



ACME TOWNSHIP
YUBA CREEK NATURAL AREA STEERING COMMITTEE
Monday, January 17, 2005, 7:00 p.m.
Acme Township Hall
6042 Acme Road, Williamsburg MI 49690

Meeting called to Order at 7:05 p.m.

Members present: Dan Morrison (Chair), Bob Carstens, Voss Guntzviller, John Heiam, Stan Malaski, Ron Reinhold

Members excused: Jason Hullman

Staff present: S. Corpe, Recording Secretary
T. Henkel, Parks & Maintenance Supervisor

- A. Yuba Creek Restoration Project – Mr. Steve Largent, Soil Conservation District:** Mr. Largent distributed aerial photographs of Yuba Creek. He noted a section in the middle that was quite straight, as compared to the ends and the more natural situation where the creek has numerous bends and curves referred to as “sinuosity.” The committee is planning to install bundles of brush in this area of the creek to narrow the banks and deepen and speed the stream, which in turn will enhance the creek as a trout habitat. Another component of the plan is to install additional vegetation. This cover would shade and cool the creek, and also provide woody debris that would fall into or near the creek and feed the insects that feed the fish.

First, a plan is needed as to how many brush bundles to install and of what composition. Next, DEQ permits are required. Mr. Largent hopes that the process can be accomplished with a “minor permit” (cost \$50.00). A “major permit” would cost \$500.00 and require a public hearing process. The brush bundles should be inexpensive to produce and can be installed by volunteers with little in the way of equipment.

A sinuosity project would be a “major permit” process involving use of a backhoe to dig a new creek channel. Reinhold asked if it would be worth investigating the course of the original stream bed and trying to restore the creek to it; Mr. Largent responded that this would be precisely what the DEQ would prefer. Morrison suspects that the creek was dredged at some point in the 1930’s; Mr. Largent believes there may be an aerial photo from approximately 1938 showing the original course. Trout Unlimited might be a grant funding source, but only to the tune of a few thousand dollars. Inland fisheries grants are another potential funding source (grant application cycle ends March 31.)

The Watershed Center has already received a grant that Mr. Largent stated would enable him to perform an erosion inventory along the entire Yuba Creek. There is a lot of sedimentation occurring, but he is currently unaware of any significant erosion on the upper portions of the creek. Some of the sedimentation is due to the widening of areas of the creek over time.

Mr. Largent brought a copy of a book called “Trout Stream Therapy” by Robert L. Hunt for the committee to view. Pictures of typical brush bundles are included on page 22.

Carstens informed Mr. Largent that several sand traps have been installed on the Garvey property on Brackett Road. These are the only sand traps of which the group is aware, and nobody knows how often they are being emptied.

Proposed brush bundle installation would be in early to mid-spring, perhaps in May. Mr. Largent recommends dedicating two days to the process. Reinhold asked how long it might

take to reach some notable level of progress in reclaiming the stream. Mr. Largent believes some notable progress will be seen within 5-10 years. Success can be measured in terms of water temperature and dissolved oxygen levels, and most importantly by an observation of the presence and diversity of insects and seeing more fish. A return of mayflies would be one important indicator. Carstens recommended checking with The Watershed Center, as they have been performing insect counts.

Mr. Largent recommended that an appropriate individual sign the DEQ permit applications, and that the applications be completed and mailed. While the permit is in process some additional long-range planning can be done. Mr. Largent's time through the Conservation Center is billable at \$35/hour, although his work to date has been at no charge and the erosion inventory and remediation recommendations can be handled through an existing grant. Further work can be performed by volunteers and/or funded through additional grants. Guntzviller mentioned the possibility of using jail labor to do some heavy lifting and carrying as well. Heiam suggested building a skid to transport some materials; Mr. Largent agreed that staging some brush while the ground is still frozen might be a good idea. Reinhold's idea that the autumn olive cut from the site earlier this year would work as long as it is certain that the cut materials are completely dead and won't send up suckers when installed. Mr. Largent also likes to use cedar because it is light and long-lasting. Old christmas trees are not preferred because they look too unnatural.

Reinhold asked if Henkel has something that could haul brush down to the creek. He could use his tractor, or snowmobiles could be employed. He also made a skid a few winters ago out of an old backboard and some used skis.

Bill Kurtz would sign the DEQ permit applications after receiving Board approval. Mr. Largent and a few of the committee members will prepare a work plan and complete the document for the Board's consideration on February 1. Assuming that the work is mostly done by volunteers, the key expenses will be no more than \$500 for anchors and 1/8" galvanized aviation cable. Hodges Fasteners in Grawn carries the necessary anchors in stock.

- B. Spring Tree Planting:** Morrison mentioned that the proposed tree planting is for the uplands area near US 31 from which the autumn olive was cut down last year. The brush piles from that operation still need to be removed, and a decision made whether to use them in the creek or to burn them. Brush to be hauled to the creek should be left intact and can be trimmed to desired size during the bundling process.

Types of trees to be purchased for installation was discussed. A few rows of white spruce along the highway along with some shrubs (sand cherry, grey dogwood) and some white and red pines. There was question about the soils in the area, which was posed to Nels Veliquette who owns the farmhouses just to the south.

Mr. Veliquette mentioned his reason for being at the meeting, which is that his company, Cherries R Us, is examining the possibilities for developing their 11-acre parcel beyond the two houses currently there. He would like to gauge some general reaction. One possibility would be to transfer some development density from a Brackett Road parcel containing some wetlands and a portion of the creek to the uplands parcel. He would look at moving as many as four density units to the site using the transfer of development rights section of the Open Space Development Ordinance. This would be preferable to him to the concept of breaking the parcel into two five-acre parcels as allowed by right and selling one off, which would lead to construction of a house on the portion of the land that slopes down into the YCNA. There is half-acre residential density zoning on the west side of US 31 from his property. He would like to know if the idea of additional houses in this area would be palatable or not. The

property currently contains 2 houses and 6 outbuildings. He contemplates a total of about six houses using central well and septic systems.

Reinhold offered two initial reactions. He feels that property owners should be entitled to maximize their enjoyment of it as a general rule and would want to work with him to make the property valuable. Further development of the property might impact the placement of trees in the uplands. He is also concerned about possible erosive effects and the visual effect from the trail systems. Heiam would like to maintain as large a wildlife corridor as possible. A conservation easement that would allow for a trail at the bottom of the hill would be better than the potential a house at the base of the hill. Five or six houses atop the hill is still better for the community in his opinion than the possibility of a house at the base of the hill. Guntzviller asked if the entire 27 acre parcel on Brackett Road would be used to “fund” the density transfer; Mr. Veliquette responded that all but one unit of density would be transferred, and the wetlands and creeklands preserved. He’s also open to the idea of an R-2 rezoning on the 5-acre uplands and a conservation easement on the 5 acres sloping down to the natural area. Either way he sees the idea as meshing well with the Master Plan.

Reinhold mentioned that the committee is trying to discourage people from walking down-slope from the overlook to the meadow to prevent trails from being worn in. For this reason much of the dense natural vegetation is being retained, even if it includes autumn olive. He recommended that Mr. Veliquette give some thought to how to encourage similar controls on his property.

Guntzviller agreed that a house down in the valley, especially as firearms hunting is allowed, would be devastating. Henkel pointed out that the presence of the house would significantly decrease the area in which firearms hunting would be allowed.

The committee would still like to proceed with some tree planting, but agreed to stay in touch with Mr. Veliquette to work on ways to plant while preserving the value of valley views for his parcel. The annual Conservation District planting sale brochure should be mailed soon. When it is, the committee can review it and select the plantings for purchase. Morrison suggested planning the tree planting on the aerial photos provided by Mr. Largent. He asked if burning off the grass would be beneficial as well. Guntzviller mentioned that the seedlings are dug into a deep furrow in the ground to provide some protection from the elements for the first two years.

C. Yuba Road Parking area:

- 1. Car Corral:** Morrison thanked Henkel for his work on the car corral. Henkel is keeping it plowed, and it is seeing winter use.
- 2. Information Stations:** The kiosks have been installed except for the one for the overlook, which is being built over the winter and will likely be installed in the spring.
- 3. Electric Poles:** The eight poles have been pulled out and are laying on the blacktop. Being full of creosote there is little beneficial use to which they can be put. The old electric cable is also coiled and on-site, but will not be worth very much money. The poles are also covered with metal fittings. Henkel suggested they might make a good barricade somewhere at some point in time. Guntzviller may know a farmer who could cut the posts up and use them for barnyard fenceposts. If not, Reinhold may place a free ad in the Preview.

D. Bluebird mailboxes: Carstens knows a legally blind gentleman who has over 50 metal mailboxes that he thinks could be made into bluebird houses. He thought the door could be a

rear cleanout hatch, a baffle could be placed in the center and entrance holes could be drilled. He is willing to donate the mailboxes to some sort of wildlife-friendly use. The mailboxes are accompanied by stands. Carstens will bring information to the next meeting. Reinhold expressed concerns about the aesthetics; Carstens agreed but suggested they could be painted or placed in less obtrusive locations. Guntzviller expressed a concern that the standard mailbox post is not tall enough, and Henkel wondered if the metal boxes would become overheated in the sun and summer. One benefit of a deeper box is that raccoons can't reach all the way into a nest. Morrison reported that all of the existing nest boxes needed cleaning out this year, whether used by bluebirds or swallows. No remains of unhatched eggs or dead chicks were found, which had been a widely reported problem during the cool summer. Reinhold suggested accepting a few as a test to ensure that they would be safe for hatchlings, neither cooking nor freezing them. Henkel suggested that the mailboxes could also be hung vertically for use as bat nests. Morrison reported that some additional nest boxes were attached to the backs of the boxes hung by the committee. They didn't have backs, but he is planning to attach new backs and place them on separate posts this year.

- E. Hunting Season:** No significant complaints have been received. Henkel found a bait pile during the last deer season; Morrison found a few too and placed the bait piles in the nearby tree stands he found as a hint. At least two bucks were taken from the YCNA this season. Carstens recommends placing several on the high area on the east side of the meadow as well as extending the existing line.
- F. Public Comment/Other Business:** Carstens is curious as to why the eagles didn't produce a chick this year. They last had young two years ago. They are still in residence, and usually one is sitting on the nest. They are regularly seen to be hunting along the shoreline. Reinhold asked if the 660' buffer area surrounding the nest is adequate; Carstens believes it is. The committee should be careful not to work on the creek remediation within the buffer area when young might be in the nest.

There was additional discussion about whether or not to haul autumn olive brush to the creek for the bundles. There is a lot of brush already in the creek area that would be easier to move into place. Reinhold mentioned that Mr. Largent stated that any standing and very dead materials would be good, but that deadfall is less desirable because it becomes entwined with living materials on the ground. At 2:00 Sunday afternoon on January 23 a few members of the committee will go down into the creek valley and see what good materials might be available.

An article about progress in the YCNA will be in the upcoming newsletter. It should include thanks to Cherryland Electric for removing the electric poles and wires at no charge.

Reinhold is working on a finished mission statement to place in the informational kiosks.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.