



# Leadership Roundtable Meeting (LRT)

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**March 2, 2021**

Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer moderated the meeting.

## State Forester's Report

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Rob Farrell spoke about the great success VDOF had in the General Assembly this year.

- ◆ Over \$2 million extra this year.
  - Virginia now has a hardwood incentive cost-share program.
  - General fund money for the nurseries to increase production.
  - Watershed Implementation positions for the Chesapeake Bay. They will work to improve water quality and Steward our Conservation Easement monitoring process.
  - Did not get the Incident Management Training positions. Didn't have enough time to make a case for this, will try for it next year.
  - Five percent raise for all state employees.
- ◆ More resources mean more work.
  - Head up a Hardwood Cost-Share program.
  - Hire more water quality folks for Chesapeake Bay work.
  - Do more Chesapeake Bay work.
  - Expectations are to greatly expand VDOF riparian buffer work.
- ◆ Got requirements from legislature:
  - Hosting an Urban Tree Retention study over the summer.
  - Submit report on how we are going to do the Hardwood Cost-Share program to legislature.
  - Part of a Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Carbon Sequestration Study.
  - Part of a wildlife action plan with Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR).
- ◆ First virtual Board of Forestry meeting on March 4.
  - Thirteen Board members, five seats will be coming open in June.
- ◆ Next month, April 6, will be a Senior Management Team (SMT) meeting, not a Leadership Roundtable (LRT) meeting.
- ◆ The message "Virginia is losing 16,000 acres of forest land a year" is no longer accurate. Stop using this message. Working on a new message.

- Statewide we're not losing forested acreage. We are holding steady, but locally losing forest to development. New message will address fragmentation and parcelization which both reduce function and value.

## Presentations

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### Conservation Easement Pre-Harvest Plan Template (Terry Lasher and Karl Didier)

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Terry and Karl shared changes to the Conservation Easement Pre-Harvest Plan template. Wanted to ensure changes made do not conflict with any other programs.

- ◆ Will send out to LRT after meeting for review.
- ◆ Need to have a procedure in place to specify when this template is used.
- ◆ There is an internal process in place to keep landowners informed.

Karl reviewed the conservation teams' reorganization and redefined responsibilities.

- ◆ All positions are now based out of headquarters even though some still work from home.
- ◆ Overall, the team is responsible for implementing and developing innovative strategies to conserve Virginia's working forests. The teams' principal responsibility will continue to be growing and stewarding a statewide portfolio of open-space easements to protect high-conservation-value forests, although they are also tasked with starting or growing other effective strategies, including increasing landowner involvement in forest carbon markets and increasing forest landowner participation in estate and legacy planning (the Generation NEXT program). The team members are:
  - *Amanda Scheps* – one of two Forest Conservation Specialists responsible for developing new easements in the eastern half of the state. Amanda works from Warrenton.
  - *Andrew Fotinos* – our second Forest Conservation Specialist responsible for developing new easements in the western half of the state. Andrew will also be responsible for managing our relationship with the USFS's Forest Legacy Program that funds much of our work to create easements and acquire new state forests. He also serves as agency specialist regarding real estate issues that affect state forests (example, when the Department of Transportation requests to widen a road or put in a right-of-way on one of our forests). Andrew works from Salem.
  - *Sarah Parmelee* – Forestland Conservation Coordinator, responsible for stewardship and monitoring of easements, including maintaining continual communication and outreach efforts with easement landowners. Sarah is responsible for approving new Forest Stewardship Plans and Pre-Harvest Plans on easements - please send new plans to her. Sarah is also responsible for curating our GIS data as it relates to easements, so if you need information about a specific easement, please contact Sarah. Sarah works from Headquarters.
  - *Karl Didier* – Forestland Conservation Program Manager. In addition to coordinating the team, Karl will lead efforts to identify and implement new strategies to conserve Virginia's forests (e.g., carbon markets), as well as prioritizing where we should direct our efforts to have the biggest impact, including revising our Forest Conservation Value map. In addition, Karl will be responsible for representing the team on conservation funding committees, such as the Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and other multi-institutional conservation efforts such as the Generation NEXT program, Virginia United Land Trusts (VaULT) and the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). Karl works from Headquarters.

## Updates

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### Website – (Janet Muncy)

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Janet Muncy reviewed the status of the new website.

- ◆ Finalizing the plan for testing the new website.
  - Testing group will be the Leadership Roundtable, Executive Team and select partners.
- ◆ General email boxes will be set up to answer customer service questions that come from the website.
- ◆ There will be a members-only page that will be partially complete. This site will allow staff to submit procurement information for the website. Along with calendar items to go on the public calendar.

### General Assembly Approved Budget (John Colligan)

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John Colligan reviewed the budget status.

- ◆ Great year for VDOF and the commonwealth. VDOF received:
  - Hardwood Incentive Cost-Share program with fully funded position.
  - Four fully funded Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) positions.
  - One-time Funding for nursery equipment.
  - Water Quality improvement funding that flows through Department Conservation Resources (DCR).
    - \$250,000.00 for the logger's cost-share and \$500,000.00 for tree stuff.
- ◆ Employees' five percent pay increase goes into effect on July 1.

### VDOF – Support of State Emergency Operations Center (John Miller)

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John Miller reviewed the VDOF support of the State Emergency Operations Center.

- ◆ Since mid-January VDOF's IMT has been helping the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to help with support of the vaccination effort.
  - Challenge of state-provided assistance with locally provided assistance.
  - Currently have two teams of six members rotating each month.
  - Task force leaders in areas where vaccination sites will be.

Ed appreciates everyone contributing to this effort, whether it's helping on the team or picking the slack for those pulled away.

## Round Robin Updates

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### Eastern Region (Bryant Bays)

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- ◆ Main focus has been keeping roads open and cleaning up storm damage from the past ice storm.
- ◆ Assisting with five vaccination sites around the region.
- ◆ Eighty-nine approved exemptions burns approved covering 20,000 acres. Thirty-five of those exemptions are VDOF applications.
- ◆ Wrapped up our replanting inspections, no significant survival issues.
- ◆ Hired Capital and Mattaponi area forester positions. Interviewing for the Eastern region mechanic position. Two open positions left, Blackwater forester and Capital forest technician.

- ◆ Waverly and Blackwater have been working on a test project that cleans-up and reduces the number of files according to the Library of Virginia. Looking at having 80 – 90 bank boxes of files ready to shred.

## Nursery (Ed Zimmer for Josh Bennicoff)

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- ◆ Over sixty percent of the loblolly crop is lifted.
- ◆ Pick-up by planting contractors is still a little slow.
- ◆ Seedlings are still available.
- ◆ Going to issue the warden trees to the regions. They will be elite instead of premium seedlings.
- ◆ Will expand planting at Augusta with equipment funding received in the budget.

## GIS (Parik Patel for Jason Braunstein)

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- ◆ Continue supporting regions with geographic information system (GIS) mapping.
- ◆ GIS Pro-Training begins Thursday March 4 and Monday March 8.

## Forest Health (Dean Cumbia for Lori Chamberlin)

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- ◆ Welcome the new Forest Health Technician Teagan O'Brien who started February 25.
- ◆ Received \$10,000 from the Virginia Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services (VDACS) plant protection fund for spotted lanternfly work.
  - Doing surveys for high-risk areas.

## Finance (Fernanda Crandol)

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- ◆ The Cardinal payroll project has been postponed. No projected date at this time.
- ◆ Welcome the new Procurement Officer Corey Richie.
- ◆ Will be meeting with the vendor of the VCE printer cartridges to address the concerns with the cartridges.

## Forest Resource Management (Dean Cumbia)

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- ◆ Reforestation Timberlands (RT) committee met in February. Discussed the RT 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event.
- ◆ Working on 20 hardwood demonstration sites using the hardwood assessment tool.
- ◆ Thanked Todd Groh for his service with the vaccination Incident Management Team (IMT).

## Forestland Conservation (Karl Didier)

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- ◆ Received results of USDA Forest Service (USFS) audit for the Forest Legacy program and projects from 2016-2020. Passed audit with flying colors. Next audit in five years.
- ◆ Annual monitoring this will include landowner questionnaires which will be going out by email this month and regular mail for those that don't respond by email.
- ◆ Team is developing 14 new easements and four – five carryovers.

## Fleet (John Miller for Danny Fortune)

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- ◆ Danny Fortune is now the contact for the Federal Excess Personal (FEP) Program and the Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) Program.

## State Forest (Gary Heiser)

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- ◆ Timber sales going well.
- ◆ Working on cleaning up storm damage on the State Forests from the ice storm.

## Urban and Community Forestry (Lara Johnson)

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- ◆ Received from the Arbor Day Foundation our Tree City USA boxes and will be distributing to the regions.
  - Arbor Day Foundation has waived the Arbor Day requirements this year but are requiring a signed proclamation. Will email all Tree City USA communities to let them know and will put something in the Branch.
- ◆ Received 28 applications for the Trees for Clean Water Program. Fourteen of these are first-time applicants.

## Fire and Emergency Response (John Miller)

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- ◆ Dave Houttekier is doing fire readiness checks throughout the state.
- ◆ Information coming soon on the Longwood Fire Academy Training and the Mid-Atlantic Fire Academy Training.

## Information Technology (Parik Patel)

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- ◆ Approximately 20 computers left for computer refresh this round.
- ◆ The refresh for the regions are being finalized. Staff will meet the technician at one of the three regional offices. On schedule to have all done by June.

## FIA (John Pemberton)

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- ◆ 30 percent complete with the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) panel.
- ◆ Elena Hurley, started last week as a forest inventory technician in Abingdon. FIA is currently fully staffed.
- ◆ Currently reviewing the 2019 draft tables from the USDA Forest Service and those will be released to the public.
- ◆ Staff will be doing the Urban FIA recertification training for the work in NOVA this summer.

## Water Quality (Matt Poirot)

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- ◆ Two months left for the 2020 calendar year to get the Riparian Tax Buffer Credit applications in.
- ◆ Virginia Logging Expo is scheduled to happen in May. Plan is to have one next year as well.
- ◆ Working on an endangered species comment from the Virginia field office of the Fish and Wildlife Service..

## Human Resources (Hector Rivera)

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- ◆ Received a Warning Order in regards to an email that will be sent out on March 8 to all state employees about an Adjunct Emergency Work Force. Employees will be able to volunteer to help with the work force depending on whether they are considered essential or non-essential.
  - All regional staff and anyone involved in IMT are considered essential and cannot volunteer at this time.
  - Non-essential are able to volunteer and will be at two week increments.
  - A message will go out in h Branch with more details.
- ◆ All state employees as of March 10 or April 10, 2021 will receive a five percent pay raise in July.

- ◆ Regions have done some great diverse hiring has been done.
  - Historically raises for P-14's will be determined by agency funding.
- ◆ Rolled out our Education Tuition Assistant Program and the Education Paid Leave Program two years ago.
  - We currently have five participants using one of the programs.
  - These programs are a great opportunity to offer growth for staff. Please encourage these programs.
  - Virtual hiring going well. Developed a one page document to assist applicants with interviewing.

## Assets and Infrastructure (Joe Schaefer)

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- ◆ Ed Zimmer mentioned the great job Joe Schaefer and his staff did cleaning up after a water fountain malfunction in the Headquarters building that happened over the weekend.

## Public Information (Michelle Stoll)

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- ◆ Finalizing the ads for our sponsorship that will begin airing on April 1 for the Untamed show on PBS.
- ◆ Great media coverage for spring wildfire season, prescribed burning and storm response. Thanks to everyone that spoke with the media.
- ◆ Since we can't hold camp this year due to the pandemic VDOF is partnering with the Soil and Water Conservation District for a virtual academy. The academy will be called The Virginia Academy of Natural Resources and run from July 12-16. Classes will be a combination of synchronous and asynchronous.
- ◆ This is not a replacement for camp just a substitute until we can meet in person.

## State Lands Coordinator (Ed Stoots)

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- ◆ State Forest staff has been busy with storm clean-up.
- ◆ Recently completed the annual SFI survey to maintain certification.
- ◆ Completed an SFI logo use survey along with an SFI marketing use training course.
- ◆ Have two state-owned lands timber sales posted on the web site for Virginia Tech McCormick Farm Property.
- ◆ Will be posting a state-owned timber sale for Greensville Correction Center soon.
- ◆ Gary Heiser is retiring March 25.
- ◆ Working on the Turlington acquisition.

## Central Region (Robbie Talbert)

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- ◆ Four new employees have been hired;
  - March 10-Alejandro Zuniga area forester for Meherrin work area
  - March 25-Peter Schoderbeck area forester for Rappahannock work area
  - April 10-Chad Briggs forest technician for Shenandoah work area
  - August 10-Zoe Bergman area forester for Rappahannock
- ◆ Central Region now has zero vacancies.
- ◆ Approved 103 burning exemption applications covering 73,000 acres. Thirty-five of those exemptions are VDOF applications.

## Western Region (Chris Thomsen)

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- ◆ Finished interviews last week and made offers for the Blue Ridge area forester and the Mountain Valley forest technician positions.
- ◆ Interviewing next week for two forest technician positions in the Headwaters work area. Western Region will have no vacancies after these positions are filled.
- ◆ Thanks to Mountain Valley work area staff Grayson Coleman and Clint Folks for finishing up the restoration of the gravel driveway at the Delta Forestry Work Center Office.
- ◆ Western Region completed the timber trespass training.

Ed Zimmer thanked everybody for their continued hard work. Stay safe and be vigilant with COVID-19.

*Minutes recorded by Mary Weaver, Executive Assistant*