



Board of Forestry Meeting

October 06, 2020
Appomattox, VA

Convene Meeting, Call to Order:

The Board of Forestry meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairperson Burke at the Appomattox Inn and Suites in Appomattox, Virginia. Chairperson Burke read the anti-trust policy to remind the Board of the legal requirements.

Roll Call:

Board of Forestry Members Present

John Burke III, Jamie Coleman, Michael Harold, Beth Flippo Hutchins, Ken Morgan Jr., Franklin Myers, Bill Osl, Ben Reeves, Heather Richards, Greg Scheerer, Dr. David Smith and Glen Worrell

Members Absent

Mike Hinch

Adoption of Agenda:

Motion was made to approve the agenda as presented; seconded. All present were in favor.

Recognition of Guests and Visitors:

Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOT) Present

Rob Farrell, State Forester; Ed Zimmer, Deputy State Forester; Terry Lasher, Assistant State Forester; Matt Poirot, Water Quality Program Manager; Deya Ramsden, Middle James River Forest Watershed Project Coordinator; Mary Weaver, Executive Assistant

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau; Lesley Mosley, Virginia Forest Products Association; Corey Connors, Virginia Forestry Association; Beckham Stanley, Virginia Agribusiness Council; Susan Seward, Virginia Forest Products Association; Former Board Member; Don Bright

Hearing of Citizens:

None

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the March 11, 2020 minutes as presented; seconded. All present were in favor.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry (SAF) Update:

Secretary Ring and Deputy Secretary Copenhaver were unable to attend due to multiple events happening in Richmond. On Secretary Ring's behalf State Forester Rob Farrell discussed the items below.

- ◆ Introduced the Board of Forestry's three new Board members that were appointed in July.
 - Jamie Coleman from R. S Coleman Lumber Company holding a Hardwood Lumber Industry position.
 - Michael Harold from Speyside Bourbon Cooperage holding a Hardwood Lumber Industry position.
 - Bill Osl from Oakland Farm holding a Small Forest Landowner position.
- ◆ Recognized three board members whose term ended in June. In recognition of their service, Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer presented picture frames he made from Chestnut lumber from the Lesesne State Forest research area.
 - Don Bright expressed his thanks and gratitude for how much he has learned while serving on the Board of Forestry.
 - Anne Beals and Joel Cathey were unable to attend and will receive their frames at a later time.
- ◆ Rob Farrell gave the floor to Assistant State Forester Terry Lasher who introduced VDOF's Middle James River Forest Watershed project Coordinator Deya Ramsden. The program focuses on utilizing the Virginia Environment Endowment funds to do watershed restoration work and stream stabilization work in the Middle James Watershed.
- ◆ Acknowledged the challenges everyone is facing in the industry and forestry community and expressed his appreciation to everyone for their efforts to keep everything going and growing.
- ◆ Recognized the VDOF for keeping things going and being responsive while keeping with the COVID-19 restrictions.
 - Would like to hear if there are any concerns.
 - Information Technology (IT) team quickly made sure everyone was up and ready to operate outside the office with equipment and internet.
 - Project Learning Tree went from a completely hands on face to face teaching program for teachers and students to a completely virtual online program providing information to teachers and students.
 - Received a letter from a teacher in Hawaii tasked with teaching Natural Resources with no background. She found VDOF's website and was very pleased with the information she found.
 - Throughout the COVID-19 response, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management Emergency Operation Center planning was done by VDOF. Because of VDOF's experience in wildfires and incident management teams, VDOF is the most experienced Incident Management Team (IMT) in Virginia.
 - VDOF was part of the IMT for 113 days straight, 1300 individual 12 hour shifts with 22 employees.
- ◆ Some VDOF staff and part-time firefighters helping with fires out west.
 - Resources at the national level are stretched almost to the breaking point.
- ◆ Getting ready to deploy VDOF staff down to Alabama to work flood recovery from the Hurricane. No shortage of assistance needed.
- ◆ The Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund (AFID) grants had some successes with some new sawmills and sawmill expansions in Virginia.
- ◆ On a national level, administration has placed an emphasis on shared stewardship.
 - VDOF is entering into a shared stewardship agreement with the George Washington Jefferson National Forest and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) committing to work together.

- VDOF is entering into a second shared stewardship agreement with the State Foresters of the Chesapeake Bay States committing that all will work together to do good forestry work and try to get more buffers for the Chesapeake Bay.

State Forester's Report:

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

- ◆ The approved 2021 budget was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included the VDOF positions, funding for the apprentice program, study of the IFRIS database and Hardwood Cost-Share funding.
 - Looking towards the 2021 General Assembly, priorities remain the same. Would be great to get the positions and funding again.
 - This is the last General Assembly with the Northam administration. Secretary Ring would like to have an administration legacy item related to forestry.
- ◆ The agency budget is currently last year's budget, nothing lost, and nothing gained.
- ◆ A follow-up from last year's General Assembly:
 - There were multiple bills put forward from various localities that dealt with tree protection, tree preservation during development, and trees for water quality related to the Chesapeake Bay.
 - All of them raised concerns about potential impacts to the right to practice forestry.
 - Most of the bills were tabled.
 - Rob Farrell offered the VDOF to work with the localities to come up with a more holistic solution.
 - Had plans to get all localities together, tell them what their current options were with no new legislation, identify what the gaps were, propose solutions to fill the gaps and then go to the broader community and see if a solution could be created that everyone could live with.
 - Convened the localities and got a summary report. Due to COVID-19 was unable to get to; what are the next steps and getting the stakeholders together.
 - Shared the summary report with VDOF partners. Looking for one big solution.
 - The National Audubon Society (NAS) local chapter in Northern Virginia proposed legislation that would prohibit counties from spraying for fall cankerworm unless all land owners opted in for spraying, The NAS had concerns about the baby birds that rely on fall cankerworms for food.
 - Legislation was tabled, and Rob Farrell offered to meet with them.
 - Plan to create a white paper that states what VDOF knows and thinks about fall cankerworms and implications for oak declines.
- ◆ China has banned import of southern yellow pine (SYP) logs from Virginia and South Carolina because of nematodes.
 - Considering asking USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to propose to China a pilot program to export logs from Virginia and South Carolina.
 - South Carolina feels they have enough commitment to export logs.
 - Need to ensure there is enough commitment in Virginia to participate.
 - Board discussed exporting views.
 - VDOF will pursue any opportunity on behalf of forest resource in Virginia.
- ◆ Update on hiring at VDOF:
 - 23 open positions, part-time and full-time
 - Currently interviewing for four forester positions across the three regions.

- Next positions to be filled include forestry and nursery technicians, utilization and marketing grant position, land conservation manager, urban and community forestry, water quality specialist and a senior area forester.
- So far, unable to find a mechanic in the eastern region.
- ◆ Would like to propose that VDOF Director of Human Resources Hector Rivera present at the March Board of Forestry meeting his career progression plan that he is developing for our foresters and technicians.
 - Seeking funding for career increases in pay.
- ◆ Charlotte State Forest – Stanley property in Charlotte County was purchased by The Conservation Fund with Heather Richards' great work.
 - VDOF is in the process of purchasing property from The Conservation Fund in phases. Currently in phase-one consisting of 2,500 acres. Phase-2 will add another 2,500 acres. Phase-3 will be purchase of easements.
- ◆ Rob Farrell has been meeting with individual Senior Area Foresters every other week. These visits have been very beneficial.
- ◆ Presented a sneak peak of the redesigned website.
- ◆ Charlie Becker, who was in the Marketing and Utilization Program Manager position, left to work for the U.S. Forest Service.
 - Replacing the Marketing and Utilization grant position first because the grant money needs to be spent and quickly approaching deadlines.
 - Will replace the Marketing and Utilization Program Manager position after reviewing our economic strategy.

Informational Items:

Reports from Board members on impact from COVID-19

The Board and partners were given the opportunity to express the impact COVID-19 is having on them or their business.

- ◆ Martha Moore from Virginia Farm Bureau spoke on concerns of the mandatory COVID-19 worker protection standards becoming permanent.
- ◆ Susan Seward from Virginia Forest Products Association was concerned about getting a permanent infection disease standard that goes beyond COVID-19.
- ◆ Cory Connors from Virginia Forestry Association shared concerns about the lack of outreach from the Virginia Occupational Safety and Health (VOSH) Program to employers about what their requirements are.
- ◆ Don Bright, former board member, spoke about the hardwood lumber industry. Prices have plummeted in hardwood lumber. Landowners are holding onto timber. Timber sales are getting harder to find. Housing boom is helping, and he is optimistic that the industry will recover.
- ◆ Heather Richards shared her concerns about the impact upon land conservation deals by people purchasing land outside of cities. They are able to outbid conservation organizations. This is particularly significant in rural areas that are two – three hours from the cities.
- ◆ Beth Hutchinson spoke about the difficulty of finding people willing to work.
- ◆ John Burke noted, from a landowner's perspective, the VDOF has not missed a beat.

Ten-minute break.

VDOF Economic Development Efforts

Assistant State Forester Terry Lasher reviewed changes in the VDOF Utilization and Marketing division.

- ◆ Utilization and Marketing Program Manager Charlie Becker retired October 1 and is working for the U.S. Forest Service.

- Currently hiring for the Utilization and Marketing Project Developer.
- Evaluating the Utilization and Marketing Program Manager position and will advertise soon.
- ◆ Thinking about the future and how to position VDOF with workforce development.
- ◆ Exploring possibilities for the next big innovative product. VDOF is working with Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) and partners at Virginia Department Agricultural and Consumer Services to explore opportunities related to cross-laminated timber as well as other potential products and markets like carbon sequestration in Virginia.
- ◆ The Utilization and Marketing Project Developer will take the information from the Industry roundtables and will begin to chart the future approach of how VDOF interacts and works with the industries for the next steps in market and product development.
- ◆ Urban Wood Utilization Forester Joe Lehnen has been working with urban wood workshops to utilize urban wood and keep it out of landfills.

Solar Energy Development Update

Terry Lasher gave the board an overview of where solar development is taking place, what the numbers are starting to look like in terms of number of projects, number of acres and what VDOF's role was at the Solar Regulatory Advisory Panel.

- ◆ Solar development will usually impact forest and agricultural lands.
- ◆ Currently there is 107 projects and a total of 27,970 acres that can be potentially impacted by solar development if we look at the Notice of Intent, permits in review and projects approved. It is possible that not all 107 projects will be completed due to local approvals, reviews or contractors pulling their Notice of Intent
- ◆ In addition to the acreage impacted by solar development, it is estimated that an average of 22,660 acres of agricultural land is lost to development per year.
- ◆ VDOF was a part of the Solar Regulatory Advisory Panel that met to discuss what the permit-by-right review process for solar applications should look like and what costs should be to keep program self-sustaining.
 - There was an effort to limit forestland and agricultural land loss or impacts. . A request was proposed regarding addressing these potential losses that if you can't have avoidance then there needs to be some mitigation. The Solar Permit by Right recommendations made by the RAP are currently sitting on the desk of the Secretary of Natural Resources.

The Board briefly discussed solar development issues.

- ◆ We need an economic analysis to look at long-term value and data regarding pitting "Green versus Green". Items such as:
 - How is solar development impacted if subsidies are removed?
 - What is the long-term impact on the soil from having nothing growing on the land?
 - What issues are involved in replacing solar panels?
 - What about all the energy that goes into making a solar panel?
 - Are solar panels recycled?
- ◆ Should or could the state make some effort to direct where solar farms can be built without impacting significant working forests and agriculture? Brown field sites, parking lots, poor soils.
- ◆ Should there be some sort of state-level effort to look at solar farms more holistically?
- ◆ Rob Farrell mentioned that there are two efforts under way by other groups to look at siting solar development to protect natural resources and identifying issues for the Northam administration.
- ◆ Board of Supervisors have control through creating ordinances to support solar development.
- ◆ Solar development will be discussed in-depth at a future Board of Forestry meeting.

- ◆ Mr. Scheerer requested that the information about solar development reflect the number of acres affected on each site. He asked that information be gathered on all the non-permit required sites and shared at the meeting when solar development is discussed.
- ◆ Tentative plans were made to discuss the next set of priorities for the Board of Forestry during the March 2021 meeting. A working group is being created to look at how Virginia citizens get to weigh in on where solar goes. This group is willing to give a presentation to the board on their findings. VDOF will schedule a meeting after the March meeting to discuss solar.
- ◆ There was discussion of who would be able to do the economic analysis of solar development compared to forestry (green vs. green).
- ◆ Susan Seward mentioned looking at getting legislation that requires tree replacement for the trees removed for solar development.

The Board recessed at 12:30 p.m. for lunch and reconvened at 12:40 p.m.

VDOF Silviculture Water Quality Program

Water Quality Program Manager Matt Poirot gave a presentation on the VDOF Water Quality Program. Matt discussed the following items.

- ◆ The program has a program manager and 13 water quality positions dedicated to the Water Quality program.
- ◆ Operationally involved with protecting Virginia's Water Quality by:
 - Harvest inspections, water quality law enforcement and timber theft initiative
 - best management practices (BMP) training – SHARP Loggers Program, landowner education
 - BMP implementation monitoring
- ◆ Chesapeake Bay Initiative
 - Riparian forest buffer program
 - Afforestation
 - Urban tree canopy
 - Forestland conservation
- ◆ Riparian Forest Buffer Tax Credit
- ◆ Compliance actions and violations have greatly decreased and programs are changing behavior.
- ◆ Using drones for some inspections greatly reduces the time for an inspection.
- ◆ All 13 states in the Southern region are using the same monitoring protocol.
- ◆ Water quality grant funding
 - Receive Chesapeake Bay grant every year that goes to the Virginia Trees for Clean Water Program which promotes forest buffers in urban areas primarily.
 - Chesapeake Bay Regulatory and Accountability Program (CBRAP) grant used to cover Bay BMP monitoring, water quality law enforcement, riparian forest buffer establishment and partially funds a Chesapeake Bay Coordinator.
- ◆ Moving towards a watershed approach to forest management and providing clean water to all Virginians.
- ◆ Chesapeake Bay initiatives within the agency cross four different program areas. Moving towards consolidating all these functions under an agency coordinator to meet the needs of the Bay Program in VDOFs reporting responsibilities.
- ◆ Protecting threatened and endangered species and their habitat will pose ongoing challenges to timber harvesting in the future.

- Recently VDOF has responded to requests for comments for the Neuse River waterdog (an amphibian) and the Carolina madtom (freshwater mussel).
- More than 300 additional species are being considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for listing and each will require a separate rule.
- Probably one of the single biggest things that will impact forestry in the next ten years.
- ◆ Working on a research project with Virginia Tech and some other Southern states on a regional program to quantify the correlation between sediment reduction and the percentage of BMP implementation.

Chesapeake Bay Water Improvement Plan (WIP) and VDOF Riparian Forest Buffer Plantings

Middle James River Forest Watershed Project Coordinator Deya Ramsden gave a presentation on the James River Buffer Program (JRBP). Deya reviewed with the Board:

- ◆ This program is grant funded through the Virginia Environmental Endowment under their Water Quality Improvement program.
- ◆ Goal is 942 acres of buffers in the next three years.
- ◆ VDOF and James River Association are lead partners with additional support from the Chesapeake Conservancy.
- ◆ Landowners may fill out an interest form located on the JRBP website; <https://www.jamesriverbuffers.org>
- ◆ This program is intended to fill the gaps for landowners that are not eligible for other buffer programs.
- ◆ Eligible area and landowner requirements are:
 - Within the Middle James Watershed
 - Area along waterway to establish a 35' or greater buffer
 - Land with waterways in need of streamside forest restoration
 - Can be buffer creation or enhancement on lands that were never forested.
 - Cannot plant over an area that was previously planted through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
 - landowners with a desire to improve water quality and riparian habitat on their property
- ◆ This is a turnkey program that funds the design, site preparation, labor and material for buffers, project establishment and maintenance for three years.
- ◆ VDOF's implementation of this program includes:
 - Goal of 700 acres plus 315 BMPs.
 - Offer planting of pines or hardwoods without shelters or through establishment through natural regeneration.
 - Implementing plans through private contractors.
- ◆ 131 acres of buffers have been installed through the JRBP with some match funding from Tomorrow Woods.
- ◆ Goals for future:
 - Plant 131 acres in 2021
 - Improve and promote natural regeneration as a method of riparian forest establishment.
 - Practitioner training.
 - Create a landowner publication.
- ◆ Investigate opportunity to incorporate buffers into solar developments that may or may not happen.

Hardwood Initiative Update

Rob Farrell expressed that during his field visits he has seen how difficult hardwood management will be. It will take much longer than expected. Farrell briefed Board members on VDOFs focus.

- ◆ Finding demonstration sites that will make good hardwood management sites for education and training.
- ◆ Finding landowners that are willing to:
 - be earlier adopters
 - take risks on their land
 - spend money since cost-share isn't available yet
- ◆ Finding places where contractors or landowners are willing to do the work.
- ◆ Identifying and sharing the good work that is being done.
- ◆ Federal EQIP funds and the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) Mitigation funds are available, if appropriate, for landowners to get some hardwood management done since statewide incentive is not available yet.
- ◆ Since VDOF did not receive funding for the Hardwood Coordinator position yet, the MVP Mitigation funds will be used. The U.S. Endowment group will hire a Hardwood Coordinator to get work done using those funds, with focus on public lands.
- ◆ VDOF will also be hiring a position to work on the Cowpasture project in Bath County.
- ◆ VDOF is also submitting a grant request through the U.S. Forest Service to fund the statewide Hardwood Coordinator for a couple years.

Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer spoke about what has been accomplished in IFRIS to address the following questions:

- ◆ What happens to all the harvested tracts after they're harvested?
 - We know what happened to 100 percent of the partial harvests and about 25 percent of the total harvests.
- ◆ How much land currently in hardwood is converted to pine when it's harvested?
 - From the data that is available (we do not have data on all tracts), we cannot yet determine how much hardwood land is being converted to pine after a regeneration harvest
- ◆ Ed Zimmer concluded that VDOF is identifying what data needs to be captured in IFRIS to determine answer these questions about all harvested tracts.

Committee/Liaison Reports:

Reforestation of Timberlands Committee

- ◆ Greg Scheerer reported that the Reforestation of Timberlands Committee met on September 24.
 - Beth Flippo-Hutchinson replaced Glen Worrell on the committee.
 - Reviewed accomplishments that will be discussed at the March meeting.
 - Reviewed the Virginia Seed Tree Law. Did not feel it had issues that needed to be addressed at this time.
 - Discussed concerns of seedlings from out-of state nursery operations that may not be suited for planting in Virginia being planted with RT funds and low survival rate.
 - Will be meeting again to discuss these rate changes at the March meeting.
 - Discussed celebrating the upcoming 50th anniversary of the RT program with a media event to commemorate.

Action Items:

Appointment of Nomination Committee Members

- ◆ Chairperson Burke appointed Glen Worrell and Frank Myers to the Nomination Committee to nominate a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from existing board members by February 15 for selection at the March Board meeting.

Unfinished Business:

None

New Business:

Frank Myers requested a meeting to come up with a BioMass plan.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

Will meet in March 2021 in Charlottesville. Mary Weaver will send out a poll for possible dates.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Burke called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made to adjourn the October 6, 2020 meeting at 2:05 p.m. and seconded. All present were in favor.

Minutes recorded by Mary Weaver, Executive Assistant