

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MAKEFIELD
PARK & RECREATION BOARD
MINUTES – MARCH 9, 2010

The regular meeting of the Park & Recreation Board of the Township of Lower Makefield was held in the Municipal Building on March 9, 2010. Chairman Fritchey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Those present:

Park & Recreation Board: David Fritchey, Chairman
Patricia Bunn, Secretary (joined meeting in progress)
Dave Gordon, Member
Fran McDonald, Member
Andrew Newbon, Member
Dennis Wysocki, Member (joined meeting in progress)

Others: Donna Liney, Park & Recreation Director

Absent: Henry Carpenter, Park & Rec Board Vice Chair
Matt Maloney, Supervisor Liaison

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. McDonald moved, Mr. Gordon seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the February, 2010 Minutes as written.

FIVE MILE WOODS PRESERVE ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. John Heilferty, Naturalist, was present with Mr. John Lloyd and Ms. Jan McFarlan, Friends of the Five Mile Woods. Mr. Heilferty thanked the Park & Recreation Board and Ms. Liney and her crew for their support.

Mr. Wysocki joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Heilferty stated the Friends held their Annual meeting on February 24. Mr. Lloyd stated at that meeting they set their agenda for the year. He stated they will have volunteer work days the second Saturday of the month from March to November from 9 a.m. to Noon. He stated they are always looking for additional volunteers. Ms. McFarlan stated they had a number of National Honor Society members from Pennsbury help them as well. Mr. Lloyd stated typically they get between five to twenty

volunteers each time. Mr. Heilferty stated there is a core group of ten. Mr. Lloyd stated they also have Scouts who help, some of whom do major projects in the Woods. Mr. Lloyd stated this Sunday they will have the annual maple syrup demonstration from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. He stated last year they had over one hundred people in attendance. Mr. Lloyd stated they have two open house events each year where they have guided walks through the Woods one around Earth Day and the other just after Harvest Day. This year the dates are April 18 and September 26. Mr. Lloyd stated they also have other events throughout the year including Mr. Heilferty's frog walks.

Mr. Heilferty stated there are approximately 90 members of the Friends of the Five Mile Woods although they do not all attend all the events. He stated the Friends take care of maintenance and other needs that enhance the Woods along with Scout groups and Eagle Scouts.

Mr. Heilferty stated in 2011 it will be thirty years since the Township acquired the Five Mile Woods, and he is trying to think of something to do to honor this recognizing there is a limited budget.

Mr. Heilferty stated the Roving Nature Center continues to hold their program in the Woods in the summer. He stated they host this for eight weeks, and they do an excellent job. He stated they pay the Township the per person user fee which is \$12 for residents and \$24 for non-residents; and the Roving Nature Center supplies all the staff and materials. He stated the Five Mile Woods is their top venue because there is an indoor facility at the Five Mile Woods. Ms. McFarlan stated an additional benefit is that it acquaints the Township youth with the Five Mile Woods.

Ms. Bunn joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Heilferty stated this year he has also been able to fill the one week vacancy in the summer with a one-week camp in conjunction with Pennsbury School District. Mr. Heilferty stated he also continues to work with Eagles Scouts, and he is currently working with two Scouts one who is working on a garden area/bird feeder area and the other is doing trail work.

Mr. Heilferty stated they have officially gone through the monies which were allocated from the Grants thirty years ago, and they are now a line item in the Budget. He stated they do receive rents for the house on site which covers approximately one third to one half of what he spends in a year. He stated he would like to repair some windows and replace carpets which are thirty years old, but they are phasing these in slowly.

Mr. Heilferty stated they remain concerned about open space acquisition opportunities. He stated there is an existing property adjacent to the Woods which is nine acres; and while they listed it for sale some years ago, the developments plans did not come to fruition although this is still a possibility. He stated the Township Supervisors know that they are interested in this property if they are able to acquire it.

Mr. Heilferty discussed his Frog Squad, and stated he will offer a frog walk in the near future. Mr. Heilferty stated this year he hopes to work with the EAC who has an interest in making detention basins more natural, and he would like to work with them to see what amphibians could be provided habitat in these natural basins.

Mr. Heilferty stated there has been progress with regard to the deer problem. He stated the Township had retained Bryan Shissler to prepare a deer management program Township wide. Mr. Shissler had recommended a sharp shoot which is very efficient, although it is expensive, as the best way to remove deer in this environment. Mr. Heilferty stated the Board of Supervisors agreed to proceed and contracted with White Buffalo to do a deer management program Township wide. He stated the PA Game Commission has a requirement that anytime there is a sharp shoot, they must first demonstrate that they tried to do local hunting as a means of solving the problem. He stated Five Mile Woods became the site where they allowed the recreational effort preceding the sharp shoot. He stated the Big Oak White Tail Management bow hunters were permitted to come into the Five Mile Woods and manage themselves. Mr. Heilferty stated they were very professional and cooperative. Mr. Heilferty stated the time for the recreational hunt was eight weeks with two weeks on and two weeks off with no more than 24 archers who were prescreened for safety and competency to have access to the Woods which was divided into twelve different regions with each region to have only two hunters in each region per day. Mr. Heilferty stated they eventually removed 29 deer, 16 in the first two weeks with a dramatic lessening as the weeks progressed.

Mr. Heilferty stated the problem which was predicted by Mr. Shissler came to pass which is when you allow a number of hunters to hunt for that amount of time, the deer become accustomed to the hunting pressure and learn from it and they become more suburban and do not remain in the Woods. He stated they have found via cameras and the White Buffalo people sitting in the Woods that there were still groups of twenty deer in separate parts of the Woods after the Big Oak effort was over so they feel there were still 40 to 50 deer in the Woods. He stated White Buffalo was concerned that asking them to follow up in this situation with a sharp shoot really was laying the groundwork for an unsuccessful sharp shoot effort. He stated White Buffalo's efforts have been very successful when they are dealing with naïve deer who are not accustomed to hunting. He stated in the six other locations throughout the Township, White Buffalo has been very successful in removing deer. He stated this was not the case in Five Mile Woods, and in six nights, they removed eleven deer which, while it was a higher per day ratio than Big Oak, the White Buffalo people were not satisfied with this and felt this low number was a result of

the over hunting of the property. He stated Township wide White Buffalo has been very successful and they will have documented numbers to share; and when those numbers are compared to Five Mile Woods which was the only site to have archery first as well as property owners surrounding the Five Mile Woods who hunt over bait, it will show that this had an impact on their success in the Five Mile Woods. He stated people from White Buffalo indicated they did see a group of twenty deer in the Woods, but they would not approach the bait. He stated he feels they will be able to address this better in the future to make it more successful. Mr. Heilferty stated the Fish and Wildlife Service has reports that indicate that a square mile of habitat should have twelve to fifteen deer so with forty to fifty deer still in the Five Mile Woods, this is too many. He recommended that they pursue deer management again next year.

Mr. Heilferty stated last year they started a vegetation sampling protocol and a botanist from Bowman's Hill did a five day survey which has created a good baseline of vegetation. He stated they will do three more spring time surveys. He stated Rick Mellon did a vegetation survey thirty years ago so that they can do some comparisons. He stated the base line being done now will provide data to compare to changes in the vegetation that seem to reflect management of the deer population so they may see some of the more desirable plants rebounding. Ms. Bunn asked why they did not go back and use Rick Mellon again, and Mr. Heilferty stated they went with Bowman's Hill because they have an actual procedure where they will do this survey and there is a species list and each species is assigned a certain rank based on how unique of a habitat it requires to thrive.

Mr. Fritchey asked if they have any plans to do planting in the Woods, and Mr. Heilferty stated they do not as this is against the original management plan and philosophy of the Woods which is not to interfere to any great extent although they do fight invasive species. Ms. McFarlan stated they are hoping that once the deer stop eating everything, many of the plants will come back. Mr. Heilferty stated most of the plants have not disappeared entirely although the deer do eat the blooms which does not permit the species to thrive. He stated they have twelve, ten meter square plots established in the Woods and they will check these each year to see what is coming back, and this will be a good indicator that something in the Woods has changed and the plant survey will help them to quantify this. He stated the Five Mile Woods is a half square mile and if you add the surrounding open space there is approximately another half square mile. He stated they know that the number of deer still in the Woods is too many for the size of the tract. He stated the deer exclosures have been up for eight to nine years, and they can see the number of plants that have been able to come back in these exclosures while adjacent to them outside of the exclosures there is almost nothing. He added that rebound of the plants will take years.

Mr. Newbon asked if they have heard anything further about advancements in contraceptives that are approved for use by the FDA. Mr. Heilferty stated they had discussions about this a year or two ago and at that time there was an experimental product, but the FDA had not yet approved this since game animals can legally be eaten by people and they need to make sure that nothing has been used on a deer that would not be able to be consumed. Ms. Bunn stated the problem is that other wildlife could get into this if it was a salt lick. Mr. Heilferty stated if you were able to get a permit to try a contraceptive, you would have to inoculate the deer and mark it and this causes stress to the animal, takes time, and is expensive. Mr. Heilferty stated the reason the Five Mile Woods was first purchased was because of the uniqueness of the plants. He stated during some of the work days this year he hopes to install some more deer exclosures. Mr. Lloyd stated the deer management plan is a multi-year plan, and they need to be able to stay on the plan and use the plan they paid for. He feels they can do a better job of this next year. Mr. Lloyd asked how much longer White Buffalo will be in the Woods, and Mr. Heilferty stated he understands that they have shut the program down because they did not feel it was worth pursuing any further. Mr. Heilferty stated they did offer to assist in the management of public hunt, but this did not occur and Big Oak White Tail Management managed themselves, and he feels that in the future they could still meet the Game Commission requirements to hold a public hunt but it should be more scaled down and White Buffalo should be involved in the management of the hunt. Ms. Bunn asked if they would have to have a public hunt every year, and Mr. Heilferty stated this is a Game Commission requirement, but he feels the eight week program was too extensive.

RECREATION DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Liney stated the contractor has started repairs to the two hooded backstops at the Roelofs complex which were damaged by the February snowstorm. This work is scheduled to be completed by March 19th, and it is expected that the repairs will be covered by the Township insurance policy.

Ms. Liney stated the spring permits are being issued to the user groups. Field space continues to be a challenge based on multiple use requests for limited resources as well as the ability to perform the necessary maintenance for turf recovery on the fields.

Ms. Liney stated that due to the severe winter, the park crew is getting a later start with field preparations for spring play. Material to slit seed has been ordered. The park crew has begun dragging infields and setting bases. New batteries have been placed in all light timers. The Township will do everything possible to keep the fields on target for play by March 27.

Ms. Liney stated they will begin opening restroom facilities in the parks the end of March.

Ms. Liney stated that Pool membership registration for the discount period ended this past Friday with a 5% increase in registrants over this period last year. The Pool service company is scheduled to begin servicing the complex the end of March. She stated that in light of the very qualified, experienced staff returning to the Pool this year, it is anticipated that they will have very limited opportunities for new hires at this time. Pool management expects to be able to staff all openings with returning staff. She stated the Pool received over 45 new applications this year. Ms. Liney noted that the new guest booklets for the Pool are being well received, with sales of 50 booklets to date.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. McDonald stated the Township staff did a great job getting the roads cleared after the recent snow storms. Ms. Liney stated she will pass this on to the crew.

LEAGUE LIAISON REPORT

Mr. Wysocki stated a lot of play is taking place on the turf field and there are a number of people who have expressed concern with the bleachers which are small and this field would benefit from a grandstand type set up. Ms. Liney stated YMS has discussed this, and the cost would be very expensive. Mr. McDonald stated there have also been discussions about selling bricks and from the fence back there could be a place to stand so that you are not standing in mud.

There being no further business, Mr. Newbon moved, Ms. Bunn seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia Bunn, Secretary