

Rouge River Advisory Council (RRAC)
Draft Meeting Summary
October 17, 2023 at 11:30 a.m. FOTR Offices (Hybrid)



List of Attendees:

Voting Members:

Marie McCormick, Chair - *Present*
Dan Ballnik, Vice Chair- *Present*
Bill Craig, SPAC Representative- *Present*
Jacy Garrison, Oakland County- *Present*
Erma Leaphart, Sierra Club - *Present*
Doug Moore, Livonia- *Absent*
John O'Meara, ECT – *Present*
Sally Petrella, Friends of Rouge Park - *Present*
Heather Rice, Washtenaw Co. WRC Office- *Present*
Brandy Siedlaczek, Southfield- *Present*
Tyler Sonoga, Farmington Hills- *Present*
Dean Tuomari, Citizen – *Present*
Shawn Duke, Stantec – *Present*

Others Present:

Chris O'Meara, ARC
Tennille Newsome, ARC
Ashley Allen, HRC
Eric Wahrman, DWSD
Noel Mullett, ARC
Jen Tewkesbury, EGLE
Chris Raschke, Dearborn
Sam Davis, FOTR
Lauren Eaton, FOTR
Gregory Bajuk, HRC
Don Carpenter, LTU
John Gundry, WC
Trisha Gabriel, Livonia

Introductions

Marie McCormick called the meeting to order and completed roll call by calling on attendees listed in the Teams meeting and in person at Friends of the Rouge offices. Chris O'Meara also reminded attendees to add their name and affiliation in the chat box if they came into the meeting late. Introductions were completed.

Approval of Meeting Summary

Marie McCormick reviewed the meeting summary from July 18, 2023. The meeting summary of the July 18, 2023, meeting was approved with no discussion. The motion to approve the meeting summary was made by Dan Ballnik and seconded by Sally Petrella and passed unanimously by voting members.

Old Business

Items to be voted on (bylaws section 3.4) by RRAC voting members

Marie McCormick stated Chris O'Meara put a procedure together that voting members would vote on that refer to by laws section 3.4.4. The procedure document can be found in the handouts that were sent out before the meeting. Marie noted that as a reminder, votes will be simple majority of quorum of current voting members and that votes can be made in person, virtually or via email, but they would all be in one. Marie read off some examples from the procedure. Marie inquired a question that sometimes letters of support are required in a timely manner and wondered how the RRAC would handle that. John O'Meara advised Marie that there is no reason to have a protocol for something that may not occur and it could be turned around quickly within a day or so now with email voting. Heather Rice stated she was looking in the by laws where it states that urgent items will be discussed with the Executive Committee and will be ratified at the next meeting or a special meet can be held, therefore it is already in the bylaws. Erma Leaphart stated a practice that the Sierra Club has followed was sending it out to members and if there is no response by a certain day then it passes. Marie thought it was a good point to give voting members a deadline and that adding sign on letters would be great to add on the procedure list. Chris O'Meara wanted to remind the RRAC that the document is just a procedure and is not set in stone but is there to give the RRAC some direction. Marie and Chris stated that the procedure would be an internal document.

Bill Craig stated that the clarification would conclude the bylaws and requires a celebration.

PAC Business

RRAC IDI Next Steps

Marie McCormick reminded voting members who have not already scheduled their one-on-one with Morgain MacDonald to do so. There will be a DEI training that is open to everyone and is scheduled for January 23, 2024 at 8:30 a.m. Marie stated that you do not have to be voting member to attend the DEI training. Marie stated that it will be a great training and is covered by the PAC support grant.

Marie asked if there were any other questions, there were none.

Voting Member Term Expirations (Bill Craig, Jacy Garrison, Doug Moore, Noel Mullett, Heather Rice, Brandy Siedlaczek, Tyler Sonoga)

Marie reviewed the list of current voting members and the term expiration dates. Marie asked if you plan to request be a member again that you would just need to let Chris O. know. Marie also mentioned that the Chair and Vice Chair terms are expiring as well. Marie asked Chris if everyone was going to reup. Chris O. stated everyone was going to do another term with the exception of Heather Rice. Marie reported that Don Carpenter and Eric Wahrman expressed an interest in becoming members. Marie asked Heather if there was a potential of someone from Washtenaw County stepping in. Chris O. reminded Marie that the bylaws state that if someone wants to be a voting member they will need to attend two meetings. Marie reported Don Carpenter and Eric Wahrman have fulfilled the requirement so far. Sally Petrella asked if there was a Wayne County representative. Chris O. stated it was Noel but now John Gundry is considering membership and is beginning his requirement of attending meetings. Marie also mentioned that Don Carpenter, Eric Wahrman and John Gundry will need to send it bios. Don Carpenter will have his role serve as Lawrence Tech University to fulfill the academia requirement.

Bill Craig asked Heather how many years she had been on the RRAC. Heather stated it had only been a handful of years. Bill thanked her personally for her attendance. Heather mentioned she would ask around in her department and see if anyone else is interested.

Chair and Vice Chair Term Expirations (Marie McCormick and Dan Ballnik)

Marie reported that the Chair and Vice Chair terms are expiring and that she plans to rerun as Chair. Marie mentioned that if anyone else wanted to run for Chair or Vice Chair, feel free to do so. Dan Ballnik stated he was willing to rerun unless someone else was interested. John O'Meara stated that if anyone else was interested in running for the positions over the next month before the January meeting, to email Chris O.

Marie asked if there was any comments or questions, there were none.

SPAC Report

Bill Craig reported the following:

SPAC Meeting

Bill Craig reported the last SPAC meeting was October 3-4 at Sault St. Marie at Lake Superior State University; Center for Freshwater Research and Education. Some highlights were:

- Presentation on the Little Rapids Project that was a restoration of the rapids and construction of a bridge with a fishing platform. There was increased community support once people were catching fish again. Marie McCormick asked how they funded the pier. Bill Craig said he didn't know but he believes it was a NOAA grant.
- Tour of CFRE Fish Hatchery inside hydro-electric station. Marie asked if it was an indoor hatchery and Bill confirmed yes.
- Site tour of Little Rapids Project, several large salmon were seen and several people were fishing
- Group dinner; Bill stated he enjoys the meetings that includes site visits.
- EGLE update: two vacancies for AOC coordinators, Jen T. now has 4 AOCs

- EPA update: Teresa Seidel is the new EPA Region 5 GLNPO Director. There is about 1 billion dollars being thrown in to help AOCs achieve their BUI removals. The BIL ACT is putting money into the program and 117 million dollars is being used focusing on sediment projects.
- GLNPO had a review of the AOC Conference that was held in Green Bay and some items discussed were there are no more “buckets” and they put all the “buckets” together and made a rocket for the Moonshot and is going to try to get all the management actions completed except for 3 AOCs by 2030 and the Rouge is at the tail end of that.
- SPAC DEIJ subcommittee was very brief and there will be a meeting that is TBD
- SPAC Habitat subcommittee update was given by Bill Craig and there was a recognition of service presentation for Bill Craig and Patty Troy (St. Clair River). There will be a “changing of the guard” as Erma Leaphart is the next SPAC representative.
- PAC Bylaws subcommittee will be meeting soon with a meeting TBD
- PAC reports: the interesting part of the SPAC meetings are the PAC reports. There are engaging conversations with project updates, by law revisions, community outreach invite letters, CAC stipends for time and travel and it was agreed to allow more time for these discussions.
- SPAC meeting minutes are not available at the time
- Doodle poll has been sent to set the next meeting and hopes Erma is included in the email.

Marie McCormick wanted to recognize Bill Craig’s commitment for his 25 years with the SPAC and the RRAC and as an engaged citizen. Bill stated it was 28 years.

SPAC Habitat Subcommittee

Bill Craig reported the SPAC Habitat Subcommittee meeting was held on June 28th that was an hour long virtual with only 10 participants. Some highlights were:

- Discussed CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas); there are different AOCs that have CISMAs or have had them active in their areas. Marie wanted to clarify that work is done with the Oakland County CISMA and they are active on aquatic invasive monitoring
- Discussed MiCorps
- Discussed Not Michigan Species webinars on invasive species hosted by EGLE.
- There are many webinars on a wide range of interesting topics that can’t fit into an hour time slot.
- There is a continuing question: “What happens to a habitat project after contractor fulfills performance requirements?” Landowner has no requirements to maintain, maybe some if there are wetland permits involved. Wide variations in landowner willingness and capacity to maintain natural areas.
- There was some support for committee to draft a guidance manual, an Operations and Maintenance Guide to educate landowners on best management practices for better habitat sustainability.
- August meeting was canceled
- Next meeting will be virtual on October 18th 11am-12pm Agenda will be to discuss O&M guide drafting

SPAC EJ-DEI Subcommittee

Marie McCormick reported that there was no update from the subcommittee at this time.

EGLE Update

Jen Tewkesbury reported the following:

- It was announced that Teresa Seidel will take over Chris Korleski’s position effective November 6th
- EGLE will be looking to fill her position. Currently, Phil Argiroff will be acting in her position. It will be good for the State of Michigan.
- There is a federal partners meeting coming up in a couple of weeks were each AOC is discussed
- Jen is currently managing 4 AOCs, there are two vacancies that will be posted at any time.

- Melanie and Jen have a Detroit News interview tomorrow focusing on the Moonshot about sediment work.
- Lower Rouge Old Channel Project: The ACOE is finalizing contracts and plan to resume dredging in the spring
- Main channel Project: For the lower three miles of the Rouge River, the remediation investigation and feasibility study will be completed over this winter and hope to begin design in spring to see what the project will cost, etc. EGLE has a handful on non -federal sponsors that is working with EPA behind the scenes.

Marie thanked Jen for her report and asked if she covered the EPA update as well. Jen confirmed.

EPA Update

Jen Tewkesbury provided an update above.

Bill Craig stated he had a conversation with Leah Medley at the AOC conference that one of the sessions brought up the critical path conversation to understand what has been done, what you are doing, what is next in line and what are the other initiatives being taken on the other BUIs. Currently, we are focused on the habitat projects and juggling sediment projects and there are other BUIs sitting there and Bill wants to know if there is anything being done on those other BUIs. Bill also asked if any work was being done with the CSOs. Jen commented their role is to keep tabs on BUIs and they give predictions to EPA for what they think they will remove. The sediment portion is tied to 7 of the BUIs and until the sediment work is done, they can't assess the BUIs properly. Jen stated her role is to keep tabs on all the BUIs. Jen also stated at the next meeting it would be a great idea to go through the status of each BUI.

Marie McCormick asked Jen if she would be willing to give the presentation, Jen confirmed. Chris O. said she would put it on the agenda for January's meeting.

Marie read Noel Mullett's note in the chat that Wayne County has been making progress with the Rouge Valley sewage disposal system long term correction action plan and might be helpful for RRAC to get a presentation on upcoming actions. Erma asked if DWSD and GLWA should be invited to discuss their long term control plan. Jen suggested DWSD or permit staff from the state could also give the presentation. Marie stated they will plan for the presentation in April.

Rouge AOC Grants Update

Status of Projects

John O'Meara reported there is a status report of the habitat restoration projects included in the RRAC meeting packet. Some highlights were:

- A lot of projects have somewhat completed construction with maintenance occurring.
- HFE fish passage was open at the beginning of August after 7 years of work. Marie asked if there was a ribbon cutting or press release, John O. stated not at this time. It is possible to have that next spring/summer.
- Washtenaw County will go out for construction bid for the Johnson Intercounty Drain late winter, as they are still working on permitting with EGLE.
- ARC is in the process of signing a contract with a contractor for the Phoenix/Wilcox work that will begin in March 2024

Marie wanted to state how nice the Johnson Creek Fish Hatchery restoration project looked and how beautiful it is. Marie also mentioned she was at a bug hunt and working with someone from Redford and they were saying how amazing Lola Valley or Bell Creek looked.

Sam Davis asked John O. if there were going to be any in-lake winter activities until they mobilize in March. John O. stated no, they are just doing their paperwork. John O. will check the schedule to confirm and let her know.

Sally Petrella had two questions for John O.

1. Fire Fighter Park restoration: Were those 360 mussels successfully relocated within the Rouge? John O. stated she would need to reach out to the contact he gave her.
2. Wallaceville restoration: When will the community input for that project be started? John O. stated all the projects that were part of the 2016 request that were submitted to RRAC and RRAC approved the general concept that was submitted and chosen. The general concept has already been laid out and it is more or less to do in the open space a wet prairie. The ARC just received approval on the QAPP so no work has been done. Once additional data is gathered then there will be discussion within the community on what the wet prairie will do for the area.

Sally stated she thought the project was a wetland restoration, not a wet prairie and if something changed. John O. stated it depends on what the actual activities are. Sally thought the intention of the area was to add wetlands, not wet prairie.

Marie asked if there was any other comments, there were none.

Other Related Watershed Projects

FOTR Monitoring Update

Lauren with FOTR reported the following:

- Fall bug hunt was on October 14th, it was rainy and gloomy. Sally, Marie, her daughter and Dean was there. There were about 65 volunteers and 21 sites were completed. It was a successful event despite the weather.
- Held a team leader training a few weeks prior to the bug hunt and had 8 volunteers show up to be team leaders
- Completed fish monitoring over the summer; the last site is tomorrow. A total of 21 sites have been sampled
- FOTR has begun working with U of M student, Olivia

Other Related Projects

Marie McCormick mentioned the following:

- Northville Downs Daylighting project that was approved by City Council to move forward. Marie asked Jen T. if she was involved in the project. Jen T. stated it is Jeremy Richardson who will be issuing the permit but he is keeping her in the loop.
- The owner of the Bell Foundry will be restoring a section of the river. It is a brownfield site that is north of the Downs Daylighting project.
- There have been conversations that FOTR has been involved in a development and possible restoration dollars for Tonquish Creek in downtown Plymouth. Marie asked John O. if he had an updated. John O. stated no, it is in discussions.
- Johnson Creek Watershed is being highly developed and is part of the Master Plan for Northville Twp and Plymouth Twp. to create the MITC corridor and part of that is to put in the Northville Downs alternative location, as well as a 500,000sf hydrogen producing plant. FOTR is hoping to seek a technical update to the Johnson Creek Subwatershed specifically to look at opportunities for conservation and preservation with Johnson Creek to create the highest value for water quality management.

Marie asked if there were any other projects in the watershed.

John Gundry reported the following:

- Next year a lot will happen at Venoy with launches and a greenway.
- Nankin just had a boat launch installed and the public is always using it.
- Nankin has posts in the ground for a kiosk that will be double-sided with mountain bike. Marie asked if there was a paddling safety sign. John G. stated they need to think about what they want on the kiosk. There is also a kayak/canoe storage rack. Marie asked if Wayne County was going to do a press event or ribbon cutting. John G. agreed and probably more toward the warmer months. There will also be two buoys away from the dam.

Dean Tuomari stated years ago there was a wetland restoration in the lower Rouge called Inkster Wetlands. He asked if anyone has looked at it lately. John Gundry stated it is overgrown and asked if anyone had plans on what that site was. Sally stated Tilton & Associate designed it. Chris O. stated she will check some files but can't guarantee anything.

New Business

Future Meetings

Marie McCormick reported

- **RRAC:** January 16, 2024 (virtual), April 16, 2024 (virtual), July 16, 2024 (hybrid), October 15, 2024 (hybrid)
Marie stated if you would like to host a hybrid RRAC meeting and had the capabilities to do so, to let her know.
- **Oakland County Stormwater Summit:** at LTU on October 20, 2023; Don Carpenter stated there is still an opportunity to register.

Marie mentioned that there will be a brief talk by the University of Maryland on developing the watershed report cards and will be sending them out to the stakeholders who participated to received feedback and stakeholder surveys.

Comments

Members

Marie McCormick asked if there were any comments or questions.

Bill Craig stated at the 2023 AOC Conference there was to be a session by Herman Jenkins, Environmental Justice was unable to attend. At one of the sessions, Bill was able to give a synopsis of the water trail and bringing the local communities out to the river.

Bill Craig wanted to compliment the Great Lakes Restoration event at THF which came out with another great document. Teresa Siedel did a great job of acknowledging all the partners in the Southeast Michigan watersheds and watershed councils and groups that are making progress in our area. Bill thanked ECT.

Marie made an administrative comment that she wanted to remove the current voting members list from the procedure document and kept as a separate document.

Marie McCormick asked if there were any more comments or questions, there were none.

General Public

Marie McCormick asked if there were any comments or questions, there were none.

Review of Action Items

- Approved the July 18, 2023 meeting summary
- Voting members to schedule one-on-one with Morgain if you have not already done so for IDI

- Chris to send out reminder email for IDI training
- Eric Wahrman, Don Carpenter and John Gundry to send their bios in to Marie
- RRAC members interested in running for Chair or Vice Chair to email Chris O.
- Chris O. to add EGEL BUI expiration and updated presentation to January agenda
- Chris O. to remove voting members list from the procedure document
- Chris O. will look into Inkster Wetland RPO for files
- RRAC members who would like to host hybrid meetings to let Marie know

Bill Craig made the motion to adjourn the meeting, Sally Petrella seconded the Motion. The meeting was adjourned.