

City of Aurora
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY BOARD
Plains Conservation Center
November 15th, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vicky Samuel, Joy DeMots, Dennis Roy, Wayne Gallagher, Brad Stratton, Mark Christopher, Bob Hunchberger, David Bourne

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bob Gemmill

STAFF PRESENT: Joy Thompson, Natural Resources Supervisor; Kristin Memmott, Natural Resource Specialist; Lauren Morales, Management Assistant

VISITORS PRESENT: None

- I. CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 5:36 PM.
- II. WELCOME: Brad Stratton welcomed everyone to the November OSB meeting and asked the OSB members to introduce themselves. Brad welcomed staff guests Joy Thompson and Kristin Memmott.
- III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA: Dennis Roy moved to approve the agenda. Vicky Samuel seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Bob Hunchberger motioned to approve the October OSB minutes. Mark Christopher seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- V. GUEST SPEAKERS: Brad Stratton introduced Kristin Memmott to present on beavers in urban areas. Kristin shared about her past work with the Denver Botanic Gardens and her time as a wildlife habitat biologist, studying human-wildlife interactions and creatures that are considered nuisances by humans. Kristin has a passion for animals that are ecologically central but not always welcomed by humans, such as beavers. Beavers live in the lowest points of elevation in the water. Aurora has lots of beavers, and they can be 45-65lbs. The US beaver population has historically been impacted by trapping and the loss of natural habitat. The statewide stream network can currently support approximately 1.36 million beaver dams, compared to 2.39 million dams historically. Kristin shared more information about the anatomy, habitat, and habits of beavers. She also explained why they are important ecologically and common reasons why humans consider beavers to be a nuisance. Bob H. commented that he saw about six dams in one area and asked how many dams one beaver family will build. Kristin responded that we generally see anywhere from 6-25 dams per family. Joy T. asked if it is usually one main dam, and the other dams are auxiliary, which Kristin confirmed. Vicky asked how far away beavers will build dams. Kristin said they often build miles away. She would love to study how far they go, but we don't have data on this currently. Vicky mentioned a dam that has a big pond behind it. Lots of animals enjoy the pond, and she would love for Brian to put up a camera there to view the beavers. Kristin added that beavers can hear trickling water up to 3 miles away and will go to stop it. Brad mentioned that a couple of cameras are set up at Pronghorn and that the OSB members could talk to Fendi about getting another camera for the beavers. Joy T. shared that she had ordered a bunch of cameras for PCC, but all are currently in use. She offered to order more. Bob H. asked if dams are usually downstream or upstream. Kristin replied that usually the lodge is downstream of the dams, but some dams can be downstream. The beavers like to swim in the water that their dams create for food and protection. Wayne asked how long a beaver lodge can stand. Kristin shared that she saw one story where a lodge was discovered to be 150 years old. Mark asked what other effects on beavers are caused by weather, other than wildfires. Kristin answered that water rights and water storage also have profound impacts on beaver populations. Mark asked if beavers migrate or stay. Kristin answered

that beavers like to settle. Ideally the beavers would be part of a harmonious system. Roadways, cars, and dams affect that system. Beavers are also territorial in nature. Lauren asked if more trees are lost by removing dams, since the beavers will cut down more trees to rebuild. Kristin responded that she would hypothesize so. However even if dams were not removed, beavers would still continue to eat and chew trees. Bob H asked how we can balance water rights for humans with the needs of beavers. Kristin responded that there are no water rights for beavers. Joy T added that there has to be a certain amount of cubic water feet moving through. Humans are always prioritized. Repeated deficits in snowfall and snowpacks could be a real management issue for beavers in the future. Wayne commented that he likes to do checks at Pronghorn. Last time he visited, he noticed that another dam had been built, but that water flow had improved a great deal. Joy T commented that some of that may be due to how much it has been raining. Lauren asked if beavers are considered a keystone species. Kristin answered that they are, and the city of Aurora should invest in beaver habitat.

- VI. **MANAGEMENT REMARKS:** Kristin placed the order for vests and name tags for the OSB members. Logos are still being put on by the vendor, but the vests and name tags are on the way. Wayne said he or Brad could pick them up if that would be helpful to staff. Joy T announced that David Bourne had been appointed to the OSB by city council and is now an official board member.
- VII. **NEW BUSINESS:** Brad asked if everyone had had a chance to look over the minor changes made to the 2024 Action Plan. The language “initiating funding opportunities” had been changed to “supporting funding opportunities”. He had also added in some words to indicate that the included lists are not comprehensive. Brad asked if anyone had other changes to suggest. Wayne Gallagher moved to approve the 2024 Action Plan. Joy DeMots seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- VIII. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** The OSB members discussed the Holiday Habitat Cleanup event. Brad and Wayne met up with Fendi. They agreed that the location should be moved to Horseshoe Park instead of Centre Hills. Fendi felt that the event would not be hard to move, as not many folks had signed up. Brad shared that Centre Hills did not have much trash except for in the Highline Canal, which could be dangerous and difficult to remove. They might have better luck at Horseshoe Park. OSB members will be segment leaders for the cleanup event. Each OSB member can lead a group of volunteers. Fendi will provide trash grabbers, bags, and gloves. The volunteers can leave the filled bags and city staff will come to pick them up. Bob H asked if there is a space in mind of how far to cover. Brad answered that they do have an area in mind, and that he would like to have a pre-cleanup meeting to strategize. The OSB members agreed to meet on December 2nd for the pre-cleanup meeting. Brad asked how many OSB members can be there for the actual cleanup event on December 16th. All OSB members said they would be able to make it. Brad shared that April 20th will be the annual Earth Day cleanup event, with the following Saturday as a backup date. Fendi asked OSB members to be segment leaders for that event as well. Mark asked if the board could have a running event calendar. Lauren responded that she could work on putting that together. Brad said that he would like for the OSB to have a central drive, where everyone could access documents and central info. Wayne shared that this had been done in the past and proved more challenging than expected. Vicky suggested that the board could work on a shared space and Joy D agreed. Mark asked about a list that outlined the upcoming OSB dates and locations. Lauren recalled such a list appearing in the minutes once. Brad added that Joy T will be sending a list of potential special events that the board could choose to participate in. He asked who would like to volunteer to organize this list. Mark volunteered Vicky and Vicky accepted. Mark asked what would happen if it snowed a lot on the Holiday Habitat Cleanup day. Brad answered that the event would simply be cancelled, but that it would be Fendi’s call since it is a staff event.
- IX. **REPORTS:** Brad reminded the OSB members to complete their quarter 4 conservation easement monitoring. Brad and Dennis went out together. Dennis shared that the area is very quiet now, with things turning brown. The trash did not increase. Brad shared that a lady confronted them and asked why they were in the area and if they were planning to build on the land. Brad explained that they wish to save and preserve the area. Dennis added that the lady also did not want them to kill any prairie dogs. A trail had just been completed on Jewell and it changed the access point. Brad shared that they saw a herd of 20 or so pronghorn. Bob H shared that he also saw a large number of them on

Monday. Bob H and Joy D completed their monitoring at Coal Senac. Unfortunately, people continue to dump there. It looked like a flatbed truck of trash was dumped, along with yard debris and tree limbs. They reported the dumping through Access Aurora and staff came to clean it up. There were office chairs and desktop computers dumped. The area is brown now and Bob H is hoping to see mule deer. Brad commented that it is great that the OSB members are out there to check things out. He added that it might be good to do some bioblitzes in monitoring areas. He and Dennis noticed lots of Mullen on their recent visit. Bob H shared that on the west side of the entrance onto the farm, it looks like a huge area has been excavated for a pad. He asked if that is for a storm sewage line or if the pad is for building a pumping station. Joy T said that Brian might know. Wayne and Brad presented the 2023 OSB annual report to the PFQL city council committee. The presentation went very well. They reported on the action plan and what was done, as well as individual projects. Wayne shared that it went well and there were lots of compliments from the council members. The Morrison Nature Center 20th anniversary was wonderful. Joy T shared that it was a great presentation and very well received. The snake retirement went very well. The snake will be staying at the nature center until the summer, when Liz will take him. Several council members attended the event.

- X. CHAIR REMARKS: Brad commented that the OSB will be losing Vicky and Wayne come April, due to term limits. Vicky joked that they would form their own board and Wayne joked that Vicky will be in charge. Brad asked Lauren if the upcoming openings could be posted sooner so that interviews could be conducted on the earlier side. Lauren agreed to reach out to the Clerk's office to check. Brad commented that he attended the Trick or Treat Nature Trail event with his daughter and grandkids. Kristin was great as a mad scientist. The event had to be moved indoors due to heavy snow. About 383 people attended over 2 days. Brad added that the timed entry worked great as there was no crowd and they did not feel rushed. The kids loved it, and it was a great event. Kristin added that it is a nice event for families because it is not scary or haunted. Brad shared that the recent city council election means some changes to the council members. Bullet points will continue to go out to the same folks. Mark asked if the board will be changing council assignments. Brad said that the assignments will change in January. Brad shared about an incident involving the trail cameras at Pronghorn. One camera was missing from the tree. The strap broke and the camera fell from the tree and into the water. The camera still works perfectly as they are totally waterproof. The lens was pointing straight up, and anytime the light changed, the camera snapped a photo. There were 1,300 photos of blurry water. They are exploring better methods to strap the cameras- maybe a cable, lock, and chain. Brad wants to relocate one camera to be near the beaver dam. They still have not caught any photos of the beavers on the camera.
- XI. BULLET POINTS:
- Aurora Naturalist Kristin Memmott presented a program to the Board titled, "Beavers in Urban Areas," as part of the Board's winter speaker program.
 - The Board welcomed our newest member, David Bourne.
 - The Board approved its 2024 Action Plan.
 - The Board discussed plans for the Holiday Trash Clean Up at Horseshoe Park, which is scheduled on Saturday, December 16.
 - Members of the Board reported on the Annual Report presentation to the PFQL committee, the Morrison Nature Center 20th Anniversary Celebration, and Conservation Easement Monitoring.
- XII. MEMBER COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION:
- Wayne- Not much to report- he has been staying busy working on his house.
 - Bob H- No update.
 - Joy DeMots- No update.
 - David Bourne- No update.
 - Mark- Saw what he thinks is a beaver dam. It looks like a part was taken apart. Could that be due to water flow? Kristin- could be. Mark- will they rebuild? Kristin- likely yes but somewhere else.

- Vicky- Saw someone unload a 4-wheeler. The signage there is not sufficient. Vicky called the ranger station and went on a walk. When she came back, a ranger was patrolling the area.
- Dennis- Has been taking pictures of deer up at Arsenal. It has been interesting to see the changes in deer behavior due to the rain. The deer are more spread out this year. The Harrier hawk population is huge. Wayne agreed and added he saw several Harrier hawks along the Cherry Creek Spillway.
- Wayne- Led a bird walk last Saturday and found a dead harrier hawk. Kristin asked if Mila took it. Wayne said she did. Vicky added that there are lots of raptors in that area. Wayne agreed and said he had witnessed a battle between a Red-Tailed hawk and a Harrier three times a week for the last few weeks. Vicky and Dennis have seen 7 Harriers, including 1 male. Males will take up to 5 nesting females.
- Joy T- Attended the awards ceremony at Aurora Reservoir for Aurora Paramedics and Fire. There was an incident involving a man who collapsed at the reservoir. Two city rangers resuscitated the man. He was conscious and breathing when the paramedics arrived. The family attended the awards ceremony and was hugging others.
- Kristin- The eagles at Star K Ranch are enhancing their nests. It is so cool to hear them breaking branches.

XIII. ADJOURN: Vicky Samuel moved to adjourn. Bob Hunchberger seconded the motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:22pm.

The next meeting will be on January 17th at 5:30 PM at Morrison Center. Vicky will be giving a presentation. Mark asked if there are any other locations where the board can meet. Joy T responded that Senac could work after March.



 Brad Stratton, Chair

Lauren R Morales

 Lauren Morales, Recording Secretary