SCCC Minutes First draft 3.21.23

Snowmass Fire Station and Zoom

Board members in person: Ned Andrews, Judy Frey, Michael Kinsley, Molly Child, Jill Sabella

Board members on zoom: Jen Rupert, Chelsea Brundige, Judy Lovins

Guests: Forrest Thomas - caretaker of the Darling Family Ranch, John Guenther, Martha Ferguson, Sharon Caulfield

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes and Treasurer’s Report

The Treasurer’s report shows $32,752.96 in the unrestricted account and $9,490.51 in the restricted water account, for a total of $42,243.47. Expenses were $32.46 for printing, $94.00 for Post Office box rent, and $250 for the Dark Sky International application fee.

Michael approved the Minutes and the Treasurer’s report. Molly seconded. The Minutes of February 28, 2023 will be posted on the Caucus website.

CAUCUS COMMITTEES

Ned spoke of the need to get the committees finalized so that committee chairmen could start committee activity.

Molly suggested focusing on the Capitol Creek trailhead issue and Dark Skies Initiative.

Wildlife

Ned addressed the Wildlife corridors that the County is creating to link up areas to help migrating wildlife, like the Williams Mountain to Light Hill connection and the Crown Mountain area.

Michael said what the Caucus can do is to develop a commentary, and that since the Caucus has no authority to make policy, our purpose is to focus and develop a strategy as to what we think should happen and pass that on to the County and other involved organizations. Sharon added it’s good to have local comments for accuracy added to the County’s information.

Capitol Creek Trailhead

Ned said Pitkin County, OST and the Forest Service are concerned about the overuse and lack of organization/upkeep of trailheads throughout the valley. Chris and Jen have expressed interest in helping with the Caucus’ input. Molly referred to last month’s minutes which say the Caucus will do what we can to report accurately numbers of people, cars, take photos of waste etc. and get this information to Michael who will pass them on to OST.

Dark Skies

Martha gave an update on the Caucus’ application process and what to consider: 1. in one year, where do we want to be?; 2. we have begun our application process; 3. we will be reaching out for support to network with other groups, like RMI, ACES, AVLT, Aspen Educational Foundation, Ideas Festival, Wilderness Workshop, Roaring Fork Audubon, Nature Conservancy, CO Sierra Club.

The Caucus needs to provide a letter to the Dark Skies organization as part of the application. She added that currently the County is revising it’s lighting codes and that she will provide the County with information about Dark Skies and light pollution. Martha also requested that we ask Devon to create a Dark Skies webpage on the Caucus site.

Michael question how best to communicate with valley residents who are unaware of the Caucus. Molly said the Community Outreach committee is considering a postcard with this kind of information presented in a positive educational manner, and Sharon suggested reaching out to the local newspapers to do an Op Ed on what we are planning.

Ned suggested doing a caucus-wide mailing letter in order to facilitate getting email addresses and include on the letter info about Dark Skies. Martha said the Colorado Dark Skies association President Aaron Watson, who lives in Paonia, will be recommending us. Also, that April 15-22 is Dark Skies Week and that would be a good focus point to approach the newspapers with. Martha agreed to put together a piece for the papers which could include Pete McBride’s interest in dark sky photography, and also Judy Frey’s interest in celestial watching.

Water

Chelsea spoke on the LOTIC study the Caucus commissioned in 20— to study and understand the Capitol Creek flow and where the creek is transformed, and to develop a preliminary understanding of the flow with measurements and modeling and with a chapter of recommendations for management. And that now it’s time to move forward as stewards of Capitol Creek since we now have the executive study on our website and the study is out in the public.

Reviewed was the Two Creeks LLC proposed diversion of CC water for three ponds, each 300’ long and Ned’s thorough letter to the County in response to their application which Ned proved was inappropriate usage.

There is state interest in installing some device - like a weir - in the creek to measure flow accurately and provide information to help protect the stream. The CO Basin Round Table will be prioritizing water and will fund a device like that for Capitol Creek, so funding is available.

Because the CO Water Plan of 2013 mandates that all watersheds do a water plan to manage water resources, we could do a stream management plan. Irrigators could be compensated for not using all of their allowed water and thereby give it to those who do need more water.

Ned outlined three points: 1. The LOTIC study by the Caucus is good modeling but there were no measurements and therefore a gauge is needed. 2. If you have a gauge - a “measurement device” - the state will administer the water amounts. 3. Statewide - in the Colorado Basin - there is anticipated more accountability will be required. So the question is what would be required of us? a weir, or some measuring device on Capitol Creek and lower Snowmass Creek. Michael said possibly there is such a device in the creek under the bridge on Lower Snowmass Creek.

Mention was made of the Sky Ranch pond’s having an augmentation pond using water from Reudi reservoir, a procedure which in the past has not been objected to, but now the attitude toward augmentation plans are changing because the water doesn’t go into the Capitol Creek/Snowmass Creek flow.

Within about two months we would need to submit a proposal and budget. The CWCB (Colorado Water Conservation Board) is aware of what the caucus has done with the LOTIC study. We would need a letter from the County to the CWCB and the DWR (Department of Water Resources) and private foundations.

Chelsea made a motion to approve the Caucus authorizes the Water Committee to explore the opportunities to fund the measuring device for Capitol Creek and other activities for protecting the minimum streamflows on Capitol and Lower Snowmass Creek, and return to the Caucus with the information about the availability of such funding to support the approved scope of work.

Molly seconded the motion.

All in favor of the motion.

Jen commented that before we request funding we want more thoughts and ideas and that this is not a rubber stamp approval. She said the rest of the Board needs to review the situation.

Ned made a motion to adjourn. Judy Frey seconded. All in favor.

Ned will be out of town for meetings on April 18, May 26 and June 20.