



Senior Management Team (SMT) Meeting

December 12, 2022

State Forester's Report

Rob Farrell opened the meeting.

- ◆ Welcomed new Chief of Administration Amanda Davis and Chief Human Resources Officer John Habel to VDOF.
- ◆ The Governor submits his proposed budget on Thursday, December 15.
- ◆ The new Weldon Cooper Study on forestry is out.
 - Will be put on the VDOF website, and a news release will go out.
- ◆ The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) space in Richmond is now available for use.
 - There are four desks available per day and a schedule will be shared to sign up for use.
 - This space is primarily for those that live in Richmond to use as an office day.
 - DWR badges are required to enter the building.
 - February 7 Senior Management Team (SMT) meeting will be held at the DWR building in Richmond.
 - When vehicles are available there will be a state vehicle located there for use.
- ◆ Completing the State of the Forest report is top priority.
 - Please give Greg your full attention with any information he needs from your department.

Presentations

Organizational Design Project Recommendations – Robbie Talbert

- ◆ Robbie discussed the special project he was assigned: look for ways to get more on-the-ground forest management accomplishments done on the landscape.
- ◆ This project will identify barriers to productivity, resource needs, and state headquarters personnel, with the goal of allowing field staff to implement forestry accomplishments in a way that is impactful, meaningful, and beneficial to the resource.
- ◆ Five goals and their strategies are recommended:
 - Set focused expectations
 - Transition from the “Learn, Plan, Act” mindset to a “Learn from Doing” model to increase on-the-ground forest management accomplishments.
 - Establish agency-level expectations for field staff.
 - Fire prevention and suppression

- Harvest inspections as it pertains to the agency's silvicultural water quality program
- Public outreach and education
- Forest health
- Outline 2-3 additional field-level forest management expectations based on local demand.
 - Hardwood management
 - Pine management
 - Riparian buffer establishment
 - Urban & community forestry assistance
 - Prescribed burning
 - Diminished species establishment
 - Forest management planning
- Re-assign previous field activities to regional or headquarters staff
 - State-owned lands plans and projects
 - Stewardship monitoring
 - Easement monitoring
 - Arbor Day events in areas in which U&CF assistance is not identified as an expectation.
- Establish a comprehensive professional development program
 - Create a comprehensive technical 5-year training program for all employees to include elements of our fire, forest management, forest health, and silvicultural water quality programs.
 - Develop a comprehensive technical training program designed for employees with 5-10 years of experience.
 - Establish a progressive leadership development program for all supervisors.
 - Develop a formal mentorship program. This should include opportunities for growth for employees at all levels of the agency, to include technical, administrative and leadership development.
 - Institute measures that facilitate employee retention, including salary compensation and targeted recruitment efforts.
- Create operational efficiencies.
 - Create an agency-wide outreach and communications strategy that provides field staff with guidance as to the audiences, venues, and messages that it wishes to engage with at the field level.
 - Push as many administrative items as possible to regional support staff.
 - Utilize technology to the fullest extent possible, including electronic signatures, drones, tablets, GIS software, and mobile technology
 - Assess policy and procedures and eliminate unnecessary processes to streamline production.
- Stimulate on-the-ground accomplishments.
 - Develop local contracts for forest management services in areas that lack private contractor availability.
 - Reduce or eliminate training, meetings, conferences, or other events during March and April.

- Encourage production through the use of monetary bonuses, recognition programs, and professional development opportunities.
- Establish achievable benchmarks and motivate employees through regular progress reports.
- Create an accomplishments dashboard to allow employees and supervisors to gauge their progress in meeting benchmarks in real-time.
- Develop an applicable reporting system.
 - Reduce double reporting by developing a fully integrated reporting and mapping system.
 - Develop a mobile app for mapping and accomplishment reporting.
 - Create an accomplishment tracking dashboard for field staff, supervisors, and managers to gauge progress in meeting benchmarks.
 - Develop reports that allow field staff to work, plan and follow-up with landowners on pending forest management projects.
 - Conduct a complete overhaul of reportable accomplishments by creating activities that accurately capture field deliverables and easily transfer to useable and accessible reports.
- ◆ At the State-Wide District Foresters retreat in October, the recommendations and feedback were discussed. District foresters identified some activities to begin. In the next year or two, program managers will be asked to help reach the goal of facilitating on-the-ground accomplishments while freeing up time for field staff and allowing them time to focus on their accomplishments.
- ◆ We need to help our staff proactively schedule time rather than reactively.
- ◆ We need to transition work area plans to district area plans.

Change Proposals

None

Updates

Forest Resource Management (Dean Cumbia)

- ◆ The Forest Sustainability Fund was created to help offset the funds counties with a Forest Land Use Tax are losing.
 - The fund was established with one million dollars for the first year.
 - Counties were surveyed about funding requests.
 - A news release will be sent out and the counties will be notified of how much funding they will receive. Amount received is based on amount of forgone revenue.
 - Counties can use these funds for three different areas: public education, forestland conservation and recreation.
- ◆ Hardwood Initiative Tax Credit was passed August 4 by the General Assembly to assist landowners who implement hardwood management best practices.
 - Will reimburse up to \$1,000.00 for hardwood management best practices.
 - Requirements for landowners are:
 - be subject to individual income tax
 - have a forest management plan
 - implement an eligible hardwood best practice.

- Companies are not eligible.
- Application is ready and training will be held in January for field staff.
- The regions will send a message out to field staff that the Hardwood Tax Credit is not yet ready for use.
- ◆ Research Program Manager Jerre Creighton is retiring at the end of January.
 - Looking at conducting a research seminar to allow Jerre to review his research over the years.
- ◆ Working on getting a committee together to start planning for the 2023 Forest Management Academy.
- ◆ Looking at changing the cost-share rates for pre-commercial thinning. They haven't been changed since 2014.

Information Technology (Parik Patel)

- ◆ Working on the IFRIS to ESRI migration.
 - ESRI is designing a Water Quality Program module and is working on the back end and where to store the data.
- ◆ Copiers and printers are starting to come in and should start arriving around January.
- ◆ Audiovisual equipment for the conference rooms is waiting on scheduling with the company for installation.
- ◆ Headquarters and New Kent phone system phones and equipment have been ordered and should arrive in January.
- ◆ Equipment has been ordered to meet wi-fi needs for New Kent and Salem; seeking a third-party to do the wiring.
- ◆ Kick starting printer project for field offices.
- ◆ DWR Office Update
 - Technology is all hooked up and ready for use.
 - A schedule for use of the DWR office space will be sent out.
- ◆ Web grants through Cardinal
 - Going through VITA to find a contact for Cardinal on how to download and upload information to Cardinal for web grants.
- ◆ Migration from Google to Microsoft 365 is complete.

Human Resources (John Habel)

- ◆ Attended a Human Resources Conference.
 - Looking at standardizing EWP's and moving to electronic.
 - Transferred over to Cardinal and will eventually be able to do salary survey reports.
 - Upgrading to Page Up which will replace current job posting system. Will go into effect January 24. There will be a blackout period for approximately 2 weeks where no job postings will be allowed.
- ◆ Governor Youngkin is focusing on ways to offset the state salaries that are not competitive.
- ◆ Interviewed for the Safety, Compliance, and Fire Training Officer position.

Western Region (Brad Carico)

- ◆ Fall fire season is officially over for the western region.
- ◆ Two vacant forester positions and a water quality specialist position need to be advertised.

Eastern Region (Bryant Bays)

- ◆ Working on hiring positions. Currently six positions open.

- District Forester position in southeast Virginia still open.
- Brunswick Forester position is open until filled with currently no interest.
- ◆ Eastern Regional meeting will be held on February 8.

Executive Assistant (Mary Weaver)

- ◆ Reminder to submit events through the intranet to go on the website/intranet.

Finance (Lauren Sumner)

- ◆ Still trying to figure out Cardinal
 - The change in the FLSA workweek (Thursday-Friday) is biggest issue. Waiting to hear from the Department of Accounts (DOA) payroll manager to see if we can convert back to workdays prior to Cardinal (Saturday-Friday).
 - Looking at doing FAQ webinars on Cardinal questions.
- ◆ Web Grants
 - Forest Sustainability has been moved into the web grants program.
 - Looking at moving Fire and Urban & Forestry Community (U&FC) grants next.
- ◆ Procurement Officer position has been approved and will be advertised.
- ◆ Surplus is being handled by Facilities Manager Richard Schmidt.
 - Working on the inventory, goal is to remove the small items.
- ◆ Business Cards
 - Chrissy Gough is ordering all business cards for the agency.
 - Message/example was in [Branch](#) on October 31.
 - The space to put which region (Eastern, Central, Western) was left off the example in error.
 - The working title (as listed on the website) is to be used.
 - The template can't be changed (look, font size, etc.).

Office of Communications (Greg Bilyeu)

- ◆ The data for the State of the Forest should be by fiscal year.
 - Please respond to requests from the Communications Office on State of the Forest information as quickly as possible.
- ◆ All requests for all staff emails should be sent to Communications Officer Greg Bilyeu.
 - The Communications Office is sending out all staff emails to ensure messaging is clear and minimal.

Central Region (Robbie Talbert)

- ◆ Ten vacancies; 5 foresters, 4 forest technicians, and urban forest specialist.
 - Some interviews are scheduled.
- ◆ Some tablets were given to field staff on a trial basis.
 - Testing went well, would like to offer to field staff that would like them.
- ◆ Have an agreement with Madison Fire Department to have a field office there.
 - When fully staffed three field staff will be working from there.
- ◆ Moving spare dozer in Halifax County to Highland County to a VDOT office.

- ◆ Two chainsaw refresher courses coming up.
 - January 9 at Paul State Forest.
 - January 11 at Cumberland State Forest.

Fire and Emergency Response (John Miller)

- ◆ Safety and Compliance Officer position will be announced soon.
- ◆ Basic Law Class coming up in January.
- ◆ Longwood Academy is scheduled for May 23 – 27, 2023.
- ◆ Will send out a matrix of training classes coming up for 2023.
- ◆ Fall fire season had 89 fires for about 2700 acres.
- ◆ Vehicles are allocated, requested 31 but only receiving 13.
 - Ensure you do your vehicle maintenance.
- ◆ Secretary's office is following up on the Law Enforcement Commissions that need to be approved.

Budget (Faye DiFazio)

- ◆ We have an attrition savings from prolonged hiring time, will need to be spent by June.
- ◆ The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) fact sheet needs to be updated and is due by January.

Assistant State Forester (Terry Lasher)

- ◆ Partnering with Virginia Tech for a Carbon Symposium March 3.
 - Will be held in Richmond with target participants being landowners.
- ◆ This is the last week to get any easement projects closed by the end of the year. A few changes have been made.
 - All decision briefs now need to go to the governor's office.
 - All projects now need a Capital Outlay project (CO2).
- ◆ Approximately \$1 million of the \$4 million that we were allocated for the Water Quality Improvement Fund has been given out in pass-through grants.
- ◆ The Urban & Community Forestry Project Manager Coordinator position was filled by Delaney Beattie.
- ◆ Checking references for the Forestland Conservation Coordinator position.
- ◆ Request for Proposal (RFP) for a contractor to work on the statewide Riparian Buffer plan has been advertised for the third time.
- ◆ At the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (VSWCD) Annual Conference, VDOF was the first-year recipient of the Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) Task Force Team Award.

Deputy State Forester (Ed Zimmer)

- ◆ Pursuing a better notification system for closing of offices for inclement weather and the need for mass notification.
- ◆ Network for all open positions.
 - Greg suggested working with social media to advertise for open positions.
- ◆ Ed will be on leave the week before and after Christmas but will be available by email or phone if needed.
- ◆ Rob will be on vacation the first week of January and unavailable.

Minutes recorded by Mary Weaver, executive assistant