

**Wright County NWQ Natural Resources Committee Meeting #2**  
**April 7, 2008**

**Attendees:**

**Committee Members:** Dave Wagner, Mike McNellis, Mark Kampa, Rose Thelen, Shelly Jonas, Lance Lindstrom, James Olsen

**Staff:** Tom Salkowski, Stacy Marquardt, Scott Deckert

**Speakers:** Marc Mattice, Hannah Texler

**Audience:** Charlotte Quiggle, Merle Anderson

**I. Guest Speakers**

**Hannah Texler** – Texler is a DNR ecologist who is responsible for taking biological survey data, collecting it and educating the public with it. Wright County is part of the East Central Region of the State. There was discussion of how glaciers formed the landscape, giving a rolling topography with differing soils and different vegetation. Wright is part of the Eastern Broadleaf Forest “Province”, and within that, most of it is classified as “Big Woods”. The pre-settlement vegetation essentially was a big unbroken block of hardwood forest.

Wright County is cut in half by two major watersheds, the North Fork of the Crow River and the Mississippi River. The present day land cover is mostly cropland, and is obviously quite different from the pre-settlement vegetation. Only 7% of the current land cover is Big Woods, and only 2% of that is high quality habitat for plants and animals. There are many wetlands in the NWQ and many public lands as well.

One type of rare native plant community in the NWQ is the Oak Savannah. Rare animals in the NWQ include the Red-shouldered Hawk, Cerulean Warbler and the Blandings Turtle. Gingseng is an example of a rare plant that can still be found in the area. There are perhaps many other types of rare plant species, but they have not been thoroughly studied or documented.

DNR advocates protecting the existing areas where there is documented biodiversity, and then buffer those areas from future development. Typically most of these resources are on private lands. Wright County is an exception in that most of our resources are on public lands. Existing areas should be made priority and future expansion should stem off these.

There was a discussion regarding conservation corridors, and how those future areas were mapped. Landowners in those areas have monetary incentives to protect land. The main threats to ecological diversity are fragmentation and development pressure. There are many options available for landowners who wish to protect their land.

Information, publications, or questions can be directed to

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/nhnrp/index.html>

Hannah Texler

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**Marc Mattice** – Marc is the Parks Administrator for Wright County. He gave a short history of the parks program. There are 7 regional parks and 22 other facilities in the County totaling 2700 acres. Future park needs are determined by evaluating the future population project of the County and then using a formula to determine how much park land is needed per person. Acquiring future park land is done by evaluating land adjacent to current parks. Mattice summarized the process by which the County acquires land for parks in the context of land prices and budget restraints. Parks are for year round multi-purpose uses, especially water and trail-related, for the protecting of biological resources, and for educating the public on environmental issues.

Mattice described Schroeder, Clearwater/Pleasant, and Robert Ney Park. There was discussion on talking with landowners adjacent to parks in the context of park expansion and designating future resource areas. In the NEQ process, landowners were perhaps not as involved as they should have been. Wagner mentioned that the County seems to have a pretty good idea about where future resource areas should be. Marquardt agreed but said that there may be additional areas that private landowners would have more insight about. Salkowski said that attitudes have changed regarding public land acquisition. Property with access to public land tends to help property values. Mattice talked about Stanley Eddy, Marcus Zumbrunnen, Harry Larson and Carl Johnson Park/Preserve as well as other County-operated facilities.

Mattice continued with the purposes and benefits of conserving land. Generally speaking, it benefits water resources, enhances human health, and improves general quality of life, including economic quality of life. Community service costs are higher on those lands used for residential and less for land used as commercial/industrial and farm/forest/open space. Open space may generate less revenue, but it requires little public infrastructure and services. The idea that residential growth is needed for increased tax base is a misconception. National studies have shown that there is a positive outcome to preserving most types of open space. A Washington County study shows that homes are worth about 6% more if they are within 200 feet of open space.

Overall, parks/open space/natural areas promote healthy lifestyles, increase surrounding property values, develop community pride, protect biological diversity, enhance wildlife habitat, protect water quality, increase the quality of life and provide access to the outdoors close to home.

The next meeting was set for May 5<sup>th</sup>.

Information, publications, or questions can be directed to:

<http://www.co.wright.mn.us/departments/parks/>

Marc Mattice, Parks Administrator

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