



# Senior Management Team (SMT) Meeting

**April 30, 2024**

## State Forester's Report

Rob Farrell opened the meeting.

Amanda Davis introduced the new DOF GIS Analyst, James Whipp.

## Environment Virginia Proposals – Caitlin Verdu

Caitlin talked about recruiting individuals to give presentations at the next Environment Virginia Symposium, April 8 – 10 2025. If you have anyone interested in presenting let Caitlin know. Some suggestions were:

- ◆ People love forests but not forestry.
- ◆ A day in the life in the woods.
- ◆ Opportunity to recruit individuals.
- ◆ Distinction between what is silvicultural and what isn't, how do we know.
- ◆ The benefits of Forest Management on Nutrient Credit Banks.
- ◆ Challenges of tree planting projects (invasives, weeds, competition, survival, and need for maintenance on buffers).

## Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives

Rob reviewed the two-year strategic plan draft.

- ◆ Executive Leadership Team came up with five goals and objectives.
  - Goal 1 – Protect Virginia from wildfire and ensure firefighter safety.
    - 1.1 – Increase the number and utilization of available part-time firefighters and other cooperators to ensure DOF capacity on an as-needed basis everywhere in the state. John Miller taking the lead.
    - 1.2 – Ensure that the agency health and safety program is integrated into all agency operations and is responsive to protect all agency employees from workplace hazards. John Miller taking the lead.
    - 1.3 – Expand the cadre of qualified Incident Management Team (IMT) members in addition to DOF first responders. Ed Zimmer taking the lead.
  - Goal 2 – Increase Forest Management activity statewide.
    - 2.1 – Support and enable staff to better focus on on-the-ground accomplishments. Robbie Talbert taking the lead.
    - 2.2 – Increase implementation of beneficial forest management practices. Ed Zimmer taking the lead.

- 2.3 – Increase tree planting to protect and improve water quality, improve canopy cover and enhance communities. Terry Lasher taking the lead.
- Goal 3 – Promote forests and forestry.
  - 3.1 – Raise awareness of the link between increased utilization of forest products and enhanced environmental benefits flowing from sustainably managed forests. Greg Bilyeu taking the lead.
  - 3.2 – Support the growth of Virginia’s forest economy and increase markets for forest products and ecosystem functions that support sustainable forest management. Terry Lasher taking the lead.
  - 3.3 – Through the work of the newly established Office of Working Lands Preservation, promote and enable forest and farmland conservation, minimize deforestation, and mitigate forest and agricultural land loss using a broad range of strategies. Terry Lasher taking the lead.
- Goal 4 – Ensure the DOF workforce is ready and able to achieve our mission. John Habel taking the lead.
  - 4.1 – Attract qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds who are committed to public service.
  - 4.2 – Provide a career training and development program.
    - How we do training should be developed by all levels of the agency.
  - 4.3 – Make DOF a preferred workplace.
- Goal 5 – Develop agency information systems to support DOF’s mission. Amanda Davis taking the lead.
  - 5.1 – Transform agency database and create dashboards to track metrics.
  - 5.2 – Ensure every employee has access to relevant, consistent information across the agency.
- ◆ The leads of these goals and objectives are to work on creating strategies and measures with a team that is directly impacted and directly involved in implementing the strategies and measures.
  - Try to have strategies that directly contribute to the objective.
  - Needs to be achieved within two years.
  - Looking for about 40 strategies, approximately three strategies per objective.
  - The strategies and measures are due by May 31.
  - Need approximately 30 measures that are able to measure in one- or two-year increments.
  - Measures need to point to objectives and make sense to external people.
- ◆ Regional Foresters need to get together and decide who would be best to support teams in creating the strategies and measures.
- ◆ Plan to have the strategic plan rolled out by end of Fiscal Year 24.

## Presentations

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### Special Project – Robbie Talbert

Robbie reviewed his Organizational Design Project with the overall goal of increasing on-the-ground forest management projects.

- ◆ Phase 1 of project was completed in July 2022 and included five goals:
  - Set focused expectations
  - Establish a comprehensive professional development program
  - Create operational efficiencies
  - Stimulate on-the-ground accomplishments
  - Develop an applicable reporting system.

- ◆ Phase 2 will begin on May 1, 2024, and focus on people, processes and projects with the overall goal of stimulating on-the-ground forest management accomplishments across the agency. This phase will focus on:
  - People
    - Training – Accelerate development of a robust and comprehensive training program.
    - Recognition – Develop a system in which personnel are recognized for exceeding stated goals and/or suggesting and developing processes which positively impact agency operations.
    - Time – Create a system for tracking how much time our staff spend on associated activities.
      - Prescribed burning, law enforcement, training, readiness maintenance, etc....
  - Processes
    - Policy & Procedures – Assess and tweak policy and procedures to create efficient processes. Ensure processes outlined in DOF policy and procedures do not negatively impact our field staff’s ability to effectively implement forest management activities.
    - Outreach – A plan outlining the appropriate messages, venues and events will assist staff with committing to events that both educate the public and initiate forest management activities. This plan will also help field staff decline events that are not the best use of their time, thus freeing up more time to devote towards working with landowners on project implementation.
    - Expectations – Set expectations to field staff as to what programs and services DOF will deliver and what DOF will not offer. This will require a comprehensive review of current agency services and programs to ensure we have the capacity, resources, and tools necessary to provide quality services to forest landowners.
  - Projects
    - Request for Proposals – Utilize the RFP process to stimulate work in areas or programs in which private contractor availability is limited. DOF has a history of using RFPs to stimulate contractor interest, such as tree planting and herbicide work.
    - Accomplishment Tracking – Work with Office of Information Services on developing a comprehensive and user-friendly accomplishment tracking system through the IFRIS-to-ESRI project. The system should also be cohesive and easily integrate into other modules such as water quality, conservation, etc.
    - Goal Tracking – Work with Regional Foresters to set achievable, but ambitious, goals and track progress. The ESRI project should include a progress tracking dashboard to help supervisors, DRF’s, Regional Foresters and Program Managers ensure staff are on-track with meeting established goals.
- ◆ Robbie will be reaching out to the appropriate Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to accomplish these goals.
  - Everyone in SMT will be involved, and feedback would be greatly appreciated.
  - The district foresters will be involved through the whole process to get these goals implemented.
- ◆ These goals align with the new strategic plan.
- ◆ Will sent out a message letting everyone know the start of this project. Robbie will still be Regional Forester with Jeremy Falkenau taking on some of Robbie’s duties temporarily for the next 18 months.

## Change Proposals

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None

## Updates

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### State Forester (Rob Farrell)

- ◆ Biomass Best Management Practices (BMPs) original version has been updated and streamlined. New version has been submitted to the Policy Office and is waiting to be reviewed.
  - Rodney Newlin is working with Timmons to have a check box to identify a biomass harvest when biomass BMPs are ready.
  - The Carbon Biomass Advisory Panel is convening this year.
- ◆ Hiring a contractor to do the Carbon LCA this year. Due to General Assembly on December 1.
  - Currently in procurement process.
- ◆ There was discussion at the General Assembly about the Sandy Point State Forest and the interest the Mattaponi Tribe has with it.
  - There was misunderstanding that Sandy Point State Forest was abandoned because it was not very active.
  - Working on upgrading the boat ramp and updating signage trying to show that State Forests are not abandoned.
  - Currently in a wait and see mode to see what comes from the next General Assembly session.
- ◆ Had a great Arbor Day event with the First Lady of Virginia Mrs. Youngkin.
- ◆ This weekend we will be attending the National Fallen Firefighter Memorial that will be recognizing Rocky Wood.
- ◆ Budget is expected to be out on May 15.

### Chief of Administration (Amanda Davis)

- ◆ Moving to SharePoint to have a document library that everyone can easily access.
  - Hiring a contractor to establish document library and replace share drives.
  - Will be moving the files on the common drive to SharePoint in three to four months.
- ◆ Cardinal supervisor training will be starting with the District Foresters on May 13. Will roll out to entire agency next.
- ◆ Have budget meetings scheduled all week.
- ◆ The wildfire reimbursements are complete for the Fall and starting to work on the Spring.
- ◆ Had to have VITA approval for ESRI; Parik is meeting with VITA this afternoon and it should be approved by tomorrow.
- ◆ The headquarters space study should be done by the end of this week.
  - Will present to Executive Leadership Team (ELT). They will review results and decide how to use.
- ◆ Working on writing an RFP for a new uniform company.
- ◆ Public Service Week is May 6 – 10 with Headquarters picnic event on May 8. Central Region will be joining Headquarters event.
  - Lunch will be catered by Wayside Chicken. A donut and ice cream truck will be available.
  - VRS and CommonHealth will be onsite.
  - There will be a demo of Robo Smokey and Forest Management demo and games in the front yard.

## Information Technology (Parik Patel)

- ◆ Have 10 locations to upgrade the network, eight are completed. Running conduits on last two.
- ◆ Forecast is running well. Last two months processed 329 tickets. Working on rolling it out with other administration units in the next few weeks.

## Office of Communications (Greg Bilyeu)

- ◆ Developed a standard template for reports and a variety of documents posted on the intranet. It also contains helpful hints for developing these items.
- ◆ Working on a one-page user guide on how to take better pictures with your phone and what to do with those pictures.

## Fire and Emergency Response (John Miller)

- ◆ National Fallen Firefighter Memorial Service on May 3-4 honoring Rocky Wood.
- ◆ Virginia Fallen Firefighter Memorial Service on June 1 honoring Rocky Wood.
- ◆ Webinar at 1:00pm today to talk about DOF's role with Federal IMTs on large incidents.
- ◆ Longwood Fire Academy is coming up end of May and have 278 people signed up.
  - Secretary Lohr will be attending Wednesday morning.

## Human Resources (John Habel)

- ◆ All telework agreements for new hires will be done electronically from this point forward.
  - Richmond is updating the telework policy. Not sure what the changes will be.
- ◆ Drug testing for CDL drivers will be scheduled this week.
- ◆ Diversity Opportunity Investment (DOI) Plan is due to Richmond tomorrow, May 1. If you have any edits, please let me know today!
- ◆ Forestry Intern Interviews went well, had nine candidates, selected three.
- ◆ Service awards are on June 15 at the D-Day War Memorial in Bedford, VA.
- ◆ Spring Fire Season bonus for firefighters will be paid out June 1.

## Central Region (Robbie Talbert)

- ◆ Hired new forest technician for the Southern Rivers district. They will start June 10.
- ◆ Amy Bigger is retiring.
- ◆ Central Region is hosting the Fall Fire Academy the week of September 16. Details to be determined.
- ◆ Annual Regional Retreat at the Berryhill Resort and Conference Center in South Boston October 2-3.

## Eastern Region (Bryant Bays)

- ◆ Currently have three vacancies: Capital District Forester, Brunswick County Forester and Northern Neck County Forester.
- ◆ Working on office clean outs. Currently completed Waverly, Tappahannock and the back of New Kent.
- ◆ Recently had uptick in water quality activity in the Eastern Region.
  - Two overcut violations in the past month.

- Opportunity to work with Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).
- DEQ will be attending the Eastern Region Water Quality Training.

### Facilities (Richard Schmidt)

- ◆ Have a new truck manufacturer.
  - Shared specs on trucks for better quality.
  - Regional Foresters selecting two field staff to look at specs to ensure trucks meet the needs.
- ◆ Working on a Request for Proposal (RFP) for radio installation.
- ◆ Working on general construction getting completed. There was a 6-month delay with awarding the contracts.

### Conservation (Terry Lasher)

- ◆ Had 16 Arbor Day events.
- ◆ Throwing Shade ends this weekend.
- ◆ Great turnout for the Callery Pear Exchange Program last weekend.
- ◆ Working on the Forestry Conservation Canopy Plan.
  - Will be assembling a stakeholders' group to discuss
- ◆ Office of Working Lands (OWL) will be coming to the Department of Forestry
  - Will now be focusing on forestry, agricultural lands and agricultural possibilities.
- ◆ Forest Legacy is starting to ramp up.
  - Currently working on four large size projects.
  - Have nine active easement projects and one violation.
- ◆ Working on fixes for the Forest Products Tax information.

### Watershed Team (Caitlin Verdu)

- ◆ Finishing up the Virginia Statewide Action Plan, should be completed today.
- ◆ Riparian Forests for Landowners (RFLL) program contracts are out.
  - Have 50% back waiting on two more.
- ◆ Extending offers to two Sentinel Landscape Coordinators today.

### Field Representative (David Powell)

- ◆ Warden Commission Certificates seem to be getting delayed again.
  - Rob Farrell will look into it.

### Forest Management (Dean Cumbia)

- ◆ Forest Management Coordinator is in recruit.
- ◆ Working on a Tree Improvement forester.
  - Would help with a succession plan for the Tree Improvement Program.
- ◆ Working on the finalists for the Forest Business Development Coordinator position.
- ◆ Selected two part-time individuals for invasive species monitoring.
- ◆ The Hardwood Forester grant funded position is currently in recruit.

- ◆ Received approval for the Underserved Outreach Coordinator position.
- ◆ Continuing to have discussions about having a forestry program at Southside Community College.
  - Morphing into possibly working with Mountain Gateway Community College, more to come.
- ◆ Forest Management Academy is September 9-13 at Sweet Briar College.
- ◆ Looking at using drones for spraying.

### Western Region (Brad Carico)

- ◆ Dealing with spring fire season that won't go away.
  - Had a very active fire season.
- ◆ Wrapped up planting season.
- ◆ Celebrating Public Service Week event on May 22 in Galax.
- ◆ Had some big Arbor Day/Earth Day events including one in Buchanan County.
- ◆ Currently have two forest technician vacancies.

### Executive Assistant (Mary Weaver)

Board of Forestry meeting on June 25 in the training room.

*Minutes recorded by Mary Weaver, executive assistant*