



Board of Forestry Meeting

March 27, 2025
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, Andrew Brown, Clark Diehl, Jennifer Gagnon, Terry Godwin, Mike Harold, Carolyn Mulligan, Bill Osl and Scott Shallenberger

Members Absent

Jamie Coleman, Heather Richards, 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, Chief of Operations Robbie Talbert, Chief of Administration Amanda Davis, Chief of Fire and Emergency Response John Miller, Communications Director Greg Bilyeu, Chief Human Resources Officer John Habel, Policy and Legislative Analyst Nathan Thomson, Director of Finance Lauren Sumner, Director of Forest Management Dean Cumbia, Hardwood Initiative Coordinator Joe Rossetti, Forest Management Coordinator Justin Barnes, Budget Officer Amanda Jones and Executive Assistant Mary Weaver.

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Other guests were Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matt Lohr; Chief Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Beth Green; Terry Lasher, Virginia Forestry Association (VFA); Ron Jenkins, Virginia Loggers Association (VLA); Susan Seward, Virginia Forest Products Association (VFPA); Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau (VAFB)

Hearing of Citizens:

Ron Jenkins from Virginia Loggers Association spoke in reference to H.R 1487 - Agricultural and Forestry Hauling Efficiency Act. This bill will allow, by special permit, the operation of a covered agricultural vehicle on the interstate in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Mr. Jenkins spoke in support and asked others to support.

Terry Lasher from Virginia Forestry Association reminded everyone of the Summit coming up May 7-9. Registration is now open.

- ◆ The 3rd annual Sporting Clay Tournament fundraising event will be on June 6.
- ◆ VFA members should be receiving their VFA membership directory and Virginia Forest magazine soon. There have been some issues with mail delivery and they have extended the VFA officer election deadline.

Susan Seward from Virginia Forest Product Association spoke about the Virginia Loggers Expo in 2026. It will be the 40th anniversary and second year at the state fairgrounds on April 17-18, 2026. There will be a lot of extras to celebrate.

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made and seconded to approve the October 31, 2024, 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.

- ◆ We are in the last nine months of this administration.
- ◆ Finished up last session and Governor Youngkin just completed his amendments and vetoes.
 - Legislators will be in town next week to finish up budget.
- ◆ Secretary Lohr wanted to compliment State Forester Farrell, Smokey Bear and the Governor for the Public Service Ad (PSA) video they did for wildfire season.
- ◆ Wildfires have been flaring up lately with the high winds. Have been receiving requests from counties for a statewide ban.
 - We don't think that is the best thing at this time. We have put together and sent out an email to every County Administrator and Chair of the Board of Supervisors for every locality in Virginia reminding them they have the authority to do a local burn ban if they feel like it's appropriate for their locality.
- ◆ The Governor is very adamant about making sure that Virginia is first in line to get assistance from all agencies when it comes to droughts and disasters.
 - He has appointed Rob Ward to be the leader and liaison of coordinating all of these programs.
 - He is the point person for grant funding that has been currently paused.
 - USDA has approved \$21 billion in disaster funding for disasters in the last two years.
 - Part of this funding will be for block grants for Hurricane Helene.
- ◆ Hoping to have a reception this fall with the Governor for Forest Product week.
 - Plan is to invite our associations and key leaders in the forestry industry to come to the mansion with the Governor and First Lady. They would like to show their appreciation for the industry and everything that's been done.
 - Planning for a date in October.
- ◆ Growing the forest industry has been top priority.
 - Business Manager Simon Chapman from Virginia Economic Development Partnership has been traveling the country meeting with potential companies and trying to see if there's an interest in coming to Virginia.
 - There is a company in southwest Virginia that will be making a big expansion announcement in a few weeks.

- Secretary Rollins is interested in coming to Virginia to have a roundtable with key industry leaders.
- ◆ Juan Pablo Segura was appointed the new Secretary of Commerce and Trade.
- ◆ Stefanie K. Taillon was appointed the new Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources.

State Forester's Report:

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

- ◆ The southeast has been absolutely hammered by hurricanes and now fires. The west is sending out folks to assist.
- ◆ Recognized new staff and positions.
 - Chief of Operations Robbie Talbert
 - Budget Officer Amanda Jones
 - Policy and Legislative Analyst Nathan Thomson
- ◆ Got the Carbon Life Cycle Analysis Report submitted to the General Assembly last year. Have not heard anything yet.
- ◆ Implemented the Biomass Best Management Practices (BMPs) last July. We have not heard of any harvest jobs that have not complied.
- ◆ A work group worked with Department of Environment Quality (DEQ) on a draft regulation for House Bill 206 to mitigate for farm and forestland lost to solar facilities. The regulation is currently in the administrative review process on Virginia Regulatory Townhall.
 - The regulation will require developers to get conservation easements to offset prime farmland, prime ag soils or forestland over 50 acres that gets converted to solar.
 - The developers can do their own easements, or they can pay per acre.
 - DOF will run the mitigation program for the Commonwealth.
- ◆ DOF is also in the midst of creating the Office of Working Lands (OWL), which is combining the VDACS Farmland Preservation Program with DOF's existing Forestland Conservation program.
 - Figuring out how to combine the programs together and make sense to the public.
 - VDACS is keeping the Century Farm Program.
- ◆ DOF will be creating the Forest Land and Tree Canopy Conservation Plan.
 - This is a more detailed look at tree cover in Virginia and what is happening over time.
 - Created a technical advisory committee and had our first meeting. Selected a vendor to do the analysis.
 - Received a position with this and will hire a second GIS position in the next few weeks.
 - Analysis should be done by June 30.
- ◆ All the federal grants were paused. Funds and work was stopped, and as the grants were reviewed and approved the funds and work continued.
- ◆ The Forest Service, where DOF gets 15% of funding, is one of the agencies that is being considered for reconfiguration at the federal level.
 - There is a Senate proposal to move wildland firefighting to one centralized agency.
 - We anticipate that Urban and Community Forestry and the Research programs will be looked at very hard.
 - We are waiting to see if things get taken away from the Forest Service, what gets laid on the states and what money continues to flow to the states to take on those new responsibilities.
- ◆ Received block grants for Hurricane Helene destruction.

- There's a good chance that timber will be added. The challenge is the guidelines require a landowner to do site prep and with fallen timber on steep slopes in southwest Virginia and no markets, it doesn't pay a landowner to clean up the fallen timber.
 - It remains to be seen how much benefit we're going to get from the Hurricane Helene Block Grants for hardwood landowners in southwest Virginia.
- ◆ Working on the Wall of Wood.
 - Our plan is to have one board of each of the species of Virginia's native woods on a wall in the Board room.
 - Virginia Forest Products Association (VFPA) led the effort to collect the wood.
 - We will go out to our urban wood and sawmill community to get the other unique species.
- ◆ We have "Trees are the Answer" stickers and are working on "Wood is Good" stickers.
 - Look at some of the ideas that were passed out and give us your feedback.
- ◆ Still working on the LOVE sign made of forestry items to be outside the agency building.

Informational Items:

Status of DOF Federal Funding

Chief of Administration Amanda Davis gave an overview of federal funds and what it means to DOF.

- ◆ DOF currently has 77 grants totaling approximately \$63million (\$44million is conservation).
 - Almost all grant areas have a match component (most 50/50).
 - 80% of the grants are pass-through to other entities (non-profit, localities, tribal nations)
- ◆ The Forest Health and Urban & Community Forestry Programs are 100% federal funded.
 - They receive their funding on multiple-year federal grants which enables DOF to do a lot of projects that require multiple years to complete.
- ◆ DOF has been knocking Forest Legacy out of the park. There is \$22 million on one working forest land conservation easement project (the second biggest in the southeast).
- ◆ The federal funding expenditures are steadily increasing over time.
 - DOF started with expending around \$3.5 million in 2017 and is projected to spend around \$6.2 million through 2025.
 - This allows DOF to use federal dollars to achieve our goals.
 - Over 80% of spending is used for direct services.
- ◆ All federal grants are reimbursable.
 - You must have the cash up front to do the work and then you get reimbursed.
 - In a healthy environment, grant reimbursements are received within 60 days.
 - DOF carries expenses for approximately two months.

Best Management Practices (BMP) Manual

Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer spoke about updating the BMP manual.

- ◆ DOF is working on the sixth edition the BMP manual.
 - Forestry best management practices are based on time-tested science. Few if any substantive changes happen.
 - Most changes are grammatical or consolidate some repetition.
 - Did significantly update the biomass section.
 - It's been downsized about 20 pages and will be a 6"x9" spiral bound book for easy use in the field.

- Goal is to have public reveal, unveiling and distribution of the new edition at the Virginia Loggers Association Annual meeting in August at Blacksburg.

Open Air Burning Recent Code Changes

Chief of Fire and Emergency Response John Miller explained to the board the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code and changes made to section 307 in the 2021 revision.

- ◆ The code is on a three-year update schedule. It was updated in 2021 and took effect in 2024.
- ◆ A section 307.2 was added for open burning.
 - Open burning that includes silvicultural rangeland or burns for basically pest and disease control have to obtain a permit from the local fire official.
 - The State Fire Marshal's office is not capable of handling the number of permits that would be required from the Department of Forestry, forestry industry, Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), state parks and many others.
 - The State Fire Marshal's office was not aware of the addition to the code.
 - Currently working with them on the 2024 updates to the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code.

Action Items:

Reforestation of Timberland (RT) 2025 Practice and Rates Committee:

Forest Management Coordinator Justin Barnes reviewed the 2025 Reforestation of Timberland rates and the proposed 2026 rates.

- ◆ The Reforestation of Timberland (RT) Committee met in February to discuss the 2025 RT practice rates.
- ◆ The RT committee proposed the following rate changes for 2026.
 - Site Preparation – Mechanical from \$60.00 to \$65.00
 - Site preparation – Prescribed Burning from \$30.00 to \$35.00
 - Tree Planting – Loblolly Pine from \$30.00 to \$40.00
 - Tree Planting – Other Pine from \$65.00 to \$75.00
- ◆ The Board would like DOF to investigate if on a conservation easement, the landowner could use RT cost-share on more than 100 acres and how much that would impact the money.
 - Currently we have about a thousand RT projects and about 10% of those were more than or right at 100 acres.
 - Will come to the next meeting with information on if we can do that and how we can implement it.
- ◆ A motion was made to accept the RT rates recommended by the RT Committee; seconded. All present were in favor.

Hardwood Cost-Share Rate Changes

Hardwood Initiative Coordinator Joe Rossetti reviewed with the board the hardwood cost-share rates and proposed changes.

- ◆ The Hardwood Steering Committee met last week to discuss the rates and suggested changes.
- ◆ This program is funded by the General Assembly with reverting funds at the end of the fiscal year.
- ◆ There are two programmatic changes we intend to make.
 - Start an early sign-up period for landowners who have done management in the past on a stand and need to do additional work in the current fiscal year. This will ensure there are funds for them to complete the work.
 - Change the maximum rate of reimbursement cost from 75% to 90% of project cost to the landowner.

- ◆ The Hardwood sub-committee proposed the following rate changes for 2026 and an additional two practices.
 - Add Prescribed Burning Prep at \$90.00 per acre.
 - Add Diminished Species Establishment: American Chestnut at \$1800.00 per acre
 - Limited to one acre per landowner, maximum of 10 landowners.
 - Will be available in the western half of the state.
 - Crop Tree Release from \$140.00 to \$171.00
 - Precommercial Thinning from \$175.00 to \$225.00
 - Midstory Management from \$175.00 to \$225.00
 - Cull Tree Control from \$175.00 to \$225.00
 - Prescribed Burning from \$35.00 to \$36.00
 - Invasive plant Control from \$100.00 to \$270.00
 - Stand Marking from \$57.00 to \$81.00
- ◆ The Board discussed the different types of practices and what is involved with them.
- ◆ Working on updating the list of contractors on the DOF website to allow staff to add contractors to assist landowners better.
- ◆ Adjusting how we use the Hardwood Assessment Tool to simplify the use.
- ◆ Brainstorming different ways to get the hardwood money spent and the work done.
 - DOF paying a contractor to get the work done for an eligible landowner.
- ◆ A motion was made to accept the hardwood rates recommended by the hardwood initiative coordinator; seconded. All present were in favor.

Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

- ◆ The nominations committee, consisting of Ervin Bielmyer and Jennifer Gagnon, nominated Carolyn Mulligan for chairperson and Heather Richards for vice-chairperson.
- ◆ There being no other nominations, a motion was made to appoint Carolyn Mulligan for chairperson and Heather Richards for vice-chairperson. The motion was seconded. All present were in favor.
- ◆ Carolyn Mulligan is chairperson and is Heather Richards is vice-chairperson for the next year.
- ◆ The following Board members' term expires June 30, 2025 but they are eligible to be reappointed for a second term:
 - Carolyn Mulligan, Jennifer Gagnon, Chad Shelton and Ralph Sampson, Jr.

Unfinished Business:

Reforestation of Timberland paybacks for solar, trends in recent years

Forest Management Coordinator Justin Barnes reviewed with the Board the trends of RT paybacks for solar.

- ◆ RT payback is a landowner that signs up for an RT project then destroys the project within 10 years.
 - They are required to pay back the funds with a 10% penalty.
 - Some landowners want to discontinue the project and will voluntarily pay back the funds.
- ◆ Between 2018 and now DOF had 1,049 and $\frac{3}{4}$ acres that have been paid back.
 - Approximately 50% were returned voluntarily. Other reasons were unknown and wanting to sell property.
 - 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres of 1,049 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres that were RT projects went to solar conversion.

- There's a lot of solar going in and a lot of forest and farmland being converted but when you compare it to the total amount of forest and farmland it's a small percentage.

Policies related to hardwood forest conversion to managed pine

State Forester Rob Farrell discussed with the Board the potential impact RT was having on hardwood.

- ◆ The Forest Management Team reviewed the Forest Inventory Analysis Data.
 - An analysis of harvesting and tree planting from 2018-203 indicated that approximately 15.5% of hardwood stands with total harvests were replanted in pine.
 - The Seed Tree Law Act and the Reforestation of Timberlands language in the Code of Virginia are limits preventing people from utilizing RT and how it's done.
 - Consider ideas on how we can tweak RT to reduce the unintended conversion of hardwood stands to pine stands.
 - If a landowner wants use RT to plant pine trees on what was a hardwood stand, we require a DOF forester look at it beforehand to see what kind of regeneration is occurring.
 - Would like to move our staff toward doing fewer wall-to-wall RT's.
 - Give landowners options (example 80% hardwood 20% pine).
 - Working on a strategy to get DOF out on every tract a year or two later to see what's going on with the tract.
 - Incentivize county foresters with goals for hardwood projects managed.
 - One goal is to have every single plan have some kind of activity scheduled for a future time.
 - Board members will ponder ideas on how to encourage hardwood planting and will discuss at a later date.

New Business:

Assessment of Legacy Fire Towers

State Forester Rob Farrell mentioned to the Board that we are pursuing getting rid of the fire towers for which DOF is responsible.

Shane Furze is the new assistant professor of silviculture for Virginia Tech, replacing David Carter.

Virginia Tech Natural Resources and Environment Dean Paul Winistorfer has announced his retirement, and we are in the process of conducting interviews for his replacement.

Carolyn Mulligan was approached by the Virginia Forest Magazine committee to provide an update of what the Board of Forestry does at each meeting.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

The next Board of Forestry meeting will be held in June or July. Would love to have the meeting at a different location. If you have any suggestions, please let State Forester Farrell know. Will look at when would be the best time to have a tour of the nurseries. A Doodle poll will be sent to identify a date.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Osl called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made and seconded to adjourn the March 27, 2025, meeting at 2:04 p.m. All present were in favor.

Minutes recorded by Executive Assistant Mary Weaver.