



Board of Forestry Meeting

March 4, 2021
Virtual - WebEx

Convene Meeting, Call to Order:

The virtual Board of Forestry meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chairperson John Burke. He read the Anti-trust policy to remind the Board of the legal requirements.

Roll Call:

Board of Forestry Members Present

John Burke III, Jamie Coleman, Michael Harold, Mike Hinchey, Beth Flippo Hutchins, Ken Morgan Jr., Franklin Myers, Bill Osl, Ben Reeves, Heather Richards, Greg Scheerer, Dr. David Smith and Glen Worrell

Members Absent

None

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 (VDOF) Present

Rob Farrell, State Forester; Ed Zimmer, Deputy State Forester; Terry Lasher, Assistant State Forester; Michelle Stoll, Director of Public Information; Hector Rivera, Director of Human Resources; Dean Cumbia, Director of Forest Resource Management; Todd Groh, Forest Resource Management Coordinator; Mary Weaver, Executive Assistant

Recognition of Guests and Visitors

Bettina Ring, Secretary of Agricultural and Forestry; Brad Copenhaver, Deputy Secretary of Agricultural and Forestry; Conner Miller, Virginia Forest Products Association; Corey Connors, Virginia Forestry Association; Jay Phaup, Greif Packaging; Lesley Mosley, Virginia Forest Products Association; Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau; Ron Jenkins, Virginia Loggers Association; John Gee, Virginia Forestry Association; Paul Howe, Enviva Biomass; Sonnia Montemayor, Virginia Forestry Association; Beck Stanley, Virginia Agribusiness Council.

Hearing of Citizens:

None

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the October 6, 2020 minutes as presented; seconded. All present were in favor.

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry (SAF) Update:

Secretary Ring spoke to the Board about the budget and other events that have been going on.

- ◆ Thanked everyone who assisted with the General Assembly and made it possible to accomplish the great things we did.
- ◆ The Governor was cautious last year and the state budget came out in a very good position this year.
- ◆ Secretary Ring mentioned the results of the proposed VDOF budget for FY2022:
 - Did not receive the request for the Incident Management Training (IMT) Coordinators that VDOF requested to help train other state agencies in preparation for emergencies.
 - VDOF has had a big part in assisting with the COVID-19 vaccination roll out.
 - Turned in the request last minute, will work on refining the request and try again next year.
 - Received four positions supporting watershed protection, Chesapeake Bay and land conservation.
 - One coordinator position and three field positions.
 - Hardwood Habitats Initiative position and incentive funding.
 - One-time funding for nursery equipment to expand our Augusta Nursery seedling production.
 - \$750,000 Water Quality Improvement funding.
 - \$250,000 for the Best Management Practices (BMP) logger cost-share program.
 - \$500,000 for the Virginia Trees for Clean Water Program.
 - Reforestation Timberland (RT) cost-share program match stayed the same.
 - Received the spending authority to move forward with the Charlotte State Forest.
- ◆ We want to promote renewable energy in the state while being very thoughtful about where solar facilities are placed. Don't want to convert land that shouldn't be converted, and at the same time we support private property rights.
 - State Forester Rob Farrell helped put together a Policy Action Work Group (PAWG) to look at solar siting.
- ◆ The Governor's Agricultural Trade Conference is coming up on March 30 and will be all virtual.
- ◆ Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Dr. Jewel Bronaugh has been nominated to be the United States Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. She will be confirmed at the end of March.
- ◆ State Forester Farrell is the Vice-Chairperson of the Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF).
- ◆ Thanks to Assistant State Forester Terry Lasher for the great job working on the Sentinel Landscape application.

Deputy Secretary Copenhaver mentioned that this legislative session was the best for Agriculture and Forestry that we ever had. Thanks to Secretary Ring's leadership working and collaborating with the administration and Governor Northam over the last three years. Also want to thank all the advocates that worked at the General Assembly for these items to remain in the budget.

- ◆ All meetings of the General Assembly were virtual but very productive.
- ◆ Bills that impact VDOF
 - Building on the Wildlife Corridor Program – gives additional responsibility to the State Forester and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) on the Wildlife Corridor Action Plan.
 - Two bills dealing with tree conservation in the context of development will need to be reenacted in the next session.

- The Secretaries of Agricultural and Forestry and Natural Resources have been directed to conduct a study group on tree conservation.
- There is budget language directing the State Forester to do something similar. Both due next fall.
- In the next couple of weeks will be working on how to mesh the two directives together.
- Bill in reference to the use of Oriented Strand Board (OSB) for certain use in fire training.
- Bill passed to support information on projects about the carbon sequestration market and getting tracks of land together for sale into the carbon markets be Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) exempt.
- Thanks to State Forester Farrell, VDOF and Delegate James Edmunds for recognizing the 50th Anniversary of the RT program. A commending resolution has been signed to recognize the importance of the program.

State Forester's Report:

We are very fortunate that former State Forester Ring has served as Secretary of Agricultural and Forestry, She has brought forestry to the forefront when opportunities presented themselves.

State Forester Farrell reviewed with the Board the changes since the last Board meeting in October.

- ◆ Recently lost Page Hutchinson, VDOF's State Project Learning Tree Coordinator, to a sudden illness. She will be greatly missed. Along with the great work she has done for many years, Page really stepped up and took her work to a new level and made Environmental Education all virtual.
 - Will be celebrating her life and work sometime around Arbor Day.
- ◆ VDOF now has a Hardwood Incentive program.
 - Coordinator position will be in the Forest Resource Management Branch
 - \$350,000.00 funding for incentive program.
 - Will discuss later in meeting how to move forward with a group to lead the creation of the hardwood incentive program.
- ◆ Received Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) positions.
 - Watershed Patrol Program Manager will report to the Assistant State Forester and be dedicated to the Riparian Buffers and Chesapeake Bay work.
 - Three Regional positions doing riparian buffer and Chesapeake watershed work along with conservation easement stewardship work.
- ◆ Water Quality Improvement Funding was increased to \$500,000.
 - \$250,000 will be dedicated to the loggers.
- ◆ \$500,000 dedicated to urban tree planting through the Virginia Trees for Clean Water Program.
- ◆ One-time funding for the nursery to use on equipment for expanding nursery capacity.
- ◆ VDOF received in total increase of \$2 million.
- ◆ State employees will receive a five percent raise in July.
- ◆ State Forester Farrell discussed ConserveVirginia and how forestry and agricultural are recognized in the model. ConserveVirginia will guide decisions about where to locate land conservation projects.

State Forester Farrell reviewed the legislative studies that VDOF was included on.

- ◆ Urban Tree Retention Study – localities would like more ability to conserve and retain trees during development without interfering with the right to practice forestry.
 - Four pieces of legislation were introduced with VDOF being the lead for three of the four studies.
 - Studies are due October 1, 2021.
- ◆ By October 15, VDOF is required to submit a report on how VDOF will use the hardwood cost-share funds.

- ◆ Department of Environment Quality (DEQ) has been tasked with developing a carbon sequestration study. VDOF has been included in the study.
- ◆ Wildlife Corridor Action Plan – VDOF has been included in the creation of this action plan to hopefully ensure forestry interests are taken into consideration.
- ◆ VDOF submitted a budget amendment that would fund positions to train other state agencies how to create Incident Management Teams (IMT).
 - Funding for the IMT training positions was not approved.
 - VDOF is the only agency that has employees who are trained and qualified in IMT.
 - Did not have time to thoroughly make our case. Will try again next year.

Assistant State Forester Terry Lasher spoke on separating agriculture and forest layers for ConserveVirginia.

- ◆ VDOF's new Forestland Conservation Program Manager Karl Didier is evaluating VDOF's position and relationship with Department of Conservation Recreation (DCR) to discuss what VDOF needs in ConserveVirginia.
 - Going to present DCR with a new proposal of what the layers should look like.

Secretary Ring mentioned that ConserveVirginia was amended to put Virginia agricultural and forestry in a position to be more engaged with the process. Incorporating a study from Farm Land Trust to create a map and look at how to integrate it into ConserveVirginia.

Public Information Director Michelle Stoll gave the Board an update on the launching of the new improved website and Camp Woods and Wildlife.

- ◆ On target to launch in April. Working on the testing phase for ease of use, accuracy, and functionality for all audiences. Will be asking Board members and partners to help with reviewing the site.
- ◆ To ensure the safety of our campers and staff, the Virginia Department of Forestry and the Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts are partnering to offer teens a new experience: the **Virginia Academy of Natural Resources**. This hybrid learning opportunity will take place July 12 – 16, 2021. Activities will include virtual presentations in the morning and self-guided field explorations in the afternoons, small group work on a project, and a mock Envirothon.
 - Camp Woods & Wildlife will return in 2022.

Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer spoke about the work VDOF has been doing supporting Virginia's Emergency Operations Center as well as nursery operations.

- ◆ VDOF was involved heavily with the COVID-19 planning IMT for the state for 134 straight days.
 - Continuing to supply two teams, six members each, with the vaccination roll-out.
 - VDOF staff will be assisting at the various vaccination sites.
- ◆ The nursery has currently lifted, graded, sorted and packed well over half of the VDOF seedling crop.
- ◆ Will be able to provide everything that was promised to our contractors
- ◆ Plan to seed for 4 million of premium, 14 million of elite, 14 million of Virginia's best and 750,000 of the controlled pollination (CP) seedlings for next year.
- ◆ Containerized seedlings will be comprised of 150 – 200 thousand of longleaf, 350 thousand of CP for Weyerhaeuser and will provide containerized CP and Virginia's best for anyone that is looking for those. Total number of containerized capacity is 1 million.

State Forester Farrell mentioned a few more items:

- ◆ Spoke about VDOF's message from about a decade ago: "Virginia is losing 16,000 acres of forest a year." This message is no longer accurate. Forested acres in Virginia are holding steady so VDOF is working on updating this message.
- ◆ Recognized the great work the Human Resource team has done hiring 30 positions in the last few months.

- Marketing and Utilization Program Manager is a difficult position to fill. Looking at evaluating the position description.
- By end of spring should have 100 percent staffing for all three regions.
- ◆ Toured the Cross-Laminated Timber (CLT) building in Charlottesville. CLT is a great thing, would be a great opportunity for Virginia.
- ◆ Met with Department Wildlife Resources (DWR) to discuss getting DWR law enforcement dispatch to support VDOF when they do their fire law enforcement. Also discussed working together on hardwood initiative and habitat work.

Secretary Ring mentioned the Oriented Strand Board (OSB) bill that was introduced at the General Assembly. The way the bill was worded it would have been a problem for firefighters in training facilities and future uses. Thanks to the Virginia Forestry Association, The American Wood Association and former Executive Director of the Virginia Forestry Association Paul Howe for their work with getting amendments through.

Board took a break at 10:48 a.m. and reconvened at 10:55 a.m.

Informational Items:

Findings from the Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute (VNRLI) Policy Action Work Group (PAWG) on Solar Siting

Terry Lasher introduced Kimberly Hodge from Washington and Lee University and Michael Skiffington from the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy.

- ◆ Kimberly Hodge spoke the formation of the VNRLI PAWG group and how they did their research.
 - There was diverse representation from all over the state.
 - Tasked with “How can the state balance renewable energy development with impacts on working lands.
 - Encouraged to use the “Equitable Collaboration Framework” method.
 - Spoke with a wide variety of individuals impacted both positively and negatively.
 - Looked at a variety of categories of interest.
 - Held five meetings and then broke into sub-groups.
 - Came up with a shared goal: “To best ensure the balanced and equitable development of solar energy to meet Virginia’s clean energy goals while incorporating environmental justice, protecting Virginia’s natural resources, addressing land ownership concerns, and supporting local economic benefits.”
 - Had a special focus on Environmental Justice (EJ). Some of the key concerns were:
 - Not engaging EJ communities from the beginning.
 - Historic harm/trauma.
 - Mitigation that fits community needs.
 - Lack of mapping EJ communities.
- ◆ Michael Skiffington spoke on the recommendations the VNRLI PAWG came up with.
 - Develop a comprehensive toolbox for localities and stakeholders which includes:
 - GIS mapping tool with layers for:
 - Existing transmission infrastructure
 - Brownfields/abandoned mine land
 - Marginalized agricultural/silvicultural lands
 - EJ communities
 - Best Management Practices.

- Decommissioning
- Soil Health
- Habitat protection
- Agri-voltaics/pollinators
- Templates containing appropriate emphasis on equity/EJ issues.
 - Model ordinances
 - Siting agreements
 - Conditional/Special Use Permits
 - Outreach/education strategies including EJ principles
 - Maintenance agreements
 - Cost/benefit tools
- Update stormwater and erosion and sediment control standards, incorporating climate change and resilience.
- Form a statewide Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to identify and evaluate updated storm water management (SWM) and erosion and sediment (E&S) technology.
- The TAC should recommend updates to the manual for utility-scale solar site development.
- The Commonwealth should adopt policies that prioritize and incentivize the use of previously developed project sites (brownfields) and other marginalized agricultural or silvicultural land for utility-scale solar sites.
- A stakeholder group should be assembled to identify potential funding opportunities and to offer recommendations.
- Develop a process to incorporate Environmental Justice throughout the entire solar siting process from site exploration through decommissioning.
 - EJ communities mapped in collaboration with localities.
 - EJ included in zoning and comprehensive plans.
 - EJ histories recorded and considered during the solar siting process.
 - Collaborate with Council on EJ, DEQ's Director of EJ, and/or Interagency Working Group on EJ.
 - Practices informed by the local community to mitigate negative impacts.
 - Legal, financial, and development assistance for EJ communities.
- ◆ Farm Bureau and Virginia Forestry Association requested to be involved with future processes.

State Forester Farrell reminded the Board that there will be a future Board of Forestry meeting specifically for solar discussion.

Reforestation of Timberlands (RT) Committee Report

Forest Resource Management Coordinator Todd Groh reviewed with the Board the RT interim budget, regional allocations and project accomplishments reports for FY 2021 year to date.

RT Committee Chairperson Greg Scheerer reported the Reforestation of Timberlands Committee met in February.

- ◆ The RT committee is recommending the RT rates for FY 2022 remain the same as FY 2021.

A motion was made to accept the RT rates as reflected on the last page of the Reforestation of Timberlands Program Report dated March 04, 2021 (included in these minutes); seconded. All present were in favor.

- ◆ There was discussion about the potential cost difference between ground and aerial applications. Will gather data to verify the potential cost difference and possibly recommend a cost differential for next year.
- ◆ Elizabeth Flippo-Hutchins was recognized as the new RT committee member replacing Glen Worrell.

Reforestation of Timberlands Program Strategic Discussion

Director of Forest Resource Management Dean Cumbia spoke about the great success of the RT program for the last 50 years. VDOF is working on having an event to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the RT program.

VDOF Field Employee Compensation Plan

Director of Human Resources Hector Rivera reviewed with the Board:

- ◆ What the Human Resources team has been doing the last four years.
 - Established paid internship programs.
 - Established a paid tuition assistance program and paid educational leave.
 - Was able to raise the base pay for VDOF forest technicians.
 - Provided different paths to become a forester.
 - Increased veteran and minority hires.
 - Positioning the VDOF workforce by looking ahead for the next 20 years.
- ◆ State Level Activities
 - 2020 Compensation Report
 - Corrections and healthcare occupations most recruitment and retention challenges.
 - Consistent pay raises and perception of underpayment main reasons for turnover.
 - Commonwealth base salaries are 16% (private sector) and 10% (public sector) below market value.
 - 20-year-old compensation philosophy; HR leaders support a strategy that seeks:
 - More frequent/annual increases.
 - An attempt to align with the market; and
 - Paid ties to performance.
 - Salary Increases
 - Commonwealth has not awarded on a consistent basis.
 - Increases traditional lagged the market.
- ◆ Forester Talent Development Model – Goal is to implement no later than November 1, 2021.
 - Provide a framework to project budgetary needs for workforce salary adjustments based on achieved status and developed competency.
 - Advancing Forester, Professional Forester, Managerial Forester, Executive Forester
 - Augments employee work profiles, which ordinarily serves as the only tool for objective technical development and assessment.
 - The goal is to align competency development with required technical tasks/objectives with Pay Cycle 2021-2022.

State Forester Farrell summarized that we are trying to establish the framework of what it takes to move people through the career progression and anticipate the cost. We can then come back and have a discussion about augmenting the VDOF budget to allow us to implement this progression.

Action Items:

Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

- ◆ The nominations committee of Glen Worrell and Frank Myers nominated Ken Morgan for Chairperson and Elizabeth Flipppo-Hutchins for Vice-Chairperson.
- ◆ There being no other nominations, Glen Worrell made a motion to nominate Ken Morgan for Chairperson and Elizabeth Flipppo-Hutchins for Vice-Chairperson. The motion was seconded.

- ◆ Voted on motion for Ken Morgan for Chairperson and Elizabeth Flippo-Hutchins for Vice-Chairperson. All present were in favor.
- ◆ Ken Morgan is Chairperson and Elizabeth Flippo-Hutchins is Vice-Chairperson for the next year.

As John Burke's last meeting as Chairperson for the Board he presented Board members with two homework assignments:

- ◆ Think about more topics of discussion for the future Board Meetings.
- ◆ Look for good replacements for the five Board members that will be leaving the Board June 30, 2021.

Ken Morgan expressed great appreciation for John Burke's service as Chairperson for the last two years.

Secretary Ring echoed Mr. Morgan's comment about Chairperson Burke's service and thanked Mr. Burke for his time. Please be very thoughtful about the representatives for those upcoming Board vacancies.

Committee/Liaison Reports:

Hardwood Management Task Force

State Forester Farrell addressed the Board about the next steps for the Hardwood Incentive program.

- ◆ Need to establish a group of stakeholders to advise, develop and oversee the program.
- ◆ Hire a VDOF Hardwood Coordinator as soon as possible after July 1.
- ◆ State Forester Farrell was invited to join the White Oak initiative steering committee as the State Forester representative.

Unfinished Business:

None

New Business:

Dr. Smith spoke on proforestation.

- ◆ Proforestation is a term used in conjunction with climate change and how to mitigate that.
- ◆ It has been promulgated as the answer to forest sequestration of carbon, the bigger the tree the more carbon sequestered. The message "Don't cut trees," has taken hold in the northeast.
- ◆ Concept doesn't take into account the forest management, silvicultural, or science behind what we know.
- ◆ Should this message become prevalent in Virginia, we need to be pro-active and get talking points about what forest management is all about to groups.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

Discussed having next meeting in conjunction with the Richmond Expo May 21-22. Will put options together and send out a doodle poll of dates.

Adjournment:

Chairperson Burke called for a motion to adjourn; motion was made to adjourn the March 4, 2021 meeting at 12:34p.m. and seconded. All present were in favor.

Minutes recorded by Mary Weaver, Executive Assistant