



Big Elk Creek Master Planning Task Force Meeting #2 Transcript

Meeting Date: May 22, 2024

Meeting Time: 6:00 – 9:00 PM

Meeting Location: The Meeting House at White Clay Creek Preserve

**All Task Force members have been assigned a number in lieu of their Names for the purposes of the meeting transcript.*

Task Force Members Present:

- Absent: 3 (represented by 4), 21
-

Meeting Minutes:

2- So first on the agenda is (name, #32). For those of you who were on our field tour today, you were introduced to (name, #32) and I will let him introduce himself to the group. He led the tour today and we're going to have a recap as you can see here – on site visit follow up. And (name, #32) is going to cover some of the key topics for those of you who couldn't make it today in his short presentation here and answer any questions that those of you who were on the tour might have since then. So (name, #32), why don't you introduce yourself and we'll go from there.

32 – Thanks, (name, #2). Evening everyone. I'm really grateful for the opportunity that my work with DCNR takes me all across the state but Big Elk Creek is close to home for me. I grew up on a farm in West Nottingham Township and spent my youth fishing in all of the creeks in Lancaster County. I appreciate the opportunity to work on this project and to be here talking to you folks. So I am in the Resource Management section of DCNR and I've been doing fisheries management work, and aquatic resources work, for the past 30 years. And in that time, what I've learned is, while it's important to understand the current condition of the resources, it's also really important to look at the past and look at past activities and past impacts that shape the way the resource looks and functions today. So in order to look ahead, we need to look back. And that's what we'll be doing tonight. We'll be looking at an overview of some of the aquatic resources in Big Elk Creek State Park. We'll be looking at some soil impacts that may have significantly impacted what the resource looks like today. And then we'll look ahead to the future to some possible restoration that might be feasible in the park to preserve, protect and enhance our aquatic resources there.

I'll be talking about 3 different areas tonight – wetland resources, the main stem of Big Elk Creek itself, and finally the smaller tributaries that run into Big Elk Creek. Let me just put a quick caveat here – when I talk about the resources at Big Elk Creek State Park tonight, this is based on my being on site for a couple of different days and this is based on my observations so far. We have a lot of work to do on

stream health assessments, and we're currently putting together a scope. We'll be looking to local folks with the knowledge of the history to help us out with figuring out what some of those past impacts were. So there's a lot of information to gather yet, and we'll be doing that. But tonight is based on what I've seen out there and my past experience and some observations. So I'll go through my presentation, and then afterwards I would welcome any questions or discussion. I'm happy to entertain that in the amount of time I have.

The landscape in the park has some pretty unique wetland resources. There's multiple springs that pop out of the hillsides that create these really unique wetlands. For the folks who joined me in the field today, you got to see this firsthand. So for the folks who weren't able to join me in the field today, I'll just give you a quick lay of the land and show you where the wetland was that we were looking at today. The main parking lot on Stricklersville Road, this is Augustine Lane going back to the old farmhouse, and the farm lane wraps around through the hedgerow and this is the wetland that we're going to be talking about tonight specifically. It's about halfway down the slope and it drains down into Big Elk Creek. So if you're standing on this ridgeline and you're looking south, towards Big Elk Creek and south into Maryland, this is the view. Very pastoral. The wetland we're talking about is down in the bottom of that image. So now we've hiked down the hill and turned about 180 degrees and we're looking back on the hill we just came from. We're standing in the middle of a wetland that has some really great function and values. The thing that strikes me about this particular wetland when you're in it is there's very minimal invasive species. It's got a really good native plant community. There's native sedges, brushes, jewelweed, skunk cabbage, spring cress, a really neat vegetative community. The water that makes it a wetland is coming from two different sources. You have the main stream itself that is feeding it, and you also have the runoff that's coming off of the hillsides, that's coming into this wetland and being retained.

So the wetland is interesting also because it's on a slope and you don't see a lot of wetlands in that condition. Typically you think of wetlands as being bowl-shaped or flat, but this one is on a pretty steep incline. And the reason it's functioning so well as a wetland on that slope is because there's no bed and bank channel there draining the water. The water is coming into it, that water is being retained, it's being filtered out, and it's being released slow down towards Big Elk Creek. So when you're in the wetland then, and folks experienced this today as they were trudging through the saturated ground, it's acting like a big sponge – it's doing what it's supposed to do. It's filtering that water, it's holding it and releasing it slowly.

But from what I've seen, there is a threat to these particular wetlands that's coming from down slope. As you walk further down the slope, there is a bed and bank channel that is draining this part of the wetland. And you can see, as soon as the channel forms, that wetland gets narrower. On one side you have upland grasses that have worked their way down, on the opposite side you now have multiflora rose and other invasive Autumn Olive that have established on that dry soils that have now been draining because that ditch is there. There's still some wetland plants and sensitive ferns hanging on in these margins that used to be wet, but again, that wetland is shrunk because that ditch is draining it. As you move further down the slope, the ditch gets deeper and the wetland gets narrower. And even further down, now it's an eroded gully and the water has enough velocity to take a lot of sediment with it as it rolls down the ditch. You have eroded sides of the ditch and there's no wetlands anymore. All of the wetland hydrology is draining and it's going to go down into Big Elk Creek and take the sediment with that.

It might be hard to see it in the photo, there's a couple of different small waterfalls right here. They're drops in gradient. And as you go further down there's an even bigger waterfall down here at the mouth of the Big Elk Creek. And these waterfalls, these changes in grade, that water is running over bare soil. And what happens is the waterfall erodes that soil upslope, towards our functional wetland. It's called an erosional headcut. So year after year, that waterfall migrates upstream and it takes that deeper ditch with it. And this is what that looks like. Current condition, we have a deep ditch at the bottom of the slope and a waterfall, and you have our really nice wetlands at the top of the slope. And over time, the waterfall migrates upstream, the ditch follows it, and eventually, that deep ditch makes it all the way up to the wetland and the spring and it drains all of those features. So now instead of the wetland holding all of that water and releasing it slow, water is coming out of the spring and off the hillsides and going right into the ditch and flowing downstream into Big Elk Creek.

In cross-section, this is what it looks like. This is our functional wetland, again there's a lot of storage area, a lot of filtration, wildlife habitat, and then the ditch comes up through and drains that area. Now the water runs in, erodes the side of the ditch, and there's very minimal habitat value in there. But I think there's opportunities to protect that wetland before it reaches that point. And we can do that through subsurface gradient control, where we bury large rocks – we knit those rocks together – and its underground so you don't see it from the surface. Its not a dam where you're impounding anything, but those rocks stop the waterfall and prevent it from moving further upslope and it protects those wetlands. So again, we'll be looking more into this and collecting more information and studying it, but I think that's a good opportunity there to protect those really nice wetland resources that are at Big Elk.

16 – Are we allowed to ask questions or should we wait until the end?

32 – It helps me if we could wait – if I can get through everything and then we ask questions certainly. I'm happy to answer any questions in my presentation.

There is also an opportunity at the bottom of the slope, where the wetlands are completely gone, they've completely eroded away. I think there's a good opportunity to rebuild that wetland system into what it was originally. So you can put the material back in that's washed out. We can put grade control in to make this a more functional resource that's better for water quality and for wildlife habitat.

13 – Did the agricultural practices contribute to this?

32 – Could be. Working across the state, a lot of these ditches started because they were trying to get more of these areas into cropland way back when. Sometimes when these ditches drain into a stream, sometimes that stream elevation will drop for some reason and cut down, and that erosion follows the tributaries upstream. And later on in my presentation you'll see that on a tributary on Big Elk Creek where that exact thing is happening because of changes in grade on the main stem. So this wetland restoration where you have an eroded really deep ditch, that doesn't have a lot of value, is just feeding a lot of sediment into the main stem. There has been a lot of work that's been done on these types of systems lately that has been very successful. What we're doing is reversing the process now. This is the condition with the ditch and the wetlands are compromised, and we rebuild that, put that material back to where it was and reestablish the wetland that was there originally. Again, it's a way of looking at past impacts and putting the resource back to the way it should be.

Real life example: This is in Washington County, in the western part of the state. Very similar to the bottom end of that wetland out here in Big Elk. This used to be a wetland swale that came down through and same situation, it eroded, scoured down, no wetlands there anymore, all the water does in and then right down the drain. And this is what it looks like post-restoration. The wetland terrace has been rebuilt, saturated conditions are present across that whole wetland terrace. This is turning and looking downslope, you can see, even though its on a very steep slope, because there is no bed and bank channel anymore, it's amazingly stable. This was built 8 years ago and it's survived hurricanes, floods, downpours, and it's still stable. Look at all that vegetation there. So what would that look like at Big Elk? Possibility: you could take that eroded, trenched channel that's on the left and restore it to something that looks like that right hand side where instead of a deep trench you have wetland soils, you have retention, you have water quality, you have wildlife habitat. This creates a lot of niche habitat that is perfect for woodcock. Its saturated soil conditions across the bottom of that, and that saturated soil is resistant to invasive species. It reduces the amount of cutting and chemicals that have to be applied as well. It also improves access down there if you want to hike and enjoy that solitude that that really neat, little hidden away wetland offers out there. And also, it improves acreage for hunting as well because you aren't going across a ditch that you can barely get across that's surrounded by multiflora rose and instead you have a wetland area to explore, to walk in or to hunt. So that was a little bit about wetlands at Big Elk. Let's shift gears and talk about the main stem of Big Elk Creek.

This is a view looking upstream from the Stricklersville Road bridge, and me nerding out, I'm always looking at photographs and what I'm seeing within the resource. I start to notice things. Like, the sycamore trees are all relatively the same age, so they started growing around the same time. And why is that? And there's vertical eroded banks on the south side that are really high, and why are those banks so high and eroded. And the sandbar on the inside, why is that there? And to understand some of those things, it is very helpful to rewind the clock and look to the past of what happened here. And fortunately there's ways we can do that. #10 and I were talking earlier about what old maps might be available that show different things from the past. This is an 1856 map of Chester County. This is available online from the Library of Congress. These old maps are neat because not only does it show historical roadways and municipal boundaries, but they also show in really good detail the stream channels and what was going on in those areas. So the photo we were just looking at was looking upstream from the Stricklersville Road bridge, and from this map, we know there was a dam in that area, associated with a mill, that I learned maybe belonged to (name, #10)'s relatives actually, which is kinda cool. And at this point, being kind of new to the game here, I'm not sure what that looked like. It may have looked something like this, which is typical of mill dams in the area. Or maybe it was a more significant structure – this is a mill dam on Big Elk Creek that was down in Cecil county. And if anyone has any photos, drawings, records of the dams that were on Big Elk Creek, I would love to see that information. That is very helpful to us to better understand the past and those impacts so that we can assess the current resource and better manage it. And as I said earlier today, it's not about dams being good or bad, in this process, it's more about knowing that the dams were there and knowing the changes they made in the landscape. And those changes were pretty significant.

This is an old drawing of Valley Creek in Valley Forge, but you can see the high dam, no buildings, the road that was put in in the floodplain, and just how the impoundment itself changed the landscape. How the whole valley and floodplain became inundated. And looking at those individual dams is interesting, but it's also interesting to zoom out a bit and look at just how many of those dams there were on those

streams. On our old 1856 map of Chester County, here's our dam at Stricklersville Road, going upstream, there's a papermill with an impoundment. Just upstream is another mill with a dam and an impoundment. Another paper mill that's shown on the map with a dam and a millrace that's associated with it. And then there's a furnace with a millrace and a dam associated with it. So there's a significant amount of these structures, sometimes a lot more than folks realize at first glance. This is back in an era when the main source of power for mills was the water. Its an amazing number of dams that were put into these stream systems.

These red triangles indicate the known locations of dams from an 1840 atlas. And although it shows York and Lancaster County, that same atlas tells us that in Chester County, in 1840, there were 323 dams that were known to exist. And this was 1840, not even towards the end of the dam-building-era, and this is a significant number of dams put in and it really changed the character of the landscape. And the way they changed that character was that the dams were put in, and the dams were built at a time where simultaneously you had massive land clearing going on at the same time. So a lot of sediment was being introduced into the flood plains and the streams, and that sediment would come down and get trapped in these mill dams relatively quickly. And the mill ponds would keep filling, and eventually they would fill to the point where there was little to no storage capacity anymore. Completely full of sediment. And at that point, if there was a drought or a low-water event, the mill owner was in trouble. So they would either have to rebuild their dam higher to impound more water, or they would need to build a new dam upstream. And the records also show this happening. This map is of the Conestoga River in Lancaster County. Think of looking at the river as a sideview – so this is the headwaters up here, and the confluence of the Susquehanna River down here. And each of these rectangles is a known dam and the records show what the height of the dam was, so you can get a sense that dam height and you can plot out the length of the backwater behind the dam. And the main point of this slide is to show that the Conestoga River was a staircase in the 1800s. As soon as one millpond ended, another began. There was very little flowing water in the Conestoga River by the 1800s. Just massive change in the characteristic of that river. And you can still see this today. This is Mill Creek, very appropriately named, in Lancaster County, you have backwater with a dam, and as soon as that ends, another dam with its impoundment. And so on and so forth along the river.

We're getting a better sense of before the dams were built, what these original floodplains looked like. And I'll get into how we know that in a minute. Looking at a cross section, the dams are built across with a millpond behind it and water flowing over the dam, and if you could picture yourself looking through this dam structure and into the impoundment, eventually you'll find a dam that fills up with sediment and the only water left is where the stream channel comes through. And eventually, the mills close and the dams are no longer maintained for whatever reason and the dams start to breach. And when they breach, the water that was perched on top of the sediment now comes through, and that's how, if you look at streams in this area with those high, vertical banks and the artificially flat floodplains, that's a key sign of what was going on in the past that valley filled with sediment, the dam breacher, and then it came through. It drastically changed the landscape. This shows the breach in the center of the valley, but often, dams would breach on either side, so now the stream channel is against a valley wall causing a lot of erosion. Sometimes when you see streams and they are right up against the hillside like that, often that's a case where the dam breached on that side only and it caused the stream to shift to the side of the valley and not be in the center anymore. And the landowners usually liked that and kept it like that because that gave more useable property for them. But what you end up with is the original

floodplain is buried under this sediment, and you have high vertical banks that just get flooded when high water events happen, and it's highly erosive when water during a storm can't access the floodplain and reduce its energy. All of that velocity just hammers the banks and the vegetation on top of the sediment is trying to grow, but it's not connected to groundwater so it's really susceptible to dry conditions and droughts.

So it's one thing to observe this and see what's going on. But more and more folks are starting to do soil profiles in order to date that material – those different layers. I'm going to go over these soil horizons and what they mean. So going back to our drawing, you have the bedrock as the basement, the foundation, of the valley. And then you have a layer of streambank gravel that went all the way across from valley to valley. And on top of that is the original organic soil, the original floodplain that's been buried by that accumulated sediment. A real-life example, the bedrock would be down here and that's the foundation, then you would have a layer of original streambed gravel, this lighter color, and when you radiocarbon date that, it's thousands of years old. On top of that is the original floodplain layer, this dark soil horizon, that's also thousands of years old. These systems were amazingly stable. It wasn't something that washed out and was replaced by newer material. They were incredibly flood resistant and stable. The sediment in the original floodplains also contain organic material like stumps and logs, which you can still find in that layer. This soil profile is from one of our state parks in the western part of the state – Laurel Ridge – where we found a buried hemlock log that dated back to 790 AD. On top of the original gravel and the original floodplain, that's thousands of years old, you have this lighter layer of accumulated sediment that dates back to the 1700s when the dam was first built and there's a rapid accumulation of that sediment. So this is some of the science behind not just observing something and thinking that's what it is, but actually testing that theory and making sure that's what's going on.

This is a series of soil profiles, floodplain on one side to the other side of the floodplain, again, it looks like a massive amount of excavation but it's just the way the photos were taken. You have your bedrock, you have your streambed gravel, and that dark original floodplain surface, which is buried under the sediment. You'll notice that this floodplain that is buried is not flat, it's undulated, and from that we can extrapolate that these original floodplain valleys were multiple-tread channels. Varied wetlands-type of habitat. Very stable. We're working with Franklin and Marshall University and other colleges are starting to analyze the seeds and nuts that have been buried in that organic layer. It's interesting that some of the seeds are still viable; they're growing those old sedges and brushes based on that. Almost like a police sketch artist, they're analyzing that pollen and seed to figure out what the vegetation looked like and sketch that out, and get an idea of what the entire floodplain looked like – from the tree canopy to the vegetation to the way the channels looked.

Rolling all of that back to Big Elk Creek and what I've seen out there. The first thing that becomes obvious is that really flat, artificial floodplain layer. And this layer of accumulated sediment, that looks very much like it was behind a milldam at some point. And the eroding banks and massive amounts of sand and gravel that are being moved through the system and deposited with every storm event. Something like this, we'd want to take a really close look before we would propose any kind of habitat or stream work, because we really need to understand what that channel is doing before proposing any kind of work and throwing resources at it.

As far as opportunities, we can do a soil profile and find out what that original floodplain looked like, both from a resource perspective and from a historical perspective before dams appeared and interpret

that for future generations about the history of this landscape. That's a lot about the main stem, and let's switch to the tributaries. The main stem would take a lot of work to remove all of that sediment and get it back to where it was originally, but the tributaries, I think it is feasible to do a lot of that work.

Going back to our map, looking at Stricklersville Road impoundments, we're looking at this tributary that comes in right in that area. And our modern aerial shows the bridge – this is Mt Olivet Lane and this tributary is the one we're taking a look at there. So we have a pretty good hunch that the dam was there, the dam breached, and it cut down through all that sediment and the tributary cut down along with it. This is really close to the confluence of Big Elk Creek and you can see that. So here's the original gravel, going back to the drawing we saw, here's that dark original floodplain layer that was buried underneath all of this uniform silt and you can see the striations where that is deposited year after year. Highly erosive. And you can see the vegetation growing on the top, but the roots aren't very thick, and before they can get a good foothold, the streambank erodes from high flows.

The other interesting thing is this square-ish eroding area, and that is from freeze-thaw cycles. You have erosion from water hitting the streambank but also these banks are pretty moist from water seeping through, so in the winter they freeze and when that happens, those chunks of soil fall into the creek. So again, if you think of the tributary being on the grade, close to Big Elk Creek, there's a lot of erosion as you move on through. As you move up the tributary, it hasn't cut down as far and you can see that by going up to Mt Olivet Road and over the bridge. The stream has cut down but it hasn't reached that original gravel layer yet – it's not as deep a canyon yet as it is near confluence. But the bed is still choked with all this fine material that hasn't eroded out yet, and the floodplain is just a wall of invasive species with no wetland associated with it. In fact, I found tadpoles trying to live out their lifecycle in these puddles on the roadway in a race against time. There's no floodplain for them to breed in, so they're laying their eggs in these roadside puddles.

Moving up the tributary, again it hasn't down cut all the way to the gravel, but you can see the striated layers of deposited sediment that's cut down through. And you can see places where there was vegetation but the stream has eroded and is moving laterally side to side with every storm event – it's a very unstable system. Moving a lot of sand and material. This is a stream bend, where on the inside of the bend the water is slower, so all of that sand deposits. On the outside of the bend, the water moves faster and you get all that erosion. And as you can see, the sand deposits on the inside bend which puts more force on the outside bend, so you have the stream really moving from side to side, which is very unstable. In high flows with debris, it blocks the stream, sand deposits behind it, but because this is an area that has that legacy sediment that has accumulated, the stream eventually blows out around the debris jam and creates a new channel – it can't access the floodplain and reduce its energy.

So opportunities in the tributaries? Same thing. We could do soil profiles to get a sense of what that tributary looked like before the past impacts. And it may be feasible to rewind the clock and take it back to what it looked like before dams were built and before the impacts occurred. This is Bedford Springs out in Baker County, it's a golf course. Situation where there was a dam and the impounded sediment behind it breached, and the stream cut down through. This is the before photo. The golf course spent a lot of money trying to put rock and log structure in to stabilize the streambank. And every time a high water event occurred, it would remove everything they had just done. Eventually they threw their hands up and they decided that they needed a sustainable, long-term solution to fix this area while giving them some aesthetics and not losing any of the fairway. And so they entered a partnership and removed all

the sediment that had created the floodplain and got it back down to the original floodplain soil. So now when the stream floods, it spreads out across there, it reduces its energy. And what they found is, they planted it, but they also found that the original seed source that had been buried for 150 years started to pop up and that vegetation came in. So you're going from a condition like this – where the original floodplain is buried and your seed banks are buried – and your tree roots can't reach the groundwater so they end up falling in the stream, to a condition that is what it was like originally. Removed all the sediment that was built up in the system and you're back to a very functional floodplain. It's saturated soils, it reduces the amount of invasive species and naturally provides a lot of habitat and access.

The final example tonight is from Big Spring Run, just south of Willow Street. Again, sound like a broken record but same type of situation. This photo is taken in the same location before and after restoration. There was a dam located behind the photographer that had a millpond that filled with sediment and the dam breached, the water cut through, highly erosive banks. They removed that sediment and the material that they excavated, they sold to a developer in Lancaster City that paid for 40% of the project by doing that. And they ended up with a really nice, stable floodplain.

And I'll run through this really quick, but I want to leave you with – this is a restored stream, Big Spring Run, and we're going to run through a timelapse of a storm event that came through. And usually when you think of heavy rains around here, you think of the stream looking like chocolate milk, carrying sticks, mud and debris with them. You can hear the rocks rolling in the bottom of the channel in a big enough storm too. So around 4:00 pm, the storm rolls in. And by 4:30 the floodplain is doing what it's supposed to be doing – it's capturing all that water and holding it. And you don't see that chocolate milk color, you don't see the sediment moving down stream. That water is being retained and released slow. By 5:00 the floodplain is totally inundated, but you have all that storage capacity now that the sediment has been removed that you didn't have before. By 7:15 it starts to recede; here's 8:30; and a day and a half later, the channel is amazingly stable, it didn't erode at all, it didn't blow out a new channel. There's no erosion on the outside. The only disturbance is to the vegetation which is laid over, but that will pop up very quickly.

I appreciate everyone's attention through that, and do we have time for questions and discussion? #16, you had the first question?

16 – I did, but it's fine.

13 – I noticed that it looks like thousands of trees have been planted in the floodplain just across from the location you're talking about upstream from the Stricklersville Bridge. So if there was an opportunity to excavate that legacy soil, it's now planted with small trees. So that looked like an opportunity to me that has maybe passed by.

32 – I think we look at it as “those trees provided a service while they're there” and if we get to the point where we can restore that then they would have served their purpose in the meantime.

8 – We're lucky enough to have Stroud around here and I know they've got a somewhat contrarian position on streambank restoration and stuff, but usually, their concern is that “you fix it, but you didn't fix any of the upstream stuff”. So you fix a stream and upstream the farmer is usually doing the same thing and in 20 years, you have the same problem. Whereas it seems like we have a different situation here where we do actually have some control over the stream and so it's a ‘better than most’

opportunity for restoration because we can do the things needed to allow us to complete the process successfully.

32 – It is. There are opportunities to capture all of that tributary with the restoration work. And it's always a conundrum when you're doing restoration on a stream and you're looking at it watershed-wide. You start asking "where do we start"? Ideally, you would start at the headwaters and work all the way down to the confluence of the larger stream, but you don't always have the permission of the landowner, and you don't always have the opportunity to do that. So a lot of these legacy sediment projects that have gone in, at the midway point of the watershed, there's always a point at the upper end of the restoration at the transition zone, where you know that sediment source is still coming downstream, where you know you are still getting sediment off the hillsides, so looking at the upstream situation first, we know there is going to be an area where that silt and sediment are still going to accumulate on the upper end of that restoration project. Maybe we need to go in every 10 years and clean that area out of that sediment coming in, but there's a transition that accounts for that. And then, by means of removing all of that accumulated millpond sediment, there's opportunities where that system now captures a lot of that sediment that comes into the watershed.

Getting back to the Stroud thing, I'm always a person that thinks 'show me the conditions and data and that's what we roll with'. Sometimes people get into different camps and stick strictly to one idea versus the other, but the way we look at it is, it's land that DCNR manages, it's public land, so we tend to look at the conditions and the data to show us what is going on. Because we cover streams Commonwealth-wide, so every one is going to be different. So we need to look at each one individually and determine. We were talking earlier how there are different heights of dams, sometimes there's a millrace but not a dam, so it's very case-specific when we look at a project to determine what is the best restoration project approach.

8 – That's part of my point. Some people would say "well Stroud is just against me" but I don't think that's the case. Stroud isn't against something, but they want to deal with the upstream part.

19 – What is Stroud?

8 – It's a water resource group.

16 – It's a water research center.

8 – They're world famous. They do restoration and studies. Really well known. They just happen to be right here.

16 – It's an educational facility – they talk about water quality, the benefits of it, and how to achieve it.

(name, #32), so is your role then to identify the restoration potential, possibilities and then develop plans for where the restoration work would most benefit the area? Like, what is the purpose of all of the research?

32 – Yes. That's exactly it. We're in the beginning stages of figuring all of this out – what the existing resource looks like and we're going to be putting together a scope for watershed assessment to give us more information. I hope to talk to different individuals – like (name, #12), going out together and hiking some of the streams and showing me some of the locations they were talking about earlier. And (name, #10), sharing some of the history of the dams. We can share that information back and forth to make a

more complete picture of the area. So there is an assessment phase, then information sharing and a lot of discussion on 'what is the exact impairment' and 'what the best solution or opportunities to fix that and restore it' and finally 'is it feasible, and where is it feasible to implement some of that restoration?'. Is that helpful?

16 – Yes, I'd like to know where all of this is going.

12 – What is your best guess for the number of dams were on the main stem and the tributaries? Any feel for that yet?

32 – That's a good question. I don't know about Big Elk specifically, but I would suspect back on that 1856 map where it showed at least 5 dams in the area, I would bet that it was a case similar to the Conestoga River where one millpond ended and pretty close to that you had another started.

12 – That steep bank you're describing, that pretty much describes the entire thing.

32 – Absolutely. And some of the dams downstream were quite large based on that one down in Cecil County. Like it wasn't just a dam across a stream channel, these were valley-wide dams that altered it. So they backed up a lot of sediment – not just a stream channel filling up but you had a valley filling up with sediment.

12 – Clearly a restoration like this is not cheap or fast. What are the resources available to do this? I know there are other priorities competing against this.

1 – There are funds that have been designated – been earmarked – for the improvements at Big Elk Creek. But at the end of the day, there is certainly not enough to tackle everything, including all of the natural resource work that needs to be accomplished. And it's the Department's responsibility, as it was with Ryerson in Greene County, to acquire the funds needed to execute the project. When I mentioned Ryerson in Greene County, that is a stream restoration post-dam breach at the park. And the project totals are in the tens of millions of dollars for the full-blown restoration at the park. But again, the Department's responsibility is to gain those resources, those funds, specific to the projects that need to be done here.

12 - So is there a worst case scenario where one dam led to the next led to the next and it spans the entire distance of the creek; you're talking decades to do that kind of work. Would the Bureau of State Parks commit to that kind of a timeline? That's huge resources.

1 – And that's the timeline we're always committing to, #12. We're in the long game, not to call it a game, but we're managing in perpetuity. So those projects and that project horizon that goes out decades is precisely what we're talking about. We've been at the Ryerson work coming up on 20 years – I think that dam was breached in 2005. And yes, when I say it's up to the Department to come up with the resources, it's up to the General Assembly to approve our budgets and our project allocations so that we have the funds to advance the work.

16 – As you're looking into the Master Plan, and the last time you were here we went over the areas of focus for the Master Plan, I'm just wondering priority-wise, what is the priority for DCNR? Is it restoration? Or are all of the priorities priority all at once? Because if I had money, which I know this project has money, but all projects need money, how am I going to allocate that? What is my first priority?

1 – I would answer that we are advancing all of the priorities for the improvements at the park. And different projects that different amounts of time from concept to design, permitting and construction. And I would use the example of the resource work that has been ongoing even with the Master Plan not complete is our commitment to advancing the resource work. The work that we're talking about regarding stream restoration will require more planning and decisions as Jack noted the process on that, to bring those projects to fruition. But I would say that they are all advancing simultaneously.

16 – I would think sometimes, depending on what the project is, you would need one before the other.

1 – Yes, in sequence. That goes back to #13's comments on riparian buffer planting and then are we going to potentially do something to make a restoration fix to the wetlands we visited today, and will that in some way negate the earlier restoration work we did on the riparian buffer. I think it's all a consideration, but it's something that we have to advance, and that we are trying to advance, at the same time.

16 – And that is something that would be shared with this Task Force? Those priorities and when they will actually be executed? Because the last time we spoke, you were talking about 30,000 ft view and now we're getting into more details and I'm just trying to see where the line is.

1 – The Task Force, and what we're gathered here to do throughout the remainder of the calendar year, is to come to the elements that will be in our Master Plan, which is that foundational document for the park. This will call out the need for not only the resource work, but the amenities and improvements for visitor services. So will the Task Force be involved 3 years from now if we're planning or designing a restoration on a tributary? No, that is not the purpose of the Task Force to review those improvements on a tributary when it's in the project queue to initiate that restoration work.

18 -You mentioned the assessment work. How long does that typically take?

32 – That's a good question. Right now we're putting together the scope. I would assume that will take a few weeks to put together because it is very similar to scopes we've done previously. So we have all of that language and we know from me being out here multiple times now, I know what I don't know. I know what we need to ask for in that scope, so it can happen pretty quickly. Then it's a matter of getting funding for that and getting an entity on board to complete that for us. I can't give you a timeframe, but I don't think it'll be a terribly long timeframe; I don't think it'll take an unrealistically long timeframe for it to happen. It's really good information to have as quickly as I can get it.

18 – And the selected entity, what is that process like?

32 – So we put the scope together, and then we look for folks who have the knowledge and experience that give us the information we're looking for. That have done that work in the past and we're not spending money to train someone or to have them guess at what they're doing. We want an entity that has done this in the past, that is familiar with the streams in this area, and that can give us this information on a not-expedited, but on a not-unduly-delayed schedule; they can get out there and give us the information, and give it to us in a form that we can use.

1 – And I'll just jump back, #16, I think that this Task Force is working towards the goal of reaching the input needed for the Master Plan, certainly because the resource work is paramount and our stewardship of it in perpetuity is paramount as the work is progressing, we can certainly have a touch

point with the Task Force to discuss it. Bring updates to the Task Force's attention and certainly gather any input. But it would be in an add-on, outside of the priority areas that we are focusing on. But I think we can certainly do that if there are milestones that are hit in the resource work.

16 – I was thinking more of a rolling thing. Like we're going to these meetings and they're very informative like this one is, and at what point do we get more. Like how much input do we get in the plan? When do we get to see the plan? It's a little bit bigger than just the natural resources part. I'm just trying to understand what the actual timeline is for the plan and are we going to be reviewing the plan for the first time when everyone else is?

1 – I think the input coming from all of you is geared towards the elements of that master plan and we picked, as a group, the resource work to be first. And certainly that plus the other main topic of tonight's discussion – the preserve discussion and Pennsylvania State Park special park designations – are central to that plan. But as we move through the other priority areas, we're going to get to the crux of some of the significant input that all of you need to weigh in on and provide the Bureau your thoughts, concerns and considerations. I know we're in the infrastructure mix for the July 1st meeting.

11 – I want to thank you first for your presentation tonight. And I think you highlighted really well the way we need our land management and seeing it being in it's current condition without knowing its history, so thank you for presenting on this. I work way down stream in salt marsh restoration and understand the nuances of this type of restoration work and the challenges that come with it. One thing that I have seen done well down in Maryland is providing opportunities to share the specifics of a project, so right now, we're working on a restoration project where we're doing some channel installations to try and remove some standing water on the marshes and we're taking those project ideas to the entities that live there and saying 'this is our idea; this is how we're doing it' and to #16's point, if we are also not going to be involved when you're writing your prescriptions and having planning discussions and doing the work, but maybe that could be a good time to re-invite community members to say "here is something that we committed to doing during our Master Plan, this is what it looks like, here's the action and this is what we expect 3 years from now" and things like that.

1 – Thank you for that. It helped me personally, not being the scientist in wetland and stream restoration, to actually be out on a project site with Resource Management and Planning that (name, #32) and #31 coordinated just a couple of years ago. This was just south of Harrisburg. But actually seeing the restoration work in progress, understanding what (name, #32) presented tonight was informative, and I don't think I would have made all of the connections that I did make and understand it as well as I do without seeing it in person.

32 – I will say, if anyone is interested in knowing about projects happening or more about what we talked about tonight, I am happy to point people to where some of those projects are if you want to see it or see a finished product.

8 – There is a project just up in Penn Township and to your funding question, that is all funded by PennDot, who is basically had to pay for the replacement of the damage that has been done and the townships threw in a little bit of money to get credit, something like that. Akin to restoring the tributaries or the first order streams.

12 – There is federal money too that has come around and can be stacked up, so there are additional sources of funding.

32 – The traditional funding sources are the national Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Fish and Wildlife Service, others are not exhausted, but folks have gone to the well a lot of times for that funding. But there are other sources that haven't been tapped yet. Like #8 mentioned, PennDot needs a project because they are widening a roadway and they impact a stream, and they need credit for that resource impact. Instead of looking at each individual mitigation replacement project for that, there are companies that create and do larger mitigation projects ahead of time to create a bank of mitigation to offset those impacts. So that's the type of thing people are looking into – especially in the healthcare community as a source of funding. Healthcare being that people are outside recreating – you're hiking, you're fishing – it's good for you overall. Some of the Gysingers, Penn States, UPMCs of the world are starting to look at resource restoration as a way to increase their PR with the way they give back to communities. So those questions are starting to be asked now, for some of those alternative sources of funding that can bring higher dollar amounts in than some of those traditional DEP Growing Greener, or Fish and Wildlife. Those are capped at a certain limit, and there may be an opportunity in the future to bring in a lot more money and entities that haven't been approached to-date. So that part is very encouraging.

19 – Can we talk a little about the committees associated with these projects? I'm a political scientist, so I'm wondering about politicization of the projects that people are asking about. How was politicization of budgets affected these past projects that you've worked on? You talked about the commitment in perpetuity, but funding is not always in perpetuity, and Administrations change over the years. A committee like this is not just for PR or a photo opp, right? And it does sound like, and feel like, a different committee, in my opinion, just reading the room, than last time. But this is a committee that is a place that creates the kind of goodwill that should be carried over into committee rooms and hearing rooms and debated. This seems like the kind of thing that, whether or not we are following it all the way through on some committee, that the work, even though right now is private, is already building some social input for these future projects. So I'm just wondering about the past and the money.

1- We always have our eye on the money, because we have to. Because of these projects and the time horizons that they take. Because we do go through Administration changes, it's up to the professionals at DCNR and within State Parks to keep their eye on the target and move these projects forward through all of the things – bad budget years, good budget years. At times we're at the mercy of the economy and what funds are available but gaining the commitments that we do – and I'm glad (name, #32) brought the fact that DCNR and State Parks are not just committing funding through our annual appropriations process and special funds and Capitol-bonded funds for projects, but we will go out for grant funding as well. That is something that we pursue – again that is something that our professional staff are always keeping their eye on at all times, year after year. We'll look to those funds and those mitigating funds that often times come in because of a non-beneficial or detrimental impact that they have to cover for, and we will seek that funding. I'm trying to remember, (name, #32), if Raccoon Creek was an example of that? Yes? Okay, that is an example where those funds were not appropriated dollars for DCNR and State Parks, but it was mitigation funds.

32 – Yes, it was two and a half million dollars in funds, so not just a small \$50,000 project.

19 – You talk about an earmark. So if I'm understanding your funding capacity, are those per year?

1 – Our annual appropriation is our fiscal year funding, and we have operating dollars but then we have special funds that are dedicated to projects like infrastructure or restoration. Some funds are non-lapsing, meaning they don't go away – Keystone 93 – it's sort of like our bread and butter. And the Environmental Stewardship fund – those are non-lapsing funds. So we're able to hold those funds. We get an annual allocation of those funds from the percentage of the real estate transfer tax that we receive and we put those forward and deal with prioritizing our projects from there. It's the lapsing funds, the appropriation General fund and Oil and Gas funds for DCNR that are difficult for us to work with those multi-year projects issues. Capitol projects are a different matter. Those are bonded funds so we carry those projects through. For the example we talked about specific to stream restoration at Ryerson Station in Greene County, we have been working now for more than a decade off of a large amount of funding that is there to continue those resource activities as well as visitor amenities. And again, that can span decades because it's Capitol funded.

32 – Like I said earlier, I really appreciate meeting everyone today, and the folks who came out in the field today and braved the heat this afternoon. I look forward to chatting with everyone in the future and exchanging more information.

15-minute break

2 – We've got a slight agenda change tonight, and it's because I want to touch base on a couple of things that will set the table for us on the rest of the agenda tonight. I think I've met everyone in here, but in case I haven't, I'm (name, #2) and I am the Chairman of the Friends Group here at White Clay Creek Preserve. Before we move on, to those who were on the field tour for the Task Force today, what did you think about that? Was it worth your time? Did you learn anything? Do we want to continue to do those kinds of things over the next few meetings where its appropriate depending on the topic of the evening? Any feedback on that? (name, #8) gave a thumbs up.

11 – It would be great if you could offer it when we aren't at work.

2 – Yeah, I get that but it's a little hard to get the meeting in and then we have to do this over 2 days which is going to be difficult.

15 – I could just walk and hold my FaceTime up! (laughing) I think its helpful to see what we are talking about. Especially when we get to things that very site-specific. Because I know a lot of people here are not familiar with the property at all. They didn't grow up there. So its hard to work on things and talk about what you want to see in different places if you don't have a sense of what it actually looks like there.

2 – Absolutely. Well I'll tell you I learned a lot – my background is not in water management and the topics that (name, #32) talked about today let me learn a lot about what goes into that process as opposed to just glancing blows of conversation like “oh we've got to protect the resource”. Okay. How? Well, I learned what sort of things go into that process and all of the things that need to be considered before a project would begin. So don't hesitate to share your thoughts with #25, #1 or myself, on things like how we can do this better or more, or where it might be necessary.

And before I move any further, I want to introduce you all to (name, #20). #20 is a member of the Task Force and is the Executive Director or President of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation. And the operative word here is foundation, non-profit organization, and that is what the Friends of White

Clay Creek Preserve and Big Elk Creek fall under. This organization. We do encompass Big Elk as well. So we are a chapter of that foundation, just to make sure everyone understands how that works. Is anyone in here a member of the Friends Group at White Clay Creek. I know #8 and #12 are, but anyone else? Well, I need to see all of the rest of you later (laughing). So, we have an operating board here in the Friends Group of up to 15 people, we meet regularly on the first Monday of every month, except for July and December. And I'll make sure that you get our website information so you can read about what's going on, what's happening in the community, what sort of projects the Friends are involved in, the things that we do.

Not to sit here and talk about the Friends group, but I want to give you a little timeline about how the Friends have been involved in Big Elk. This has been going on for quite some time actually, and I thought it would help ~~in the~~ provide context around our discussion tonight around Big Elk and how it should be managed. I want to talk about where we started. And if you look at the timeline of acquisitions, early 2007-2010, that's when the first parcel was purchased. Then from 2017-2020, somewhere in there, the 3 additional parcels were purchased. This is now what encompasses the entire park aside from the most recent one, a 155-acre Martin Property. So those things kind of evolved, and then around 2019, I'll put (name, #9) on the spot to correct me if I get this wrong. I went to see (name, #9) as the Chair of the Friends group. This was right after the announcement of the 2nd parcel and now we were looking at about 1700 acres, and I'll paraphrase here, but I said "(name, #9), I am (name, #2) and I am all about preservation of property. I like what the state is doing around that but, I need your help. We have one full-time person at this facility ((name, #29) was our full time park manager but she also had responsibilities at Ridley Creek, so she was already stretched thin). We have one full time maintenance person and ~~now we have~~ 2 more thousand acres sitting in our lap. So, I said "(name, #9) we've got to have some help ~~here~~. We can't operate like this. I can't get enough volunteers to keep the trails cleaned, the kiosk in order, and help ~~and~~ maintaining the wooden footbridges." As you can imagine, I was going into detail about what the Friends do. And (name, #9) was very good. He said "I understand", and ~~what~~ I wasn't expecting ~~was for~~ (name, #9) to reach into his pocket and pull out a wad of money to go hire somebody for DCNR or the Friends group, I was just trying to raise awareness with (name, #9) that this is something to be aware of and that we needed to keep our eye on it. And to please help us in the budgeting process as it comes about. That was about 2019. So, after that, I ~~can back~~, talked with Gary Kirk. — If you don't know him he was just awarded by the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation as one of the volunteers of the year – he's also the Vice-Chair of the Friends Group, and we call him the trail master. ~~And he~~ Gary works tirelessly as a volunteer here and down at Big Elk Creek, and at White Clay Creek State Park in Delaware. So we were talking and he said "you know, there's a spot over here at Big Elk that really needs some attention. We got some trails that aren't ~~sitting right~~ constructed properly and with the big floods we keep having we're getting some erosion problems. And where the horses are crossing the stream it's just not good for the streambank situation". So not knowing any better, Gary and I get on the phone with one of (name, #1)'s senior leaders, Paul Zeph, who was Strategic Planner, and we knew Paul. And we knew Paula Devore because she had helped us scout out some trail locations a few years earlier in the Preserve. So we said "Paul, we got some improvements that we need to make at this "Big Elk" property that was just purchased". And he goes "Well that's good (name, #2), I understand that, but there's a lot more that goes into this than me just telling you that you can go build a foot bridge over this little stream in order to minimize erosion or to help keep the foot traffic out of the stream that is leading to the streambank erosion. We need a master plan. And we can ~~not~~ get any kind of authorization for a Friends group to go do such a project until we have a plan". Which made

sense. Gary and I, not really understanding the process at the time of master planning as well as we do today, I said “okay, well when can we start on that?”. And Paul says “Well, we have a problem, (name, #2). We don’t have any resources nor any money to help get that master plan developed”. Oh. So in the meantime, we’ve had some of this property as part of the state for several years now. And we’re seeing social trails, where people take the shortest distance from Point A to Point B, which may not be the best place in the world to put those trails because it doesn’t take care of the resource like we’ve been talking about this evening. So ~~what I did was w!~~ I had heard a little bit about ~~this a~~ ‘Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance’ Program ~~with the National Park Service~~ and I looked it up on the internet. ~~And I~~ called them and spoke to Helen Mahan ~~Mann~~, and I said “Helen, this is (name, #2) and I work as a volunteer and we need a master plan, and I heard that there was a way to get help from the National Park Service ~~for to do~~ this”. And she said “that’s true, we have a lot of people who want in on this program, but we do have funding available and we do help entities develop master site plans from time to time. And I said “well, we could use your help because we have some property here that we need to do something with”. So ~~then~~ I went back to Paul and he connected with (name, #1) and (name, #1) drafted a nice letter and sent ~~that thing it~~ to the National Park Service ~~and low and behold~~, in June of 2020 – June 30th, to be exact. I have the letter if anyone would like to see it – a letter from (name, #1) sent to them and then they agreed to help us.

At the time, what many of you heard was the ‘Big Elk annex’, ‘Big Elk extension’ of White Clay Creek Preserve. It really fell under that umbrella because there was no additional money, no additional resources, and we didn’t have any kind of plan by which to provide guidance to do anything with it. So that’s how it got to be the White Clay Creek Preserve extension at Big Elk Creek or Big Elk Annex. There were all kinds of names floating around for it. It was the best option at the time. In 2020, right in pandemic, we couldn’t hardly have meetings. And in the fall of 2020, we got accepted into the National Park program. So at that time, we started a project with (name, #29) and the National Park Service and we had several of their staff joining us. We had Paul Zeph and people in the community like Gary Kirk, and some of you might know Susan Moon – she’s ~~big~~ is in the historical commission in London Britian ~~township~~, ~~Gary Eric~~ Baker who is also in the historic commission. ~~And along with~~ several other volunteers from the Friends Group that all participated in that project. It got off the ground and we did some work. Some of you may have seen or heard about some community Zoom calls – we had a couple of those to get some feedback from the community about ‘hey, we’ve got this property here in addition to White Clay Creek Preserve, and we want to ~~redefine~~ a master plan around this in order to get it firmed up and know what changes need to be made on how you manage it, and how we plan to manage Big Elk. So we need to come up with some foundational documents’. So all of this work was going on, albeit slowly because of the pandemic. We couldn’t meet in person, it was hard to access data, etc. etc. So this was going along and a lot of community feedback was going into this, and the announcement in September 2022, when the state said that Big Elk would be its own state park. And at that point, the National Park Service project came to an end. And it wasn’t complete, but it was the right time because it was time to move on. Now we had a state park designation, and the National Park Service says “we gave you 2 years, although it was slow and we didn’t get a tremendous amount accomplished, we did get some foundational resources documented for that property”. And ~~the ones here~~ we did a ~~bunch lot~~ of historical documentation.

So that’s where the transition began. And that’s kind of where we are today. Because at that time in early 2023, DCNR then began working with their consulting team and their ~~inner~~ internal staff of

experts to begin the master planning process. I just thought I should give you a little background of how the Friends Group got involved. And we were doing the best we could, so I could never believe that 5 years ago we would have this many resources in one room all focused on this property. Because we couldn't get even a dollar to spend on the thing, and it wasn't (name, #1)'s fault, it was just about the money and the budget. And you know, that comes from various places. And there are 124 state parks in the state of Pennsylvania. And if you want to talk about the work that needs to be done across the system, you should talk to (name, #20) about it because her staff did a comprehensive review of all 124 parks about 2 years ago, and you would be shocked at how much funding it is going to take to get some of the infrastructure we have in the system up to maintaining level, not fancy improvements or anything like that. So I didn't mean to bore you with the timeline, I just thought I would give you a little background here.

We do a lot of grant work with private donors and things like that, and I will say (name, #4) has been a big help for the Friends group and working with (name, #3) because she's helped us secure some funds for some of the things we're doing here. Because it takes a lot of volunteers, like all yourselves that are here – you're volunteering your time to help with this project. So I just wanted to give you the background to show you why this conversation started and where we started from. From me begging (name, #9) to get us some money to help (name, #25) and lobby for some money through the budgetary process so we could get more funding to manage this additional 2000 acres that they just said "here you go" and not "how are you going to manage it".

16 – Thank you for that timeline, but it sounds like it was originally trails, which I understand, you need to manage trails. But then it's morphed. And I don't know where the morphing occurred to where now it's a visitor satisfaction and accessibility and a lot of infrastructure. And I don't think that was the original, at least from what I'm gathering from what you said. Over time people got involved and I'm wondering how the amalgamation of all of that come into place and then just finally, I thought we were here tonight to talk about that plan and have input into that plan and I understand that we need to understand that we all need to understand what happened today, and I wish I could have been there, but is that part of the real master plan? It's not my priority to have amenities like that, so I want to know.

2 – This is my version of it. It morphed from what Gary and I knew best, as just a couple of volunteers in the community just looking at this with our own eyes and not being – my training is in plant physiology and agricultural research, it's not in managing state parks and how to do that. Our volunteer team are very knowledgeable in certain areas and we take what they have, but Gary and I and just a couple of other people – it was the obvious things that jumped out at us. Like, you know about the Springlawn Trail and how that was managed. But there are some other places where we've got some serious erosion going on. We've got some water that we need to keep horses and bikes and foot traffic out of because we've got big streambank erosion. And that was what we knew, quite frankly. And that's what prompted the call. Because I'm not one to sit around and wait until we decide that we're going to do something, it's like, let's get on it. So what are the things that we knew about that the Friends group could probably handle. I wasn't asking for any money, except we need permission. So it started that way. And we had no belief at that time that it was ever going to be a separate entity of anything. What we knew was how it got started. But, when we did get started on a master plan, (name, #25) can correct me if I'm wrong, it wasn't just trails and it wasn't just managing a ditch, or correcting the direction of a trail or preventing the washout of a trail, it was "we need to develop a master site plan for the whole

property”, which encompassed a lot of things and seeing what else needs to be there. So we had discussions about what things needed to be on this property in order to improve it. Plus we had a couple of Zoom calls to get feedback from the community to see what sort of things they wanted to see or be able to do.

16 – And when did that happen? That feedback from the community that indicated the amenities?

15 – Were those the stakeholder meetings?

2 – Yes

15 – Those were the stakeholder meetings last summer that we weren’t invited to.

24 – (name, #2) to clarify, those were the stakeholder meetings with the National Park Service, not the stakeholder meetings related to the Master Plan with DCNR.

2- Yes, exactly right. The stakeholder meetings with the National Park Service. I’m sorry, and thank you for clarifying that. So there’s a lot of maintenance that we knew was needed, and I was just trying to press ahead with what the Friends group saw as a ‘need’ and here is this property. And then we got something official. We got (name, #25), we got the National Park Service, we got some experience, and we were just rocking along there seeing what we could put together and seek feedback from the community through those Zoom calls. And then all of the sudden, well, we’re going to have a state park and it is going to be a separate entity. And that doesn’t mean we didn’t need a master plan, but we had to re-gear it at that point, and that’s where it evolved. So we took all of that foundational documentation and we split it in two. It was kind of intertwined because at the same time, we were going to take a look at White Clay Creek Preserve and see if there was anything that needed to be changed there. And as an overall feedback from the community, not official but what people were telling me was, “yeah, we need to get some clarity on a few of the trails and look at what type of use should be there, but for the most part we’re good with what White Clay Creek Preserve is doing”. But there were also some suggested changes and things that might need to be considered and take place down the road. I would say they were minor. But those two documents with the National Park Service – the one document was split apart by Paul. And that data was made available to the project team that is working on what is now the Big Elk Creek State Park. So all of this data has been coming together with the community feedback and all of that.

16 – I find it interesting that White Clay can stay the way it is but Big Elk...

2 – No, I didn’t say it would stay the same. It was on the table for some updating and I’ll tell you why. There are several versions of the White Clay management plan that started back in 1984. There have been a couple of iterations of that and sometimes there’s some confusing language in the various couple of versions and I was always getting caught in the middle. “(Name, #2), I’ve got the 1984 version that says this, but in 1992 it says this, and those are not lining up”. And we had some signage that was mistaken so it was minor stuff, but my goal was to get a new clean plan that everyone can align around and get real clear on all of the trails and what would be done and how we were going to utilize them at White Clay Creek Preserve.

9- I appreciate all that you do, and for walking us through this tonight. I have no argument – everything you said about funding being needed because, one of the most historic buildings here in Chester County,

if you walk 150 yards that way, is collapsing. No argument about all of that, and certainly we talked about many things, including the trails and everything. I think one of the concerns is that, I saw, over 5 months before there was any announcement of Big Elk Creek State Park, in 2022, there were emails going back and forth between DCNR officials where the \$12M development plan had already been determined. There's going to be a camping colony, there's going to be a \$2.5M pit latrine and wastewater treatment system. And I don't want to put words into anyone's mouths, but I think the question is, it seems like at some point there was a change in conversation from "we need to move the trail away from the stream because there's an erosion issue" to "\$12M blowout" from the agency who all we have heard from tonight is running out of money and can't address the issues. I won't put words in anyone's mouth but I think that's the concern. Am I right? (unidentified agreement from a Task Force member) I would like to know and talk about this tonight, where, and it must have been before May of 2022, and I don't know how helpful it is to relive the past, but I do think if we're going to be honest with everyone in the room, and particularly with moving forward here – because at some point we have to talk about facilities and everything else – I mean, it just seems to me that it would be helpful to know when that conversation shifted from moving a trail to a \$12M development.

1 – I'd like to respond to that, (name, #9). And you're referring to the pre-decisional document that was our request, the Bureau of State Parks' request to the Wolf Administration, so that we had – back to what you started off talking about, (name, #2) – in Big Elk Creek, a new mandate without the resources to manage that. And it wasn't a fully baked "this is what's going to happen", but what we needed to do was provide information for what could happen to garner the resources – the staffing and the funds – to manage it as a state park in the future. Something that we did not have up until that moment when the Governor in his budget – in the last 6 months of his last term – announced Big Elk Creek in September; 4 months after we made the request. But we had to ask for positions. We had to ask for again, estimates in funding as far as annual funding for those salary positions as well as the funding for those potential improvements that could be made on the park. And that was an estimate that (name, #23) and I pulled together specifically and I communicated that to you through your Right to Know request. It was, again, sent to you letting you know that this was a pre-decisional document and it was our request anticipating what we felt we needed to adequately run, manage and improve Big Elk Creek State Park. So that's the timeline, and that's the honesty behind what that was. It wasn't a master plan and decisions made on what's going to go in the park. It was what we felt we needed to address potentiality of running this park in the future. And, as you know, we did that for not only Big Elk, but we did that for Susquehanna Riverlands in York County and Vosburg Neck in Wyoming County.

9 – Again, not to be contrarian, but tonight we've heard that in 2020 there was the National Park Service involved and then all of the sudden there is this – it's like a mushroom, it just appeared overnight. I don't know where it came from and that's my question. What was the driving desire behind, again, I don't know where it came from. Where did it come from that we're going to have a \$12M development plan. What was the genesis of the desire to do that.

1- To provide service.

9 – I guess who, someone in Chester County, somebody affiliated with White Clay Creek Preserve, somebody who lived around here, really anybody who lived around here, who said "here's what you ought to do. Let's have a \$12M buildout on this site that in 2019 DCNR said would be a day-use only area and would be low-impact in perpetuity", where did that change happen?

1- So in 2019, when Strawbridge 3 was acquired, I think that is what you are talking about, a comment was received by our person in land acquisitions to discuss passive outdoor recreation and no plans to change that for the foreseeable future. For the foreseeable future is what he said. That was in direct response to a new mandate without the resources to adequately manage and improve that mandate. That is what it what.

9 – But my question is, where did the idea come from?

16 – Yeah I don't think it was generated locally.

15 – It was not generated locally.

4 – Can I say something? Because in 2019, prior to the state park designation, I was on the calls – there were public calls for the master plans for the White Clay Creek Preserve, which only recently had the Big Elk Creek sections. But there was public meetings, we did our best to publicize them and hold them in the evenings. I know there were discussions, not dissimilar to what we discussed early on with the state park as far as questions asked – “would you like motorized vehicles there”, things like that. But I can't remember the specifics, but there were meetings held prior to the state park announcement. I remember Governor Wolf committing to 3 new state parks in the Commonwealth. I think we're talking about a master plan with a tremendous lack of resources, because that is what we were discussing. Reduce heavy washout from Hurricane Ida, which you came out and visited, to a master plan with more resources attached.

16 – I just find it interesting when you say that because I was on the call when they said “hey do you want this, do you want that” and it was a “eh, maybe, yes, no, okay” sort of thing, but I don't feel that here. Here I feel a “we're doing this, these are the things we're doing and that's that”. And that's the difference I feel than what happened maybe earlier that you're referring to.

4 – I didn't hear that tonight that “this is what we're doing”. We're talking about some stream restoration, and in fact, we're all asking when they're going to be done with that, not should you do it.

14 – A couple of things from my observations, it sounds like, an answer to (name, #9)'s question, if I can interpret what you're saying (name, #9) is that, putting myself in your shoes (referring to name, #1), where I've been before working for state government, it sounds as though you were faced with a situation where you needed to come up with an answer for how much money you needed to be put into this park that was sitting in your lap and you had to figure out what you needed. I'm not sure how you did it, but I might have looked at some of my other parks and said “okay this is the kind of budget I need, this is how that would happen and this is what I need to do” which might total \$12M bucks or something like that. And you throw that out there and now you make a budget request and that's no easy feat usually to get those passed and get the money and now you're like “what am I going to do, how am I actually going to put that into play responsibly?”. It sounds to me like that's kind of what the process is.

1 – Yes, that is a good interpretation.

14 – And that makes sense. And I think all of us can imagine being in that position, trying to figure out how we can responsibly manage this resource and what you need financially, and with staffing, and figure out more or less what you need based on what you think you can do with the property. And now you have a situation where get some public influence into what that plan looks like and that got maybe a

louder response than what was expected. And so now we're here, and I guess my question is – let me preface that - when I heard what the plans were, I was concerned about the scope of the plans, having been involved in that property planning long before it was ever, you know, a sparkle in the eyes of DCNR as a possible state park, we were talking with Strawbridge about putting a conservation easement on it, so nothing could happen on the property. We evaluated the resources that were on the property, what would we do to retain the conservation value of the property through the conservation easement. And so that was what, back in the early 2000's, that was what many local conservationists like myself thought was going to happen. So fast forward and I hear that there are plans for development. At first I was relieved to hear it was going to be a state park, at least it didn't get housing put all over it, but now it's going to be a park and these are some of the ideas they have to turn it into one. And I find myself speaking with some folks who have been in touch with the local public and have talked about those plans and it occurs to me that you guys might benefit from a more engaged process. Where you get to hear from those of us who have been involved with the property for a long time. So I guess, at that point, and this might have been talked about previously, I don't know, but when I spoke in January, that was my suggestion. I thought you guys would benefit from that so that you could hear the kind of input and the benefit of the study of some of us folks who have done this research. So I'm still hopeful that this is where this is going to go but so far, this is the first meeting I've gotten to come to, and we're more than halfway through it and I haven't heard you guys ask us anything. So what I would like to know is "what are your plans for actually soliciting feedback from those folks around the table that are assembled. This pretty esteemed group of folks here, you know, I learned about stream geology back in 1983 so even though that was a very nice talk, you know, I just worked all day and I've got three hours to try to give you the benefit of the time I've spent studying that park and do you guys actually want to get into that? And if so, when is that?"

19 – Can I respond to that, please? I don't have 25 years of stream ecology knowledge, so this has been extremely helpful for me to understand what the issues are and to see what, even though I couldn't go today, what they got to look at. So it's not to discount what you're saying. I want to hear. And I did hear last time, and I am also hearing this time, so, I am finding the evolution of things coming out including tonight's presentation to be super helpful from my perspective.

14 – And that's fine and maybe it's what the scope of this group should be talking about.

19 – I'm not trying to deny what you're saying, I just wanted to add that. Because I kept thinking the whole time "this is really helpful for me".

14 – I just need clarification as to whether we're going to perform as an advisory group or whether there is a different direction that this group is going to take.

1 – Advising and input is what we need, (name, #14) and I think there's going to be certainly – we actually have additional topics to discuss, and one of them is different park designations – preserves. But very much like the first task force meeting, I think what was required for us to move through and gather your input and advise for the creation of the master plan of the park is to establish a baseline of information to get everyone on the same page and understanding for the task at hand. When we get into some of the flashpoint issues that people reacted to in the preliminary presentation of concepts in November, and in our public meeting what we heard in January, was about the improvements and enhancements of visitor services and amenities and what those look like and to what scale they are going to be on the landscape. I think very much so that that is the input this advisory group is going to

be providing the most substantive input on. And we decided this in the first meeting, and I know you were not here in the first meeting, there was a decision, or a vote, that we move to the resource discussion first in this second task force meeting. And I think the infrastructure and enhancements and improvements are in the queue for the next task force meeting.

14 – So there's going to be a presentation at the beginning of that meeting as well, is that what you're saying?

23 – There's going to be a site visit out in front of it, and then there will be a presentation on different types of amenities to solicit feedback on thoughts, on what is needed, what isn't needed, and considerations that need to be made for all of those facilities. I guess specifically, just to be clear, talking about bathrooms, some type of educational/administrative area, and a maintenance area. Those are the three things we're going to focus on next time. We can do others, obviously you have input for agenda items, but we thought those would be the three big ones.

1 – And I think, we talked about trails and the National Park Service foundational master planning because the park did not have resources, did not have the ability to move forward with the plan at the time. But the Friends group, as they do, it's the highest form of visitation and interaction with our state parks, they recognized right out of the gate as we were acquiring the lands that the trails needed to be established, and there needed to be a plan because resource impacts were happening. And I'll just say that trails are our greatest contributor as far as recreational amenities go. They're access to the resource. And more trail mileage and different types of trails and how we manage those trails are critical. So we were just happy that the Friends were wanting to advance on this new mandate without the resources and to bring the National Park Service in was the right thing to do at the time. Again, we greatly appreciate it. I just have one other thing to say because we talked about infrastructure. The historic home that's a few hundred meters down the road with a chain link fence around it, is going through a fully funded project. We informed the Friends of that in 2022, that we were advancing the historic stabilization and restoration of the John Evans House. They had their first design meeting last week, and the design will be complete by October of this year and will be in construction to enhance and improve that historic and important cultural resource. We have more project funds at this time than we can move on. We have ARPA funds that we received – over \$75M dedicated to parks and forest infrastructure. Governor Shapiro advanced, in this budget year that we're in, \$112M in Oil and Gas funds decided to park and forest infrastructure. It's not the giant full swing at our deferred maintenance in the Bureau of State Parks but it's substantive and it's more than we can actually move as far as engineering and design. We can't move that money as fast as we would like just because there's capacity issues. But we have been the beneficiaries of some really substantive infrastructure funding in addition to the money that we received for the three new state parks in 2022.

14 – I'm trying to cope with what I'm hearing you say, but I think where I'm having the disconnect is, again, I'm trying to put myself in your shoes. I think I'm at the point where, I understand where the presentation came from because you need to set the baseline as you're describing, but then I would probably design the process to try and solicit some feedback and input.

1 – We hope to.

14 – It's just that I haven't heard anybody ask any questions of us yet and I'm just wondering whether that is part of the plan.

1 – That is very much part of it. As we get into the important elements, the more controversial elements that generated the grassroots effort that expressed concern over the preliminary concepts.

14 – Okay, so like this part, I guess, what you guys are saying is “hey we’re going to do some restorations and this is the basis of our plans for that restorations – specifically stream and wetland restoration – based on this kind of understanding that you have of the site. This is sort of the baseline. But I understand that this is what we have in mind to do on that front. And there are going to be things that you want a little bit more after for public input. Is that right?

1 – Yes, the resource work is very much the statutory mandate in our enabling legislation for what we as DCNR and the Bureau of State Parks has to do. We have to take care of this resource. Not only take care of it, but improve it. So the presentation today, everything today from the stream restoration work that (name, (name, #32)) communicated but also the riparian buffer planting that was viewed today. In addition to the meadow plantings that are going in. There is ongoing resource work that is happening because we have the funds that are moving in lock step with this Task Force work and the master plan.

2 – So we’re going to move on, but I just wanted to make a couple of comments (name, #14) to your concerns. At the very first meeting, there was an exercise at the end of that meeting where everyone in the room had the opportunity to show their vote about “this particular topic is most important to me”. And this is how we drove the agenda for tonight. Resources was decided as the first topic and restoration was voted as the top item. We couldn’t cover all of the topics tonight, that was just the first one. And if you remember back in that conversation and go back and check the minutes, there was a lot of conversation – a lot of people had questions about ‘how did you decide to do this?’, ‘what trees are you going to plant?’, ‘how do you know what needs to be done here regarding the water or the washout or the runoff or whatever?’, so that’s kind of served as our guidance for how we would start. And the thing about it is, I know I don’t have expertise in many of these areas and I don’t think many of us do. So in order to bring everyone along, we’re trying to establish a base and sometimes, at any point during the meeting, somebody in here is going to be bored and know all of that and won’t want to hear it. And then somebody is going to be really energized because it’s something new that they learned. So it’s kind of hard to take a mixed group from the community and bring everyone along in the discussion because you don’t know what knowledge base everyone has or what everyone cares about. So this is a little bit of an attempt to try and establish that so we can have meaningful discussions. Don’t think for a minute that there’s not going to be plenty of time to provide input into what you think. So we aren’t rolling by that. We’re just trying to establish a base.

One more thing I’ll say about the budget – when (name, #9) and I had this discussion, I put a lot of weight on that. And I think (name, #9) you were trying to make me feel comfortable that we were getting this land and that it’s important because there is no more land left. We’ve got what we’ve got. And we can choose to use it however the communities and the people who manage it decide how to do that. But we can’t make any more. So (name, #1)’s thought to me was “we got it, (name, #2), we’ve got land and we’ll put it as a part of the preservation for now and we’ll figure out how we’re going to improve and manage it later on with funding”. One more thing on funding. I found out during this process, working as a volunteer, sometimes if you don’t have a plan you can’t get funding. Like sometimes I’ll go talk to (name, #20) about how to get some funding and she’ll say “well, do you have a plan?” and I’ll say “well, um, no” and well, if you get a plan, it’s easier to get money, especially from donors. But here’s what I’m going to do – A, B, C, D – it’s easier to get that funding with a plan. So a lot

of master planning or planning in general goes into this so that when you go after the funding you have an easier time. And that's both for internal budget and external donors. I don't have an internal budget history or experience in the government because I'm not a part of it, but I have spent a lot of time with donors and people that are providing grants. And if you don't have your act together around the plan, you aren't getting the money. It's not going to happen. Those of you who have done grant writing know that. (name, #10)?

10 – I just wanted to share from my perspective based off of the first meeting. I understand your questions and where you're going with this. And I understand, (name, #14) that you couldn't make the first meeting. But I do think we did a lot in that first meeting to set the framework for this. And I greatly appreciate your summary tonight, (name, #2). Yes, I do wish the two agenda items tonight had been reversed, but that's okay, I'm glad we're talking about what we're talking about today. Although it feels from (name, #14)'s perspective 'when are we going to get to the meat of it?', but I trust we will. And I'm glad we're talking about this easy stuff that we all feel and raised as important, and I hope we can talk about the difficult things sooner rather than later. And (name, #1) said next we're going to talk about the facilities. Okay great, we'll get to them. So I just wanted to thank you and I greatly appreciate having the back story and I'm sure you wish we had all been there to volunteer our time but hey, now here we all are. And I'm glad you've put together a big budget to give us funding again. In my perfect world now maybe we can all have a say on how we spend it.

15 – I'm just saying, it might be helpful I don't know. Are the slideshow presentations from the meetings being put online along with the transcripts? Because I think, especially for people who can't make a meeting, it would be helpful if the slideshow was there so they could read through what was done during the meeting as well as the transcript, so it goes hand in hand. If we could make that available?

1 – I'm looking to my team in the back. They are not available – we didn't load those, only the minutes right?

15 – Right, so I think it would be helpful if the slideshows were available as well in conjunction with the minutes.

18 – We did say that.

15 – Yes, I think we did discuss that.

1 – Okay, got it. Yes, we will do that.

16 – I'm going back to minutae. With regards to the presentation, I just wanted to know, (name, (name, #32)) if you were going to be working with the Natural Heritage folks when you're preparing these plans for restoration because of the importance of the property and the species that are located there?

32 – Yes, we do that as a matter of course for the restoration plans.

16 – But I mean, do you meet with those folks? The Natural Heritage staff.

14 – A PNDI?

16 – Yes

14 – She means a PNDI

32 – Oh absolutely. We certainly coordinate very closely with that. We are sure to look at that for each individual piece of a project and we work with all of the relevant entities that we need to within their jurisdictions.

1 – And (name, #15) asked in a request, and we couldn't do it for this meeting, it was an issue in timing and scheduling for this meeting, but someone from the Natural Heritage Program we hope to have representative at our next meeting. Not for a presentation, but to answer any additional questions related to their work and how we interface with that specifically when we're doing projects on our lands.

16 – Well especially next meeting it would be great to have them if we're talking about infrastructure to have them there. So thank you.

1 – Yes, we are working on making it happen.

13 – I had a clarification, I know that the Friends of White Clay have been pretty much the maintenance staff and the worker bees to keep this White Clay Preserve running, and now that there's staff here from the state, what is going to be the Friends role going forward? You won't be the bridge builders and the trail repairers, so how do you see yourselves in the future?

2 – We sponsor a lot of education programs and outreach and park cleanups. We work a lot with (name, #8) and the White Clay Creek Watershed Association around basin control. It's kind of like when you own a small farm, there is always work to do. Always.

13 – Yes but won't the staff be picking up a lot of that?

2 – (name, #24) and (name, #1) might have talked about a lot of staff but I'm going to put an end to the 'a lot' category. They have more staff, but I wouldn't put it in the 'a lot' category. They have 2 or 3 really good people who do good work, but it takes a lot of those guys, plus our volunteers to keep it going. So like I said, it's like a small farm, you can always find value-added things to do. So we won't be making up our fundraising and grant writing. One of our other projects that's coming up here is to restore the tombstones in the cemetery. I don't know if you took notice of that, but they're in a state of disrepair. This building just got some money to help them do some bricks, and things across the street.

13 – But it's the state's responsibility now.

1 – I'll say this, (name, #13), we have a tremendous volunteer task force in our Friends groups that provide a full spectrum of services that complement and support our professional staff's work. And that exists in all our parks that are fortunate enough to have Friend's groups. And there will always be a need because we can't do it alone.

2 – And in the future, we have it on the table to decide if we would have a new Friends group for Big Elk, or maintain one Friends group. Its going to be a lot of work when we start getting into it. With permission slips and what we need to do to improve the resource like we talked about today, and it's going to take a lot of volunteers. And it might make more sense to manage it separately as two Friends groups, or we might try to do it in one. But that decision hasn't been made yet. I haven't fired a volunteer yet in the 10 years that (name, #12) and I have been working on this Friends group. We always find work and there's plenty to be done. Good question though.

1 – We do need to get into the presentation, but (name, #9), I just wanted to respond to the mushroom comment.

9 – We already talked about that.

1 – Each of the three new state parks has a different origin story. And the mushroom was, really, and we were talking about this on our field trip today, the demand on our public lands. And that huge jump that we saw during the pandemic. For state parks we saw a 27% increase in visitation between 2019 and 2020. And the demand for access and for healthful outdoor recreation to find respite and recharge – all of the values that our state parks provide. So I think the mushroom was the will and desire of the Wolf Administration to provide more state parks, even these 3 that were created with different origin stories. And that was a legacy conservation moment. And if you look at the other 2 parks that were created, one was being purchased from a longstanding Conservancy – the North Branch Land Trust. It was the Highland Preserve. And Senator Baker has been pushing for a state park in Wyoming County since 2017. And again we didn't have the resources to actually take that request on. She was a champion of that state park in Wyoming County. But it was already sort of being protected by the North Branch Land Trust. That's the origin story for Wyoming County. In York County we had a longstanding partner in the Lancaster Conservancy that has been creating preserve lands that are managed by the Conservancy for a decade now. And they were moving to purchase what ultimately became Susquehanna Riverlands State Park but they viewed the resource and made the offer that we move forward with that acquisition. Otherwise it would have just been a part of their existing patchwork of preserves in York County. And of course, Big Elk Creek, DCNR has been acquiring acreage, without the resources to manage that, I've said that plenty tonight, for more than a decade. But we sort of reached a critical mass with Strawbridge 3 and that acquisition as far as the amount of acreage that we had to manage and do something with. So the mushroom was the will of the Wolf Administration to meet the need.

9 – And I appreciate that. And I think that you are correct – it was somewhere in the Wolf Administration. I think it's worth mentioning that the origin story of why we're here tonight. That origin story was very much protecting the existing White Clay Creek Preserve, preserving that ground and connecting it now to Fairhill. And \$20M of the \$32M that came to this project from a private foundation – that's what the whole thing was. (Name, #2) you couldn't be more correct – getting resources and trying to – I mean, I had to arm wrestle PennDot to get a stupid stop sign put up. And let alone something like we're talking about here. We're talking about tracking the majority of the funding for this project was from a foundation that had a vision for this. That was a part of the preserve and was connecting these two pieces of ground. That is the origin story. And I think you're correct – a campground and everything that came from that conversation was – Governor Wolf needed a legacy project. And I don't think that's bad. But I don't think it's part of the origin story, to use your words, of this piece of ground. Like I said, I don't know how helpful it is to relive this all night long, but I do appreciate your explaining that.

1 – We're going to get into this next part. At the request of this task force, the discussion on designation and preserve status and other state park designations in the presentation. And certainly, ask questions if you need to, but I need to get to this next section.

15 – Can I just ask a question while we're waiting to start?

1 – Absolutely

15 – The Spring Lawn Trail, which is under an easement with Elk Township and Mt Olivet Trail, which is owned by Franklin Township, have been egregiously damaged over the past few weeks by subcontractors from DCNR accessing these pieces of land without permission from the townships and without their knowledge. What are we going to do to make sure that the townships are kept in the loop, that they're asked permission before these places are accessed? Especially Mt Olivet Road has a bridge that goes over it, and it is not meant for vehicle traffic of any kind. They spoke about how they saw tadpoles in the puddles on the trail, that's because of truck ruts. Not because of a random divot in the trail. I personally walked both trails end to end and they are damaged to the point in some spots where it is mid-calf on my leg, the ruts are that big. They are ridiculous. It is a danger for the people who use it on a daily basis. We run on it, we bike on it, we take our dogs for a walks. Both trails are hazardous at this point because of damage done by DCNR on them.

16 – So many some procedures put into place.

15 – I think, yes. Some procedures need to be put in place but we need to look at access to these trails that are not technically DCNR property.

24 – (name, #1) Can I respond to that?

1 – Go ahead

24 – So, I do contact the townships regularly when we are accessing the trails. I talked to Mike Cochran at Elk Township and I talk to Jeff Eastburn at Franklin Township. The contractors are working on a time table, and sometimes things fall through. Whether that's on DCNR's end or the contractor end, it isn't always for me to say or to point a finger at. And we do understand that these ruts did happen on the trails. (to (name, #1) how many miles of trails do we have in state parks?) A lot. We have a lot of miles of trails in state parks. And sometimes they get beat up. In this case, we had some vehicles on these trails after some rain events so they got ruts in them. We haven't been out to fix them yet because we continue to have heavy rain storms and they are still wet.

15 – Especially Mt Olivet road, that is not a state park trail.

24 – And I understand that.

15 – And I know for a fact that Jeff Eastburn has heard from no one since the January meeting.

24 – We do keep in contact with the townships. So we're in touch with them. And I've been in touch with both Elk Township in terms of getting the repairs to the Spring Lawn Trail done with DCNR staff. So they are coming, we're just a little bit behind because the rain hasn't let up really this week.

16 – What about the bridge?

24 – Which bridge? The Stricklersville Road side?

15 – On Mt Olivet, yes

24 – They should not be going over that bridge. Have you seen them doing so?

15 – I had someone call me and tell me they watched a dump truck.

24 – Have you seen anything like that (name, #10)?

10 – There's two bridges

24 – Yes, there's two bridges. The second one is further down.

10 – The old stone bridge next to my property, no one has crossed that for years. So the one down by the ruts

15 – That was is also not supposed to be driven on

24 – That one is rated to be

15 – Not according to the township. I had this discussion with them last week.

24 – That bridge is rated for vehicles. Because Wilkinson's farm equipment was able to get over that bridge. So I can reiterate that conversation with the township if a new concern has come up about it so we're all on the same page with them. But to the parks knowledge, that bridge is rated for vehicles. But to the other bridge, no one is going over that one because there's concrete blocks in front.

1 – And restoration, just to be clear, for the damage caused by the contractors – are these the planting contractors?

24 – Yes, its from their first round of spraying. I went out and walked Spring Lawn Trail myself and I saw the damage and its muddy in spots.

14 – But is there a restoration, should it be done for the long term effect? Spring Lawn is used every day, and I take my bike out there, and it is a liability if people aren't safe. And so, you can take a bucket out there on a backhoe and smooth it out, but is that going to be a long term solution for the situation? Especially if it's going to continue to be used by maintenance vehicles.

24 – And that's a good question. And that's something we should talk with the township about – what does long term restoration and maintenance of that trail look like. But I'd like to add that Estes has tree trimming trucks down that trail all the time to cut down hazard trees, so this is not brand new that vehicles traverse these former roads.

15 – I understand that but should they traverse them when they're already in a muddy state and you know you're doing damage.

24 – And that was a miscommunication that we have talked to the contractors about and that mistake won't be happening again.

15 – I just want to make sure that there is a better communication with the townships. At this point, there's not much at all.

13 – Yeah I'd like to see a real coordination between the townships and DCNR. I don't think there is much. To really sit down and hammer out what their responsibilities are and the modes and methods of how a partnership would really work.

1 – Related to the trail? Yes, we can agree to that and I can understand the need for coordination. Okay.

25 – Alright. We did have a couple of slides on the riparian buffer but I'm thinking we need to skip those if we're going to get to the preserve topic. We've got 30 minutes. These slides will all go up on the website, and if there's questions, we can answer then.

1 – It was a recap of the planting that was viewed today on the field site visit of the 270 acres, 70,000 trees. It's the largest riparian buffer planting in the Bureau of State Parks history that has been accomplished to-date.

31 – It's over 74,000 trees (laughing). Once you're over 70,000 whose counting? And yes, to the best of our knowledge it is the largest project that either DCNR or the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay has ever been a part of.

13 – I haven't been able to see a list of the trees that were planted. Is there a list of the species.

31 – There is, would you be amenable to it being attached to the minutes?

1 – Yes, that will be fine. (referring to the slides) I am not going to read everything that is up here. And some of this was baseline information from the first meeting, but this is Act 18. It is our legislative mandate, it is our enabling legislation for DCNR. DCNR came into effect in 1995. Obviously we had enabling legislation before that – it was DER in those days. But it gives us our authority to manage, operate and improve state parks.

This was, again, our attempt to describe what a Pennsylvania State Park is. I think everyone has a general feel for what that means, but other than reading the language in our enabling legislation, this is the Bureau's professional attempt to define it for the Task Force in more clear terms. This is needed for the preamble for the park designation topic.

Unique designations in state parks. And you've heard me say it before, we have 124 state parks now with the addition of the 3 parks we gained. And they're all, including White Clay Creek Preserve, a part of the 124 number. We don't segregate it out; they are all a part of that 124 number. But we do have special designations for entire unit entities. And we have more special designations for smaller components within state parks. Some of them have statutory authority such as 'natural areas' which are defined by statute. Some of them have are by policy and by prescription and management directive. We manage particular elements or a whole unit within our system.

So 'conservation areas', that is by statute. Again, there's the PA Code that designates a conservation area and the highlighted area there is key – 'donated'. We have 3 within our system and they are typically very trail-centric as far as access to the resource, and they can have other amenities such as restrooms, parking, and supportive infrastructure including teaching stations – I'm thinking of Boyd right now which is in Dauphin County. Again, by code, we have this designation for an entire unit, but it is a state park special designation.

Environmental Education Centers. We have 4 Environmental Education Centers in our system. They are tremendous in the experiences they provide and the educational assets of the professional staff. We have over 120 professional environmental education staff in the Commonwealth Bureau of State Parks. It's the largest complement of environmental educators in the Commonwealth and that exists within the Bureau of State Parks. The Environmental Education Centers are unique in that we have environmental education in just about all of our parks and park complexes, but the centers are really focused on school

groups. And the staff are dedicating space and time during the school year. So it's engaging with all of those local school districts and providing education on those sites specific to environmental student education.

This is a unique one. This came to the Bureau of State Parks in 2016 – the first attempts to move it to DCNR management was occurring through the fiscal code in 2013, requiring DCNR to assume operations and management of Washington Crossing Historic Park. It was managed up until 2016 by Pennsylvania Historic Museums Commission. So we were mandated to assume operations here. It has a particular and important history – it is the third leg in our historical sites in the American Revolution and our country's founding in Bucks County. We assumed operations but we did not assume ownership until just a few years ago because it had to be removed from the history code, because it was by statute that it was a historic park by PHMC, removed from the history code and then put on our books with DCNR as the owner. Because of the importance of the site, it's cultural assets, it's story and it's past designation, we opted, and again that's by policy not by statute, we opted to retain the Historic Park in it's naming.

And then we have preserve. And only one in the system with White Clay Creek Preserve, where we are at tonight. There was a joint House Resolution from 1984 and that's all the language in it and it called out "low-intensity outdoor recreation and recreational use". And (name, #9) and I had this conversation a while ago maybe in our first meeting, this was just a joint House Resolution accepting it into the system. The DER system at that time as a property. It wasn't by statute like a conservation area in that designation. So by policy and by practice, we manage White Clay Creek Preserve as a preserve with that designation.

Again, because there is no specific statutory authority, White Clay Creek Preserve's name informs our management plan and operations for the site. There's some thoughts on the preserve designation, which predates my time in the service of the Bureau. (name, #12) you were around.

12 – I was there

1 – You were around, you were the man in the room. But the idea that there's a donation from the DuPont Family, and as I understand it there were lands in Delaware, but there was also a collection of parks in Delaware that were Delaware State Parks. And when the donated lands on the Pennsylvania side and the Delaware side were donated and came to be, this idea of that connectivity and connection to those lands was to take place, how they were to be managed and agreed upon happened. Again, preserve in the name, very much like historic in the name of Washington Crossing, was placed on that park as a designation managed by policy and management directive.

12 – In addition to the formal park that you aptly described, the reason that DuPont gave the land was because the community was in an uproar, similar to what you experienced in November and January about not turning this into residences. We get our water from those lands, so the community, through the bi-state advisory council, 6 people from each state and I happened to be one of the original members of that. So the concept turned into a plan, and the plan is what we experienced here. And the reason I bring it up, which is what we're doing now with Big Elk is, the enabling legislation be separate from that. It was certainly the starting point but it was this community and it's engagement with the bi-state advisory council that created this preserve that we all live, experience and have come to benefit from. It's totally engrained in us – the 40th anniversary just occurred. So since you're using this as a set

up for Big Elk, I think that's important information to have because this is our role, sitting around this table, to do the same thing and give you decisions.

1 – Thank you, (name, #12). And it's an interesting – it happened not just in southern Chester County but in many other locations around the Commonwealth in the 1980s and 90's and into the late 90's, the local grassroots effort to squash particularly a large impoundment and inundation of valuable natural resource lands. The first park I served at was at Nescopeck and it was slated for a large impoundment. You can think Swatara just north of Harrisburg, another one that was meant to be inundated and impacting the significant natural resources of those valleys. And you have that origin story here for White Clay Creek.

You probably aren't going to be able to read this, but this is important information because this is related to the acquisitions of Strawbridge 1, 2 and 3, and the deed restrictions that came with the property acquisition. "The use of the property is defined in this declaration shall be restricted to open space, agricultural, forestal, recreation, natural resource conservation or public access purposes including but not limited to such purposes and uses authorized for state park land or pursuant to the Conservation and Natural Resources Act", etc. "Prohibited: disposal on or under the property of sewage effluent generated on or off site, including off-site sewage effluent of any kind, etc. Cellular towers. The conveyance of groundwater resources from the property for commercial purposes. And the placement onsite of any composting materials, waste products or any other similar items that are generated off-site". And that's what was required within the deed restrictions. So when we're doing management by management plan and directive and policy on any property, we obviously have to live within the terms of the deed restriction with the property when it was conveyed. And with this conveyance, it was to allow for a state park specifically and not exclude it. So that in and of itself, when we acquired the property, was the extent and the limit of the conveyance as the land managers.

7 – You keep saying 'acquired, acquired' what does that mean?

1 – Not donated. And I don't have – and maybe someone from the Bureau staff has it – but I know that it was millions of dollars of Commonwealth funds, in addition to foundation funds that went into this and the county as well. It was a joint effort – and Chester County has been amazing to work with for open space protection and conservation. This was a piece of that puzzle, and it still very much is.

16 – Did it say somewhere else in the agreement that it was to be a state park? I see it says "and uses authorized for state park land". I mean, I understand that. But that's just one of many other uses. So even though it's a state park doesn't preclude it from also being managed in a different way than you might find at other state parks.

1 – Yes, we're getting to the sort of... yes, that's where we are. Is how we manage it. What actually is improved on and to what extent.

16 – I like the 'for open space purposes'. It's a nice title.

15 – If you think about the conservation funds who put into this, it was going to be a preserve. That's where all that money came from. To keep it as a part of the preserve.

1 – That is not accurate.

15 – The intent was.

1 – I think that was maybe the expectation, and (name, #9) you and I talked about expectations. I think that was some expectation there but

18 – That was the expectation from the Mt Cuba Center who provided funding for it as they said on March 20. They explain that it is part of an 8,000-acres of contiguous protected habitat in the region and they go on to describe how pressure from development and other problems poses a risk to biodiversity and one of the things that we can do is conserve open space and the habitat it comprises. So there was an understanding that is repeated throughout many different news articles and recorded discussions from other entities that that was the purpose of this.

1 – And it still is the purpose of this. And it's the Bureau of State Parks purpose in this as well. There is nothing that you stated there, (name, #18) that is in conflict with our mission and mandate of state parks.

18 – But it does pose a conflict with the master plan for the site that was presented in November. There is Article 4 also, a notice of certain activities where, DCNR is bound to notify the county in writing no less than 60-days prior to the undertaking of any activities that can be said to reasonably expect to materially alter the property. That they are to maintain that oversight in compliance for open space purposes. As we go through this process I just want to make sure that is followed.

1 – Yes

9 – So, (name, #1), 1984 was before my time in the House, but even as I read this here, “the use of the property shall be restricted to” and then there's a bunch of undefined terms. So, right, undefined terms can mean anything you want. But just as I look through that, right? The intent, right? Open space. That has a real meaning in this area. Agricultural. Agricultural use of the Strawbridge property is coming to an end. Right? Even though it's listed right in here. What are the things? I'm just pointing them out. Forestral. Alright. That sounds like trees to me. Park. Okay, park. Very generic word. Recreation. Another very generic word. Natural resource conservation. Okay that sounds to me like natural resource conservation. Public access. Okay. Then it goes “included but not limited to”. So the deed restriction does not say ‘state park as outlined in state law’. It lists a whole bunch of things and then says ‘including but not limited to for the purposes of’, and then you have this wrap up of open space purposes. Right? So I think it's worth, the preservation (emphasized) partnership program. That term of preserve, in this neck of the woods has a meaning. There is a community understanding in the county of Chester. We have all kinds of preserves and it's a word that isn't well defined. But we have private preserves, we have Natural Lands Trust. If I go up to Erie I'm not going to see any preserves. And I don't know if there's preserves in Wyoming County. But in this neck of the woods, the preservation partnership program. Again, all this history. All of this money, the majority of it not that state's, although the state was over a series of years, \$1M a year for a number of years, as our endowment with DCNR. Just making sure this is on the record. The purpose of the minutes being taken. That I want to be very clear. The intent the entire way along was that this was to be a part of the preserve. That's just the beginning and the end of it. And would I have drafted this deed restriction differently if I was drafting it? Yes I would. But it is what it is. Just pointing it out, that they used the word preserve even at the top.

20 – I just want to finish reading the line that you started reading which was “including but not limited to such purposes and uses authorized for state park land pursuant to the Natural Resources Act”. If we’re going to put it on the record, I think we need to read the entire restriction.

16 – Again I would just say that just because it’s a state park doesn’t mean it can’t also be a preserve.

9 – And look, I apologize for not reading the whole thing. I am happy to read the whole thing. There are state parks in this state that have swimming, there are parks in this state that have hotels.

1 – Bald Eagle Nature Inn, don’t worry we wouldn’t put that here.

9 – I’m just saying, the terms here are very broad. Some of them.

1 – Broad terms, different definitions or expectations for the word preserve. And we haven’t. And that is acknowledging sort of a ‘down the rabbit hole’ of how do you define preserve. And we have another preserve that is not a full unit, but it is a portion within a state park, at Washington Crossing Historic Park. And it’s the Bowman’s Hill Wildflower Preserve in Bucks County. And they are a lessee of that property which is state park land since we have taken it. So preserve is challenging. So technically we created Vosburg Neck from a preserve that was being managed by a land conservancy.

9 – But White Clay Creek Preserve has a certain precedent and weight on the task at hand.

1 – I think (name, #2) said it to me as we were doing agenda setting, it ultimately isn’t necessarily in the designation but ultimately what we agree and define and how we manage it and what goes on it.

16 – So if this is an organic effort by the community who want to bring these amenities and these activities to this area, it would have been a different perception than if it was ‘hey we need help with trails and to manage this property. And as I see it, and I could be wrong, this situation that we’re in happened because you heard the 500 or 600 people from the greater community that were there. The greater community did not, they were totally happy with the way it was. Even though (name, #2) and his friend were having a hard time with the trails. I totally understand that. But that’s what, I think, is the organic feeling of the community. Not the infrastructure. Not the amenities. Not bringing everybody to this location. I mean, if they want to come they can come, but not to open the doors. If it happened in an organic effort and people were knocking on the door of state parks saying ‘hey we really want you to fix this’ it would have been a different story. But that is not, from what I’m gathering, what people were hoping would happen.

1 – This is something relatively new but its certainly worth explaining tonight to all of you. An additional land protection in the deed restriction is applied to a portion of Big Elk Creek State Park, but not the entirety of it. I think it’s Strawbridge 2 and 3 that it applies to. The Land and Water Conservation Fund. I’m not sure of your familiarity with this. But it’s federal funding from the Department of the Interior. Its been around since ’79 if I’m getting my year correct. And its gone into everything on the stateside funding from park infrastructure development to park acquisitions. And when that funding is applied to a project in the state, there are protections that go along with it. And you can’t deviate from the requirements of LWCF regarding a change of use of that property. You can’t move it out of the recreational portfolio into some type of commercial development without it being called out as a conversion. And that conversion then comes at a price for the agency that accepted that fund. Be it a

state agency or a municipal entity that acquires that fund for acquisition and development. One of the things that happened. Does that explain LWCF?

(Group – yes)

These are the parcels, this is Strawbridge 2 and 3. So this is the new boundary for LWCF protection on Big Elk Creek State Park.

14 – Is it the federal or the state funding involved here?

1 – Its LWCF federal protections that have been applied. I'm going to explain it in one of these slides coming up. So we did not use LWCF funds on Big Elk Creek State Park. We mitigated conversions that took place on DCNR land and placed the additional protection of LWCF to mitigate those conversions and thereby placing the protections on Big Elk Creek State Park. I wish I had the total acreages in my head – I want to say it's approximately 1000 acres. 985? Thank you.

“References to LWCF documentation and passive recreation is to equate the use of the lands that were converted had LWCF protections removed from them. It was not intended as restrictive that Strawbridge could only be for hiking, hunting and wildlife watching, nor since the converted lands were mostly passive use and the use of Strawbridge 2 and 3 at the time were similar, Strawbridge parcels were accepted as replacement land for those conversions that took place on Bureau of Forestry land and I believe a few other pieces of land that were associated with grants that were provided to municipalities. And we cleaned up those conversions in addition to the forestry land. Conversions on forestry land was DCNR calling out ourselves essentially. Saying we created conversions where we leased our forest lands for natural gas development. So its well pads and natural gas development that created those conversions. We mitigated that by placing the LWCF protections on Big Elk Creek, 1000 acres. 985.

14 – So if you change that then, how can you change the use? Say on that, to something that might be different? Like, I don't know, I'm just going to say a parking lot. Would that be a different use?

1 – No, that would not be considered a change in use. It's support for the public access, which is what LWCF is predicated on. The public access to those public lands and outdoor recreation in all of its many shapes and forms. So you put a McDonalds on it, or you lease it for an overnight accommodation, maybe that's not the best example. I'm thinking of municipal park land where they removed it from public access and use and some type of commercial activity was, again to generate revenue for the municipality that accepted those funds. So again, our sister Bureau of Forestry accepted those funds and 6M boundary goes around that portion of the ground.

18 – So just so I understand, these protections or this trade, is still active for this property here?

1 – It is permanent protections; additional protections on the ground. If we were to convert, or if we were to do something that were against the federal regulations for LWCF then we would be responsible for generating additional replacement land. Like if we moved it out of recreational use.

23 – I think the easiest thing is, if the Turnpike would divert down here and build a road right through the middle of the park. The Turnpike and us would have to come up with replacement lands. What we can do with LWCF, and I'm not suggesting we do this because I hate it too, we could put a swimming pool there. You'd still be okay to do that with LWCF. I'm not recommending that, but you could.

1 – We are not putting a swimming pool here. For the record. (laughing)

23 – Right, but it's some kind of infrastructure like that would be allowed.

15 – So its not actually protecting the land as far as development?

1 – It is preventing incompatible development. Development that would obstruct recreation and public access to it.

31 – I don't mean to delay this but I pulled it up. 28 different conversions and some of them were as small as a tenth of an acre. One of the examples is a county took LWCF funding for a park and rec feature, and on a portion of that land they built a fire station. I think we can all agree that's incredibly important work, but it's not public recreation so we accepted the mitigation for it.

1 – That's a good example, thank you for it. I just wanted everyone to understand the additional protections with the this property.

14 – Sorry, so what are the additional Land and Water Conservation Fund protections that are put on the property then? Just that is has to be accessible for recreation then?

1 – Yes, it has to be open to the public and accessible for recreation. And not, they call it, I'm going to get my federal language wrong here, if you change use away from that public recreational access, then it's a conversion.

Thank you for your conversation tonight and your questions and statements. As I said, I think we're going to get into the crux of the issues coming up and talk about how we're going to be managing, which is extricably tied to what we decide to improve for public access. And I think we're going to get into the thick of that at the next meeting. And as I noted, at the request of (name, #15) and her request to have someone from the Natural Heritage Program present for that discussion to answer your questions and maybe delve down into impacts. I know we got into some discussions around core habitat at the first meeting and we'll get into the thick of it at the third task force meeting.

18 – Two thoughts before we break for the evening. One, is it possible to get the breakdown of the funding for the acquisition of the property?

1 – Absolutely. We put it out a lot, but we will add that for you.

18 – You have been referring to yourself and the Task Force and given the scope of the project and that the Friends Group has been involved in the past, perhaps moving this from a Task Force to a long-term steering committee. So is that something that we could look at and that could be a part of this. Something that goes beyond just starting and ending here.

1 – We can take that into consideration and discuss that. But what that looks like and what that would take, the commitments that we require both from the people that are in this room tonight as well as others, I think we can have that discussion but not a commitment to do it.

2 – One possible avenue here; what I'm hearing is "I'd like to have a voice" and we could look to develop an ongoing Friends Group. We work very close here. And people always say 'well (name, #2), why don't you do this?' and its DCNR property and it's a relationship. We're a supporting role to DCNR's goals and objectives. But if there's something that comes up and (name, #24) or (name, #29) want to know the

Friends Group's opinion on that, we could certainly use that as a pop-up sounding board at our monthly meetings. I know (name, #1) said we can consider it, but I'm just offering up one avenue and I'll be passing out applications for membership soon (laughing). Comes with a small fee too!

11 – I just wanted to ask, have we now discussed the natural resources topic? Because I thought you said something earlier about talking about the forest management, the planting. Like I'm wondering if we'll come back to some of these discussions. Because I would love to talk more about some of these things.

1 – And I know there's valuable information you can communicate as we're working on those projects. But the timing in what we're accomplishing in each of the task force meetings, unless there's a specific request to include it on the agenda, then no.

11 – This is something you might have said earlier, but I'm sort of asking myself like, last meeting and this meeting, coming to the end and thinking "what did we do"? Like, what was our contribution, and what is the next thing? I know a lot of us have things to say and we're kind of unruly, but I'm wondering if we could set aside 10-15 minutes to recap what we discussed and what people can take from this meeting that will directly inform the next meeting and your next steps on the master plan.

1 – We can certainly do that, and I think that would be helpful. And again, contribution-wise, as I stated earlier, I think for the master plan, and the challenges will be coming up with how we're going to manage the park and the amenities we're going to place in the park. The resource work, certainly, if there's recommendations or requests for additional information, I think that could be added to the agenda but it would have to be specific. And even if we're on the infrastructure topic on July 1, if there is something that we need to discuss or provide clarity on regarding the resource work, we can work that into the agenda.

14 – Will we be reading the plan when everyone else is reading the plan? Or will we see it and have input into it first?

1 – That's a good question that I don't have the answer to. I will think about it.

23 – You're asking for the master plan. Based on the input we get from the task force, whatever revisions are made to the final draft of the master plan, you're asking if you can view it before we had a public presentation?

14 – Well I just want to know if we have input.

23 – I'm saying after the input you want to see the presentation before it goes to the public?

14 – That's what I'm saying but I know it takes a long time to make that happen.

1 – Yes, because you're informing it as we're moving through the next several meetings, that based on the timeline of the communication of that plan and the next public meeting of that plan that you have provided input on, you certainly have that and we can do that. Maybe that is sort of the culminating experience of this work.

14 – I think from my perspective, and I don't know where everyone else is coming from. Having written the coastal zone regulations for the State of Delaware, for instance, we had an advisory committee that we facilitated. And we had to use consultants to do that because it was very controversial but what we

did was, we structured a sort of give and take process for the advisory board. We had a series of topics that we needed to get input on and we asked then 'what do you think about this, this and this'. And then with that input we then gathered a draft on each of these various things and we said 'okay, here's what we're throwing at the wall, what do you guys think' and then they gave us feedback and we brought that back to the drawing board. Came back out with revised versions. So they had several bites of the apple along the way and when we got to the end we presented them with 'this is what our conceptual idea is; it's not the actual regulation' (I had to write those when we were all said and done), but here's the idea of where we're going to go with these regulations and does this reflect what you guys told us. And then they got the chance to again come back and tell us.

1 – It's ground truthing it.

14 – Yes, the process was sort of iterative. Visit it with the advisory committee, then do some things so that there was some give and take so you could see. I think that was my expectation, and I think that's what (name, #16) is asking too. When you get done, if this group gives some input on this thing, when you get to the end, is there going to be a draft that you're going to run by the group and say 'does this reflect the input you gave us', which is what I think we're asking.

1 – Yes, it will certainly require explanation, particularly if it's something where input was given but there was some change or deviation from that input. And certainly DCNR owes that explanation to this task force as we're going through it. I think as we get to the more challenging issues and topics, we're gaining that. It's going to be recorded in the meeting minute notes and we'll know where everyone stands and their position. But having that recapped at the end to contribute to the master plan and having you verify – like you're looking at the meeting minute notes and verifying that – yes, that is certainly on us to provide that to the task force and we will.

16 – We just wouldn't say it's our plan if we didn't understand it or get a chance to read it. I mean, I know it's your master plan but we were invited.

1 – Oh absolutely.

13 – I participated in the stakeholder meetings that were held here last summer. The landscape architect and the architect, they were both here. And are those two firms the firms that will be creating the master plan.

1 – Yes, still on contract. (name, #30) from (firm name) is sitting right there in the back right now. And (firm name) is the sub going the landscape architecture.

7 – Just to check, July 1 is a Monday.

25 – Yes, that is correct.

7 – There is a very small possibility that our state budget doesn't get passed.

1 – Anything else for the good of the order? Okay. This meeting is adjourned.

