

**Minutes of the Parks & Environment Advisory Board
Meeting May 3rd, 2023 at the Canale Training Center**

In attendance:

Officers Present - Mike Hogan, Chairperson, Stephen Fiedler, Vice-Chairperson

Members Present - Dick Colby, Dan Crum, Belinda Chester, Emma Witt

Members Absent - Ken Sooy, Alex Perri, Lisa March

Commissioner Representative - Andrew Parker -present

County Staff - Greg Brookins, D.H.P.W. - present

Secretary - Eric Husta, D.D.P.R. – present

Guests- Julie Akers, Fred Akers, Cathie Skinner, Lynn Wood, Mikayla Pomatto

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM and a flag salute was conducted. The minutes from our April meeting were approved also.

Guest Speaker: Rebecca Klee, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Rebecca provided an informative presentation on some of the federally listed threatened (8) and endangered (2) species found in Atlantic County. She gave a brief overview of Section 7(A)(2) of the Endangered Species Act which requires agencies to consult with the Service to ensure actions don't jeopardize the continued existence of a particular species. Ms. Klee also discussed how the agency makes the determination between the designations. Habitat threats and best management practices were also discussed at length.

Rebecca also made mention of the fact any citizen can run their own project through their planning and conservation website at <https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/> to explore the possibility of impacting species and habitat, conduct a regulatory review, or build a consultation package. She also provided for the group, an overview of her work with the northern long-eared bat and the concern over wide-ranging impacts of white nose syndrome.

The discussion concluded with a brief question and answer session. One question in particular was asked about threatened marine species leading Rebecca to note that protection of these species is regulated by NOAA.

Roundtable Discussion topics:

Emma Witt noted finals at Stockton University are wrapping up and many local sites are experiencing high water conditions currently, due to the recent heavy rains.

Dan Crum reported on a sharp shinned hawk sighting he recently had.

Dick Colby made mention of his investigations into lead in the drinking water pipes in Egg Harbor City. Discussion was had on the various ways water distribution systems can be owned and operated.

**Minutes of the Parks & Environment Advisory Board
Meeting May 3rd, 2023 at the Canale Training Center**

Steve Fiedler updated the group on his on-going work at Glen By The Bay Park. He noted 3 out of the 4 grants his group applied for have been obtained and are being used to fund various improvements and plant purchases. He also provided an update on the Smithville Conservation Project.

Commissioner Parker provided an update on the McKee City Betterment Park. He noted an upcoming ribbon cutting event on May 20th from 10AM-12PM with a rain date of May 21st. The park is located at 6 Atlas Lane in EHT and those interested in attending can call (609) 272-8120 or visit www.ehtrec.com for more information. Discussion was also had regarding the efforts to acquire markers noting historically significant African American sites in the area and the Arbor Day Trees for Schools grant program. The grants range in size from \$10,000 - \$500,000 and cover all aspects of tree planting and monitoring.

Eric Husta was asked about the Division of Parks completing a 10-year update to the Recreation and Open Space Master Plan. He noted he believed there was a plan done in 2008 by the Department of Regional Planning and Development but wasn't aware of an update being done recently. He said he would investigate and follow up with the group.

An update was indeed completed in 2018 by the Department of Regional Planning and Development. Below is a link to the page containing all available planning documents and a link to the actual plan itself.

[Planning Documents - Atlantic County Government \(atlantic-county.org\)](http://atlantic-county.org)
[Open Space and Rec Plan 5-1-18.pdf \(atlantic-county.org\)](#)

Belinda Chester updated the group on the status of classes offered by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension including the Master Composter class, the Environmental Stewards class, and the Garden Education series. She also mentioned the large number of requests for speakers she is receiving and noted they are always looking for additional speakers.

Mike Hogan mentioned his upcoming orchid walk in Estell Manor Park will be on the last Saturday of July and begin at 8AM after meeting in the main parking lot.

The evening concluded with discussion regarding proposed projects in the area. Fred Akers mentioned a proposal that would call for a dam to be built across the Great Egg Harbor inlet for flood control but noted the upright support columns will restrict flow and the dam, even when open, will restrict access and fish migration routes. He also noted growing opposition to off-road vehicle use. Ordinances are being passed in towns such as Hamilton township and Egg Harbor township, allowing local police to confiscate illegally operated ATVs.

Julie and Fred Akers then updated the group on their progress working with the new owners of the former B.L. England powerplant site. Public access is a key component of the plan along with environmental education. Julie mentioned ATV traffic in public roads in Vineland and suggested the PEAB meetings be publicized. She finished her update by noting the lack of Native American information and displays in the park system and making mention of the upcoming plein air art event in the parks.

Lastly, it was decided that our June field trip will be to tour the Stockton University forestry management area and proceed from there to the University's sustainability farm. The trip is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, June 7th at 6PM.

**Minutes of the Parks & Environment Advisory Board
Meeting May 3rd, 2023 at the Canale Training Center**

The meeting adjourned at 9:07 PM.

Our next meeting is currently scheduled for Wednesday, June 7th at 6PM and will consist of a field trip to Stockton University's forestry management area and sustainability farm.

cc: Dennis Levinson, County Executive
Jerry DelRosso, County Administrator
Diana Rutala, Deputy County Administrator
John W. Risley Jr., Chairperson - Board of County Commissioners
Andrew Parker, Board of County Commissioners – PEAB Representative
Greg Brookins, Department Head Public Works
All Advisory Board Members