

City of Aurora
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY BOARD
Plains Conservation Center
February 21st, 2024

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bob Hunchberger

STAFF PRESENT: Brian Green, Deputy Director of Operations, Parks, Open Space, and Forestry; Joy Thompson, Natural Resources Supervisor; Lauren Morales, Management Assistant

VISITORS PRESENT: Bryon Shipley

- I. CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 5:34 PM.
- II. WELCOME: Brad Stratton welcomed everyone to the February 2024 OSB meeting and welcomed guests Bryon Shipley and Joy Thompson.
- III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA: Wayne Gallagher moved to approve the agenda. Dennis Roy seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Mark Christopher moved to approve the January 2024 OSB minutes, with changes. Bob Gemmill seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- V. GUEST SPEAKERS: Brad asked the OSB members to introduce themselves. Bryon Shipley led a presentation on herptiles and prairie dog colonies. Bryon started working at the PCC (Plains Conservation Center) in 2000. He worked for the Denver Zoo at the time and felt there was great potential in studying the site at PCC. Bryon spoke to the conservation biology department at the zoo about doing a survey on reptile and amphibian diversity at PCC. The zoo approved the study but asked for a study on black-tailed prairie dog colonies to be incorporated as well. The zoo was interested in studying how prairie dog colonies influenced the grassland environment around them. The study sites consisted of three major prairie dog colonies at PCC, as well as control sites (non-colonized grasslands). The team set traps all across the study sites and control sites. Across the three-year study, 152 herptiles were caught. A total of ten different species were caught: five species of snakes, two species of lizards, and three species of amphibians. Many herptiles would take refuge in the abandoned prairie dog sites. Eight of the ten species were found both on and off the prairie dog colonies. The species that was most commonly caught both on and off the colonies was the prairie rattlesnake. Greater short-horned lizards were caught only on the prairie dog colonies, and lined snakes were caught only off the colonies. In conclusion, the study found that prairie dog burrows are important refuge sites for herptiles and other wildlife throughout the year. In another aspect of the study, the team decided to microchip captured rattlesnakes to track their movement patterns. Bryon shared information about those results and general information about rattlesnake breeding habits and toxicology levels. Bob G. noted that Bryon mentioned he would be surprised if some of the species from the study were still around at PCC today. Bob G. asked if that was because the prairie dog colony sites were no longer there. Bryon answered that that is part of the reason, yes. Eventually the abandoned burrows start to fill in. Bob G. asked if the three major prairie dog colonies were gone now. Bryon responded that the prairie dog colonies spread out and merged into one larger colony. The prairie dog population goes up and down regularly based on other factors such as plague. Brian Green added that in 2000 the prairie dog numbers were low but in 2013 the entire 2,000 acres at PCC was colonized by prairie dogs. Currently, less space is occupied by the prairie dogs at PCC. Bob G. asked if the study showed that the most diverse habitat is healthy prairie dog colonies next to healthy non-

colonized grasslands. Bryon said that is absolutely the case. Bob G. asked if invasive species are an issue affecting the current prairie dog population at PCC. Bryon answered that they certainly could be a factor. Another likely factor is the nearby houses and other development. Mark asked how the size and boundaries of a prairie dog colony is determined. Bryon answered that they went out to the edge of the colony and looked for abandoned burrows. This was repeated from the center of the colony in all directions. It is not precise but provides a good estimate of the colony boundaries. Bob G. asked if there would be any value in repeating the study today to look for differences. Brad added that the restoration area at PCC could also be examined to see if the restoration had any impact. Bryon replied that there is always a point in repeating research just to see what is going on, and that a repeated study today would definitely reveal some differences.

- VI. **MANAGEMENT REMARKS:** Brian asked the OSB members for ideas for site visit locations for summer meetings. Brad brought trail maps to hand out in case anyone wanted to look through them for site ideas. Brian added that the sites did not have to be decided on right away. Bob G. suggested the Ponderosa Preserve. Vicky suggested the ACRE site. Brian asked the OSB members to keep thinking about other ideas and suggestions. Bob G. shared that he and Joy had taken over Bob H's conservation easement monitoring at Coal Senac. It might be a good location for a Bioblitz project. Brian agreed. Brian handed out reservoir passes to the OSB members.
- VII. **NEW BUSINESS:** Brad mentioned the OSB idea to have a table presence at community events. Joy Thompson had sent over a list of events that PROS naturalists would be participating in. The first event is not until May. Brad asked the OSB members if they would be interested in participating as a board. The OSB members replied that they would be interested. Brad asked Joy what the naturalists do at these events. Joy responded that they are going to share about wildlife monitoring and will look for ways to make that information fun and engaging for people of all ages. Brad mentioned that he envisions the OSB joining too and promoting open space sites. They should not have the same topic as the naturalist team but should have something complementary. The OSB members agreed. Brad suggested adding two events to the list Joy had sent over- the arctic polar plunge event at the Aurora Reservoir and the 7/20 memorial event. Brad suggested that the event schedule should be managed by the outreach subcommittee. Brad and Bob G. agreed to take a look over the event schedule together. Brad mentioned that the June OSB meeting falls on Juneteenth, which is a city holiday. The meeting would need to be rescheduled to a different date. The OSB members agreed to meet on the 18th of June for the June OSB meeting.
- VIII. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** The OSB members discussed revising the bylaws. Dennis recommended adding a line about supporting further research in flora and fauna in Aurora under Article II section 4 of the bylaws. Bob G. noted that the bylaws make a lot of statements about things that the board hasn't done in the past year. Brad noted that Article II section 4 states that the board shall "support" finding funding opportunities but in Article II section 5 it says "identify". The OSB members discussed other potential revisions. Bob G. asked if a future board meeting could have a presentation on how grants are pursued and for which projects. Brian said that would be fine and mentioned the work the PROS department is doing on the department-wide master plan. Once the master plan is wrapped up, the department will move on to a strategic plan to pinpoint specific projects and goals. Dennis asked if there could be a presentation on each site during visits. Dennis suggested voting on the proposed bylaw changes. Brad said he would like to discuss specific changes tonight and then vote on the totality of changes at the March OSB meeting. Brad pointed out Article II section 3 of the bylaws, which mentions that OSB members shall keep apprised of the PROS department budget. Vicky asked what the history was behind that section. Brian said that he was not sure but would guess that in the early days it was in reference to advocating with appointed officials to increase funding for open space. Brad offered to write up the bylaw changes and email them out to the board. Brad asked if a proxy could be assigned to the board in the event that a regular member was unable to attend meetings for an extended period of time. Lauren agreed to check with the City Clerk's office. Wayne mentioned that changes to the bylaws could be made at any meeting. Due to time limitations, Brad suggested tabling the action plan priorities item. David Bourne moved to table the action plan priorities item to the March OSB meeting. Vicky Samuel seconded the motion. Motion carried.

- IX. REPORTS: Brad reminded the OSB members that it is still quarter one of conservation easement monitoring. The weather is very good, which provides a good opportunity to get out and do the required monitoring. Bob G. gave an update on the outreach subcommittee. Their first meeting was today, and they had a long discussion. Progress was made but there is still more work to be done.
- X. CHAIR REMARKS: Brad reminded the OSB members that there will be OSB vacancies coming up very soon. So far, one new application has been received. Brad asked about the status of Bob G's application. Lauren answered that the Clerk's office has not received Bob G's application yet. Brad stated that the OSB will hold interviews at the March OSB meeting. There will also be an election for the positions of board chair and vice chair. Lauren agreed to invite the new applicant to interview at the March OSB meeting. Brad also mentioned the upcoming volunteer day events. Bob G. shared that the volunteer portal does not seem to work very well. Brad responded that if searching for events in the volunteer portal doesn't work, events could be found on the list or calendar. Bob G. asked who runs the volunteer portal. Brian answered that Chad Angell in HR runs the volunteer portal. Lauren agreed to provide this feedback to Chad. Brad shared information on the 2024 Earth Day cleanup event. Brad asked the OSB members if the April OSB meeting should be held at Senac Creek Nature Center at the Aurora Reservoir. Joy Thompson and the OSB members agreed that that would work.
- XI. BULLET POINTS:
- Guest speaker Bryon Shipley gave a presentation about the two research projects he completed at Plains Conservation Center concerning the effect of prairie dog towns on populations of rattlesnakes and other reptiles and amphibians.
 - The Board agreed to have a table at several City of Aurora sponsored events in order to help promote the city's incredible open space areas.
 - The Board continued the discussion of updating and revising the OSAB bylaws with the goal of approving the changes at the March meeting.
- XII. MEMBER COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION:
- Mark- No comment.
 - Dennis- Commented that he has been enjoying the nice weather lately.
 - Bob G- Commented that he has really liked the recent presentations. Shared that he will have a bug gathering at his house on March 23rd. The OSB members are welcome to attend.
 - Joy- Commented that she has also been enjoying the nice weather. Shared that Bob H. is doing better. He is at home now and doing very well.
 - Vicky- Visited Coal Creek recently. Lots is changing there, and the creek is all over the place. There is a beaver lodge right there, with lots of dams. She saw 15 Goldeneyes. The creek is now too wide to hop over. At a recent meeting, staff member Kristin Memmott commented that the city is looking at the structural stability of the area. Vicky asked if that is an issue. Brian answered that it is not. Vicky shared that Coal Creek is a nice place right now, with lots of water and tons of birds.
 - David- Seeing two eagles at the Confluence nest was the highlight of his week last week. Brad mentioned a nesting pair in one of the riparian areas near Quincy reservoir. Wayne asked if the city could get the owner of the land where the nest is located to protect it. Brian answered that the area is owned by the State Land Board, which is one of the largest landowners in Colorado. Their mission is to use land to raise money for the public school system. A lot of their land is used for agricultural leases and oil and gas drilling, but a percentage of the land has to be kept in a conservation trust. Any land in the trust can't be sold or developed into certain things. There was a proposal roughly 15 years ago to take the area north of Quincy reservoir out of the conservation trust and sell it. A developer was interested in developing the land. The proposal did not end up happening due to the economic downturn shortly after. The State Land Board can change which property is in and out of the conservation trust, as long as the total percentage of land in the conservation trust is maintained. David asked if the eagles nest makes a difference.

Brian responded that it could make a difference due to the federal protection that is provided to eagles, but the federal protection rules have relaxed a little as the eagle population has rebounded.

- Wayne- No comment.

XIII. ADJOURN: Vicky Samuel moved to adjourn. David Bourne seconded the motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:53pm.

The next meeting will be on March 20th at 5:30 PM at Morrison Nature Center.

Brad Stratton
Brad Stratton (Mar 21, 2024 14:44 MDT)

Brad Stratton, Chair

Lauren R Morales

Lauren Morales, Board Liaison







2-21-24 OSB Minutes (APPROVED)

Final Audit Report

2024-03-21

Created:	2024-03-21
By:	Lauren Morales (lrmorale@auroragov.org)
Status:	Signed
Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAAgyNE2Y1pMrbNIKXEhb_0VigVosW_kIQy

"2-21-24 OSB Minutes (APPROVED)" History

-  Document created by Lauren Morales (lrmorale@auroragov.org)
2024-03-21 - 3:23:17 PM GMT- IP address: 63.149.121.82
-  Document emailed to stratb@aol.com for signature
2024-03-21 - 3:23:34 PM GMT
-  Email viewed by stratb@aol.com
2024-03-21 - 8:43:52 PM GMT- IP address: 73.229.125.77
-  Signer stratb@aol.com entered name at signing as Brad Stratton
2024-03-21 - 8:44:23 PM GMT- IP address: 73.229.125.77
-  Document e-signed by Brad Stratton (stratb@aol.com)
Signature Date: 2024-03-21 - 8:44:25 PM GMT - Time Source: server- IP address: 73.229.125.77
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2024-03-21 - 8:44:25 PM GMT