



Board of Forestry Meeting

July 23, 2025
Raphine Volunteer Fire Department
Raphine, VA

Convene Meeting, Call to Order:

The Board of Forestry meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairperson Carolyn Mulligan at the Raphine Volunteer Fire Department in Raphine, Virginia. The chairperson reminded the Board of the anti-trust policy legal requirements.

Roll Call:

Board of Forestry Members Present

Andrew Brown, Jamie Coleman, Jennifer Gagnon, Mike Harold, Carolyn Mulligan, Bill Osl, Heather Richards, Scott Shallenberger and Chad Shelton

Members Absent

Ervin Bielmyer, Clark Diehl, Terry Godwin and Vance Wright

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, Chief of Operations Robbie Talbert, Chief of Administration Amanda Davis, Communications Director Greg Bilyeu, Chief Human Resources Officer John Habel, Policy and Legislative Analyst Nathan Thomson, Hardwood Initiative Coordinator Joe Rossetti, Working Lands Preservation Program Manager Amanda Scheps, Utilization & Marketing Program Manager Sabina Dhungana and Executive Assistant Mary Weaver.

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Other guests were Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matt Lohr; Terry Lasher, Virginia Forestry Association (VFA); Lesley Mosley, Virginia Forest Products Association (VFPA); Rachel Henley, Virginia Farm Bureau (VAFB); Jay Phaup, Greif Packaging LLC.; Adam Downing, Virginia Cooperative Extension; Brad Copenhaver, Virginia Agriculture Business Council; Charlie Paullin, Inside Climate News (freelance journalist)

Hearing of Citizens:

None

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made and seconded to approve March 27, 2025, minutes as presented; all present were in favor.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry (SAF) Update:

Secretary Matt Lohr briefed the Board on the events since the last Board meeting.

- ◆ There are five months left of this administration.
- ◆ Board appointments and updates:
 - Ralph Sampson chose not to be reappointed.
 - Jennifer Gagnon, Carolyn Mulligan and Chad Shelton were reappointed for a second term.
 - Vance Wright with Charles Wright Logging is a new board appointee. He was unable to attend this meeting.
- ◆ The Governor and First Lady would like to hold a Forestry Industry Reception lunch on September 16 at the mansion for the various forestry organizations, the Board of Forestry, our leadership.
 - DOF will send an email to the Board of Forestry and partners for a list of attendees by a selected date and send to Secretary's office for official invites to be sent out.
- ◆ One of the positives to come out of the Georgia Pacific Industry closing is that it has rallied the industry organizations together to meet and look at the big picture.
 - Visiting our existing pulp mills and large sawmill industries to make sure that we don't lose any more.
 - Continuing to look for new markets, which is a challenge in the current economy, but a priority.
 - Working with Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) and Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) on incentive programs to attract companies to Virginia.
 - Having conversations with International Paper, WestRock and Dominion to see what their biggest concerns and needs are.
 - Meeting with VEDP to make sure there is a plan and we are as aggressive as we can be.
 - Trying to revive the Wood Council which is an opportunity for the various components to come together and meet on a regular basis to identify needs and issues of concern.
- ◆ Working on an Executive Order to highlight the "grown in Virginia" and "made in Virginia" for agricultural and forest products.
- ◆ Working on Disaster Block Grants for Hurricane Helene
 - There were 15 localities in Southwest Virginia that were most heavily impacted.
 - Block grants were created to cover claims that are not covered by other programs
 - Block grants run through each state Department of Agriculture and will be used for infrastructure, roads, bridges, structures, timber and certain types of agricultural products that were not previously covered under other programs.
 - US Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins and the Governor will be kicking the program off and announcing what the dollar amount is going to be, what's covered and what farmers and landowners can do to start compiling the documentation.
 - Goal is to roll out in August and looking at 45 days for applicants to submit their claims so we can determine how to divide the funds.
- ◆ There is a large greenhouse being built in Carroll County called Oasthouse Ventures that will be selling tomatoes and will be using biomass for their heating source.
 - The Governor will be doing a ceremonial signing on August 8.

State Forester's Report:

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

- ◆ There are changes ahead with the federal government. The US Forest Service is one of the agencies that is under the microscope.
 - Potential significant impacts to Virginia from those changes.
 - Consolidating all wildland firefighting under the Department of Interior.
 - A concern is they provided a solution before clarifying the problem.
 - They're not going to make any changes until after the fire season we are currently in.
 - We're hoping that in the fall state agencies will get to have input in how this change happens.
 - If you separate preventing wildfires from suppressing forest fires you're just making the situation worse.
 - Reduction of force at the Forest Service.
 - Big fires have incident management teams that manage the fires and rotate out every two weeks. Normally there are 60+ teams ready, currently there are 40 and 20 of those have already been ramped up.
 - The reductions are real and there are going to be fewer people to do things.
- ◆ The administration, in order to reduce government, is saying the US Forest Service should focus on the national forests.
 - Right now, the National forests have three pieces.
 - The National Forest (biggest part)
 - Research (small part)
 - State and private and tribal forestry (money that flows to DOF through the state)
 - The President has recommended eliminating the research program and the state and private and tribal forestry program and have US Forest Service just focus on national forest.
 - Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) is slated to remain.
 - Currently DOF gets 14% of funding from the federal government. Approximately 23 of our 282 full time positions. The Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager and the Forest Health Program Manger that run these programs are completely federally funded.
 - Federal funding also flows through for equipment and training for fire departments throughout the state as well as training for DOF staff.
 - This doesn't seem like the best investment to spend all federal funding on the National Forest System at the expense of the money coming to the states.
- ◆ Currently we are in Federal fiscal year 2025 which goes from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025. We have not received our FY2025 funds from the US Forest Service yet.
 - Concern is that it will be held until September 15 and then it will be taken back through the rescission process. That will be quite a budget impact.
 - The House proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026 recently came out and it has level funding for those affected budgets.
- ◆ Tasked with Forest and Tree Canopy Conservation Plan from the General Assembly.
 - Looking at the timber change, timber loss, forest cover loss and tree canopy loss across the entire state so that we can finally have a good number on where we're losing forest and tree cover.

- A detailed tree cover analysis was already done for all the urban areas. The same group is going to do that analysis on the rest of Virginia.
- We'll have five years (2018 – 2023) of where forest and tree cover change is happening in Virginia.
- The next advisory committee meeting for the Tree Canopy Plan is August 27. We'll be able to show a couple of counties where the analysis has been done and start talking about what the plan is going to look like.
- The Tree Canopy Plan is due November of 2026.
- ◆ Meet with the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO) to discuss timber harvesting on large development projects.
 - Technically you can't get the silvicultural exemption to cut the trees on what's going to be a solar facility because that's not silvicultural, that's development.
 - Would like to find a way to get the trees harvested and protect water quality even though it's going to be a development.
 - We have some suggestions for the counties and after discussing with VACO we're going to talk with some counties and propose this process to do timber harvest inspections on big developments.
 - Another topic was land use plans. Localities revalidating forest land use want owners to have a forest management plan. This causes our foresters to have hundreds of requests for plans just so landowners can stay in land use.
 - Would like to do an analysis like the Tree Canopy Plan for land use plans and auto-generate the land use plans for the landowners that want to get land use. The localities get the plan they want, and the foresters don't get swamped with plans that don't create forest management work.
 - Also discussed hardwood forest management and farm conservation and shared a lot of good information.
- ◆ At the invitation of the VFA we met with Virginia Aviation Business Association (VABA) which represents basically everything that leaves the ground and where they leave the ground from.
 - VABA is putting an emphasis on sustainable aviation fuel. Discussed the intersection of sustainable aviation fuel and woody biomass.
- ◆ Economic Development – Glad to have Sabina Dhungana back as our Utilization and Marketing Program Manager. She will be convening the Wood Council.
- ◆ Working with VFA to host the Forest Industry Town Hall on August 7 in Charlottesville.
- ◆ Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer shared Reforestation of Timberlands (RT) numbers with the Board.
 - This year we collected 96% of the tax that we projected. There has been a significant increase of tax collections year after year.
 - Having a pretty good typical subscription to RT projects.
- ◆ The Wall of Wood – getting a good collection of wood.
 - Have 66 species on the list, have 40 species collected.
 - We have an angle on 12 species but have 14 that we're looking for:
 - Aspen, Sweet Birch, Yellow Birch, Buckeye, Hackberry, Honey Locust, Black Oak, Scarlet Oak, Swamp White Oak, Water Oak, Redbud, Tupelo, Willow and Yellowwood.
 - If anyone has an angle on these odd species, please let us know.

Informational Items:

Solar Mitigation Program

Working Lands preservation Program Manager Amanda Scheps reviewed with the Board the contributing efforts of the Solar Mitigation Program.

- ◆ Solar mitigation is one part of what is now the Small Renewable Energy Permit by Rule Solar that was developed and is overseen by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).
 - A permit by rule process is an outline of all the elements that DEQ wants to see from a solar developer.
 - If a solar developer goes through this process to the satisfaction of DEQ they are automatically given their permit for the project.
 - This will bring some clarity to the process on behalf of the developers, and localities and citizens can see what the elements are. There is also an opportunity for public comment.
 - Developers can also go to the State Corporation Commission (SCC) for approval.
 - They can use the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program which is a more defined process by which some projects can get approval without having to get commission approval.
 - Projects must fall between 5 and 150 megawatts and have disturbed 10 acres or more of prime agricultural soils.
 - Projects larger than 150 megawatts are required to go to the SCC.
 - Developers will have to do an analysis of the impacts of their project, including whether there are impacts to wildlife and historic resources.
 - There are seven mitigation districts now established across the state. Any applicant in one of those mitigation districts using the PDR program will have to mitigate for their impacts within their district.
 - One element of the PDR process is before you apply to the SCC you have to have locality approval for your project.
 - The mitigation process is the same whether it is for Prime ag soils or forest loss.
 - There are two elements where the Department of Forestry (DOF) will serve as the reviewer but are not the insurers:
 - Projects meet the Department of Forestry's guidelines for agricultural and forestal conservation
 - The actual mitigation requirement
 - DEQ currently has no projects to date.
 - All easements will have to follow the Department of Forestry easement guidelines using the DOF easement template.
- ◆ The Department of Forestry is celebrating 20 years and 100,000 acres of conservation easement with no annual dedicated funding for that purpose.

Hurricane Damage Block Grants to Landowners

Chief of Operations Robbie Talbert spoke about the process being developed for the Hurricane Helene Block Grants timber aspect.

- ◆ Hurricane Helene came through Southwest Virginia last fall and caused catastrophic damage to crops, infrastructure and timber.
- ◆ Through the American Recovery Act, we're able to wrap timber into the crop damage loss assistance for landowners.
- ◆ DOF developed values for timbers.
 - Did an initial damage assessment through aerial surveys, GIS tools, etc.
 - Used Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data to come up with timber volumes.
 - Used Timber-Mart South and some feedback from local consulting foresters to fit values to the volumes.

- DOF's analysis determined that over 146,000 acres of timber had been damaged, with over 93,000 acres falling in the severely or very severely damage categories. The loss estimate was \$83.3 million for areas in the severe and very severe categories.
- ◆ The American Recovery Act of 2024 will provide assistance to private landowners for crop loss, including timber.
 - Interested landowners will submit a request for participation/assessment to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS).
 - VDACS will forward Department of Forestry (DOF) any timber loss requests.
 - DOF has developed a GIS damage verification tool that will make an initial assessment of landowner eligibility and damage categories. A value will be assigned associated with the application on a per-acre basis.
 - The amount each landowners will receive will depend on their individual losses and how many total applications are received.
- ◆ DOF will do an outreach to reach as many affected landowners as possible.

Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Hurricane Supplemental Funds

State Forester Rob Farrell spoke about the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) supplemental funds for Hurricane Helene and the opportunities available.

- ◆ GNA is where the states assist the national forest in doing work on national forest land.
 - DOF has been assisting the George Washington-Jefferson National Forest with timber sales. We do the work, charge them an hourly rate, and the revenue for timber sale goes back into the forest.
 - We can entice more loggers to bid because we follow the state procurement process instead of the federal procurement process.
- ◆ The National Forests that were impacted by Hurricane Helene are getting a significant increase in the amount of GNA funding for hurricane restoration. This will allow state agencies and partners to significantly more work to restore the damage from the hurricane.
 - Everything from repairing roads, replacing culverts, rebuilding the campgrounds, invasive species removal, fire suppression and forest management.
 - This is 10-year funding.
 - DOF is looking at wildfire prevention and suppression, hardwood management, community tree planting, assisting with communities that were impacted by the hurricane, and forest health work.
 - This funding includes adjacent lands that influence the National Forests.

Action Items:

- ◆ None

Committee/Liaison Reports

- ◆ None

Unfinished Business:

Hardwood Conversion to Pine Stands

- ◆ There has been concern addressed by some constituents that hardwood conversion to pine will affect the future availability of hardwood and the associated benefits.
- ◆ We are emphasizing to DOF staff when they're looking at current hardwood ground, that they make sure to explain to the landowners the hardwood management options as well as the pine reforestation options.
- ◆ We can do a better job of going back to sites and making recommendations to the landowner.

- There is positive regeneration out there, or there is not good regeneration and here's what you can do help.

New Business:

- ◆ New silviculturist coming to Virginia Tech – Shane Furze.
- ◆ Paul Winistorfer is retiring August 31 from Virginia Tech and Dr. Saskia L. van de Gevel is replacing him and will start August 1.
- ◆ Doing an Extension project promoting working forests in Virginia. Eight billboards will be going up across the state: two each in southeast, southwest, central and northwest. Each billboard will promote a different aspect of working forests.
 - Working forests for healthy water, working forests for healthy economies, working forests for healthy people and working forests for healthy wildlife
 - Purchased domain names virginiaforest.info, .com and .org. Those sites will take you to a webpage of information on all those themes.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

The next Board of Forestry meeting will be held in October or November. Looking at having it at or near the Augusta Nursery. Will look at when would be the best time to have a tour of the nursery. A Doodle poll will be sent to identify a date.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Mulligan called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made and seconded to adjourn the July 23, 2025, meeting at 11:54 p.m. All present were in favor. A tour of the hardwood demonstration sites at McCormick Farm was given for anyone that was interested.

Minutes recorded by Executive Assistant Mary Weaver.