

VMI Chessie Nature Trail Advisory Committee Meeting, May 13, 2014

The Chessie Nature Trail Advisory Committee met at 4:00 p.m. on May 13, 2014, at the VMI Physical Plant, Hinty Hall conference room.

Attending committee members were MAJ Jennifer deHart, chair; Keith Holland; Sam Crickenberger; Chris Wise; and Lisa Tracy. Absent were Terry Harrington and Jay Scudder.

BOY SCOUTS: MAJ deHart provided an update on the Eagle Scout project to replace mile markers along the first half of the trail. Miss Utility tickets still need to be called in before the holes can be dug. MAJ deHart also mentioned that a parent of a former Eagle Scout was upset that her son's own mile markers (project c. 2002) had been removed. Recognition will be given to both troops' efforts.

RECENT EVENTS: MAJ deHart and Lisa Tracy said that guided trips to the locks had gone well during the VA Canals Society conference at the end of April. A weed-pulling volunteer event that same day was well attended and produced a pile of brush that VMI Physical Plant still needs to clear off the trail. Conversation returned to locks and dams, specifically their maintenance and preservation. Advisors identified several questions that need to be answered: who technically owns the locks? Is there a standard of care for such structures? Where would we find funding for such work? Will annual brush clearing actually promote root growth and faster deterioration of the structures? MAJ deHart offered to contact Philip Devos and/or Tom Kastner of the VA Canals Society for guidance.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE: MAJ deHart provided an update on trail maintenance. Land-owner Rick Jones called in an observation that people throw trash on the ground at the South River parking area. MAJ deHart shared images of three styles of recycling and trash containers, and advisors selected one to be ordered. As a complement to that, MAJ deHart will also order doggy waste bag stations like those found on the Woods Creek Trail. Deb Gordon offered that the Rockbridge Master Naturalists can stock the bags in the stations. Finally, Keith Holland described the vandalism he sustained on his property: wire fencing cut in over 20 locations, one day's worth of work to repair, no theft. MAJ deHart shared a suggestion she received from land-owner Swanson Childress: plant fence posts as a visual guide at regular intervals through pastures to send a message that trail users should stay on the trail. Posts would be accompanied by signs. VMI would not intend to fence the trail, for that would require too much maintenance and would disrupt cattle paths. MAJ deHart explained that she inquired to a classified ad that a Mr. George Worley is selling locust posts. Keith mentioned that locust is not uniform and may only last 5 years, and suggested getting alternative materials and pricing. Chris Wise offered to check on pricing at Spencer's, the Farmers' Co-Op, and a place in Orange. Keith also suggested planting the posts more often (every 1/20th of a mile) so they are close enough to be seen as an intentional structure. This spacing would require 150 posts for the Holland and Childress properties.

GRANTS: MAJ deHart provided an update on progress on the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant. Coordination and approval by six (6) state or federal agencies is required before the grant funds can be released. Currently only the DNH needs further information. MAJ deHart shared a proposed schedule of work over the next many years, including work that would be grant-funded. She later sent this

document to the Advisors by email. Advisors suggested MAJ deHart find a way to publish on the Web site updates and events related to the trail.

SAFETY: Sam Crickenberger asked whether we could get VDOT to put a line on the bridge over the South River to provide a safe walking area for pedestrians using the detour. Lisa Tracy added that “pedestrian crossing” signs would be helpful there and at the Mill Creek entrance where people park on one side of the road and walk across to access the trail. Sam suggested contacting Susan Hammond at VDOT to schedule site visits.

FRIENDS GROUP: Lisa Tracy provided an update on the “Friends of the Chessie Trail” concept. She has already sent invitations to several dozen people and organizations to take part in the first meeting, June 11 at 7pm in the Piovano Room of the library. She explained that she will have a questionnaire for each attendee to fill out in lieu of a sign in sheet and as a way to get more feedback and ideas. MAJ deHart will not attend but offered to provide information as needed.

Meeting adjourned at 5:15pm.