

## ConsCom Performance

The ConsCom Performance Survey questions were sent to all Conservation Committee members – Group representatives, Issue Team/Campaign representatives, at-large members -- and 17 people on the “ConsCom extended” google group list, a total of 40 persons. Twenty-one responded, including:

- 10 Group representatives or alternates for eight of the Groups<sup>1</sup>
- 7 representatives of 9 Issue and Campaign Teams<sup>2</sup>
- 4 other ConsCom members or attendees.

Nine of the 21 respondents had been to 3 or more of the 5 ConsCom meetings held March 2019-March 2020, while twelve had attended only 1-2 meetings. Attendance increased over time. Seven or eight of the respondents attended each of the first three meetings in 2019, while 12 respondents attended the December 2019 and 17 attended the March 2020 meetings. This can be explained in part by the appointment of a number of Group and Team/Campaign representatives in early 2020.

The ConsCom performance survey included only five questions, covering: the respondent’s degree of understanding of the purpose, responsibilities, and ground rules of the ConsCom; the strengths of the ConsCom; the weaknesses; the frequency of meetings; and suggestions to improve the value and effectiveness of the ConsCom for the Chapter Conservation Program. The answers to these questions are provided below.

### 1. On a scale of 1-5 with 1=not at all and 5=very well, how well do you feel you understand the purpose, responsibilities, and ground rules of the ConsCom?

Overall, about half of the 21 respondents and of the 10 Group representatives reported that they understood at least moderately the purpose, responsibilities, and ground rules of the ConsCom (Table 1a, score of 3-5). Understanding was lower among Issue Team/Campaign reps (two of the seven representatives).

**Table 1a. Half of respondents reported at least moderate understanding of the purpose, responsibilities, and ground rules of the Conservation committee**

Respondent type	Level of Understanding				
	1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very well)
Group reps (n=10)	1	4	3 <sup>a</sup>	2	
Teams/Camp (n=7)	2	3	1		1
Others (n=4)		1	1	1	1
<b>Total (n=20)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>

a. Includes a response of 3.5, with the comment: “There needs to be more clarity on scope of the committee, responsibility of members, how they are appointed, who votes and how”

<sup>1</sup> The survey was sent to 13 people representing 10 Groups. Responses were received from representatives of all but the Greater Baltimore and Western Maryland Groups.

<sup>2</sup> Responses were not received from the Pesticides Campaign or the 100% Renewable Energy Campaign.

The level of understanding was higher among those who had attended more meetings. Only five of the twelve respondents who had attended 1-2 ConsCom meetings reported at least moderate understanding of the purpose, responsibilities, and ground rules of the ConsCom, compared with 5/9 respondents who had attended 3-5 meetings.

**Table 1b. Understanding was higher among those who had attended 3 or more meetings, but still not universal**

No. of ConsCom meetings attended	Level of Understanding				
	1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very well)
1-2 meetings (n=11)	2	5	3 <sup>a</sup>	2	
3-5 meetings (n=9)	1	3	2	1	2

a. See the footnote to Table 1a.

## 2. What have been the major strengths or achievements of the ConsCom over the past year?<sup>3</sup>

The major achievement cited by respondents was improved communication across teams, campaigns, and Groups, though two respondents questioned whether these efforts had improved outcomes. Respondents also noted that this was a “reboot” of the committee, an achievement itself, but that the ConsCom wasn’t completely operating for the entire time.

### ***Communication/information sharing***

- The strengths are to bring people together to communicate and share info and ideas.
- Sharing ideas
- Bringing group representatives together and creating a space for anyone who wants to share information.
- It was an important forum for communication across issue teams that enable the consideration of intersections among issues and developing a more integrated perspective as priorities were identified.
- A major strength was in getting all teams represented and talking to one another, and in encouraging each team to have a full campaign plan. Not aware what actual achievements there were.
- The ConsCom has sought to share info across campaigns and across Groups, and has sought to support and assist environmental activism by the campaigns and Groups. However, I have not seen that these efforts have had much, if any, tangible results.
- It was somewhat successful in terms of facilitating the exchange of information between issue teams and between teams and Groups. The issue teams might need to confer more frequently, however, and at not such a long meeting. The Zero Waste Team has “leads” from 7 of the 9 Groups, so I didn’t benefit much from the information exchange with the Groups. There was more value to me of hearing what other Issue Teams were doing.
- The quarterly opportunity to convene with issue team leaders that were otherwise completely inaccessible to groups in rural counties.
- Really did this group have any meaningful impact or create better collaboration anywhere?

<sup>3</sup> Eighteen of the 21 respondents answered this question.

***Establishment of the new ConsCom***

- Just getting it up and running and now the outreach to the teams and groups
- 2019 was a reboot year so this is hard to answer. There is value in the conversations. Before the pandemic hit there wasn't enough time to get the reboot fully going.
- Much of the year the ConsCom was inoperable

***Other strengths or achievements***

- A couple of people in the committee have been strong participants and leaders, especially in the plastic use/ban area.
- Re-evaluation of structure and function
- Unify, prioritize, and consolidate the SC chapter goals.
- The September and December meetings gave opportunities to include a virtual component for those from further away. The December meeting featured the new "Owl" technology and was a positive experience for those on the web end.
- Good meetings
- Leading BioBlitz campaign which was great way to be outdoors during pandemic. Providing meeting time personal support as everyone struggled to adjust. Facilitating technology transitions with Zoom and videos. Professional behavior during transition.

**3. What have been the weaknesses?<sup>4</sup>**

The major weaknesses cited by respondents were: lack of clarity on the purpose of the ConsCom, its role vis-à-vis the ExCom, and governance structure; lack of specific action, decisions, or results; low relevance or value added to Groups or Issue Teams; disappointment/undervalue of some volunteer leaders; and financing/budgeting issues.

***Lack of clarity on purpose and governance***

- I really have no idea what [the ConsCom] does.
- Lack of clearly described purpose and responsibilities, the role of the Committee vis-a-vis the Conservation Program, the decisions it is authorized to make.
- I was never clear on the boundaries between the Conservation Committee and the ExCom with respect to decision-making because conservation is the core mission of the Sierra Club.
- Clarity on structure, role and responsibilities is important and would be helpful to have.
- I read all of the documents and principles, and yet I do not feel that I understand whether the ConsCom was a decision-making body and if so what its delineated responsibilities were. It seemed from the meetings that the only purpose was to gather together leaders from each issue team and group to talk.
- Lack of guidance on the structure of Issue Teams and their responsibilities, and the requirement that each one designate a member to recruit volunteers. People join issue teams to work on issues, not to recruit (unfortunately). Many have difficulties even getting a Secretary.
- There is very little accountability for the Issue Teams – they are supposed to put together annual goals and a work plan, but there's no requirement to report back on what was achieved, at least not in the principles document. There should be some minimum standard that assures accountability and transparency for the issue teams, with guidelines on structure.

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<sup>4</sup> Seventeen of the 21 respondents answered this question.

- There's no specific description of the responsibilities of a Campaign Chair and how they relate to the Issue Committees.

### ***Inaction***

- No action items coming out of meetings / no action taken by the Cons Com. (3 responses)
- There were no decision-making points so there was never a fully conclusive direction.
- The ConsCom meetings typically have been long (3+ hours), but the lengthy discussion and sharing have not, in my view, resulted in much, if any, concrete action that otherwise would not have occurred with regard to advancing our conservation goals. It is not clear to me that bringing 15-20 people together for a long meeting is generally the way to move our conservation goals forward.
- The committee never really became organized over the past year, so it has not been very effective. This is not due to any person or group in the ConsCom, it is because it has not been a priority for the Chapter ExCom.
- Did this group have any meaningful impact or create better collaboration anywhere?

### ***Low relevance/value added***

- The discussions were very much procedure/policy oriented (and maybe that is needed in the beginning), but I feel that this discussion is less important to the mission of the groups.
- The ConsCom hasn't really provided much value – at least to those issue committees that already had a campaign plan

### ***Leadership***

- Controversy and division regarding leadership. Some volunteers have felt undervalued
- There has been tension and conflict, and people get discouraged and drop out. There are power issues.
- Negativity amongst volunteers or from volunteers towards staff was not addressed. Everyone was welcome to give their opinion but no one was ever politely asked to evaluate their impact on others when they were speaking at great length during the meetings I observed. There were no equity norms, or if they were shared at the prior meetings they were not observed in action.
- Leadership burnout.

### ***Budgeting, finance***

- The leadership team made a good faith effort to get teams involved in the planning and budgeting process, but my understanding is that this didn't produce much.
- Funding to actually get things done seems to be a problem
- The process for accessing the \$5000 budget allocation was an afterthought, and it served as a (second) special projects fund (beyond the existing special project fund that the ExCom controls) instead of financing the programmed activities of the Issue Teams. There was no deadline for submittal of proposals, so they were discussed and approved as they arrived, risking that the money might not be there if something better and more relevant came along later. The allocation wasn't tied to the planning and budgeting process of the Issue Teams. Of course, this was an unusual year, but these concerns were apparent before the Covid epidemic

### ***Other weaknesses***

- The regular convening of the ConsCom did not make the issue teams any more accessible or welcoming to local group volunteers between quarterly meetings.
- Long meetings far from home

- Time is likely the biggest weakness, there just isn't enough of it.

**4. In 2019-20, the ConsCom met quarterly, in person. Is this too frequent? Not frequent enough? Just right? What frequency would you recommend?**

From March 2019-March 2020, the ConsCom met quarterly, all but the last meeting in person.<sup>5</sup> Almost half of the respondents thought this was “just right,” but an equal number favored more frequent meetings – including retaining the larger quarterly meetings with sub-group meetings, phone calls, a listserv, or other communication in-between (Table 2). It was also noted that the frequency depends on the ConsCom’s purpose and responsibilities – more frequent meetings of the voting membership might be necessary for decision-making; monthly calls between the quarterly meetings would facilitate information-sharing.

**Table 2. Frequency of ConsCom meetings**

Frequency	Responses	Comments/suggestions
Too frequent	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twice/year as a body (1 response)</li> </ul>
Not frequent enough	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly (1 response)</li> <li>• Every other month; bimonthly until reestablishment, have a forum listserv (2 responses)</li> <li>• Monthly for general meetings, more often for specific project issued</li> <li>• For in-person, quarterly, but virtual in-between, 6-8 times/year</li> <li>• Just right, but might need work of subgroups between meetings.</li> <li>• The frequency depends on the purpose and responsibilities of the ConsCom. If it were debating decisions, policies, sign-on letters, making recommendations to the ExCom, then it probably should be meeting more frequently. For sharing information on activities, it might be worth having monthly calls.</li> <li>• It depends on what the purpose of the ConsCom is. If it is simply a quarterly conference, then that is fine, though agenda planning will be necessary in-between each conference and I'd suggest that at least 1 of the 4 meetings be integrated with existing chapter events, such as an orientation or leadership retreat. If the ConsCom has any particular responsibilities or decision-making piece, it must meet more regularly. At minimum, 6 times per year.</li> </ul>
Just right	8	
Other	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More zoom meetings like the last ConsCom meeting would reduce the time and travel burden – save the face-to-face meetings for a once a year retreat.</li> <li>• Quarterly might be OK - if I could see some value to the meetings</li> <li>• Not familiar enough to answer this question (attended only one meeting).</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> The March 2020 meeting was virtual due to the coronavirus epidemic.

**5. What suggestions do you have, if any, on improving the value and effectiveness of the ConsCom for the Chapter Conservation Program? Are there other structures that would be more effective?<sup>6,7</sup>**

***Responsibilities/Expectations of the ConsCom***

- In my view, the conservation committee should set overall direction for Sierra Club conservation/policy/legislative work across the state, share ideas with groups on the issues they work on, and provide support to the groups seeking help with their campaigns on an as-needed basis. There should be “go-to” folks who can help out with different campaigns just the way the zero waste campaign works, which works very well! They should also help with recruitment and identify folks in the state who could help with our work.
- Having a Committee can be effective if it is clear on the objectives, roles and responsibilities and members have a vote in the process. Having Conservation Chair / Co-Chairs who can organize regular meetings, bring group chairs, Chapter committee Chairs and campaign leads together to strategize and support goals of the Chapter Cons Com but also synchronize efforts for grant giving, training and other resources would be helpful. Policy and guidelines are needed to have clarity on the role of the Cons Com and how it will support the groups / Committees / Campaigns. Policies should also include accountability that each member and group will have to support the overall ConsCom goals and how it ties into the legislative priorities / advocacy efforts for SC MD
- Communicate with groups about structure, function and resources available.
- Structure the to-do's for the Committee to complete. What conservation priorities should we have?

***ConsCom membership and size***

- The committee seemed rather large. Perhaps there could be a rep from each group and choose among those a point person for each issue, rather than having both group and issue reps. Defining roles better might prevent some difficulties.
- The membership seems to have morphed from a handful of appointed people who are the Conservation Steering Committee to a large membership with a representative of each Group and each Issue Team or campaign, all of them approved by the ExCom. It should be possible to have a regular exchange of information among all of these categories of people without the formality of appointment. What the ConsCom really needs is a core team that shares the functional responsibilities of the Committee vis-à-vis the needs of the Conservation Program.

***Structure***

- **More engagement by Conservation Chair(s) and issue campaigns, less emphasis on the ConsCom.** It may be more productive to have the Cons Chair(s) work separately with campaigns and Groups to support, facilitate, and advise their work, monitor what they are and are not doing, seek to address problems and bring problems to the attention of Chapter leadership (staff & volunteers) when necessary, and coordinate the conservation work among different campaigns and Groups. In other words, I believe we need activist, hands-on Cons Chair(s), and that there is a limited role for the ConsCom as a large body. Put differently, the ConsCom might consist of reps from issue campaigns and Groups, along with at-large ex-officio members (e.g., the Leg Chair & Political Chair), and the

<sup>6</sup> Fifteen respondents answered this question.

<sup>7</sup> I've tried to group these together and underscore or summarize the main points for easy reading, but there are lots of comments that cut across issues. Bolded headings are my attempt to summarize; underlining is of the original comments.

issue campaigns would be viewed as ConsCom subcommittees. So the work of the issue campaigns would be essentially the work of the ConsCom, not that the ConsCom as a body would in any way micro-manage the issue campaigns; this also could get around the Bylaw requirement, which we have been consistently violating, that Chapter committee members must be approved by the ExCom

- **Better defined roles within the Conservation Program, addition of Subject Matter Experts.** One of the reasons I was excited about the Conservation Committee was that I saw it as a chance to address the interconnectedness issue. For me, the focus of the Sierra Club needs to be on Climate Change. All of our committees and campaigns address a part of this issue. However, where do the intersections get addressed? I see this occurring in two ways: through an entity such as the Conservation Committee and through digital tools. I suggest the following structures and definitions: (which we mostly have): 1) ExCom – Overall operation of the chapter; 2) Conservation Committee – Looks at the big picture across committees and campaigns. Identifies gaps that need addressed. Also, reaches out to neighboring states for opportunities to partner where issues cross our state borders. 3) {XYZ} Committee – A standing committee that address an area long term. 4) {XYZ} Campaign – A campaign has a start and an end to address some item. A campaign may grow into a committee if the topic and interest are broad enough. 5) SMEs – Subject Matter Experts are folks that are identified, and while they may be focused on a committee or campaign, their expertise may be useful across the chapter. Expertise does not need to be issue oriented. We could have SMEs for Social Media, Outings, Fundraising/Grant Writing, Video Production, etc. ... If you have questions on my comments, I'd be happy to have a conversation on this.
- **Engaging Subject Matter Experts.** Being a volunteer-driven organization is Sierra Club's greatest strength and also its greatest weakness as many environmental issues require subject matter expertise. The Conservation Committee can provide a mechanism for effectively engaging and getting input from those with Subject Matter Expertise on issues that are not necessarily the focus of statewide campaigns – and help to build the capacity of volunteers.
- **Clarify accountability points to the ExCom; consider alternative structures.** Purpose and clear accountability points to the ExCom would be necessary to improve the value and effectiveness. I have also considered a few other structures: a “new projects committee”...that would review proposals and determine if we have the funds and volunteer interest across the chapter to launch new programs; a conservation budget committee that would review funding requests for existing campaigns; a “sign-on letter review committee; a quarterly conservation campaign webinar with space and time at the end for a “show & tell” from other organizations.

### ***Strengthening Group Conservation Programs and Issue Teams***

- Local priorities may differ from Chapter priorities since they address legislation/management programs of paramount importance from a local perspective. For example, [my] Group's top priority is presently development of the County's new Comprehensive Plan ...which will [guide] the County's development and environmental protection programs for the next 20 years
- Have the ConsCom focus most of its efforts on creating or strengthening issue teams where there is a need for an issue to be addressed in the state but there is a weak or no issue team. Are there other structures that would be more effective? To be frank, ConsComs have worked effectively in SC MD in the past when the ConsCom volunteer chair was willing to work essentially full time to ensure important issues received the attention they deserved, and helped lobby for those issues in Annapolis, too. Lacking that, having one or more staff members focused on supporting issue teams has helped in the past, but that requires more funding for staff that we don't have. When we have tried in the past to get issue teams to seek out funding for their issue, that has not worked, but perhaps a new ConsCom could help with this.

### ***Leadership training***

- I can't stress enough how communication between groups and between group and chapter are key to getting things done without all of us feeling like we have to re-invent the wheel. I feel like the SC tries to do a lot and since the scope is so large, it feels overwhelming. I would feel better if we could find focus and try to do fewer things better. In practice, though we can only get done what we have leadership and volunteer enthusiasm to accomplish. Leadership training would be helpful, especially focusing on how to recruit and empower new leaders

### ***Other suggestions***

- The presence of an effective ConsCom is absolutely invaluable for the Chapter to have a robust conservation program. I can't answer this question because I do not have a good foundation for comparing the effectiveness of our current organization. I believe there is room for significant improvement and would love to see that happen.
- With respect to the preparation of the Conservation Program's plan and budget, either the ConsCom leadership team needs to include someone who is willing and capable of organizing it, or the Chapter needs a "Plan B" process that involves staff members and ExCom members conferring directly with the Issue Teams.
- I see the local Sierra Club as very bureaucratic and not focused on working together to prevent the larger climate catastrophe - not supportive enough of other local and grassroots groups which I am working with - VERY staff led - and rule bound. The local staff are knowledgeable and the national sierra club has many experts that are helpful. Some local group members (not staff) are focused on opposing development and don't seem to work to impact the global climate crisis (there may be some NIMBYism) and specializing in very particular and local issues but not seeing a big picture.
- Remote meetings that are much shorter
- Have more Parks/Wildlife/Land Issue Teams.