



Senior Management Team (SMT) Meeting

February 6, 2024

State Forester's Report

Rob Farrell opened the meeting.

- ◆ Working on update to the Strategic Plan.
- ◆ Yesterday was the last day to respond to Biomass BMPs.
- ◆ Reviewed several items from the General Assembly
 - Bringing the Office of Farmland Preservation from VDACS to DOF – passed full senate, heard in full house Ag Committee tomorrow. Doesn't anticipate opposition.
 - Forest Conservation Plan - renamed Forest Land and Tree Canopy Conservation Plan. Big GIS effort to look at where we're losing forest. Has passed house committee, being heard in senate committee this afternoon. Chesapeake Bay folks are the primary supporters. At \$900,000, expense may drag it down once it gets in to budget negotiations. Explores reason for forest loss on a more granular scale.
 - Sandy Point State Forest - bill authorizing DOF to transfer to Mattaponi Tribe. This bill authorizing DOF to transfer land to Mattaponi Tribe is just the beginning of the process. The Tribe is trying to get a grant, needed something to say state would work with them. Delegate Hodges is working with County – authorized to transfer southeast third to the tribe, authorized to work with tribe and locality on other portions of the forest. Funding for carbon lifecycle analysis in Governor's budget, \$100,000
 - Amendments – With the Office of Farmland Preservation a VDACS position and funding would also be transferred to DOF.
 - Policy analyst position is our first priority, Farm Bureau is advocating for that position for us.
 - DOF to lead effort to do something about invasive species, two positions at DOF, funding to oversee invasive species project.
 - Forest Sustainability Fund, \$5,000,000. Technical changes seem to be well received so far.
 - Ed Zimmer acknowledged Conservation group does Farmland Conservation very well, even better than VDACS with less funding.

Changes to Timesheet Management Process – John Habel, Lauren Sumner, and Amanda Jones

- ◆ Payroll is working on clearing up a large number of errors and asks employees and supervisors to follow the following steps to reduce the number of errors.
 - All employees should enter time weekly.

- Any time off should be submitted immediately after being entered i.e., don't use the "Save" function for absences.
- Exempt employees should enter the hours they are scheduled for in Cardinal whether they work-adjust it or not as it creates an error in Cardinal. There was discussion as to whether certain classes of employees could become "exception" time reporters instead of "positive" time reporters. John Miller states this would change for exempt employees in state of emergency.
- Supervisor responsibilities would include checking time weekly, verifying timesheets aren't missing, and approving time weekly.
- ◆ Lauren Sumner and Amanda Jones provided a Cardinal demonstration and Quick Reference Guide for supervisors on how to approve timesheets and how to fix timesheet problems.
- ◆ Brad Carico inquired about the ability for Regional Foresters to have access to field personnel timesheets, and Lauren will check.
- ◆ Rob Farrell inquired whether the process can be amended so that Amanda Jones shares the list of exceptions with supervisors so they can deal with exceptions. An appropriate platform would need to be determined.
- ◆ John Habel discussed the random drug testing requirements. DOF is responsible to have 50% of CDL holders tested annually. The first lists were distributed to the Regional Foresters. Tammi Oliva will schedule the test for the closest facility to the employee's home and send them an email. They will have 48 hours to be tested and will be provided a barcode. There will likely be issues with the first round due to communication issues with part-time firefighters.
- ◆ The cost of LODA insurance is increasing significantly. DOF would like to avoid paying insurance for individuals who aren't fighting fires. There was discussion about self-insuring part-timers. John Miller confirmed it is provided for in the Code.

Accident Report – John Miller

- ◆ Accident report for January: One injury received by a part-time employee.
- ◆ Two vehicle accidents: a mirror clip and a back-up accident
- ◆ 2023 – 388 agency vehicles, 2.9 million miles, 6 chargeable accidents, and 4 non-chargeable accidents.

Administration – Amanda Davis

- ◆ A document clean-up day has been scheduled for HQ on February 26, 2024, and Amanda urges everyone to do some pre-planning. Amanda will order banker boxes and send out an email notifying everyone.
- ◆ Records retention schedule – Bryant Bays has created a guide for the field, and Amanda and Bryant will discuss further before sending out guidance.
- ◆ HQ Fitness Room: Efforts to clean up and modernize are underway. We'll start with painting the space and purchasing an elliptical, then a treadmill and build into a weight room. Also discussed putting equipment in regions, perhaps one location in each district.

Updates

Forest Resource Management (Dean Cumbia)

- ◆ Todd Groh is retiring after 30 years in two segments with DOF and will work with USFS in Atlanta. Reception next Wednesday at 2pm, everyone is welcome. Joe Rossetti is collecting if you'd like to contribute.
- ◆ IRA outreach: We expect the \$500,000 for 5 years any day now.

- ◆ Underserved Landowner Outreach: Good stakeholder meeting here last week with good input and participation from Board of Forestry.
- ◆ Bipartisan infrastructure: Dean, Lori, Lara and Todd are meeting Thursday morning to work on narrative. Forest Action Plan portion of bill. Geared toward invasive species, but we can steer in other directions. Due toward end of month.
- ◆ National Fish & Wildlife Foundation stewardship grant - support for producing longleaf seed and seedlings - \$60,000/year.
- ◆ Forest Management Academy: Sept 9-13 at Sweetbriar, planning is progressing. Wednesday is joint day, would like to invite regions to committee to start planning.
- ◆ Virginia Association of Forest Health Professionals is meeting Monday and Tuesday.
- ◆ He attended SGSF committee meeting the week of January 22. Good meeting, EAB, Hemlock cost share programs open, two hardwood tax credits now.
- ◆ Research – planning burn at Lesesne in oldest Chestnut orchard to encourage regeneration. Zoe Bergman is serving on Red Spruce Technical Advisory Committee. Todd is working on training materials with NRCS. Invasive species workday Thursday afternoon.

District Forester Representative (David Powell)

- ◆ Working with new employees and get them ready for fire season. Discussing things we learned from last fall fire season. Happy with the new training program.

Human Resources (John Habel)

- ◆ A VRS representative will be in Salem on the 12th and at HQ on the 16th. There are a lot of appointments available.

Eastern Region (Bryant Bays)

- ◆ Regional meeting tomorrow at 9:30 – training and fire related. Matias Pineiro is the new Water Quality Specialist. Currently, there are six vacancies. The second Brunswick Forester position is open and has been declined four times. Heading into fire season with 38/47 positions filled.

Facilities and Capital Outlay (Richard Schmidt)

- ◆ Working on the Fire Tower project, specifically two tower locations: Volens and Crafton Gate. Rich reached out for asbestos inspections.
- ◆ Waiting on JOC to be awarded for old coolers. \$300,000 to use by 6/30.

Administration (Amanda Davis)

- ◆ Waiting on ESRI to confirm next module for forest management database.
- ◆ Tickets have been entered for all nine locations to upgrade broadband.
- ◆ Final IT audit report last week, working on corrective action report.
- ◆ GIS analyst – Jim Pugh's old position has been reassessed to help with IFRIS to ESRI position and will be available to print GIS maps. The position should be advertised this week.

Assistant State Forester (Terry Lasher)

- ◆ The new Land Conservation Program Manager is Amanda Schepps.
- ◆ The new Forest Legacy Program Coordinator is Justin Altice who was previously with VOF.
- ◆ Two positions out this week for Sentinel Landscapes Coordinators, one in Quantico and one in Hampton, will be advertised until end of February.

- ◆ Molly O'Liddy returned yesterday from parental leave.
- ◆ Caitlin Verdu will be returning from parental leave 2/23.
- ◆ Last year we closed our 200th easement, this year we anticipate reaching 100,000 acres over the life of the program.

Fire and Emergency Response (John Miller)

- ◆ Spring Fire Season starts 2/15.
- ◆ VFA grant awards open to fire departments and dry hydrant grants open 2/15.
- ◆ Registration for Longwood May 29-June 1 (date not yet confirmed by Longwood) also opens 2/15.
- ◆ 6/1 is state firefighters memorial service in Richmond where Rocky will be recognized.

Western Region (Brad Carico)

- ◆ Prescribed burn seminar for landowners on 2/17
- ◆ Western Region is already picking up fires.
- ◆ Regional staff meeting and fire review on 2/14.
- ◆ Two openings, interviews scheduled in next two weeks. Once those positions are filled, the Western Region will be fully staffed. Applicant pool has changed for better recently. Could be attributable to sawmills shutting down, NC State, VT, etc. graduates being more interested in state forestry.

Central Region (Robbie Talbert)

- ◆ Fire review from Quaker Run is almost done.
- ◆ Deputy Regional Forester initial interviews were held last week, second interviews will be held on Friday.
- ◆ The only other vacancy is in the Rappahannock District.

Office of Communications (Greg Bilyeu)

- ◆ Will remove the Burn Ban map from the website in favor of pushing to follow up with local authorities for that information. Annual release coming out soon for spring fire season.
- ◆ Completed a video of 4PM signs, talking about removal and history, to be shared with public soon.

Finance (Lauren Sumner)

- ◆ Meeting with Regional Foresters later today to go over after-action items concerning SPCC cards and lodging authorizations.
- ◆ Conducted Buyer Specialist interviews mid-January and had many qualified candidates. Their second choice candidate has verbally accepted position, and we are waiting on background checks, etc. Hope to start around March 10.

Minutes recorded by Lora Newlin, Facilities & Assets Coordinator