

**Invasive Species Working Group
May 13, 2015
Swift Creek Dining Hall
Pocahontas State Park
Chesterfield, Virginia**

DRAFT MINUTES

Present

Sandy Adams, VDACS
Jacob Barney, Virginia Tech
Karen Canody, Dominion Power
Ruth Douglas, VNPS
Michael Fletcher, DCR
Karen Gruszynski, VDH
Kevin Heffernan, DCR
Lisa Moss, USFWS
Larry Nichols, VDACS
Thomas Smith, DCR

Andy Alvarez, VDACS
Scott Barros, USDA APHIS WS
Clyde Cristman, DCR
Ande Ehlen, VMRC
Katie Frazier, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Laura Hare, VDACS
Todd Lookingbill, University of Richmond
Rick Myers, DCR
Aaron Proctor, DGIF
Tom Thompson, Natural Art Landscaping

Call to Order, Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Cristman called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. He said that he was chairing the meeting on behalf of Secretary of Natural Resources Molly Ward who was unable to be in attendance.

Mr. Cristman said that the meeting was long overdue as the working group is supposed to meet twice annually.

Federal Invasive Fish and Wildlife Legislative Proposal

Mr. Proctor gave an overview of the Federal Invasive Fish and Wildlife Legislative Proposal. He said that the belief is that the bill will be revised and reintroduce in the next session of Congress.

The bill seeks to, "...establish an improved regulatory process for injurious wildlife to prevent the introduction and establishment in the United States of nonnative wildlife and wild animal pathogens and parasites that are likely to cause harm...to humans, and the interests of agriculture, horticulture, or forestry, or wildlife or wildlife resources..." (H.R. 996, 2013-2014).

Mr. Proctor said that the committee would hear a lot about the challenges. He said that this legislation is a good way to start thinking about the large scope of the challenge.

Mr. Proctor said that the current law is based on the Lacey Act, passed by Congress in 1900. He noted that since that time, imports to the U.S. have grown exponentially with cargo arriving at the ports from all over the world. Nonnative wildlife species are among the imports, both as intentional and accidental introductions. Mr. Proctor noted that a later amendment to the bill added injurious species.

Mr. Proctor said that trying to use a bill written 115 years ago was a risky strategy. He said that the overall approach had been a retroactive approach focusing on listing species as they are discovered.

Mr. Proctor said that one study shows over \$35 billion in annual economic damage. A different study has the number as high as \$100 billion. He noted that the cost for Asian Carp since 2001 was rough \$120 million just for one species.

Mr. Proctor said that prevention is the key for this act. He said that once an invasive species is present, control is difficult if not impossible. The bill seeks to address preventing importation while still allowing trade.

Mr. Proctor said that specifically the bill would:

- Empower the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to use modern scientific approaches to assess injurious species;
- Shift the costs of assessment from taxpayers to importers;
- Prevent future invasions by allowing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to block harmful importation of animals that cause ecological and economic damage.

Mr. Proctor said that this was a proactive rather than a reactive approach. He said that the advisory committee was recommending that the working group sign a letter of support once the bill is reintroduced.

Mr. Cristman asked if there was any sense of the support from the Virginia Congressional delegation.

Mr. Proctor said that his understanding was that the measure would have the same group of sponsors from the last introduction. He said that there had been no indication of support from the Obama Administration.

Mr. Proctor noted that members had been provided a copy of a draft letter for their consideration. A copy of this draft is available from DCR.

MOTION: Ms. Adams moved that the Virginia Invasive Species Working Group endorse the draft letter regarding the Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act indicating support for the legislation.

SECOND: Mr. Thompson

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Invasive Plant Risk Assessment Protocol

Mr. Heffernan reviewed the proposed Invasive Plant Risk Assessment Protocol. A full copy of his presentation is available from DCR.

Mr. Heffernan noted that the Invasive Plant Risk Assessment Protocol:

- Was developed by NatureServe and partners
- Is scalable to specific state or region
- Has multiple choice questions with weighted answers
- Creates a record of the various information sources that goes into the ranking process

The qualifying questions include:

- Non-native established outside of cultivation region of interest?
- Occurs in conservation areas?

In evaluating the ecological impact, the protocol considers:

- Impact on ecosystem processes and system-wide parameters
- Impact on ecological community structure
- Impact on ecological community composition
- Impact on individual native plant or animal species
- Conservation significance of the communities and native species threatened

The protocol also considers the current distribution and abundance of an invasive species. That includes the current size and range in Virginia as well as the proportion of the current range where the species is impacting biodiversity.

In considering the management potential the protocol looks at:

- General management difficulty
- Minimum time commitment
- Impacts of management on native species
- Accessibility of invaded areas

Regarding the invasive plant list:

- There are 90 species on the invasive plant list. There were 109 on the 2009 list.
- 31 species have been removed
- 12 species have been added, eight are early detection species

- 6 species increased ranks
- 4 species decreased ranks

Mr. Cristman asked how long it took for a species to be declared native.

Mr. Heffernan said that he was not aware of anything since the continent was settled by Europeans that is now declared native.

Mr. Cristman noted that the invasive species list is a non-regulatory list and provided as an education tool for the larger community.

Mr. Heffernan asked that the working group endorse the protocol.

MOTION: Ms. Adams moved that the Invasive Species Working Group endorse the Invasive Plant Risk Assessment Protocol as presented by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Thompson

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

VDACS Noxious Weed Regulations

Mr. Nichols presented an overview of the VDACS Noxious Weed Regulations. He said that much of the information was the same as presented at the last meeting. He noted that the regulations are now in final form and were passed by the VDACS Board in March, 2014, and again in May, 2014.

Mr. Nichols said that the regulations contain the regulatory list of noxious weeds.

Mr. Thompson asked if there had been any further action regarding golden bamboo.

Mr. Nichols said that VDACS recommended that the advisory committee take up that issue.

Mr. Cristman asked that there be a report at the next meeting.

Species Update: Feral Hogs

Mr. Proctor gave an update concerning feral hogs. He said that this continues to be a problem because Virginia is a “fence out” state as opposed to “fence in” meaning that animal owners are not required to fence in livestock. This allows domestic animals to breed with feral animals thus increasing the population.

Mr. Proctor noted that this is a problem for hunters who are not able to make the distinction between a feral hog and a domestic animal.

Mr. Proctor said that the discussion continues regarding how best to deal with the issue.

Species Update: Wavyleaf Grass

Mr. Heffernan gave an update concerning wavyleaf grass. He noted that this is currently the #1 plant species of concern.

Mr. Heffernan said that wavyleaf grass has adapted to the forest understory where it creates a dense carpet and overpowers other species. The plant is often carried by hunters.

Wavyleaf grass can be controlled in small amounts by hand pulling and with some herbicides.

Mr. Heffernan said that addressing this issue would be a long term project.

Public Comment

There was no public comment

Mr. Cristman noted that Pocahontas State Park originally opened in 1938 as a national park. The Civilian Conservation Corps built the building where the working group was meeting. Pocahontas is the largest park in the Virginia State Park system.

Mr. Cristman said that following lunch, park staff would be available to provide a tour to some of the challenge areas on the property.

Next Meeting

Mr. Cristman said that the Code of Virginia required the working group to meet twice annually. He said that staff was considering an October meeting date.

There was no additional business and the meeting was adjourned.