



Board of Forestry Meeting

June 25, 2024
James Garner Building
Charlottesville, VA

Convene Meeting, Call to Order:

The Board of Forestry meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairperson Bill Osl at the James Garner Building in Charlottesville, Virginia. The chairperson reminded the Board of the anti-trust policy legal requirements.

Roll Call:

Board of Forestry Members Present

Ervin Bielmyer, Jamie Coleman, Clark Diehl, Jennifer Gagnon, Terry Godwin, Carolyn Mulligan, Bill Osl, Heather Richards, and Scott Shallenberger

Members Absent

Andrew Brown, Mike Harold, Ralph Sampson, Jr. and Chad Shelton

Adoption of Agenda:

Motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda as presented; all present were in favor.

Recognition of Guests and Visitors:

Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) Present

State Forester Rob Farrell, Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer, Assistant State Forester Terry Lasher, Chief of Administration Amanda Davis, Communications Director Greg Bilyeu, Forest Management Director Dean Cumbia, Utilization and Marketing Program Manager Justin Barnes, Hardwood Initiative Coordinator Joe Rossetti, Forestry Business Development Specialist Brian Gillispie and Executive Assistant Mary Weaver

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Other guests were Travis Rickman, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry; Corey Connors, Virginia Forestry Association (VFA); Lesley Mosley, Virginia Forest Products Association (VFPA); Rachel Henley, Virginia Farm Bureau; Ron Jenkins, Virginia Loggers Association (VLA); Brad Copenhaver, Meadowview; Beth Hutchins, Flippo Lumber and VFPA; Don Bright, Meherrin River Forest Products and VFPA; and John Diehl, VFPA.

Hearing of Citizens:

None

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made and seconded to approve the March 21, 2024 minutes as presented; all present were in favor.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry (SAF) Update:

Deputy Secretary Travis Rickman briefed the Board on the events since the last Board meeting.

- ◆ Have been working with Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) to find new ways to increase the forestry industry here in Virginia, specifically on the biomass products side.
 - Working with a Cross-Laminated Timber (CLT) company.
 - While Secretary Lohr was in Chicago he met with a Controlled Environment Agricultural (CEA) company that uses biomass as a fuel to operate their greenhouses.
 - The Secretary and Governor have been really keen on developing the new and innovative facilities and allowing companies to come to Virginia.
- ◆ We had a very tough fall fire season. We are dedicated to working with all agencies to contain any fires when they happen.
- ◆ Getting ready for next General Assembly session.
 - If you have any ideas of ways we can help and assist the forestry industry, please let Deputy Secretary Rickman know.
 - Any specific laws or barriers that might need to be changed or tweaked.
- ◆ Governor will be speaking at the Annual Future Farmers of America (FFA) event in Blacksburg.
 - He will be the first Governor in 98 years to speak at this event.

Chairman Osl encouraged all our partners in forestry-related organizations to work together and bring forward suggestions for the next General Assembly session.

State Forester's Report:

State Forester Farrell reviewed updates since the last Board meeting in March.

- ◆ The Governor plans to visit the Brooks Forest Products Lab at Virginia Tech before he attends the FFA event.
 - Another great opportunity for the Governor to understand more about the forest industry.
- ◆ DOF's next all-staff webinar will be July 17 on Carbon Credit Markets. Board members are welcome.
 - State Forester Farrell and Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program Coordinator Jennifer Gagnon will present.
 - Jennifer is working on updating a companion website page to the current Virginia Tech Extension Carbon Credit website that will have updates to the publication in between publishing.
 - State Forests have not been enrolled in any Carbon Credit programs.

Informational Items:

Legislation and Budget Review

- ◆ Working on filling the positions we received in the budget.
 - Two invasive species-focused positions – one regional and one state level coordinator position.
 - Two regional Office of Working Lands (OWL) positions – one focused on agriculture and one on forestry.
 - Working on developing the policy position and will recruit as soon as possible.
 - Will begin developing a position to support the Forest Land Conservation Plan.

New Biomass Best Management Practices (BMPs)

- ◆ Created an updated version of the biomass Best Management Practices (BMPs).
 - They are out and ready for use effective July 1.
 - State Forester Farrell and Water Quality Engineer Rodney Newlin conducted a biomass BMP webinar for DOF staff to explain how they will work.
 - Depending on loggers to notify DOF if they are harvesting biomass for a facility that wants to claim renewable energy credits.
 - DOF will inspect for biomass BMPs during a water quality inspection.
- ◆ Water Quality Engineer Rodney Newlin is working on updating the BMP manual.
 - Working out how to include the biomass BMPs that have to be enforced in this manual

2024 Carbon Life Cycle Analysis

- ◆ In the midst of second biomass effort – 2024 Biomass Advisory Group.
 - This includes Carbon Life Cycle Analysis (CLCA)
 - Off to a good start with a UVA professor and group of undergrad students assisting.

Forest Legacy Program Awards

- ◆ Got three forest legacy projects funded through various streams of forest legacy funding.
 - A big natural area preserve.
 - A project on the front face of the mountains in Albemarle.
 - A new state forest that comes through tribal funding dependent on developing a co-stewardship agreement with the Nottaway tribe.
 - It was only project in the country in the tribal category.
 - Heather Richards has contact information for someone who has a co-stewardship with the Rappahannock tribe.

Harvest Notification Online Portal Update

- ◆ Implemented another way to enter latitude-longitude in IFRIS for our harvest notifications.
 - Thanks to Ervin Bielmyer for the suggestion.

Action Items:

- ◆ None

Committee/Liaison Reports:

- ◆ None

Unfinished Business:

Guidance documents to help landowners compare cost-share programs.

- ◆ Director of Forest Management Dean Cumbia and Hardwood Coordinator Joe Rossetti discussed how DOF staff can direct landowners to the best cost-share program for them.
- ◆ Joe started with difference between the DOF Hardwood Cost-Share (HCS) program and the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP).

- Joe reviewed flow charts and tables that will help DOF staff guide landowners to which cost-share is best for them.
- The primary differences between the HCS and the EQUIP programs are:
 - EQUIP rates are higher. They come with a long list of practices landowners can do accompanied by a long list of methods to carry out each practice. This requires a lot of planning at the front end of the project.
 - Landowner payments for EQUIP are a flat rate guaranteed if you're approved. Can take several years to receive funds.
- HCS is fast and easy with everything wrapped up in one year. Payments are at a percentage.
- DOF foresters will discuss both HCS and EQUIP with the landowners and let them choose which one to use.
- ◆ Ervin talked about his experience with EQUIP. It can be misleading.
 - You have to build-up preference points.
 - Once you apply, you wait several months, sometimes over a year, to see if you were approved.
 - Each agent has their own perspectives on projects.
- ◆ Landowners can't do EQUIP and hardwood cost-share at the same time.
- ◆ Hardwood management is multiple years of practices to get their forest in the condition they want it to be in.
- ◆ Not enough contractor force out there to help with hardwood management. Contractors are slowly showing interest.
- ◆ Share information with loggers about doing things differently and incorporating HCS practices.
- ◆ Talk with landscape associations about doing HCS.
- ◆ Need to promote use of hardwood better.
- ◆ The Board discussed the current economic market of pine and hardwood.

Data analysis regarding hardwood forest conversion to pine

- ◆ Information was not available yet. This item was moved to the next meeting.

New Business:

Potential strategies to reduce RT incentivizing conversion of hardwood forest to pine.

- ◆ State Forester Farrell received a letter from the Virginia Forest Products Association (VFPA) Sustainability Committee. He asked Don Bright, chairman of the VFPA Sustainability Committee, to discuss the letter with the Board.
 - The purpose of the VFPA Sustainability Committee is to promote the sustainability of all Virginia forest products and industry. This will be done through engaging membership, other industry associations and DOF.
 - First action as a new committee was to engage directly with DOF.
 - Met last May and had a great discussion about growing pine vs hardwood.
 - Sent a follow-up letter to DOF this May on some key issues that the committee had.
 - State Forester Farrell suggested they come to a Board of Forestry meeting to discuss.
 - Availability of quality hardwood timber seems to be the main focus of discussion.
 - Committee believes DOF can help with understanding and navigating some of the issues facing the hardwood and pine industry.

- Would like DOF's help by taking a deep dive look at some of the issues by regions.
- Some of the issues we are facing are:
 - The loss of industrial forest acres to data centers and solar farms.
 - Change in average size of forest ownership since 1970.
 - Ownership changes and goal changes since 1970.
 - Conversion rate of natural regenerated forest pine plantations and other multi-cultural forests since 1970.
 - Species makeup of natural regenerated forests since 1970.
 - Growth to drain ratio by region for grade hardwood, industrial hardwood and hard pulpwood.
 - Should the Seed Tree Law be reviewed and include hardwood forests?
 - Issues that are arising on certification because of plantation forestry.
 - Issues the department identifies as opportunities and problems for the entire forest products industry.
- The Board discussed how to address these issues.
 - Assistant State Forester Lasher questioned the significance of 1970. VFPA Sustainability Committee Chairperson Don Bright explained the change of harvesting practices.
 - Outreach in the schools is very important. Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension is in the process of hiring a Natural Resources Youth Extension Specialist. This would be a good issue to involve that position.
 - Try to influence and support counties in their decisions to maintain land use taxation rules that are favorable to the industry community.
- ◆ DOF will try to answer the questions and concerns the best they can.

Director of Forest Management Dean Cumbia addressed the Board about pines and hardwoods.

- ◆ Our mission as an agency is to protect and develop healthy and sustainable forests for Virginians.
- ◆ The strategic plan includes assisting landowners with implementing beneficial land practices.
- ◆ In 1971 the Reforestation Timberland (RT) Program was established.
- ◆ Our culture was developed around pine. Pine grows much faster than hardwood.
- ◆ Developed a Hardwood Management Initiative to initiate incentives to grow hardwood.
 - This program is going well.
- ◆ Want to manage a good forest with pine and hardwood together.
 - RT is converting hardwood stands to pine stands using state incentive programs, which seems counterintuitive to the hardwood initiative.
 - We want to manage good forests for the purpose of the landowners and the Commonwealth by working together with pine and hardwood.
 - The first step in having complementary pine and hardwood programs is in the planning stage.
 - Working with landowners on their objectives, identifying those, examination of the property and then making a plan.
 - There is a Hardwood Assessment Tool to help more objectively assess the forest and make a more scientifically based, silviculturally sound recommendation for management of the forest.
 - Doing a cultural shift to change all-pine mindset to incorporate more hardwood through:
 - The DOF strategic plan.
 - Expectations of our regions and personnel.

- Providing training for forestry professionals, including loggers.
- Developing service providers.
 - Hope to build a demand and service providers for hardwood.
- Outreach and education is one of our strategies and we are working closely with Virginia Cooperative Extension. An educated landowner makes a good decision.
- We are on our third year with the hardwood incentive.

The floor was open for discussion on RT and how it relates to hardwood in Virginia.

- ◆ The Board discussed:
 - The interest in managing hardwood vs pine and those managing for economic purposes and just for the love of forests.
 - How to better support private landowners keeping forests as forests.
 - The need for dedicated funds for permanent land protection in Virginia.
 - There is interest in a hardwood-pine cost-share program.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

The next Board of Forestry meeting will be held in October. A Doodle poll will identify a date.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Osl called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made and seconded to adjourn the June 25, 2024, meeting at 1:39 p.m. All present were in favor.

Minutes recorded by Executive Assistant Mary Weaver.