



2021

NATURAL AREAS ASSOCIATION
YEAR - END REVIEW

natural
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ASSOCIATION

2021 YEAR-END REVIEW

The NAA was founded on the principle that when we work together as a community of engaged peers and professional colleagues, the combined effort will have a tremendous impact on the protection, management and restoration of natural areas.

As we reflect back on 2021, we are inspired by the fact that even though the world was challenged by a pandemic, land management and conservation professionals persevered, never relenting in the protection and management of the land in their care. Our industry, like so many others, faced layoffs, hiring freezes, financial cutbacks, operational restrictions and facility closures. These changes impacted so many aspects of our lives, but not our commitment to protect the natural areas we manage. The circumstances brought new challenges, and the NAA rose to meet them.

During 2020 and 2021, while small nonprofit organizations were struggling with the unprecedented circumstances, NAA's staff proved to be creative and nimble, adapting quickly to an uncertain economic environment. As it became apparent that our traditional, in-person events for which we depended on revenue were not going to happen, NAA made the bold decision to monetize the programs that had previously been offered free of charge. However, along with that strategy, NAA embraced a policy to provide complimentary registration to any practitioners who were not able to pay the fee upon request. An inability to pay should not be a barrier to access.

NAA's response was not only related to programming, but in all areas such as operations and finance, grants and contributor management, and marketing and communications. From cutting expenses, a freeze on hiring, and closing the physical office location, to establishing new sources of earned revenue, securing government emergency funding (PPP), and contacting donors and underwriters to adjust donor intent such that the funds could be utilized within the new climate, NAA ended the 2020 fiscal year in a better position than anticipated.

In addition, the positive financial impact of our new business model put us in a better position enabling the organization to take a part-time program coordinator position to a full-time position managing marketing, communications and programming. The increased capacity allowed NAA to rapidly accelerate the organization's use of technology as a vehicle for programming and service delivery and to communicate with our stakeholders on a more regular basis. More programming in an accessible format and frequent communication resulted in increased engagement with NAA stakeholders. As added programming increased the value of engaging with NAA, membership became more attractive. NAA grew by 30% during 2021.

Increased capacity and additional programming has enabled NAA to improve the organization’s website (naturalareas.org) so that in addition to providing information, it has transitioned into an outlet for program and service delivery. Along with upgraded branding and design, the website is fresh, attractive and engaging to members and non-members alike. According to Google Analytics, NAA’s website traffic has increased during 2021 compared to 2020.

WEBSITE TRAFFIC	2021	2020
users ↑ 57.8%	49,268	31,219
new users ↑ 60.3%	49,294	30,755
sessions ↑ 39.7%	65,364	46,781
page views ↑ 11.5%	171,377	153,667

The NAA website also provides access to archived resources that are available for on-demand access by members, along with attracting additional related works from presenters, partners and other land management organizations. During 2022, the NAA will focus on building a searchable resource library on the website that will include publicly-available and paid-access materials for those who focus on the conservation of ecologically-significant resources.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

During 2021, NAA launched a strategic planning initiative designed to build upon the achievements of the organization over the past five years. This initiative will focus on creation and implementation of a business plan driven by strategic goals that will promote financial sustainability.

To lead this effort, NAA engaged a strategic planning consultant. After circulating a Request for Qualifications and interviewing three highly recommended candidates, the organization selected Shelli Bischoff, President & CEO, Conservation Impact. Shelli has more than 35 years of experience and an established track record of helping organizations in the conservation space produce powerful results.

NAA is now equipped with a Strategic Business Plan that is the culmination of the strategic planning process of August to December, 2021. The Plan represents input from 38 interviews, rigorous market analysis, and the conclusions of a virtual board and staff retreat. The Plan defines strategic direction to refresh NAA programs, products and services to impact biodiversity protection and to reach a broader audience of practitioners who have a responsibility for the stewardship of ecologically significant natural landscapes.

STEWARDSHIP IN ACTION FIELD WORKSHOPS

NAA hosted the first in-person workshop in two years on September 29 & 30, 2021. ***Sustainable Summits: Managing Public Access for the Protection of Rare Plant Communities***, developed in partnership with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VA DCR), was held in Dublin, VA. Small by design due to physical limitations of the field sites and a commitment to observed public-safety protocols due to the surge of the Delta variant, the field workshop included 12 participants from Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, along with 6 presenters and NAA staff.

As a new feature of the field workshop strategy, NAA secured underwriting to provide for the addition of a videographer to film both the classroom and field site presentations during the in-person event. Collecting video footage of the workshop experience will allow NAA to host a subsequent **Stewardship in Action Virtual Field Workshop** via Zoom. This effort will not only increase access to the innovative concepts and approaches to the public access management issue, but it will also expand the opportunity for collaboration and collective learning related to this timely and relevant topic. NAA will host the live, two-hour virtual field workshop on January 25, 2022.

Based upon the success of both the in-person and virtual programs, NAA hopes to include videography to expand access to regional field workshops in order to continue to increase the organization's resource library of quality science, new methodologies and emerging best practices for those who steward natural areas around North America.

The 2021 Natural Areas Conference (NAC21), *Life from the Ashes: Exploring the Impact of Prescribed & Natural Fire on Insects and Other Invertebrates*, was held on Tuesday, October 19, 2021 in partnership with the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. The agenda was a deep dive into a timely topic, considering the positive and negative impacts of prescribed and natural fire related to insects and other invertebrates in landscapes across North America, providing research and practical insights to inform natural areas professionals as they manage landscapes with fire.

A completely virtual, five-hour event, NAC21 had the highest conference registration numbers in many years, capping at 654. Participant segmentation included approximately half members and half non-members. In an effort to maximize participation, the NAA opted for affordable registration fees, and offered Early Bird rates to encourage early registration.

NAA also added a new feature to the NAC21, Stewardship Shorts. Stewardship Shorts are brief 3 to 5 minute, pre-recorded video presentations that describe a project, methodology, best practice or challenge related to a natural area(s) and can focus on any area of conservation ecology. These "vlogs" are an opportunity to share with and learn from colleagues so that they can become a resource to each other. NAA received eleven submissions, and six of the Stewardship Shorts were highlighted during conference breaks. All eleven Stewardship Shorts are now available on the NAA website and can be viewed here.

2021 ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

NAA recognized two new recipients of the George B. Fell and Carl N. Becker awards during 2021. Recipients were announced during the 2021 Natural Areas Conference; however, the awards will be presented during the 2022 Natural Areas Conference in Duluth where we will celebrate both the 2021 and 2022 awardees during the annual awards dinner.

The NAA was delighted to celebrate the achievements of Lifetime Member, Dr. Glenn Juday, Professor Emeritus, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 2021 recipient of the George B. Fell Award for Lifetime Achievement, and Ken McCarty, Natural Resource Management Program Director, Missouri State Parks, 2021 recipient of the Carl N. Becker Stewardship Award.



WEBINARS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

NAA offered 10 webinars during 2021 compared to 11 in 2020 due to a decision not to host a webinar during September in order to focus on marketing the 2021 NAC virtual event during October.

NAA also hosted a virtual Earth Day Symposium, *Nature's Firefighters: The Role of Beavers in Wildfire Mitigation and Recovery*, on April 22, charging both non-members and members to participate. This two-hour program featured respected researchers and was facilitated by well-known journalist and author, Ben Goldfarb. Ben is the author of *Eager: The Surprising Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*.

STATE NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM (SNAP)

During 2021 NAA hosted quarterly State Natural Areas Program (SNAP) Roundtables virtually. This program is led by Mike Leahy, Missouri Department of Conservation; Bill Hollimon, Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission; Ryan Klopf, Virginia Natural Heritage Program; and Jason Miller, Tennessee Division of Natural Areas.

The February, May and August Roundtables focused on a particular topic of interest to state natural areas program managers. **Topics included:**

- ❖ The Role of Groundwater in Natural Areas Stewardship (August)
- ❖ Advances in Herbicide Application for Invasive Species Control and Lessons-Learned from Practitioners (May)
- ❖ The Role of State Natural Areas in Invertebrate Conservation (February)

In addition to time for open discussion, during the August Roundtable, NAA invited state natural area program practitioners to submit five-minute, pre-recorded presentations of projects to share with their peers. These presentations were also included in the NAC21 Stewardship Shorts.

The final Roundtable in November was the annual State Natural Areas Program Reports. Typically held in person during the annual conference, the virtual event was different, but still highly successful. Twelve states submitted pre-recorded state natural areas reports including, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. **These reports are available for viewing here.**

C O N T R A C T E D S E R V I C E S - P A B O T A N Y S Y M P O S I U M

NAA coordinated the **Pennsylvania Botany Symposium (PA Botany)**. Due to COVID concerns, the planning committee determined that it did not make sense to host the event in person. As such, the NAA assisted PA Botany by coordinating three webinars (April, June & October) and a four-hour virtual symposium in November.

TYPE	EVENT	DATE	REGISTERED	ATTENDED LIVE	RECORDING VIEWS	TOTAL VIEWS
WEBINAR	Design and establishment of seed mixes for prairie restoration	06/17/2021	88	39	41	80
WEBINAR	Implications of climate change for invasive species	04/09/2021	69	29	61	90
WEBINAR	Small and Surrounded	10/07/2021	89	36	32	68
SYMPOSIUM	PA Botany Virtual Symposium	11/06/2021	165	100	60	160



CONTACT US

Gifts to NAA will support those who are on the front lines of protecting our natural areas, preserving biodiversity, and ensuring that all species survive for generations to come. Please add your voice, because nature cannot speak for itself.

Join/Renew

Becoming a member is the easiest way to support our mission – and to benefit from all we offer.

Invest

Your gift to NAA supports programming like workshops, webinars, and the *Natural Areas Journal*.

For more information on how to support

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