



Board of Forestry Meeting

March 14, 2023
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 Beth Flippo Hutchins at the James Garner Building in Charlottesville, Virginia. The chairperson reminded the Board of the anti-trust policy legal requirements.

A moment of silence for Forest Technician Rocky Wood, who lost his life while working a wildfire Thursday, March 9.

Roll Call:

Board of Forestry Members Present

Ervin Bielmyer, Clark Diehl, Jennifer Gagnon, Mike Harold, Beth Flippo Hutchins, Brian Irvine, Carolyn Mulligan, Bill Osl, Heather Richards, Greg Scheerer and Chad Shelton

Members Absent

Jamie Coleman and Ralph Sampson Jr.

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 (DOF) Present

State Forester Rob Farrell, Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer, Assistant State Forester Terry Lasher, Chief Human Resources Officer John Habel, Chief of Administration Amanda Davis, Utilization and Marketing Program Manager Sabina Dhugana, Communications Director Greg Bilyeu, Forest Management Director Dean Cumbia, Forest Management Program Manager Todd Groh, Executive Assistant Mary Weaver

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Other guests were Deputy Secretary of Agricultural and Forestry Beth Green; Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau; Susan Seward, Virginia Forest Products Association; Lesley Mosley, Virginia Forest Products Association; Corey Connors, Virginia Forestry Association

Hearing of Citizens:

None

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the September 27, 2022, minutes as presented; seconded. All present were in favor.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry (SAF) Update:

Deputy Secretary Green reported on current events.

- Deepest sympathy for the loss of DOF Forest Technician Rocky Wood. Governor Youngkin requested the flags flown at half-mast.
- Waiting for the Governor to approve the budget.

State Forester's Report:

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

- ◆ Forest Technician Rocky Wood was the first full-time employee lost on duty on a wildfire in the entire 109 years of our history.
 - Recognized the tremendous help of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs with this tragedy.
- ◆ Were successful with getting biomass back into the Virginia Clean Economic Act thanks to a great deal of effort from the associations in Virginia, the policy folks and the Secretary's office.
 - Legislation is on the Governor's desk awaiting his signature.
 - DOF will be looking at the life cycle analysis of carbon in the utilization of biomass for energy by December 2024.
 - Requested to develop biomass Best Management Practices (BMP) and also include a life cycle analysis of carbon due by December 2023.
 - Can borrow heavily from other southern states that already have biomass BMPs.
- ◆ The hardwood tax credit that passed legislation last year that would give landowners tax credit for the out-of-pocket cost of doing hardwood management still doesn't really exist. The special session was never officially adjourned, which caused the hardwood tax credit to not be official yet.
- ◆ Hoping for additional funding for the Forest Sustainability Fund that passed last year.
 - Thanks to Dean Cumbia and the Forest Resource Management Branch for getting that funding distributed in a short amount of time.
- ◆ Legislators suggested funding for invasive species work and dedicated positions to the four agencies that work on invasive species.
 - Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), and Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Natural Heritage.
 - DOF was requested to lead the effort for invasive species work.
- ◆ The Solar Workforce workgroup in the General Assembly that was created to figure out how to mitigate for solar did not make much progress.
- ◆ The northern long-eared bat (NLEB) was classified as a threatened species and silvicultural was exempt under threatened status. As of March 31, the NLEB will move to endangered species status.
 - DWR released two documents in regard to the NLEB.
 - Consultation Framework – for any federal funded projects.
 - Internal Volunteer Guide – for anything that does not have federal funding.
 - There are very few of these bats in Virginia.

- The map from DWR shows pretty much all cave locations are in national forests.
 - State Forester Farrell will share the maps with the Board.
- There are only two roost tree locations: Fentress Airbase in Virginia Beach and in the mountains in the western part of Virginia.
 - If you are doing work in these areas take steps to confirm there are not bats in that area.
- Current guidance is business as usual if you are not working in the two roost tree locations mentioned in the DWR guidelines.
- Working on forestry community messaging to send out on the NLEB.
- Continue to forward questions to DOF and we'll address as able.
- ◆ Infrastructure Inflation Reduction Act Funding. A proposal was sent into the feds for 18 million dollars.
 - This will last five years and will focus primarily on underserved communities, increase community engagement, help them want and care for trees, and pay for maintenance of the trees.
 - Funding will pay for an additional grant position and field positions.
- ◆ Recognized new additions to the executive team.
 - John Habel – Chief Human Resources Officer
 - Amanda Davis – Chief of Administration
 - Greg Bilyeu – Communications Director

Informational Items:

- ◆ Member terms expiring in June 2023.
 - Elizabeth Flippo Hutchins – 2nd term, ineligible for reappointment
 - Greg Scheerer – 2nd term, ineligible for reappointment
 - Brian Irvine – unexpired term, eligible for reappointment
- ◆ Chairperson Flippo Hutchins thanked Greg Scheerer for all his time and work during his time served.

Action Items:

Reforestation of Timberlands (RT) 2023 Practice and Rates

- ◆ Forest Management Program Manager Todd Groh reviewed the FY 2023 RT Program Budget Report, FY2023 RT Program Regional Allocations and the Project Accomplishments as of March 2023.
- ◆ Chairman of the RT Committee Greg Scheerer reviewed the RT project prescription rates and recommended changes for FY2024.
 - Proposed increasing the site preparation for ground applications due to the increased cost of groundwork.
 - Site Preparation - Ground Herbicide (Hardwood only) – increased to \$50.00
 - Site Preparation - Ground Herbicide (Pine and Hardwood only) – increased to \$70.00
 - Proposed all other rates remain the same as FY 2023.

A motion was made to accept the RT rates as recommend by the RT Committee; seconded. All present were in favor.

Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

- ◆ The nominations committee, consisting of Mike Harold and Heather Richards, nominated Bill Osl for chairperson and Carolyn Mulligan for vice-chairperson.

- ◆ There being no other nominations, a motion was made to nominate Bill Osl for chairperson and Carolyn Mulligan for vice-chairperson. The motion was seconded. All present were in favor.
- ◆ Bill Osl is chairperson and Carolyn Mulligan is vice-chairperson for the next year.

Committee/Liaison Reports:

Hardwood Initiative Committee

- ◆ State Forester Farrell reviewed the progress with the Hardwood Initiative.
 - The Hardwood Steering Committee met twice last year and is preparing to meet this spring.
 - Received two LSR grants (landscape scale restoration) that come through the USDA Forest Service.
 - Developing private contractors for hardwood management - \$376,000.
 - Encourage private contractors to develop the capacity to do urban forest management work.
 - Outreach to landowners that have conservation easements in the western part of the state - \$320,000.
 - This is on top of the Mountain Valley Pipeline Mitigation funds that DOF received for forest enhancement on protected lands.
 - Will pay someone to work in the western part of the state with landowners that have conservation easements to help them do good forest management work.
 - Still doing internal training.
 - Setting up demonstration sites, wildlife management areas and state forests.
 - 33 DOF foresters trained and 19 getting trained this spring.
 - Working on training consulting foresters in conjunction with the Longwood Forest Academy in May.
 - Continuing to do outreach, working on a fact sheet that is soon to be published.
 - Next focus area is “How to better utilize the hardwood funding.”
 - Hardwood Tax Credit procedures have been drafted, just waiting for the approval of the tax credit.

Reopen the New Kent Nursery

Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer spoke in regard to the status of the \$2.8 million received for reopening the New Kent Nursery to increase the number of seedlings produced, particularly hardwoods.

- ◆ The \$2.8 million also included replacing the seedling coolers. A more cost-effective plan was discovered to replace the seedling coolers with cooler trailers.
- ◆ Have contracted with a consultant for April to spend a week at New Kent evaluating everything we have there, including the soil and the irrigation system. Will develop a detailed plan of what it would take and cost to reopen.
- ◆ Currently, we are not seeing the demand on seedlings to open New Kent Nursery. Can possibly add more seedlings to Sussex and August nurseries.

Unfinished Business:

One-Pager for the Sustainability of Virginia's Forest Resource

The Board requested a one-page document for forest sustainability. Chairperson Flippo Hutchins shared what her vision was of what this document could be.

- ◆ Something that shows manufacturers what is done in Virginia to manage forest sustainability. The Commonwealth of Virginia through the Department of Forestry ensures we:
 - Manage water quality

- Nurseries that create seedlings
- Planting and harvesting
- ◆ Tell the big picture of what DOF does to help protect sustainability in Virginia forests.
- ◆ From a producer's perspective, we can show what is done as a baseline across the board. You don't get a chain of custody which you might get if Virginia was SFI- or FSC-certified but this is how we do the right thing.
- ◆ Tell Virginia's story, don't compare to other states.
 - FIA forest growth-to-drain ratio.
 - Water quality protection program.
 - 100% Best Management Practice (BMP) notification and inspections system.
 - Industry participating in
 - Reforestation Timberland (RT) Program.
 - Private nurseries
 - Forest health protections
 - Land conservation
 - Riparian Buffer Tax Credit
 - Sharp Logger
 - Collaboration between Virginia and Virginia Tech Natural Resources being biggest program in the country.
 - Forest sustainability fund shows state is investing in keeping land in forest.
 - Landowner education program.
 - Hardwood Initiative
- ◆ Show what Virginia has to offer. This document should be directed to purchasers.
- ◆ DOF will put this together and share with the board for review and input.
- ◆ Share with Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) when document is complete to help market Virginia wood and Virginia Grown.
- ◆ Use this document as a tool for why you want to buy Virginia grown products.

Workforce Development Background

Utilization and Marketing Program Manager Sabina Dhungana and Utilization and Marketing Specialist Rachel Harris created a Review of Forestry Workforce Development Efforts document. This is a background document for what is going on, primarily in the southeast, about what other states are doing related to workforce development.

Sabina reviewed what they had found.

- ◆ Alabama has a Forest Workforce Training Institute that is a prototype for other southern states. It creates qualified workers to the forest industry; educates students, parents and teachers about careers and job opportunities in forest industry; offers a four-week logging school; and training and curriculum for teachers. Forest Workforce Training Institute is funded by state, private sectors, and state and federal grants.
- ◆ Wisconsin introduces forestry early on in education and is funded by Workforce Innovation Grant and industry association funds.
- ◆ Arkansas' industry association is paying for marketing materials to address truck drivers' shortage.
- ◆ DOF Utilization and Marketing program has partnered with Mountain Gateway Community College to assist with outreach education and recruitment for their Appalachian Hardwood Training Initiative (AHTI) Program. Mountain Gateway Community College develops educational and training opportunities and was awarded a grant for workforce development training.

Chairperson Flippo Hutchins discussed that there is a need for workforce development in Virginia and asked how to move forward.

- ◆ Dinwiddie County is looking at introducing forestry into their working farm.
- ◆ Ebonie Alexander from Black Family Land Trust is working with community colleges to promote forestry classes in Southside.
 - Dean Cumbia is trying to get a committee together and secure funding from industries.
- ◆ Need to broaden people's perspective of what it's like to work in the forestry industry.
- ◆ Four categories to focus on:
 - Foresters, Natural Resource Managers
 - Mill Industry
 - Loggers
 - Truck Drivers
- ◆ Do we want to approach this from a variety of perspectives and have different strategies for different areas?
- ◆ What's the big picture and what are all the different strategies?
- ◆ How many community college programs do we need in Virginia and what's the best way to go about it.
 - Introduce middle school students to natural resources and then have a program in high school for them to attend.
 - Is there a 2-year path for students to get into Virginia Tech? Make the path clear to students.
 - Identify what the paths are and identify where the gaps are.
- ◆ Workforce is on the initiatives for the State this year. There has been legislation this year to put all of workforce into one agency.
 - There is a lot of concern about putting it all under one agency.
 - Need to figure out what is going on with the workforce legislation.
- ◆ Next steps:
 - Express our desires to Secretary Slater.
 - Middle school is important to apply to at same time applying to high school.
 - Put together a work group to put workforce ideas together.
 - Carolyn Mulligan would like to be on the workgroup.
 - Purpose of this group is to take concerns/ideas back to constituents, get their thoughts and bring back to the board.
- ◆ DOF will send board members some questions to try and focus thoughts and generate feedback on which direction to go. Will discuss at the next board meeting.
 - Conservation Education Coordinator Ellen Powell is working on a forestry education framework for Virginia.
 - Create something showing the pathways for parents to see the variety of jobs available.
 - Need to have buy-in from different agencies like the Department of Education.

New Business:

Carbon Credits

Chairperson Flippo Hutchins spoke about carbon credits.

- ◆ Carbon credits are only available if it is additionality.
- ◆ Jennifer Gagnon mentioned she has some information from a conference she attended that she would be happy to share in regards to carbon programs that are available.

- ◆ State Forester Farrell's concern: Are carbon credits good forest management?

Vice Chairperson Bill Osl recognized Chairperson Huthchins for her service and time on the board.

The board recognized the incredible effort the organizations; Virginia Loggers Association, Virginia Forest Products Association, Virginia Forestry Association, Virginia Farm Bureau and Agribusiness Council put in with biomass.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

The next Board of Forestry meeting will be held in June in South Boston; a Doodle poll will identify a date.

Consider Mountain Gateway Community College to see the workforce program in October. Will send possible dates through doodle poll.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Flippo Hutchins called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made and seconded to adjourn the March 14, 2023, meeting at 3:36 p.m. All present were in favor.

Minutes recorded by Executive Assistant Mary Weaver.

APPROVED