



Board of Forestry Meeting

March 22, 2016
Charlottesville, VA

Call to Order

The Board of Forestry meeting was called to order at 9:30a.m. by Chairman Smith at the Central Office, in Charlottesville, VA.

Chairman Smith reminded the board members of the Anti-Trust Acknowledgement statement and the annual form needed to be signed.

Board of Forestry Members Present (roll call by Mary Weaver):

Don Bright, Joel Cathey, Franklin Myers, Greg Scheerer, Dr. David Smith, Beth Flippo Hutchins, John Burke III, Ken Morgan, Jr., Keith Drohan, James Harder, and William Snyder

Glen Worrell arrived at 9:37a.m.

Members Absent:

None

Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made to adopt the agenda as stated, seconded. All present were in favor.

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Virginia Department of Forestry Present:

Bettina Ring, State Forester; Rob Farrell, Deputy State Forester; Andy Alvarez, Chief of Administration; Ed Zimmer, Chief of Operations; Dean Cumbia, Director Resource Management; Todd Groh, Assistant Director Resource Management; Faye DiFazio, Budget Analyst; Wanda Colvin, Director of Finance; Mike Santucci, Assistant Director Forestland Conservation; Mary Weaver, Administrative Staff Specialist

Recognition of Guests and Visitors:

Sam Towell, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry; Ron Jenkins, Virginia Loggers Association; Susan Seward, Virginia Forest Products Association; Andrew Smith, Virginia Farm Bureau; Paul Howe, Virginia Forestry Association, Kurt Christensen, landowner Culpeper and Louisa Counties

Hearing of Citizens

Mr. Kurt Christiansen private landowner, would hope the Virginia Department of Forestry focus on their historic court duties like: fire, reforestation and BMP compliance and less on conservation easements, third party certification and things of that sort.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the September 22, 2015 meeting minutes as presented, seconded. All present were in favor.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Update

Deputy Secretary Sam Towell gave a brief update to the board on the General Assembly for this year. Most of the activity this year was focused on the budget. It was a successful budget, the largest agriculture and forestry budget in the history of the Commonwealth. On the Forestry side, three primary components were full funding of the Reforestation of Timberlands program, additional money for firefighting equipment, and additional funding for four positions including three foresters and one telecommunications specialist. Elements from the VDACS side that might be of interest are; the Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund which assist with forestry programs was doubled and the Virginia Farmers Business fund which was started for micro grants for farmers.

The Century Forest Program is the first in the nation. The kickoff was March 21 with a bill signing.

At the Governor's Conference on Agriculture Trade the exports were down to 3.14 billion dollars this year, still second highest on record. We further out paced North Carolina on the east coast and are catching up with Georgia.

State Forester's Report

Ms. Bettina Ring welcomed everyone and thanked the VDOF staff for all their hard work. The budget we have today wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for everyone working together.

Bettina explained to the Board of Forestry the importance of all positions at VDOF and when there is a vacancy it is looked at and evaluated to ensure that it is used to best suit the needs of the agency. With keeping our focus on the core mission, we decided to repurpose the position left vacant by Buck Kline's retirement to a Chief of Operations. Ed Zimmer, previously our regional forester of our Central Region, was hired in this position and will report to Rob Farrell. He will supervise our regional foresters and directors of our forest protection, forest management and water resource programs. Rob Farrell will be taking on new responsibilities supervising our conservation division; land conservation, utilization and marketing, and urban and community forestry programs as well as operations.

Bettina thanked the Board, Deputy Secretary Sam Towell – along with Secretary Haymore and the rest of the staff for their support along with the Governor for a very successful General Assembly session. She also thanked VDOF partners and stakeholders for their leadership and support. We had some key legislators who were instrumental in helping us secure this funding and we are most appreciative.

As mentioned, VDOFs proposal to create a Century Forest program to honor Virginia landowners who have managed their forestland for 100 years or more was unanimously approved. The Governor signed this into law and held a special bill signing ceremony as part of the Century Farmers and soon to be Century Forest Landowners, at the Executive Mansion. John Burke was present for this bill signing, along with a number of other forest landowners in the state.

The water quality improvement fund was funded once again. It provides cost share assistance for loggers to help support BMPs. A small portion of this funding goes towards an urban tree canopy program. This provides tree planting in urbans within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. We would like to see the funding level for these two programs increase in the future.

We had a tornado recently in the state and some damage occurred in the Waverly and Farmville areas. VDOF participated in a number of ways; assisted in the Emergency Command Center in Richmond, had chain saw crews in place to help with search and rescue in local areas and then assessed the damage to get information out to the loggers. Dean Cumbia reported that approximately 1700 acres, 2.2 million dollars in timber damage from the three tornados; Appomattox, Waverly and Essex. VDOF state forests lost about 172 acres, approximately 1/4million dollars in timber. The Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) was activated by the Farm Service Agency. This 75% cost share funding will be available in Essex and Appomattox Counties.

On the administrative side of VDOF we are working to update the VDOF website to make it more user friendly and easy to follow for our customers. We will be calling on the Board to help us test the site from a landowner and industry perspective.

We lost one of our own last week. Paul Revell, urban and community forestry program manager, passed after a prolonged illness. Paul recently retired after 30 years of service with the organization. He was a great networker and won many awards. Paul will be greatly missed at VDOF.

We have several positions that we are working on filling; Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager, Central Regional Forester and the Eastern Regional Forester as Eastern Region Regional Forester Tony Noreika will be retiring April 1 after 32 years of service.

Lori Chamberlin was hired as VDOF's Forest Health Manager, replacing Chris Asaro; she was previously our Forest Health Technician. The Forest Health Report has been distributed to you; this is the first one written by Lori.

The 2015 State Forest Review has also been distributed. It is created year to give us an opportunity to show what we have accomplished in the past year.

Informational Items

Budget Update:

Mr. Andy Alvarez, chief of administration, reviewed with the Board the process of the two year budget cycle that is adopted in even years and amended in odd years. The budget adopted for FY17 is approximately 31.7 million dollars. Three decision packages for the Department of Forestry were funded this year:

- ◆ Forest Sustainability and the New Virginia Economy – 100% match of Reforestation of Timber(RT) Incentive payments to landowners and three FTE forester positions
- ◆ Replacement of Fire Suppression Equipment - Master Equipment Lease Program (MLEP) financing to replace dozers and transports, as well as first responder vehicles
- ◆ Vehicles and Telecommunications – One full time telecommunications position including salary and vehicle.

Mr. Alvarez briefed the Board on the strategy of the emergency equipment acquisition over the next 10 years.

Mr. Worrell questioned if the federal funds are factored in when considering the budget. All factors are considered in the budget process. Ms. Ring mentioned that those numbers are down, some of that money is going into the new grant process and VDOF has to compete with our counterparts in other states. The federal funds are designated for certain programs and are more restrictive. The majority of the funding is dedicated to specific projects. Mr. Burke asked how does the carryover money work, is that money secure from future budgets? Mr. Towell responded that it is backed by the full faith and credit of the Commonwealth so it is more secure than average. The federal funds have been on the rise over the past ten years but those funds are also very restricted funds.

Mr. Morgan inquired, for VDOF to be fully funded again what exactly should be our driving message going forward? Being able to demonstrate how far these dollars go and what we can do with them as well as sharing stories regarding the importance of our forests. Chairman Smith expressed how important all our partnerships are in getting things done. How does VDOF continue to promote a local presence with fewer personnel? Presence is important. . We have become much more efficient in what we do but would like to hear your thoughts and ideas from board members on how to improve.

Mr. Sheerer was glad to hear that the website is being improved, a website that is easy to locate foresters and information landowners need will help tremendously. The question was asked, "Where does the continuous forest inventory fit into the budget?" Ms. Ring replied that inventory is extremely important. Industry at the national level and all VDOF partners have been working hard to make sure there is enough funding at the federal level to at least remain at a seven year cycle and not drop below that. Forestry Inventory Analysis needs to be supported first. It is also real important to meet our match. Mr. Burke mentioned that VDOF is a trusted advisor to landowners and it is really important not to lose that. VDOF is not going to reach landowners unless they are trusted.

Northern Long-Eared Bat Update:

Mr. Dean Cumbia, director of resource management, updated the Board in regards to the survival of the Northern Long-Eared Bat and the white nose-syndrome disease. As of February 2016, Department of Game Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has put a rule into effect that there is only a restriction of harvesting ¼ mile around the hibernation areas as well as 150 feet around roost trees. Most of these bats are located in caves in Western Virginia. DGIF has also issued a similar ruling on two other bats; the little brown and tri color bats effective April 1. These restrictions will have a small impact to forestry and landowners.

Forestland Conservation:

Mr. Mike Santucci, assistant director of forestland conservation, presented to the Board members an overview of the VDOF conservation programs for family forest owners (FFO). VDOF programs are geared towards the stabilizing the forestland base. The majority of Virginia's forests, approximately 10 million acres, are owned by family forest landowners. They control 75% of the timber supply along with the majority of the functions and values that are derived from forests. The conservation and management decisions that they make are very critical in sustaining the forest land base in Virginia. Mr. Santucci discussed the key forest resource issues of; forest land base decreasing and FFO land base becoming more parcelized. VDOF was directed to conduct a study on incentives to private landowners to hold and preserve their forestland; as a result, the Forestland Conservation program was created in 2004. Currently the majority of owners of family forestland want three things: their property to remain intact, remain in forest and remain in the family, which is what VDOF programs do. Mr. Santucci reviewed four FFO conservation programs; Working Forest Easements, Generation NEXT, Woodland Legacy Planning Pilot Project (WLP3) and Century Forests, along with the required criteria for these programs. Landowners have every right to donate an easement but it is at VDOF's discretion to accept that easement. The program impact to date is 126 easements with approximately 35,834 acres with a total of 179 miles of streams in 50 counties and the City of Suffolk, and 240 potential properties. The majority of VDOF easements are charitable donations from landowners. Mr. Kurt Christensen inquired if VDOF has any interest in pursuing fixed terms for easements vs perpetuity. Conservation easements are one tool in the tool box and voluntary for the landowner to choose. VDOF doesn't have a choice in this, landowners donate to get tax credits and a tax break, and they would not receive tax credits on fixed terms. VDOF easements require responsible, managed, informed and intentional harvesting.

Mr. Santucci reviewed the Generation NEXT workshop. A two day workshop separated by one week that helps landowners understand planning and steps needed to keep land in their family. A Woodland Legacy Planning Pilot Project has begun with a competitive grant to analyze, educate and provide outreach to increase awareness of what landowners can do to keep their land in their families. Century Forest Program, a bill to recognize a family's long term commitment to sustain their forestland base and provide encouragement and incentive to pass on to the next generation, has been signed and will take effect July 1, 2016.

Action Items

Nomination Committee for Chairman:

Chairman Smith asked Anne Beals and Greg Scheerer to serve on the nominating committee for Chairman and Vice Chairman and report back at the next Board meeting with nominations.

Reforestation of Timberlands (RT) Program Recommendations:

Todd Groh, assistant director of resource management, reviewed the RT program project accomplishments to date. As of the end of February \$2,047,957.00 of RT funds have been obligated for FY2016. Mr. Groh reviewed the revenue, expenses and incentives increases for the FY2016 RT program budget to date. Mr. Groh asked the Board what their recommendations for the RT rates were for FY17. VDOF recommended keeping the RT rates the same at 100 acres for another year. Mr. Dean Cumbia, director of resource management, explained some of the considerations for the recommendation; increased demand, backlog and shrinking federal cost-share. The Board inquired if the RT funds were eligible to be carried over to the next fiscal year if they are not spent in their entirety. The funds can be carried over to the next fiscal year. There is a small interest in shortleaf and longleaf pines. The RT incentive is helpful to people but the real message is to practice good forestry. VDOF changes to IFRIS will help us get better data information. We are trying to develop more rigor around evaluating our programs in order to determine what programs are successful and have impact and where changes are needed. More information will help us look at the landowner assistance side to know when we're moving the landowners to action and how RT and federal cost-share programs have been a tipping point in helping them reforest. Ms. Ring suggested looking at the FIA data at one of the next Board meetings to examine demand, etc. The Board would like to keep a close eye on site preparation prices. Chairman Smith suggested that the Board needs more than one year of data to make an informed recommendation for the future.

The Board was in concurrence with keeping the RT rates the same:

- Tree Planting – Loblolly pine - \$25 per acre
- Tree Planting – Other pine - \$48 per acre
- Site Preparation – Mechanical - \$60 per acre

- Site Preparation – Herbicide - \$70.00 per acre
- Site Preparation – Prescribed burning - \$35 per acre
- Herbicide Release by Air – all pines except white pine - \$22 per acre
- Herbicide Release by Air – white pine - \$45 per acre
- Herbicide Release by Ground – all pine - \$45 per acre

Board Recessed for lunch at 12:13pm

Board Reconvened at 12:47pm

Committee/Liaison Report

Hardwood Management:

Mr. John Burke, Mr. Dean Cumbia and Chairman Smith discussed with the Board the progress the Hardwood Task Force has made on hardwood management. Hardwood is a major part of Virginia's forest. It is critically important, has significant volume and is valuable to our economy. Hardwood resonates with many different people for many different reasons. Two focus points should be good science and the best sicultural practices to protect and improve the quality of hardwoods in Virginia. The Hardwood Task Force is working on a white paper to improve hardwood and will hopefully have it in draft form for review this fall. Hardwood management will not happen overnight and will not be a plantation; we will be relying on natural regeneration. We are approaching this very carefully and methodically as we move forward. The next benchmark for this task force will be to establish a timeline and what needs to be accomplished with whose help. The goal is to help provide insight to landowners and encourage them to invest in their hardwood forests to enhance the value in those trees.

Unfinished Business

None

New Business

Mr. Ken Morgan would like to recognize Senator Ruff for his diligence and leadership with the Century Forest and RT legislation. Bipartisan support is very important.

Mr. Don Bright mentioned it would be beneficial for the Board to see a reporting of how many new forest stewardship plans are being written along with a little bit of history of how it's grown at a future meeting.

Call of Executive Session

None

Adjournment

Chairman Smith called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made to adjourn the March 22, 2016 meeting at 01:15pm and seconded. All present were in favor.

Minutes recorded by Mary Weaver, Administrative Staff Specialist