



Board of Forestry Meeting

June 21, 2023
Berry Hill Resort
South Boston, 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 Berry Hill Resort in South Boston, Virginia. The chairperson reminded the Board of the anti-trust policy legal requirements.

Roll Call:

Board of Forestry Members Present

Ervin Bielmyer, Clark Diehl, Jennifer Gagnon, Mike Harold, Beth Flippo Hutchins, Brian Irvine, Carolyn Mulligan, Bill Osl, Ralph Sampson Jr., Greg Scheerer and Chad Shelton

Members Absent

Jamie Coleman and Heather Richards

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, Communications Director Greg Bilyeu, Executive Assistant Mary Weaver

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Other guests were Secretary of Agriculture Matt Lohr; Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Beth Green; Brad Copenhaver, Virginia Agri-Business Council; Lesley Mosley, Virginia Forest Products Association; Sonnia Montemayor, Virginia Forestry Association; Ron Jenkins, Virginia Loggers Association

Hearing of Citizens:

None

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the March 14, 2023, minutes as presented; seconded. All present were in favor.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry (SAF) Update:

Secretary Lohr reported on current events.

- ◆ Recognized the Board members that are leaving the Board of Forestry and thanked them for their service.
 - Greg Sheerer, served 11 years
 - Beth Flippo Hutchins served 8 years
 - Brian Irvine served 2 years
- ◆ Already looking ahead and planning for the next General Assembly session
 - Looking at budget requests and potential legislation
 - Organized a meeting with Ag and Forestry representatives and partners along with representatives from Transportation, Education and Labor to discuss questions and concerns that were raised from an earlier meeting
- ◆ Governor Youngkin had a zoom call on June 16 with State Forester Rob Farrell and the DOF forest firefighters to recognize them for their efforts and sacrifices they make.
- ◆ First Lady Suzanne Youngkin will be the keynote speaker at the Virginia FFA Convention on June 22, the first time in 97 years a governor's wife has attended an FFA Convention.
- ◆ Forest Products week is the first week in October and hope to include the Governor in some of those events.

State Forester's Report:

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

- ◆ We have some good applications for the three vacancies of Pine Pulpwood Industry, Greg Sheerer and Brian Irvine, and Pine Lumber Industry, Beth Flippo Hutchins.
- ◆ The 75th annual Camp Woods and Wildlife is this week June 19-23. It's the longest running camp of its kind.
- ◆ We had two accidents this spring.
 - Dozer accident - just waiting on the investigation report
 - OSHA came out and investigated. Appears shirt was buckled in the seat belt and under significant pressure it will release.
 - Firefighting fatality with an ATV rollover
 - We are awaiting the investigation report. Nothing has been found other than a tragic accident. Driving an ATV at night on a mountain is extremely dangerous.
- ◆ Governor Youngkin did a great job on a virtual call with the DOF firefighters expressing his appreciation for their sacrifices being on call in the spring and fall.
- ◆ One of the administration's administrative initiatives is reducing regulations by 25%.
 - DOF is looking at changing the code requirements for the Riparian Buffer Tax Credit to eliminate the requirement that landowners have to have a stewardship plan to apply for a Riparian Buffer Tax Credit.
- ◆ Working on legislative and budget proposals
- ◆ Administration is looking at the number of positions at all agencies. Every agency has a maximum employee level (MEL).
 - DOF currently has 248 full-time employees, permanent and grant funded.

- If all positions currently vacant were filled, DOF would have 253 just permanent non-grant funded positions and 10 open, not defined MEL positions.
- ◆ White Oak Initiative is going out on their own, no longer with the American Forest Foundation. The White Oak Initiative has created a Board of Directors and is searching for a fiscal agent; State Forester Farrell is on the executive committee of that Board of Directors.
- ◆ May 24-28 was DOF's annual firefighting training academy at Longwood University.
 - Included forestry training for the first time - Hardwood Initiative Training for consulting foresters
 - Finally branching out beyond DOF foresters to implement the Hardwood Initiative and Hardwood Cost-Share Program

Informational Items:

Governor's Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) for DOF

- ◆ Increasing markets for pine saw timber
 - Recruiting a new pine sawmill or encouraging the expansion of existing pine sawmills to increase the pine saw capacity in Virginia
- ◆ Greatly increasing riparian buffers for the Chesapeake Bay
- ◆ Expanding existing DOF nursery capacity
 - Reopening New Kent Nursery has changed to expand nursery capacity
 - Expanding capacity as needed is more cost efficient

DOF Employee Survey Results

- ◆ An anonymous employee survey was sent out to all DOF employees to get a sense of how they viewed working for DOF. Chief Human Resource Officer John Habel reviewed the results.
 - There were 29 questions on the survey, 20 multiple choice and 9 open ended questions.
 - All data was sent to entire agency for review.
 - Next steps are to form groups/teams to improve areas where DOF scored low and figure out how to move forward and make sure everyone understands their expectations and roles.
 - Will do another survey in a year or two to evaluate the improvement

Northern Long-Eared Bat (NLEB)

- ◆ Have not heard anything new on the NLEB and their new endangered title.
- ◆ Reaching out to Ryan Brown and Amy Martin for a better source for information
- ◆ Hoping to have some written guidance from Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) soon
- ◆ Will share any new information as it is received

Harvest Inspection guidelines for Proposed Development Projects

- ◆ Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) was looking for a way to deal with people cutting timber on development projects.
 - If you are doing timber harvesting for silviculture you are exempt from storm water regulations.
 - If you are clearing for solar, that is not silviculture, you shouldn't be exempt and should be inspected by the county or DEQ and not DOF timber harvest inspections.
 - This is causing a lot of issues because it takes a long time to get projects approved.
 - DEQ's solution was to call everything silviculture and DOF will continue to do the harvest inspections.

- This suggestion did not make it through the legislature.
- ◆ DOF has come up with better guidance for DOF foresters for the gray area of “maybe development maybe forestry.”
 - If the area has a change of use in its future and has been codified with a Conditional Use Permit or Rezoning, that is the point where it is not silvicultural.
 - If the area does not have a Conditional Use Permit or Rezoning, it will be treated as silviculture until such time it does.
 - If there is evidence of doing work beyond silvicultural use DOF staff will refer them to the county.
 - If there is evidence of an area that is no longer being used for construction DOF staff will resume harvest inspections on it.
- ◆ Will get a meeting together with DEQ to see where they are with this legislature request for the future

Workforce Development Survey and Next Steps

- ◆ A workforce development survey was sent out to the Board of Forestry Members and DOF partners to help give information on priorities of focus. Assistant State Forester Terry Lasher reviewed the results.
 - The survey had 9 questions and 12 individuals completed it.
 - From the survey results, the focus should be on high school students, vocational education as well as equipment and technical operators.
 - Will engage the Virginia Wood Council and see how we need to start; the council will be meeting in the fall.
 - We need to be deliberate in our approach and devote time and resources to be successful

HB2026 – Woody Biomass BMPs and Carbon Lifecycle Analysis

- ◆ Great success getting biomass back in the Clean Energy Act. DOF has two requests to complete by December 2023.
 - Develop Biomass Best Management Practices (BMPs).
 - Deputy State Forester Zimmer is heading this up.
 - BMPs will need to include a Carbon Lifecycle Analysis.
 - Putting together a work group to do an analysis
 - First meeting on June 30 with a webinar on Carbon Lifecycle Analysis.

HB206 – Solar Mitigation

- ◆ This bill is to try and figure out how to mitigate the forest and farm loss to solar development.
 - Assistant State Forester Lasher is serving on the work group.
 - There is an informal partnership of natural resource agencies getting together to figure out how to mitigate for solar.
 - They are trying to find a middle of the road mitigation response that the State Commission Corporation (SCC) will require the solar developers to do.
 - Make sure we include the management of the buffers.
- ◆ Albemarle approved a 2,400-acre solar project. Daily Progress reported on the meeting focusing on clear cuts as “a useless waste of land,” which is misinformation.
 - The wrong information is being put out.
 - We can get the right information out through social media and other outlets.

Action Items:

None

Committee/Liaison Reports:

Hardwood Initiative Committee

- ◆ The committee met and requested to increase the rates for the hardwood cost-share practices; expenses are more costly than originally thought.
- ◆ Raised the rates and added the consulting foresters to be able to use the hardwood funding and access the Hardwood Assessment Tool (HAT)
- ◆ Received two forest service grants that support hardwood
 - Mountain Valley Pipeline Mitigation funds to do good forestry work on conservation easements
 - Funding to hire someone to develop more contractors to do good hardwood management work

Unfinished Business:

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

- ◆ The Board had requested a one-page document that shows industries what Virginia does with forestry.
 - Currently have it down to two-pages in bullet format
 - Should be a source of information with DOF logo to show how the forestry community operates in Virginia
 - A living, breathing document that expands as DOF expands

New Business:

Greg Sheerer asked for clarification on the Federal Nutrient Banking Program for a piece of property in Pittsylvania – Assistant State Forester Lasher will look into the rules of establishment.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

The next Board of Forestry meeting will be held the first week of October. If you have a location you would like to meet let us know; the default will be the James Garner building in Charlottesville; a Doodle poll will be sent to identify a date.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Bill Osl called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made and seconded to adjourn the June 21, 2023, meeting at 12:20 p.m. for lunch and a tour of NOVEC Biomass Energy Plant. All present were in favor.

Minutes recorded by Executive Assistant Mary Weaver.