

Conservation Advisory Commission
Minutes of July 21, 2011 Meeting

Present: Curt Pueschel, Shepard Bennett, Cynthia Stephens/Westerman, Michael Restuccia, Linda Green, Steve Appel, Richard Pastore

Guests: Pat Roberts and Sue Rapp, representing Friends of Vestal

Minutes of the June 16, 2011 meeting were approved by e-mail on June 20. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be on August 18, 2011.

Representatives of the organization Friends of Vestal attended to put forward their concerns about the road damage and light and noise pollution that they fear will occur when gas drilling begins in Vestal. They hope to persuade the Town to enact protections against road damage and to consider how other negative effects could be reduced. It was pointed out by CAC members that most towns within Broome County are deferring the issuing of road use permits to the County.

It has been the practice in other states that the drilling companies pay for road damage only after the damage has occurred. Photos brought by the guests showed the extensive destruction of some Pennsylvania roads. CAC members suggested that another approach would be to require that the standards of road construction be appropriate for the weight of the trucks that will use those roads in the same way that bridges are rated for maximum truck weight. In such a scheme, the drilling companies would be required to bring the roads to the necessary standards before their use, and then to maintain the roads at that standard. However, this approach is not common practice.

Dick described the history of the Vestal noise ordinance, which he wrote. It would apply to the drilling operations and compressor stations. Decibel meters and sound level calibrators are required. Readings are taken, not at the source of the sound, but at the property line of the affected neighbor. This is because, in a free field, the intensity of sound changes 6 dB for every doubling (-6 dB) or halving of distance (+6 dB).

Cindy, Steve, Mike, Linda, and Curt were able to attend the June 27th field trip to Jones Park. Mike Jura of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) joined us. We examined the wetland ponds created by the USC in the red pine plantation. Although many pines have blown down leaving unshaded ground, little recruitment of native trees has occurred in this area; a few red pine saplings and a single catalpa were observed, but most of the ground is covered by bramble and grass. The other conifer plantation is an extremely dense planting of white spruce that appears never to have been thinned. The lower branches are dead and concern was expressed that they might constitute a fire hazard. It was unclear how many trees still had living crowns. After walking as far as the Grand Old Man, a very large diameter maple, we returned to the parking area by way of the creek trail. This part of the park is rich in spring wildflowers and unusual ferns. A few minutes were spent examining the old firearm range on the west side of the creek and pondering the purpose of mowing the old firing range and the open field east of the parking lot.

The forest in the areas of Jones Park we examined was reasonably diverse, with maple and hemlock being the most common trees, and with lesser numbers of river birch, basswood, white pine, cottonwood, ironwood, hophornbeam, and beech (mostly saplings). Ash was relatively sparse and of small diameters. In a subsequent trip to the southeastern part of the park, Curt noted some ash mixed in with the dominant maples. Invasive plants appear to be much less of a problem than in Middendorf Park; the only invasives noted were a few barberry bushes.

The forester's inventories of Arnold Park, Jones Park, Middendorf, Castle Gardens, and the Ford Tract had been obtained from the Clerk's Office and e-mailed to members. The inventories were reviewed briefly. The forester's contract calls for both a tree inventory and a management plan. The later includes a role for the CAC in identifying the goals of the plan.

It was noted that news reports have made public the information that timber harvesting in public parks requires state approval and acting without approval could imperil state grants.

Recent news stories drew attention to the spread of giant hogweed in the eastern US. According to a graphical representation of the distribution of this plant in New York State, it is present in at least sixteen sites within Broome County. Its flowering stalks can be up to 15 feet tall and they produce small white flowers in a flat-topped clusters that can be 2 feet across. The plant produces a chemical that makes skin extremely photosensitive, which can result in severe blistering burns. If the saps gets in a person's eyes, it can cause blindness. The Parks and Town Highway Departments should be aware of this plant for the employees' protection and for controlling the spread of this hazardous plant. The DEC has posted information about identification and control of giant hogweed: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39809.html>.