

Western North Carolina Public Lands Council
Meeting Summary
September 30, 2011
1:00 – 3:00 PM
NCDENR Asheville Regional Office
Swannanoa, NC

Members in Attendance: Nelda Holder, Delos Monteith, Jason Love, Jonathan Douthit, Jason Robinson, Tim Nicholson

Others in Attendance: Judy Francis, Maxine Dalton, Valerie True, Gary Kauffman

I. Welcome, Introduction of New Members

Vice-Chair Nelda Holder opened meeting and welcomed all in attendance. She particularly recognized two new members: Tim Nicholson who will represent Cherokee County and Jason Robinson who will represent Yancey County. All the members introduced themselves and expressed appreciation to Tim and Jason for their willingness to serve on the Council.

Nelda Holder then recognized Maxine Dalton, Past Chair of the Council whose term has expired. Maxine explained she will still follow council activities and enjoyed her time on the council. She said she is keeping busy with a number of activities in Madison County. Judy Francis presented Maxine with a certificate from Gov. Perdue expressing appreciation for her years of service to the Council.

II. Guest Speaker

Gary Kauffman, from the US Forest Service gave a presentation entitled "*Exotic / Invasive Species in WNC Forest Lands.*" He is ecologist who works on invasive plant issues. The forest service is prioritizing invasive species to target treatment areas. The NEPA process can complicate treatment options in some locations. Information points include:

- Invasive plants cause cause \$1-120 billion in damage annually.
- 25-40% of federally listed Threatened & Endangered species at risk from invasives.
- Delaying treatment only worsens the problem for ecosystem health.
- There are approximately 7000 species of plants in North America – and about 1000 of them are considered to be invasive.
- Invasive typically grow quickly, have prolific seed production, and can live in a variety of sites.
- Still need more information and study about fire control of invasives.
- Some invasives are used as ornamentals and efforts to legislate the issue is often thwarted by industries that use and harvest the invasive plants.
- A Cooperative Weed Management Partnership exists in western NC.

After Gary completed his presentation, he was asked how the Council could help.

Gary said that what is needed is awareness raising efforts, such as one-page fact sheets distributed to the general public. Spread the information to some of the nurseries and florists /wreath-makers who use the bittersweet.

III. **Agency Reports**

Tom Jackson gave an update from NC State Parks. He said that over one million visitors came to the parks over the summer. Lake James visitation doubled in one year. There is a lot of community support for many of the parks and they are using them more than ever. There has been lots of bear activity, especially in the Mount Mitchell area, until the berries ripened. Too much bear interaction has meant closing the campgrounds for a couple weeks. That helped break the cycle and there have been no problems since. They are recruiting for a seasonal fire crew now.

Judy gave an update on the license plate / specialty plates issue. Some money goes to the NC Parks & Recreation Trust Fund. Proposed legislation, if approved, could mean we would lose a significant part of that revenue. She reminded the council that the letter they approved was sent to members of the western delegation, the NCDOT Board, and the Governor's Office.

Report from the US Forest Service – A new Deputy Forest Supervisor has been hired. Her name is Diane Rubiaco and she comes here from northern California. A number of construction projects are underway. A proposal to establish the Grandfather Scenic Area has been received. The forest service does not intend to action on the request until after the forest plan revision, but will begin public sensing on the issue later this fall. New guidelines for prescribed fire management are in draft form and out for public comment.

There were no agency reports from the Blue Ridge Parkway or the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

IV. **Other Business**

Council Election Issues – Nelda asked for nominations for the upcoming chair and vice-chair election. Jonathan Douthit asked Nelda if she would consider being the Chair. Nelda said that she would be willing to serve as Vice-Chair, but her role in the local media might make being the Chair difficult. Jonathon Douthit made a motion to elect Nelda Holder as Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Jason Love and approved unanimously. After more discussion, Jason Love agreed to consider being the Chair, but wants to think about it prior to the next meeting.

MRC Representation – Jason Robinson agreed to act as the Council's representative at the October meeting of the Mountain Resources Commission in Crossnore.

2012 Meeting Dates – The Council agreed by consensus that their 2012 meeting dates would be January 13, March 9, May 11, July 13, September 14, and November 9.

V. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on November 4, 2011. If members have a location where they can hold the meeting, they will let Judy know before October 21. If she does not hear from anyone, the meeting will be at the NCDENR office in Swannanoa. Nelda will not be able to attend the November meeting and Jason Love will Chair the meeting.

Members were instructed to disseminate the license plate fact sheet to their contacts.

VI. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:30 PM.