

Minutes of the Meeting: February 1, 2024

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

Staff present: Bob Vaux, Jamie Burroughs, Darby Jordan

Meeting held in person and via Zoom and called to order at 6:00PM

Annual Board Chair Election:

Kit expressed his thanks for the opportunity to serve as Board Chair last year and he is willing to support someone else serving if they would like. JoAnn made a motion to have Kit continue in the role of Chair, Tabb seconded, all Board members voted in favor.

Minutes: January minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comments:

None

Little Cranberry Lake Update:

Jonn Lunsford was in attendance to give an update on Little Cranberry Lake. He provided a power point presentation showing the history of the lake and the dam as well as the levels of protection and regulations in place for the ACFL, lake and dam. Jonn also shared a way to fix and control the erosion of the lake shore and increase ADA access to the lake. These are both called for in the 2021 Forest Plan. This process is in its very early stages of exploration and will require numerous permits that will allow for public comment on each. Jane Burkhurst (Anacortes resident) asked about the critical areas review and if it has been completed. Jonn explained that the evaluation of the site is just the first step in that review and as there is not project proposal, the review is not complete. Jane also asked if there is expected to be a large increase in use of the area with this project. Staff shared that they do not believe this alone will increase the use of the lake, but due to population growth there will be an increase in use of all ACFL and parks.

Patrick Gallagher (Anacortes resident) expressed thanks for the information and presentation. He asked why boating activities would not be prohibited on the lake. Jonn responded that the Forest Plan calls for an increase in ADA access and a balance in conservation and recreation. To ban a single user group would require more study.

Sarah Peterson (Anacortes resident) asked why ADA access was called for at Little Cranberry and not a more heavily used water access area. Jonn explained that Heart Lake is also being looked at as the Master Plan from 2010 calls for expanded access there. He noted that providing ADA access at more than one place is a desire of staff.

Marlene Finley (Anacortes resident and VP of Evergreen Islands) asked about the oversight of donations and projects. She stated that the Forest Plan also has conservation language and asked if donations could be made for study and preservation. Jonn shared that donations have been made through the Parks Foundation for a variety of projects, but those projects must be in the plan and align with publicly approved goals. Marlene spoke about the CEP and the money donated to protect the ACFL from development. Jonn clarified that the definition of development was mining, logging and building, not allowing public access for recreation.

Cole Mumper (Oak Harbor resident) agreed with Mr Gallagher in prohibiting boats in order to protect the wildlife. Jonn stated that small boat access has been allowed for over 60 years and there would need to be a reason to prohibit use.

Jen McFarland (Anacortes resident) asked why one of the priorities was not a restroom at Little Cranberry. Jonn shared that Whistle and Heart Lakes historically had more use as well as more room for facilities.

Paul Vance (Anacortes resident) asked if there was a way to do some shoreline mitigation now prior to getting the permit and review completed. Jonn shared that any shoreline work must have a permit and be approved. Paul also asked about the background of the Forest Plan and the increase of the ADA access. Jonn referred to the lookout and dam trail access that was built and that it has been well received by the public. Staff and the Forest Board discussed the potential for more at their monthly public meetings and put additional access into the Forest Plan update that was adopted by City Council in 2021.

Tom Johnson (Anacortes resident) shared that he lives close to the ACFL and wants it left as wild as possible. He is against a boat launch and asked about the agencies that have to approve the plan. Jonn stated that there are agencies at the Federal, State, County and City levels that will all have to approve the plan and each will allow public comment. Tom asked where the public can get the latest information. Jonn offered his contact information as well as Bob's. There is also the online notifications from the City website and the Forest Board meetings.

Bruce Rustad (Anacortes resident) spoke about his years of forest trail maintenance and volunteering. He shared that he feels the community should have access to the lake.

Mark Nihart (Anacortes resident) shared that he has been a user of the forest lands since the 60's, using the lake for boating and swimming. He feels the erosion of the shoreline has not gotten worse over the years. Mark asked how other watercraft will be launched if this is a kayak specific launch. He also asked about the timeline of the Forest Plan being reviewed and updated, that could change what is restricted or allowed. He feels that this decision should be combined with the Forest Plan update and no changes be made to the lake at this time.

Christy Hine (Anacortes resident) spoke about being a frequent user of the ACFL and that she enjoys the quiet and peace. She wants the area protected and is an advocate for the wildlife.

Patty Pattee (Anacortes resident) stated that she has reviewed the minutes of the Forest Board meetings and does not see support for this project. Jonn shared that staff rarely hear support or opposition from the public until a project is suggested. Staff are looking at this idea to see if it fits into the Plan and increases equality and inclusion.

Sarah Roberts (Anacortes resident) expressed her appreciation for the presentation and information as well as the trail over the years. She feels that Little Cranberry is not a good kayak lake, being small. She shared that she had never heard anyone say that they wanted changes to the lake. She feels that Little Cranberry is unique with no nearby roads and should have access reduced.

Barbara Cooper (Anacortes resident) stated that she is not against ADA access but feels there are better areas.

Josh Gates (Anacortes resident) shared that he is a frequent user of the ACFL and Little Cranberry. He expressed concern over the use of the word “wild” and asked if the lake has a wildlife designation. He also shared his concern about restricting a user group and the trickle down impact that could have on other user groups. Josh asked about the ratio of conserved land to used land. Jonn shared that there is about 2200 acres of land protected in the CEP and other areas are protected by deed. When the miles of trail are combined and considered “used land”, they make up just under 4% of the ACFL with over 96% being unused.

Susana Gilbertson (Anacortes resident) asked about motorboats being allowed on the lake. Staff responded that only electric motors are allowed. She feels that the lake is quiet and peaceful and any increase in traffic is bad.

Todd Sham (Anacortes resident) enjoys the quiet and rejects any development, feeling that it disrespects the value of the ACFL.

Sarah Peterson (Anacortes resident) feel that allowing this change before the Plan adoption should be reviewed.

2026 Forest Plan Update Discussion:

Bob shared that this was kept on the agenda as staff is working on this for the March meeting, knowing the majority of this meeting would be discussion on Little Cranberry.

Friends of the Forest Update:

Katie spoke about the Naturalist program starting in March. Their annual meeting will be February 27th at 7pm.

Staff Reports:

Bob shared that Jamie is up and running in the ACFL. The team is thankful to have a full crew. Staff is working with the Friends to coordinate work projects with the next work party disguised as a hike is February 29th. Staff is also working with Josh and the Fidalgo Trail Riders on trail maintenance.

Jamie was in attendance and welcomed any questions from the Board and community.

Parks Commission Report:

JoAnn reported on the Parks Board meeting. She shared that the agenda packet has the most up to date information.

Other Business:

Marlene Finley asked if the Board and Staff were still accepting written comments. Bob responded that officially the written comment window on the Forest Plan was closed for this round. The next round of public comment will be on the draft when it is published. However, the public is always welcome to email the Board or Staff.

Adjourn at 7:47pm

Respectfully Submitted by Darby Jordan