

Minutes of the Meeting: April 7, 2023

Board members present: Brian Wetcher, JoAnn York-Gilmore, Tabb Stringer, Nathan Schwark, Kit Gerwels

Staff present: Bob Vaux, Steve Phillips, Darby Jordan

Guests: Asa Deane

Meeting held in person and via Zoom and called to order at 6:02PM

Minutes: March minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comments:

Barbara expressed concern about the general direction of the ACFL.

Tom Glad stated that he had submitted a letter on behalf of Evergreen Islands opposing the Little Cranberry boat chute project. He asked about the permitting for critical areas and wanted to know if this would require a shoreline permit. Tom shared that he believes any development in the ACFL is not appropriate and people have other opportunities such as Heart Lake, Whistle Lake and Washington park for boat recreation.

Bob Vaux shared that there is no plan at this time and this project is currently waiting for a biologist report. He reported that a community member saw the dispersed use of the area and existing boat launch at Little Cranberry Lake and wanted to streamline use and protect the shoreline.

Tom responded that he had concerns that an individual could direct a project based on their own agenda.

Sara Roberts spoke about her concern that the City has spent funds on a project that has not gone through the public process.

Bob Jepperson stated that he felt this was being handled like the bike park project with no large public announcement until long after the planning was started. He feels that an idea should be tested with public comment instead of spending money first.

ACFL Plan Update

- Public Comment on Chapters 1 & 2

Bob gave an overview of the process and current plan. He stated that the Board had adopted this schedule of review and updating to allow public

comment at each step of the process. He shared that the Board and staff know there are typos and formatting errors in the current plan that will be corrected as part of the update. He stated that the working Draft Plan will be available online after each Board session.

Brian reminded everyone that the Forest Board is an advisory Board to the Council and Mayor. He shared that this is just the first of many opportunities for public comment. Comments can be submitted verbally or in writing and will be accepted not only at the Board level, but at the Planning and Council level as well.

Julie Kinder, resident of Anacortes, shared that she is a member of the Friends of the Forest and helps with trail maintenance. She is interested in a good outcome and is happy to be part of the process.

Sara Holahan, citizen of Anacortes, stated that she is interested in the update. She asked if a Forest Plan could be made available without photos. She is concerned with the structure of the plan as it starts with management areas then discusses stewardship. She feels that it should start with goals and then go into the area details. She asked that there is clarification on page 7, under the Policy of the Management Areas that it state the “fish and wildlife habitat” be noted that it is a State of Washington designation. She also asked about the “priority given to local residents” throughout the document and how that was going to be put in place.

Tom Glade, citizen of Anacortes, and current president of Evergreen Islands shared that he is an environmentalist. He told a story as to what helped shape his beliefs growing up. He feels that the ACFL should not be overused. He would like to minimize human development and physical structures. He would also like to see a shut down on Mt Erie to climbing when the falcons are nesting.

Asa Deane, Executive Director of Friends of the Forest, shared the letter and recommendations on Chapters 1 & 2 that he had previously sent to staff. The full letter can be found [here](#). He also stated that the letter and additional information will be available on the Friends’ website.

Barbara Cooper, citizen of Anacortes, stated that she is interested in the process and is thankful for the ACFL.

Annette McCartney, citizen of Anacortes and member of Evergreen Islands, stated she is in attendance as a watchdog of the ACFL.

Arlene Cook, citizen of Anacortes, shared that she is in attendance as an observer of the meeting. She enjoys the forest and is aware of the local ecosystem.

Shawn Bell, citizen of Anacortes, stated that there are numerous typos and formatting errors. In the Introduction, there are some specific numbers and other general numbers, Shawn states that all should be specific and site where the information is from. Under the Management section, the term “unique environment” should be clarified and defined. He asked if there are critical areas other than the WDFW designation. He feels that sometimes the document reads formal and other times informal and this should be corrected to a formal document. Definitions were requested for a number of terms in the document such as user groups, critical areas, low impact, etc. Under the Little Cranberry recommendation section on page 8, #4 and 5 should be clarified. Also, on page 8 under the South Cranberry Lake area recommendations, #2 should be clarified. Shawn expressed concern about the discrepancy in the Whistle Lake section of high and low impact. He also believes that the Mt Erie policy on climbers and permits should be reviewed.

Jennifer McFarland, citizen of Anacortes, asked if the document currently has or will address the protocol of any changes and how the process occurs. She is concerned about keeping the ACFL pristine.

Mark Nihart, citizen of Anacortes, feels the Introduction should be switched and put the wildlife first and then recreation as that is how the ACFL has been managed. He shared that the user groups that are not represented are the flora and fauna. Mark stated that the property of the ACFL was bought for wildlife conservation and therefore should have nature first and appropriate recreation second. He also suggested that the management zones be narrowed and more specific, such as the back of Little Cranberry. He requested that the updated plan include recognition of the history and the people who made the changes to preserve the ACFL.

Bob Jepperson, citizen of Skagit County, expressed concern for the residents of the ACFL and that they are not mentioned in the document. He feels that the use and damage to the area is out of control and the worst he has ever seen. He stated that he would submit additional comments in writing.

Marlene Finley, citizen of Anacortes and member of Evergreen Islands, asked that the document start with a rapid assessment of change, looking at new laws, visitor numbers and use patterns, environmental, wildlife and water quality. The fuel load and firebreaks need to be examined both on the side of the ACFL as well as neighboring properties. She feels that there should be an emphasis on guiding regulations and protection standards.

Sarah Roberts, citizen of Anacortes, shared that she is a citizen scientist with Transition Fidalgo. She would like to examine the Whistle Lake management section and clarify the high and low impact activities. She also suggested that the plan look ahead to new impacts such as ebikes, electric motors and bikes.

Bill Kennedy, citizen of Anacortes, asks that the plan be clear in goals and vision for the long term. He feels that the ACFL should be a pristine forest without the impacts of man. Bill stated that when you have a gathering area such as a trailhead, it invites safety issues and vandalism.

Bob Jepperson, citizen of Skagit county, spoke again about the prior emphasis on recreation instead of the health of the ACFL. He feels that changes could be made to help habitats for native species. He asked for a detailed accounting of all money spent in the ACFL for human access and habitat help.

ACFL Dams Update:

Bob sent out the Whistle Lake DOE report late this afternoon to the Board and Council. There are challenges with the Whistle Lake dam but the report did not contain any surprises to staff. Parks owns and manages the trail and Public Works will help with the DOE. Bob will give more information after the engineering department gives their input.

Friends of the Forest Update:

Asa was in attendance to give the Friends of the Forest update. The intended Spring Break camp did not get the registration needed to run, so they changed it to a Family drop in program and saw about 25 people enjoy some outdoor learning. They are preparing for Earth Day on April 22nd and the "Bio Blitz". Friends' staff will be at A Avenue trailhead to help with the app. Staff are getting ready for the Spring Party on May 7th at the Depot. Festivities begin at 2pm with music and activities for all ages.

ACFL Trail Committee Report:

None

Staff Reports:

Steve reported that the Spring opening to motorbikes has resulted in less bikes on the trails than before the opening.

Bob had nothing to add to his written report.

Parks Commission Report:

JoAnn reported on the Parks Board meeting, sharing that the Parks Board had the same discussion about the Budget and they will be coming up with a priority list to present to Council.

Other Business:

None

Adjourn at 8:05pm

Respectfully Submitted by Darby Jordan