SCCC Minutes of March 15, 2022

The Board meeting was held in person at the Snowmass Fire Station annex, with a Zoom connection

CALL TO ORDER

Board Members present: Ned Andrews, Molly Child, Chris Collins, Judy Hill, Michael Kinsley, Jacqueline Russell, Jill Sabella, Helene Slansky, Vicki Treece

Guests: David Chase, Steve Child, Elise Collins, Lisa and Peter Collins

Presenters: Mark Harvey for Biota and Tom Cardamone for the Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity Study

CONSENT AGENDA

The February 15, 2022 Minutes were approved, and will be posted on the website.

The Treasurer’s Report showed a total balance from 2.28.22 of $38,590.70 with $29,100.19 in the Unrestricted Fund and $9,490.51 in the Water Studies Fund. The income for this period was $600 from a Pitkin County Donation to the caucus. Total expenses were $270 for miscellaneous. The previous balance was $38,590.70.

PRESENTATIONS

Origins of the Biota Committee Idea : Mark Harvey

Mark is a native of Snowmass Valley. His family’s cattle ranch straddles the two Snowmass Caucus groups but Mark strongly feels the two valleys are essentially one. He developed the Biota Committee. The former Snowmass Caucus stopped logging up Capitol Valley and also stopped the development of the proposed Haystack Ski area up Capitol in the 1960’s along with the Child family.

The Snowmass Valley is 35,000 acres of private/BLM/State land with abundant wildlife corridors and lots of intact habitat and diversity. There are nine distinct plant communities because of this diversity, caused by genetics, species, and landscape.

And there are a lot of imperiled species - birds and flowers. Some is beyond our control (climate change), but human marked communities - like parks, polo fields, bike tracks - do effect the natural habitats of all wildlife. The entire valley is getting chopped up.

Mark stressed that we need to treat our 35,000 acres like a little national park, as one unit.

The word “biota” includes everything that is “life”.

Mark explained that to manage “biota” we need to: 1. learn what we have and what’s imperiled; 2. read reports, like the Roaring Fork Watershed Biological Inventory 1997-1999; 3. get an inventory from Tom Cardamone; 4. become “citizen scientists” - amateur but thorough, like doing bird counts; 5. learn locations of conservation areas; 6. encourage a caucus culture, like disseminating information of sightings (bobcat, tiger salamander, new beaver dams) without endangering their habitat.

Roaring Fork Watershed Biodiversity Study: Tom Cardamone

Tom has overseen/worked on this study since December 2018 with Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP), an unbiased out-of-town group, to do a study on birds and insects, and on deer, elk and big horn sheep as the focal species.

Open Space & Trails, Parks & Wildlife, BLM and the Forest Service are working together to protect and restore the biodiversity on this million-acre landscape in the Roaring Fork watershed.

In 2019 they did field work on private land; 2020 field work on public land - including 80 50-meter plots examined “under microscope”; and 2021 used satellite imagery, like a fingerprint for each plot.

For instance, in the Highlands to Avalanche Creek there used to be 500 big horn sheep, and now there are around 140.

A study by Parks and Wildlife looks at why their numbers are dropping and at the landscape through the needs of the deer, elk and big horn sheep - like their food and habitat, and what they need - the layers of forage quality, habitat quality, shelter, anthropogenic disturbance, highways, buildings - and if we protected them, we’d be protecting biodiversity.

And then they add in what the Nature Conservancy has come up with which is a resiliency layer that has to do with the landscape’s ability to be resilient in the face of climate change and warming temperatures because there are higher elevation places which allow plants and animals to go there to escape the heating issues of climate change. Basically there are a lot of layers to this.

CNHP came up with a “Conservation & Restoration Priorities Map” - a Conservation Opportunities Map - which shows Williams Hill, Crown Hill and Light Hill to have the biggest opportunity for high value habitat in our area.

And significantly, there needs to be connectivity - a wildlife bridge -between these three areas. Highway 82 is the big divider, or “pinch point”.

Also there are high habitat areas in Emma and the Lake Christine areas. Tom said imagine connecting - with a wildlife overpass - the Maroon-Snowmass area and the red tables areas. This whole project gives us a way to think expansively about what’s possible and what opportunities we have.

What is essential, Tom said, is that we have to get all the stakeholders to agree on priorities in our community. It’s not an easy process but that’s how you accomplish durable conservation.

One common value is that people love wildlife and want it to be part of the landscape.

We want to change the “dryparian” to riparian, and to have citizen scientists record these areas. We already have a beaver restoration and analysis model developed for this watershed that show the best suited for beaver restoration. The beaver keep beneficial water in areas, controlled by their dams - and are not subject to “water rights”.

The ideal is to have biodiversity over large numbers of single species.

As to predators, there is a parallel tracking, which was done in 2019. Parks & Wildlife is looking into why elk numbers are diminishing - tracking new borns’ survival, and considering if there is a correlation between human dispersion and predation.

Citizen scientists should use the specific programs and models designed by the CNHP, like for beaver.

Michael asked if lower Snowmass Creek Road is a barrier to the wildlife connectivity between Williams and Light Hills. Tom said roadkill in a corridor on a secondary road is a concern, and that presently there is an underpass under Highway 82 next to the Conoco Parking lot area for Snowmass-Capitol Creek to flow. Wildlife can use this underpass. A typical wildlife overpass over a highway would cost around $15 million. Overpass options are being studied - near Basalt is an important area.

David said AVLT has a GIS map showing easements and connectivity that the Caucus could use. Two percent of the land here is used for agriculture and that grazing on private land is encouraged as it is safer for wildlife. An “ecosystem service” that compensates farmers and ranchers for participating in a carbon sequestration program can offer some compromise financially for farmers and ranchers to let wildlife graze on their land while maintaining alfalfa and timothy pastures.

Michael wondered about Land Use and Biota committees being able to use AVLT’s software and if the committees could spend time going through the Snowmass and Capitol Creek drainages and pinpoint problems in areas of interest and concern.

Molly and Chelsea, both who know this watershed well, were asked to work with CNHP on looking deeper into this.

Additionally, there is about $15-20 million in revenue annually from hunters.

MASTER PLAN PREVIEW: PROGRESS REPORT ON TDR EVALUATION

Michael spoke for the Master Plan Committee which met twice since the last Caucus meeting.

He said this presentation is informational only, as there has not been a vote taken on any revisions.

He said that in general, the MP Committee would bring all questions and proposals to the full Board for discussion as they work on each topic area. The MP should be framed with an opening statement of values and priorities regarding growth, conservation, quality of life in the

Caucus area and that each revised topic would reflect and support those. The MP should reflect what we want and don’t want, and that TDR’s issues should not be the only concern.

Regarding TDR’s , the committee noted that because the Caucus prioritizes the rural and remote quality of life, healthy environment, wildlife habitat, etc. that characterize our area, the Caucus has favored a house size capped at 5750 sq ft, and tolerated use of a TDR for a larger house at 8250 sq ft. After review, the committee thought the survey done in November 2021 gave a useful general measure of our Caucus area sentiment on TDR’s, and that the vote the Caucus Board took in December 2021 on acreage requirement for a TDR in the MP can be reintroduced.

Michael said possible MP statements could address - the use of a TDR to increase house size combined with a permanent elimination of a legally buildable lot in the Caucus area, especially if it results in higher conservation values and improved wildlife connectivity.The TDR must originate within the Caucus area; it could be “created” by placing a conservation easement on another land piece of the same owner or acquiring a TDR from another Caucus area landowner who has extinguished development right on another parcel.

Whether the minimum size of a TDR receiving parcel would be 30 or 40 is undecided. Also, whether there should be research on TDR-sending requirements.

Michael said he personally is sympathetic to the idea of an 8250 sf house using less energy and having less impact than two 5750 sf houses.

Chris contributed County figures that there are presently 27 sending sites of 80 acres and larger. As to receiver sites, there are 17 sites of 40 acres, and 32 sites of 30 acres.

Chelsea stressed the need to be in contact with the County and be aware of any County considerations about our zoning, and also how TDR’s can be used more broadly than they are presently. The committee wants to get feedback from the Caucus and to get deeper into needed areas.

Steve said the real issue is house size and not the use of TDR’s. TDR’s can be used in two ways: to increase house size (by 2500 sq per TDR), or as a landing right to build a 5750 sf house on an approved parcel. House size can also be increased by going through the GMQS (Growth Management Quota System) Competition. Both use of TDR’s and GMQS need to be considered to control maximum houses size. The County Community Development department is engaged now in a review of these.

The meeting was adjourned at 9