

Forestland and Urban Tree Canopy Technical Advisory Committee

Meeting #5 - Minutes

Attendees:

Adam Lipera	Fairfax County
Andrew Larkin	Old Dominion University
Charlie Paullin	Freelance Journalist
Ember Jenison	DOF
Gabby Troutman	Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Jennifer Leach	DOF
Jill Sunderland	Hampton Roads Planning District Commission
Jim McGlone	VASWCD
Jim Whipp	DOF
Johnathan Rak	Department of Environmental Quality
Justin Doyle	James River Association
Kara Alley	Home Builders Association of Virginia
Karen Firehock	Green Infrastructure Center
Kaycee Faunce	DOF
Lara Johnson	DOF
Matt Lee	Green Infrastructure Center
Matt Wells	Virginia Forestry Association
Michael Webb	City of Richmond
Nathan Thomson	DOF
Peter Forrister	Green Infrastructure Center
Phil Abraham	Virginia Association for Commercial Real Estate
Rachel Henley	Virginia Farm Bureau
Sarah Dishman	Friends of the Rappahannock
Sarah Thomas	Virginia Association for Commercial Real Estate
Sheri Shannon	Southside ReLeaf
Taylor Hubbard	Virginia Agribusiness Council
Terry Lasher	DOF
Vincent Verweij	Arlington County

Date: September 24, 2026 – 10a.m.

Location: Hybrid (DOF Headquarters + Virtual)

1. Welcome & Introductions

- The fifth meeting of the FUTC TAC began with introductions from members attending in person and online. State Forester Terry Lasher welcomed attendees and expressed appreciation for the TAC members' work, noted that the plan provides an actionable guide to conservation priorities, and emphasized looking forward to implementing the plan and revisiting it in 5 years.

2. Presentation: Plan Review and Development Overview (Nathan Thomson)

- DOF staff member Nathan Thomson provided the TAC with a slide deck on the development of the plan, the elements it incorporates, and other pertinent information. The deck included the following information:

Legislative Background

- Plan mandated by **HB 309 (2024)** and **SB 461 (2024)**.
- Requires 5-year updates; plan must be submitted to the Governor and General Assembly by **November 30, 2026**.

TAC Process Recap

- Five meetings from March 2025 to September 2026.
- Covered data accuracy, land cover classification, legislative updates, risk assessments, and development of plan strategies.

Key Draft Plan Elements

- Report sections included: methodology, findings, land cover change, risks (wildfire, pests, solar, sea level rise), and recommendations.
- Appendix includes locality-level canopy trends and challenges.

Major Data Insights

- Statewide canopy stable at ~67.7% in 2023 (net gain ~237,000 acres, within margin of error).
- Significant **losses along I-95 corridor**; rural afforestation offsets some suburban losses.
- Rising heat island effects; Fredericksburg identified as highest.
- Dozens of recommended strategies address tree retention, rural forest conservation, stormwater BMPs, university research, and more.

Future Opportunities

- Tribal consultation.
- Long-term trend evaluation when 2028 data becomes available.
- Deeper analysis of why canopy is being lost, not just where canopy is being lost .

Related Forthcoming Plans

- Farm & Forest Prosperity Plan (Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry).
- Tree canopy ordinance report (ICAR).
- Forestry economic impact report (Weldon Cooper Center).
- Virginia Wood Council report (DOF)

3. Presentation: Virginia Tree Canopy Viewer Application (Kaycee Faunce and Jim Whipp)

- DOF GIS team members gave an overview and walkthrough of the application which was developed in conjunction with the plan. The presentation included:

Purpose of the Viewer

- Public-facing tool enabling exploration of plan data at regional, locality, and census block group level.
- Designed in-house using ArcGIS SDK to avoid vendor limitations/costs.

Key Features

- Visualizes 2018–2023 canopy and land cover data.
- Filters by canopy change, land cover class, and geography.
- Locality fact sheets with ecosystem service estimates.
- High-resolution (60 cm) tree canopy coverage layers.
- Suitability tool for identifying priority planting areas based on demographic or environmental metrics.

User Support & Training

- DOF is planning for webinars and help documentation.
- Application and written plan will go live simultaneously on DOF's website.

4. Discussion & TAC Feedback

The second half of the meeting featured an open discussion amongst DOF and TAC members reviewing the draft plan. Discussion items included:

Document Edits & Clarifications

- Improve readability of certain graphs
- Clarify values in ecosystem services graphics.
- Add explanation for gray cells in risk assessment tables.

Suggestions for Strengthening Content

- Connect canopy and heat data visually to reinforce relationship in future iterations.
- Explore including Chesapeake Bay watershed-level canopy summaries in future iterations.
- Include stronger reference to the Forest Sustainability Fund and its quantified local tax impacts.

Strategy-Specific Feedback

- Incorporate the FUTC plan into Continuing Education curriculum
- Interest in tools addressing development rights (lease vs. AFD/PDR distinctions).
- Emphasize tracking “missed opportunities” due to insufficient staffing to support future funding requests.

5. Outreach & Next Steps

- Final plan reviewed by Board of Forestry: **October 13.**
- DOF hosting legislative outreach event at **Conway Robinson State Forest on October 19.**
- Plan finalization by November 1