



Sustainable Forestry Council

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SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY COUNCIL

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March 4, 2015

Minutes

Attendees:

Eric Sprague
Don Outen
Gary Allen
Kim Finch
Kirk Rodgers
Al Goetzl

DNR and Guests:

Anne Hairston-Strang, MD Forest Service
David Newburn, UMD, Ag. & Resource Econ.
Bob Tjaden, UMD Extension, Env. Sci./Tech.
Cuiyin Wu, UMD, Env. Science & Technology
Elliott Campbell, DNR Integrated Policy&Rev.

Eric opened the meeting at 10:05am. Anne delivered a State Update from Don VanHassent, noting that Mark Belton is Acting Secretary, with confirmation hearings scheduled next week, and reviewed the 2/27/15 Legislative Update. Concerns were discussed regarding HB238 expanding FCA exemptions around airports and SB 134 that would require large county payments in lieu of payment from state land revenues.

Don Outen asked how the Council could be effective regarding legislation related to forestry, given that it is an advisory board to the Secretary. Discussion included developing positions, recommendations, and information that would inform future legislative proposals, and potentially making the process transparent and available to the public on the website. Individual members are testifying and advocating through other roles. Options discussed were a Legislative Subcommittee, a letter to the Secretary summarizing past legislation and how to more consistently apply recent forestry laws, and inclusion of legislative recommendations in the proposed SFC Action Strategy.

Eric Sprague passed the chairmanship to joint co-chairs Don Outen and Al Goetzl, as introduced at the last meeting.

Don Outen introduced Dr. David Newburn and his research on Forest Conservation Act (FCA) and development in Baltimore County. Dr. Newburn reported that 22% greater retention of forests during development was found to be attributable to the FCA between 1993 and 2000. Effects were seen primarily where parcels had 60% or less forest cover, and retention was not improved on mostly forested parcels. The FCA did not affect likelihood of development, which was better explained by parcel characteristics like parcel area and distance to Baltimore. Dr. Newburn suggested a response to the research would be to identify priorities for protecting intact forest and developing other mechanisms and strategies for high-priority sensitive areas. Don Outen described a Baltimore County zoning classification that reduces development rights for parcels covered by designated 200-acre+ patches, directed at reducing forest fragmentation on larger parcels. The tradeoffs of requiring mitigation versus conservation were discussed. Members noted that currently there are lower fees inside Priority Funding Areas and the Baltimore County Urban/Rural Demarcation Line, used as incentive for infill development. Dr. Newburn noted that the arrangement does not tap willingness to pay where demand is highest

and could be used to fund conservation of parcels in more rural areas. Members noted it would be a disincentive to desired denser growth in developed areas.

Following a lunch break and a reminder to file the State Ethics form by April, Don Outen introduced Bob Tjaden from University of Maryland Extension. Dr. Tjaden introduced his graduate student, Cuiyin Wu, and presented the recently released study, “Maryland’s Forest Resources in a Dynamic Environment: Assessing the Future Confidence and Sustainability of Maryland’s Forest Industry”. He reviewed forest industry statistics from 2009 and industry changes since then with the recession, and multiple approaches to the concept of future confidence. The study differentiated forest industry, loggers and landowners. Future concerns from forest industry were fuel cost, distance to market (40-50 miles average haul), and availability of wood supply. Policy preferences were low cost loans, biofuels support, new markets, state assisted planting, continuing tree planting programs, and tax breaks. Loggers identified barriers of fuel costs and health insurance, and policy preferences for biomass programs, better equipment financing, and promoting forest management. Loggers bought 38% of harvested timber directly, suggesting addition of silvicultural information to Master Logger training; 41% would add a chipper to their operation if biomass markets were available. For forest landowners, barriers were taxes and regulations; foresters were involved in 79% of sales, 65% have never participated in cost-share programs, and most desire assistance that adapts to smaller landowners. Dr. Tjaden noted that people involved in forestry-related organizations were more knowledgeable and confident in the future for forestry. Significant policy recommendations were expanding education, enhancing the Master Logger training, expanding biomass/biofuels markets, providing low-interest loans for equipment (more 1-on-1 approach like with business planning), exploring DOE energy efficiency audits/incentives for energy use reduction in sawmills, keeping state land availability for harvest, increasing forest landowner awareness of forest management options, and keeping tree planting programs.

Discussion on responses included education, incentives, and more efficient regulation. Gary suggested forest education requirements for participation in property tax relief programs like FCMAs, but Al raised the issue of it being overly burdensome to participate in the program. Kirk Rodgers noted that Maryland cost-share programs cut out large landowners, unlike Virginia. Anne shared updates from Dan Rider on the recent well-attended Biomass Bootcamp, strong interest in wood biomass heating in Harford County Schools and Garrett College, and a new grant program from MD Energy Administration starting July 1. The importance of the thermal renewable energy credits to woody biomass projects was noted.

Bob suggested that fast tracking of forest harvesting could be tied to use of Master Loggers, a strong incentive that could expand program participation and the benefits of better logging practices. Anne mentioned discussions with Dan Rider regarding using an approved forest stewardship plan as an entry to expedited harvest permitting, similar to using farm plans as a basis for approving additional practices and cost-share; an on-line system could be considered that would allow review and approval by all the local bodies with delegated sediment and erosion control authority. Bob noted that many loggers did not feel much value for certified land, but would be likely to greatly value it if tied to more timely harvest permit approvals.

The survey identified strong interest in firewood, and Bob suggested that Extension programs could expand their focus on that. Gary Allen suggested follow-up with the Maryland Wood Energy Coalition and high-efficiency clean woodstove initiatives. He noted recent enhanced efficiency standards for air quality and continued clean stove incentives.

Bob brought up ecosystem service payments, and Kirk encouraged development of ecosystem service payments as very important in the long-term for forest landowners. Elliot Campbell and Bob Tjaden offered future presentations on ecosystem services.

Cuiyin Wu asked about future research suggestions and funding options. Options mentioned were USFS competitive grants and opportunities from the new USFS Research agenda, including urban and backyard programs that tie more broadly to the population.

Al brought up the agenda item to approve the minutes of the 12/15/14 meeting. Kirk moved to approve the minutes as submitted, Gary seconded, and the December minutes were unanimously approved.

Don briefly reviewed the proposed Workplan and continuing action strategy for the SFC. Members commended the approach, and Don invited input into filling out past accomplishments and future actions in the matrix. Kim applauded the progress on MARBIDCO funding of mitigation banking since the Fall 2014 presentation from Steve McHenry, with a 214-acre parcel moving forward on a pilot loan in Prince George's County. Discussion noted the need to follow up with the Sustainable Growth Commission on the Rural Economies workgroup and efforts relevant to sustainable forestry.

Gary brought up an opportunity to follow up on the inconclusive outcome of the Woodland Incentive Fund report presented at the last SFC meeting. During his conversation with delegates on the legislative Environmental Matters Committee, he was invited to develop language proposing a follow-up study group to broaden options considered to address future funding shortfalls for WIF. It could also be an opportunity to improve conformance of funding programs established under older laws with recent legislation like the Sustainable Forestry Act and take a new look at how we invest resources for land conservation. Gary noted that a response would be needed soon. Don moved that Gary develop draft language for a proposed study group, Eric seconded it, and it was unanimously approved.

Future meeting dates were tentatively set for May 5 or 12, July 14, and September 15, 2015. Future agenda items raised were the Sustainable Growth Commission and changes to the Forest & Park Reserve Fund to avoid rapid depletion.

Don adjourned the meeting at 2:41 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anne Hairston-Strang