

**INVASIVE PLANTS COUNCIL
MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 21, 2004**

Council Members Present: Comm. Leff, Comm. Gresczyk, Mary Musgrave, Paul Larson, David Goodwin, Dr. Magnarelli, Dr. Mehrhoff, David Sutherland

Members of the Public Present: Donna Ellis, Sandy Breslin, Karen Weeks, Betty McLaughlin

Absent: Thomas McGowan

The meeting was called to order at 1:33 P.M. by Chairman Leff.

Mr. Sutherland discussed the nomination of Dr. Magnarelli as Vice Chair. Dr. Magnarelli stated that if he were elected that he did not want to assume rank until Nov. 12, 2004. Therefore, if Commissioner Leff could not make the October 12 meeting that Dr. Anderson would have to be called to chair the meeting.

Mr. Sutherland made a motion for Dr. Magnarelli to be Vice Chair of the Invasive Plants Council. Dr. Mehrhoff seconded the motion. The Invasive Plants Council voted 8 – 0 in favor of having Dr. Magnarelli as Vice Chair as of November 12, 2004.

Ms. Ellis discussed how there are a few more openings for the Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group Symposium to be held on the campus of the University of Connecticut on October 7, 2004.

Chairman Leff then turned to the minutes from the last meeting and had a few corrections. Not everyone had a copy of the minutes so Chairman Leff suggested they hold off the voting till the members have had a chance to look them over.

Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Larson discussed the field trip to two Connecticut nurseries that took place on Monday, July 19, 2004. They were pleased with how many legislators showed up for the field trip. Mr. Goodwin stated that he thinks people learned something because they saw first hand the situation and the problem that invasive plants can cause.

Dr. Mehrhoff then talked about the field trip he led to several sites on and around the campus of the University of Connecticut. The 6 sites which were chosen were either state or publicly owned land which showed that everybody shares the problem of invasive plants.

Chairman Leff commented on the variety of invasive plants that he saw on that field trip and was amazed.

Mr. Goodwin asked if there had been a marked difference in animals in the area where invasive plants are invading.

Dr. Mehrhoff said that scientists are starting to study that issue. He said he has noticed increases in bird populations. For instance, Robins which feed on Oriental Bittersweet may be staying during winter which would change their biology. But there has been no official studies done.

Mr. Sutherland discussed how The Nature Conservancy has a project in Northwest Connecticut. The project involves eradicating 5 species, primarily Barberry, and noted that native wildflowers were moving in once the Barberry was eradicated. He also said that there was a study that showed ground nesting birds were being shoved out of their habitats by invasive plants.

Ms. Musgrave asked a joint question for Mr. Sutherland and Dr. Mehrhoff. The question was when Barberry comes in, exactly how did it get there?

Dr. Mehrhoff said that most places that are heavily disturbed, like stop 6 (Nye-Holman State Forest) on our field trip. As to what and why it is so heavily disturbed, I don't know.

Mr. Sutherland noted that Eric Mosher, a graduate student at UCONN, has been doing work on what is the history of a certain area and how did invasive plants get in.

Dr. Mehrhoff said that Eric used aerial photos for several years to determine changes to the land.

Dr. Magnarelli asked a question regarding re-invasion potential. What invasive plant would have the greatest potential in coming back into an environment that it was once eradicated from?

Dr. Mehrhoff brought up how gravel piles don't grow anything but then Autumn Olive starts to sprout due to Starlings and once food is present in the habitat then other invasive plants sprout such as Burning Bush, Oriental Bittersweet and Multiflora Rose to name a few. He went on to say that there are different issues at hand here and the situation is very complex.

Mr. Sutherland noted that The Nature Conservancy will be looking at that very issue out in Salisbury where they have a project underway.

Mr. Goodwin asked if burning the land is a viable option.

Dr. Mehrhoff said it varies from site to site. He also said that that tactic has been used before.

Chairman Leff then discussed the accomplishments of the council. For instance, establishing a list of invasiveness and changing of legislation.

The members of the council then discussed how coverage of their meetings on CT N has raised some awareness and that hopefully future meetings will be covered as well. The members then discussed that they need to push the Department of Agriculture to go after pet shop owners who sell invasive plants. In addition, they need to publish the list of invasive plants for the public to see. Finally, they need funding for printed materials such as a brochure stating that invasive plants are out there, you need to stop releasing them and that it is now illegal to sell them.

Mr. Sutherland then discussed what was going on in Washington D.C. He noted there were a few bills that were being discussed in Congress and that SB144 had the best shot at getting past. In fact, it did pass the Senate but has been put on the shelf by the House of Representatives. He said it would come back next year and that we should let our Connecticut legislators know that this bill is very important to us and needs to be passed. There was also H.R. 1080 and H.R. 1081 which centered around aquatic species, would have set up outreach programs and early detection but the bill was basically dead.

Mr. Sutherland went onto say that the Farm Bill includes some money for invasive plants and that the Transportation Bill may include money on plant control.

Paul Larson then mentioned how in the minutes from the last meeting that Tom McGowan was neither listed as present or absent. In addition, the minutes from the April 16 meeting were not passed.

Chairman Leff then discussed how he would like to hold a public hearing, open to the public as well as members in the industry, to come in and suggest ideas regarding the issue of invasive plants that the council may not have thought of. The members all thought it would be a great idea and that it should be held at the Legislative Office Building. They talked about bringing in press to cover the event. All of the members agreed that people who want to testify should summarize their ideas so that they can get to as many people as possible. The council tentatively agreed on having the hearing on December 13, 2004.

Chairman Leff then discussed how there are still issues that are not being addressed. One issue is regarding education programs specifically targeted toward planning and zoning commissions. Is this something we still want to pursue? What is the role of municipalities when it comes to invasive plants?

Dr. Mehrhoff brought up how we should pursue a pamphlet, like the one that is being distributed by the Massachusetts Bays Program. He then went onto say that he hoped the council pursues the list of questions which he raised on a handout. The handout was distributed to the council during the meeting. The idea of a tax should be brought up as an alternative.

Dr. Magnarelli stated that the idea of a tax is something that he believes the public should discuss and maybe the public hearing on December 13 would be the perfect venue.

Chairman Leff stated how funding is the central issue.

Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Larson asked how much revenue is being generated by the selling of invasive plants.

Dr. Mehrhoff said that the Department of Revenue Services should be in on these discussions.

Commissioner Gresczyk agrees that retail needs to be involved.

Commissioner Leff and Mr. Sutherland had to leave at this point due to prior engagements.

Dr. Magnarelli assumed the leadership position. He asked if there was any other discussion.

Dr. Mehrhoff asked if the council wants to pursue adding non-vascular plants to the list of invasive plants.

Mr. Goodwin said that we have 81 plants out there and that public education needs to be the top priority.

Dr. Mehrhoff made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Larson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:47 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Bloom
Clerk – Environment Committee