

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday March 5, 2025

Meeting 1

Forestland and Urban Tree Canopy Conservation Plan Technical Advisory Committee

Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) Training Room

(Virtual Option)

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Attendees: Rob Farrell (DOF), Sheri Shannon (SouthSide ReLeaf), Jonathan Rak (DEQ), Jason Bullock (DCR), Michael Webb (City of Richmond), Brooke Costanza (Virginia Beach), Rachel Henley (Farm Bureau), Terry Lasher (VAF), Jill Sunderland (Hampton Roads), Ann Jurczyk (CBF), Sarah Dishman (FOR)

Virtual TAC Attendees: Hannah Schul (DWR), Amanda Mcgee (Roanoke Valley), Andrew Clark (HBAV), Brad Copenhaver (VAC), Justin Doyle (JRA), Phil Abraham (VACRE), Susan Seward (VFPA), Joe Lerch (VACO), Ron Jenkins (VLA), Adam Lipera (Trees Virginia), Jim McGlone (SWCD), Nikki Rovner (TNC), Vincent Verweij (Arlington)

Attendees: Nathan Thomson (DOF), James Whipp (DOF), Laura Chamberlain (DOF), John Pemberton (DOF), Lara Johnson (DOF), Amanda Scheps (DOF), Jennifer Leach (DOF), Ember Jenison (DOF)

Virtual Attendees: Charlie Paullin (Inside Climate News), James Hutzler (VACO), Zach LeMaster (Gentry Locke), Sarah Thomas (VACRE), Josh Shepko, Nicole Strawderman (DWR)

The meeting convened at 10:00 AM and adjourned at 11:35 PM

Welcome and Introductions

Rob Farrell (State Forester) welcomed everyone to the first Forestland and Urban Tree Canopy Conservation Plan Technical Advisory Committee meeting. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Reminder of Technical Advisory Committee's Purpose and Charge

1. Examine the current status and trends of forests and tree canopies in the Commonwealth;

2. Identify challenges to forest health, forestland, and tree canopy conservation efforts, including land use, climate change, and invasive species and other challenges identified by the stakeholder group;
3. Identify priority forests for conservation emphasizing protection of streams or wetlands, areas with steep slopes or highly erodible soils, wildlife corridors, and large contiguous blocks of forest;
4. Develop forest-related and tree canopy-related goals;
5. Identify current and potential funding streams and state and local entities that will be vital to achieve forest and tree canopy conservation goals; and
6. Ensure consistency with the objectives of the Board of Forestry with respect to forest management, including forest protection, management, and replacement.

Group Discussion on TAC's Focus:

- Rob Farrell:
 - What is a solution/output we can take away from this process?
 - Big picture/long term, what is that we hope to accomplish from convening this group?
- Ron Jenkins:
 - Build consensus around the value of timber management and timber production
 - Support forest products business
- Jim McGlone:
 - Promoting the value of trees
 - Look at the role of trees in development
 - Determine the value that is being given up when timberland is developed into competing uses, including utility scale solar
- Phil Abraham:
 - DOF should provide the TAC as much information as possible on what localities are currently doing under their authority to preserve and replace trees during the development process
 - It would be helpful to know what authority is out there now, especially on the local level and what if anything they are using that authority on?
 - Karen Firehock may be able to help us understand that a little better
 - How many localities are using their authority?
- Andrew Clark:

- What localities are grandfathered in a replacement gray area?
- DOF should collect data from localities and regional commissions over designated periods of time regarding canopy gain/loss
 - Efforts should be targeted on where the biggest impacts are (road, solar, data centers)
- Joe Lerch:
 - Concern about utility scale solar is top of mind
 - DOF should look at updated report from VA energy
 - On local authority – look at where and if localities have authority, and what if anything is stopping them from implementing said authority
- Rachel Henley :
 - Focus on the connection between Chesapeake Bay goals, housing goals, renewable energy goals
 - Are these all realistically achievable in Virginia’s landmass?
- Sheri Shannon:
 - Why are we losing tree canopy cover?
 - Is there intention behind the decisions leading to the loss of cover?
 - Do we have housing advocates as part of this discussion?
 - How do we find the balance between building and meeting the needs of the localities?
- Terry Lasher:
 - There needs to be clear definition of Urban and Forestland
 - Insure the Right to Practice Forest Act is still useful
 - How do we treat built vs. natural environments?
- Jason Bullock:
 - Need to separate but relate all bill elements
 - Urban Tree Canopy and Forestlands are two very different things
 - They should be defined and distinguished
- Ann Jurczyk:
 - Define Urban, Suburban, Rural, Developing Corridors
 - Look at where this is the biggest competition for land based on population density
 - Preserve where we can and mitigate where we can
 - Most localities want migration as close to loss as possible
- Amanda McGee :
 - Look at different perspectives of rural and urban spaces
 - In rural Virginia there is a special importance of viewsheds and outdoor economies

- A significant amount of SW Virginia lands are Federal, how will this process speak to that or not?
- Jonathan Rak:
 - Everyone needs to be on the same page about the trends in forest and canopy loss
 - Quantify what forestlands are being lost
 - Look at the Renewable Energy Atlas
 - Analyze forest fragmentation, including how it impacts forest products
 - Recommend forming a subcommittee to analyze data
- Brooke Costanza:
 - Virginia Beach is experimenting with AI to examine forest cover
- Terry Lasher:
 - Is there room for soil analysis in this process?

Updates from DOF

- DOF has elected to use the position from the State Budget to hire a GIS Analyst
- DOF will be using high resolution satellite imagery to analyze the loss/gain, then take cues from the group to work with the procured datasets
- DOF has examined how other states have tackled this issue of statewide analysis
 - Maryland and Florida discussed
- DOF has put out an invitation to bid for a private contractor to furnish data
 - Data will establish a baseline from Year A and look at change over the course of time between Year A and Year B
- DOF hopes that a full analysis will be run prior to June 15 of 2025

Additional Conversation regarding Data

- Phil Abraham:
 - Economic trends can impact the trend in development over time
- Rob Farrell:
 - More recent years have better data, but shorter time periods capture less change
- Ann Jurczyk:
 - When are we getting the next Forest Service data files? Are they using USGS data sets?
- Lara Johnson:
 - FS used NAIP imagery

- Can be viewed online at treesatwork.org
- Brooke Costanza:
 - How far back does DOF plan on going using flyover data?
- Lara Johnson:
 - DOF is hoping a contractor can fulfill the requirement of a 5 to 6 year gap in time
- Vincent Verweij:
 - Emphasis on need for accuracy in data set
- Jason Bullock:
 - FS has developed a land cover data set
- Terry Lasher:
 - Localities already know where development is going to occur via permits
 - Layer should be added to show proposed development in the next 5 years
- Lara Johnson:
 - It is difficult to set a methodology for the whole state but DOF will be coordinate with contractor to make sure that everyone is represented
- Andrew Clark:
 - Any data from localities would be helpful for the development community
- Ann Jurczyk:
 - The TAC must define terms for what constitutes a forest (sizewise) and what is a healthy forest
- Discussion from Brooke Costanza and Vincent Verweij about what defines a tree
- Rob Farrell:
 - Subdivision and presence of invasive species can disturb forest value
 - Terminology as a standalone section is an important piece

Looking Ahead:

- DOF will convene the next TAC meeting when the contractor has returned data for the group to look at
- July/August will be the target for the next meeting
- DOF will share out information about the proposals when they are received
- DOF will put out a request from other groups for additional data sets and trend analysis
- DOF will put together a sharepoint website where TAC members can exchange information

No comments from the public received

Adjournment – 11:30am