

2015 Annual Report — Hammock Advisory Committee

February 16, 2016

The Hammock Advisory Committee (HAC) meets concurrently with the Friends of the Hammock, Inc. (FotH) every second Monday at 6:30 PM, at the Dunedin Community Center. Lalena Sheets (Parks and Recreation) attends the meetings as our liaison to Dunedin Parks and Recreation. Sue Gow serve as liaison to the Storm Water Committee. Ellie Keithly is liaison with the Environmental Quality Committee. Vince Gizzi, Director, attends on occasion as well as other interested persons and guests.

Two years ago, plans were laid by both groups to assist the City for the scientific update of the Hammock Park management plan. We are glad to see the plan finalized and the beginnings of implementation.

The first tangible evidence to us of the plan in action has been in the selection of plants to remove as part of the FotH Adoption Program. The updated Adoption Program officially began February 6, and has a new approach. The management plan delineates the park into 16 zones, and volunteers have been recruited to work a specific zone. They are trained to recognize, report and remove invasive species, and are being introduced to new tasks such as the creation of a photo archive to monitor the re-growth of native plants as they reclaim their place in the Hammock, the monitoring of gopher tortoise population and activity within a zone, and the measuring of water table levels within the park to record the status of rehydration efforts. Volunteers work on their own schedule as their time allows. Several volunteers have been assigned to work each zone. As of February 2016, 10 of these zones are ready for Adoption, and most have already been filled.

The Asian Air Potato Leaf Beetle (*Lilioceris cheni*) introduced to control the destructive invasive air potato plant in 2013 (championed by the FotH) are continuing to be a very important tool in the war on the destructive Air Potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*). In fact for the first time in many years, the Air Potato pick-up was cancelled. In it's place, the Friends of the Hammock will be focusing on the next-in-line invasives that need removal, and will do so in conjunction with the Adoption Program activities.

Of concern to both groups is the 7.41 acres of wooded land at the southeastern end of the park offered to the City in November 2015 by Our Lady of Lodes (OLL) Catholic Church. Initial reports from Parks & Recreation was that there was no money in the budget to secure any of it. This area is home to many of the gopher tortoises and plant species that are beneficial to the park. **We hope due consideration is given to this situation.** We also agree that a proper appraisal be undertaken. Perhaps exploration of using a part of the \$2.9 million in BP oil spill money earmarked for environmental issues as well as other avenues should be undertaken to preserve this large parcel that directly adjoins the park's southern border.

Also up for proposal was the remaining Harris tract that includes a house at the southern end of Lake Suemar. Naturally, we approve any consideration for action towards securing this parcel as well, but agree with the City's evaluation that this parcel is not critical to the environmental health of the nearby park at this time.

The FotH 'Benchmark' fund raising project has 'sold' 21 of 22 benches. It was a most successful program with Pat Jennings overseeing it. New benches were installed for a \$1,000 donation, and FotH worked closely with HAC to ensure they fit the park aesthetic. The total net raised was \$7,828 with \$ 5,000 being donated to the Fifty for Fern (Fern trail improvement) project launched in January 2016.

The FotH continues to be very active in public outreach and education. Efforts that began in 2015 for an updated informational signage network was concluded in January 2016 with the installation of colorful interpretive signs in key points of the 3 major trails. Costs were shared by the FotH and the City. On-going efforts include maintenance of the 4 public kiosks and maps in the park, group activities, and publishing newsletters in the Spring, Fall & Winter.

The bird banding Sundays led by Jim McGinity, Environmental Education Consultant, continue to be well received by the public. HAC recommends continued support for these efforts as they involve the public and create enthusiasm for the park and it's groups. Attendees are treated to an expert guided tour along Hammock Trails exploring the flora, fauna and ecology of the forest in the springtime.

A sensitive area near Gopher Tortoise trail was secured with a fence last year in 2014, and HAC approves of the continuing monitoring of this, as well as the gopher tortoises themselves. (Several were found dead in 2013.)

We thank the Commission for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Steve Fasnacht
Chairperson, Hammock Advisory Committee