator Harris suggested they establish an agenda item for each meeting that will allow each trail representative a month to get something together to present to the committee emphasizing what their needs and interests are. Legislator Harris noted that he would like to dive into County forest lands and what opportunities the County has with those for specialized activities. Legislator Root stated that is a great idea as this group needs to be driven by the individual trail systems.

Phillips Creek

Legislator Harris briefly discussed Phillips Creek stating it is an incredible property but a complete mess due both wetness and lack of funding. Mr. Harris continued it's a very challenging property to consider for multipurpose use because horses wreck it, and it's also impassable for hikers and runners. Mr. Harris would like input from the DEC as to what stakeholders could do to improve the property, adding while it will never have ATVs on it, there is so much potential for development. Mrs. Burnes stated there already has been activity with Phillips Creek but, understands there is still a huge amount of work that needs to be done. Mr. Muller stated a lot of the issues have to do with years of nothing going on except trail clearing once or twice a year. Mr. Muller continued recently with the Saddle Duster Volunteer Stewardship Agreement, there is a group who is actively working on it, and he also has an employee who is very interested in that property and goes above and beyond with it, adding in the near future, we'll see an improvement to that trail system. The committee discussed different improvements that could be made as well as how to accomplish them. Legislator Root asked what the purpose is for the DEC to keep Philips Creek Trails. Mr. Muller stated to promote the use of our state land. Legislator Root asked if they receive funding. Mr. Muller stated they receive a certain amount of funding for use, and they work with that amount on their continuous list of projects. Mr. Muller stated they can't dedicate all of it to the trail systems, adding some goes to trails, some goes to infrastructure, grading on forest roads, etc. Mr. Holding asked if the equestrians would be open to pay seasonal memberships to use trails similar to ATV riders who pay \$20 per day to ride. Mrs. Burnes suggested that question be added to the survey that Ms. Denhoff is working on. Ms. Denhoff suggested they schedule this conversation for the November meeting to go along with Mrs. Burnes PowerPoint presentation.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Grant Updates

Mrs. Burnes provided a brief update on the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. grant they were awarded in the amount of \$49,200 stating she is actively looking for local contractors who may be interested in bidding on the project, and asked if anyone knows of any, to please forward their information to her. Mrs. Burnes briefly discussed the improvements they plan to make such as taking down 9 existing dead trees, drainage work, installing nine 12" culverts, one 15" culvert, performing 1,600 feet worth of tread improvements, putting down gravel, installing six stone drains, etc. Mrs. Burnes noted they are working with a limited budget under \$50,000. Legislator Root asked if it is affordable to do everything they are asking, stating \$150 per hour is likely what they will get charged for excavation including an operator and the equipment. Mr. Muller noted in order to get this done, the horse council is going to need to purchase the materials themselves. Legislator Root added that there is a lot of hand work with what Mrs. Burnes is asking. Mrs. Burnes indicated they have requested an extension until October 31, 2021, and she is hopeful to get bid packages out and see if there is anyone willing to get this project on their schedule. Mr. Holding asked if Alfred State is willing to help. Mrs. Burnes stated she did contact their construction office, and they wanted to do the project, but have since backed away in case they had to shut down due to COVID-19. Mr. Muller noted that construction season is also when school may not be in session. Legislator Root asked if any loggers may be interested in it. Mr. Muller stated in the past they have done trail improvements with timber sales; however, with the timing of the grant, they can't commit to that.

Ms. Denhoff noted she doesn't have any new updates on her Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. grant as their scheduled meeting with the contractor was delayed.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 25, at 2:30 p.m. at the Crossroads Center.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:47 p.m. following a motion made by Legislator Harris, seconded by Mr. Hopkins, and carried.