

**Minnesota Forest Resources Council**  
**Minutes**  
**Cloquet Forestry Center – Cloquet, MN**  
**25 January 2012**

**Members Present:** Bob Stine (Chair), Wayne Brandt, Bruce Cox, Alan Ek, Dave Epperly, Shaun Hamilton, Joel Koemptgen, Bob Lintelmann, Gene Merriam, Dave Parent, Shawn Perich, Mary Richards, Mike Trutwin, Darla Lenz (alternate for vacant USFS representative)

**Absent:** Dale Erickson, Kathleen Preece, John Rajala

**Staff:** Dave Zumeta, Lindberg Ekola, Calder Hibbard, Leslie McInenly, Rob Slesak, Clarence Turner

**Guests:** Greg Bernu (Carlton County), Rick Dahlman (retired DNR), Anna Dirkswager (DNR), Tiffany Orth (Governor's staff)

**Chair's Remarks**

Bob Stine opened the meeting with a round of introductions. He noted that several members were unable to attend the meeting for personal or business reasons; however, a quorum of members was present (13 voting members).

**Public Communication**

None.

**Approval of the 30 November 2011 Minutes**

Joel Koemptgen moved to approve, and Mike Trutwin seconded, the 30 November 2011 MFRC minutes. *The minutes were approved.*

**Approval of the 25 January 2012 Agenda**

Shaun Hamilton moved to approve the 25 January 2012 MFRC agenda. Gene Merriam seconded the motion. *The agenda was approved.*

**Executive Director Remarks**

Dave Zumeta reported on anticipated MFRC appointments; he was hopeful appointments would be announced more quickly than they have been in the past. Dave reviewed the policy priorities approved by the Council at the November meeting and noted that the Information Management Committee will be working to further define priority issues and opportunities.

Dave Parent inquired about the timeframe for policy priorities. Dave Zumeta replied that the policy priorities generally last about three or four years. Dave Parent asked whether it would be inappropriate to address longer-term forest health concerns such as mountain pine beetles. Dave Zumeta replied that forest health includes both immediate and longer term issues and that it is appropriate to consider multiple temporal scales.

## **Committee Reports**

### *Personnel and Finance (P&F)*

Bob Stine reported that the P&F Committee has not met since the last Council meeting. In the interim, he and Dave Zumeta met with DNR Commissioner Landwehr regarding funding for monitoring and discussed opportunities to use Clean Water Legacy Funds for monitoring. Bob anticipates holding a P&F meeting in February.

Gene Merriam commented that the Clean Water Council discussed opportunities to use about \$6 million in unexpended allocations from the current and past biennium. A fair amount of the discussion centered on aquatic invasive species challenges and whether it would be appropriate to use Clean Water funds and/or work with the Outdoor Heritage Fund to address the issue.

### *Site-level Committee*

Dave Parent stated that Site-level Committee updates would be presented later in the meeting.

### *Landscape Committee*

Shaun Hamilton reported that the Landscape Committee will meet at the end of February.

### *Information Management Committee (IMC)*

Calder Hibbard stated that the IMC started a discussion on framing and addressing the new Council policy priorities.

## **Written Communications to the MFRC**

None.

## **Committee of the Whole: Resolution to approve recommended consensus forest management guideline revisions for peer and public review**

Bob Stine introduced discussion on forest management guidelines revisions. He noted that there were two resolutions on the agenda. The first addresses a series of consensus recommendations from the Site-level Committee. The second resolution relates to a non-consensus recommendation from the committee (3-3 split). Bob reminded members that approval of the resolutions will allow the Site-level Committee to move forward with the peer and public review process.

Rob Slesak handed out modified guideline language and a summary of guideline revision recommendations<sup>a</sup>. He reviewed the guideline revision process. Background information and additional detail on the evaluation of the issues and available science has been posted on the MFRC website. Rob reminded the Council that the SFRA has specific charges with respect to the guidelines. Guidelines which must address all forest resources, be based on the best available science, and be practical and easy to understand. The guidelines are necessarily broad. The Site-level Committee conducted an extensive evaluation and stressed that the decision today will not be a final approval of revisions; there will be peer and public review, economic analysis and final Council approval.

Rob reviewed the justifications for “do nothing recommendations”, which suggest that there is inadequate or no justification for revisions to guidelines related to harvest monitoring, retention of

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<sup>a</sup> [http://www.frc.mn.gov/documents/council/site-level/GuidelineRevision/MFRC\\_Summary\\_Sitelevel\\_FMG\\_Recommendations\\_2011-11-16.pdf](http://www.frc.mn.gov/documents/council/site-level/GuidelineRevision/MFRC_Summary_Sitelevel_FMG_Recommendations_2011-11-16.pdf)

balsam regeneration, erosion control on <5% slopes, leave trees (tree size), biomass (fine woody debris retention), biomass (salvage), biomass (incorporation into timber harvest guidelines), peatland crossings, rutting metrics, and seasonal ponds.

Bob asked Council members to comment on the recommendations.

*Balsam Fir Retention (Reference No. 2 in Guideline Revision Summary document- link on previous page):* Rick Dahlman was in agreement with the proposal regarding balsam retention. In areas where managers are concerned about potential forest conversion, there is sufficient flexibility in the guidelines to justify an exception to meet silvicultural needs. Gene responded to Rick's observation, noting that the Site-level Committee discussed the meaning of voluntary guidelines. He felt the voluntary nature is something of a conundrum because it is not clear what expectations are created with the development of a guideline. With forest certification, the guidelines become almost regulatory.

Dave Epperly stated that the DNR has recommended that a footnote be added to the wildlife habitat table on page 13 of the guidelines to ensure flexibility regarding balsam fir retention (e.g., allowing removal to address insects and disease on fire-dependent sites). Rob added that the DNR recommended several informational items.

Bob Stine asked whether the Council anticipates approving every word that goes into the guidelines manual or approving just the guidelines and allowing staff to add additional material as needed. Rob anticipated the Council would consider the specific guidelines and delegate vetting of informational material to staff and the Site-level Committee. Bob asked the Council for input. Wayne Brandt replied that the Council needs to act on any changes that will be in the guidebook; the Council should make the ultimate decision. Rob responded that the intent was to have the Council approve the final language at a later point. Bob asked that the DNR recommendation regarding footnotes and referencing be noted.

*Leave Tree Retention (Reference No. 6):* Wayne stated that MFI feels quite strongly that the environmental benefits of leave trees can be accomplished without reserving the current amount of valuable sawlogs. He suggested there ought to be a way to favor the less-merchantable trees for reservation. Dave Parent referred to published literature regarding the value of large diameter aspen and white pine for fishers and marten. Wayne replied that the fisher and marten research seems odd given the increases in old, large diameter aspen over the past 40 years and stated that MFI is primarily concerned with red pine and jack pine. Very little white pine is sawn in the state. Alan Ek agreed that the state has been steadily accumulating 20" or larger aspen. While there may be local situations where large diameter trees appear in short supply, across the state there has been an increase. Joel inquired about the value of large white pine as nursery trees for yellow birch. Citing work by Dr. Tony D'Amato, Rob responded that the germination of yellow birch has been shown to be dependent on large nurse logs. There is little new information, beyond the economic argument, to demonstrate that a revision to the leave trees guideline will have an impact. Wayne clarified he was not suggesting the guidelines should not advise that large trees be reserved; rather, he would like to see language that would provide additional flexibility for economic considerations.

*Rutting Metrics (Reference No. 14):* Gene asked Rob to comment on DNR standards regarding rutting. Rob responded that the DNR established a rutting metric for certification purposes. Rick Dahlman added that the development of a rutting metric was initially spurred by concerns about spruce top harvest and potential rutting. Dave Epperly stated that the rutting metric was defined in 2005 and was related to

certification needs. Rob noted that the DNR metric is largely based on MFRC guidelines which do have identifiable criteria but do not suggest actual standards; the DNR just goes a little further.

*Biomass and Salvage Harvesting (Reference No. 12)*: Dave Epperly commented that there is always concern regarding the amount of biomass being retained on salvage sites. The DNR has requested that guidelines pertinent to salvage be developed in the future once research results are available. Wayne asked Dave whether the concern was about too much removal. Dave responded that the concern is more about how the guideline is written versus removal in actual practice; the DNR would like to see quantifiable amounts. Dave Zumeta added that some DNR staff members are concerned about specific instances such as the disproportionate use of burned sites and trees after fires by two species of woodpeckers. Rob is planning to submit a proposal to the Legislative-Citizen's Committee on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) regarding salvage and would be interested in talking with DNR staff about those issues.

*Seasonal Ponds (Reference No. 21)*: Dave Epperly stated that the DNR has concerns about potential compounding effects on seasonal ponds if other proposed guideline revisions are approved. Rob responded that the Site-level Committee leaned heavily on the Riparian Science Technical Committee (RSTC) report when considering leave tree retention and seasonal pond guidelines. The RSTC was not convinced that there was an issue with respect to landscape-level impacts as a result of harvest near seasonal ponds. There is no existing research demonstrating long-term impacts. Dave Zumeta noted that the Site-level Committee's recommendation is consistent with the majority of the RSTC. Rick Dahlman commented that identification of seasonal ponds is very difficult, either because managers and loggers are there in the winter or during a time when there is no surface water. A seasonal pond guideline is not practical.

Dave Epperly suggested that ecological classification systems in use have the potential to identify the possibility of a seasonal pond. If the system is mapped, the forester is aware of the potential for a seasonal pond and can incorporate considerations into the silvicultural prescription. Rob responded that this is an area where additional research is needed. There are Land Type Associations in which seasonal ponds are more prevalent; however it is unclear whether the ponds are more important or sensitive in sites where they are more – or less – prevalent. He noted that John Rajala made a strong statement that this is one area in which more research is needed.

Dave Epperly requested that: 1) the potential for compounding effects of guideline revisions be recognized, and 2) that the importance of seasonal ponds be acknowledged to allow for consideration when site classification permits. Shaun Hamilton agreed with the need to better understand seasonal ponds.

Rob then moved into recommendations in which the Site-level Committee suggested revisions to guidelines.

*Erosion control (Reference No. 3)*: Rob reported that the committee considered two components of erosion control: sites in which slopes are < 5% and roads/trails where the risk to water quality is low. The initial suggestion was to clarify what "where necessary and needed" means. The committee agreed that it would be appropriate to change the guideline language. Clarification will also be helpful for monitoring. The committee recommended that erosion control is needed at sites in which slopes are > 2%. The committee also emphasized that this only needs to be considered where there is likely to be an impact on water quality.

*Allowable Infrastructure (Reference No. 4):* Scoping comments associated with infrastructure suggested a modification of the disturbance maximum based on timber harvest size. The committee evaluated the infrastructure disturbance on harvested sites sampled over 4 years and identified three different tiers of disturbance based on harvest size. On small harvest sites, the percentage of allowable infrastructure is not achievable. Similarly, very few large harvest sites met the infrastructure guideline. Council members discussed possible reasons for increased infrastructure disturbance on larger sites. Dave Epperly stated that the DNR is not requesting specific language changes, but rather that space is optimized to limit infrastructure to that required to get the job done.

*Leave Trees – Clumped vs. Scattered (Reference No. 5):* Rob stated that clarification on language related to clumping versus scattering leave trees was requested during the scoping process. While clumps are still preferred, the recommendation is to clarify existing language to allow clumps and individual trees to be used in concert to create more flexibility for silvicultural objectives.

*Leave Trees – Distribution (Reference No. 5):* Scoping comments also suggested that leave tree clumps be located at the boundaries of the harvest unit. The committee recommended that guideline revisions de-emphasize even distribution and allow use of leave tree configurations that meet silvicultural and wildlife objectives. Wayne responded that MFI supports the committee’s recommendation. Dave Epperly noted that the DNR’s biggest concern regarding this recommendation stems from the notion that wildlife habitat, or the intent to manage for wildlife habitat, would be a secondary consideration. Bob asked if anyone was opposed to the recommended language. No opposition was raised.

*Biomass - Redistribution of Fine Woody Debris (Reference No. 7):* During revision scoping, a suggestion was made to develop criteria to determine whether redistribution of fine woody debris (FWD) is necessary to achieve one-third FWD retention. After consideration, the Site-level Committee recommended that guideline language be modified to allow adjustment of FWD redistribution depending on incidental breakage. Dave Epperly commented that the guideline is subjective. Rob agreed and stated that he has prioritized this issue to bring forward in applications for research funding.

Joel inquired about the impact of slash redistribution on wildlife. Darla Lenz responded that the decision to leave slash piles is site-specific depending on objectives. Shawn replied that, in the case of biomass harvest, slash piles would be harvested. Dave Zumeta commented that more than 33% is being left on sites right now. Wayne stated that this will be an issue if policies drive greater forest-based bioenergy; if not, the issue is somewhat moot.

Bob noted that the language seems fairly prescriptive in its current form. Wayne responded that Dale Erickson was on the committee and was fine with the recommendation. Council members suggested that the final guideline revisions be consistent (e.g., in use of 33% or one-third FWD).

*Biomass – Exceptions to FWD (Reference No. 11):* The committee recommended that new guidelines be developed to explicitly allow modification of FWD retention based on management objectives (examples provided on pages 32-34 of the current biomass harvest guidelines). Council members did not comment on this language.

*Biomass – Language Reconciliation (Reference No. 13):* The committee recommended that guideline language be modified in the timber harvesting section to agree with recommendations in the biomass guidelines. Wayne highlighted language in the current timber harvest guidelines which suggests loggers “retain and disperse at least one-third of slash at most sites” and asked how that guideline relates to the

overall goal of FWD retention “of about 33%” in the biomass guidelines. Rob responded that the guidelines are supposed to mean the same thing. Bob Stine suggested that staff conduct a word search on and make necessary changes to ensure the language is consistent and meaning clear. Shawn suggested that the term “slash” be used, as it is the term most logging operators use. Wayne agreed with Shawn’s point but noted that slash is the stuff that accumulates at landings whereas FWD is what we want to remain on the site for soil protection, wildlife and other benefits. Bob directed Rob to take the comments under consideration.

*Invasive Species (Reference No. 16):* Several groups suggested that the MFRC develop invasive species guidelines. The committee recommendation is to create some planning guidelines to limit the spread of invasive species during timber harvesting operations. He noted that Wisconsin has a comprehensive set of guidelines for a variety of users and that DNR has also developed some internal guidelines. Dave Parent suggested that invasive species are addressed by the Department of Agriculture and the noxious weed law. Bruce Cox commented that Clearwater County has a very active weed control program. Inclusion of invasive species in the guidelines will put folks into a whole new place regarding compliance issues for certification. This guideline will be problematic for counties.

Dave Epperly clarified that the Site-level Committee is looking at limiting the spread of invasive species. Having guidelines related to limiting the spread is different than guidelines to eradicate. He suggested that development of invasive species guidelines is the responsible thing to do. Mary Richards asked about actions that would be taken in response to the guidelines (e.g., it is impractical to have wash stations at each road). Dave responded that some actions may not be practical. However, if there is knowledge that an invasive is on the site, consideration could be included in the harvest contract. Raising awareness is important.

Wayne commented that this set of guidelines addressed timber harvesting, but not other travel, as a potential vector. The industry could do everything and more in terms of operations and have zero impact on slowing the spread of invasives. Alan was disinclined to create too much detail when the list of species and issues will change. Dave Epperly responded that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If there are known invasives on a site, proactive action should be taken.

Dave Zumeta suggested that the recommendation should be set aside to allow further vetting. Mary Richards stated that awareness is important but cautioned against getting too specific as the issue will evolve.

*Watershed condition (Reference No. 17):* With respect to cumulative impacts of harvest at the landscape scale, the committee’s recommendation was to create a general guideline to consider the overall condition of a watershed when planning management activities. Rob stated that the literature review did not provide sufficient data for establishment of thresholds.

Dave Zumeta commented that Dale Erickson had some concerns about this recommendation. If a “general statement” instead of a “guideline” is created in the planning section of the guidelines, Dave felt that Dale and Wayne would probably be more comfortable. Dave Parent was in support of Dave’s suggestion. Wayne suggested the language be titled something along the lines of “watershed planning and considerations”. Rob suggested the Council review the current planning section the guidelines, noting that the general statement is not much different from current language.

*Riparian Management Zone (RMZ) Widths (Reference No. 18)*: Rob reviewed three recommendations regarding RMZ guidelines:

- 1) Adopt the RSTC minimum recommended widths. Keep existing widths for water features not addressed by the RSTC.
- 2) Retain 60 ft<sup>2</sup> residual basal area in all RMZ areas.
- 3) Allow RMZ area to count towards the 5% leave tree retention recommendation.

Dave Epperly suggested that, when possible, we should recommend a better metric than basal area (e.g., perhaps canopy cover). Until such a metric is found, DNR feels the MFRC should retain the 75 ft<sup>2</sup> minimum. The DNR also recommend no change to the existing 5% leave tree retention guideline.

Wayne commented that the challenge with respect to the RMZ guidelines is to find the “sweet spot” with respect social, science and economic considerations. Wayne felt that the committee did a nice job balancing the considerations. Shawn stated that the recommendations did not raise any alarm bells with Trout Unlimited members. To a certain degree, he agreed with Wayne, but also to some extent with DNR. Gene had a somewhat similar response. As a package the revisions are reasonable but he agreed that better indicators should be developed. Alan was hesitant to stray from RSTC recommendations.

Shaun noted that we seem to be expecting leave tree retention to cover a lot of bases (RMZs, seasonal ponds, wildlife).

Bruce commented that topography changes significantly across the state. An increase in RMZ width to 125 feet would more than double the RMZs in country where there are a lot of kettle ponds. To also increase the amount of basal area retention in those zones would be a significant re-evaluation of the managed forest in his part of the state. Rob stated that the economic analysis is a different component of the revision process.

Bob Stine suggested that the RMZ recommendations be considered at a later date.

Dave Parent made a motion to advance recommendations for guidelines with reference numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 for external review. Alan Ek seconded the motion. *The motion was unanimously approved (13 votes).*

Bob Stine asked Rob and Dave to send out language related to the remaining recommendations to be considered for approval at the March meeting.

### **Forest Resources Research Review**

Bob Stine introduced Allen Levine, Dean of the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences at the University of Minnesota and Chair of the MFRC Research Advisory Committee (RAC).

Allen stated that the RAC was reconvened in 2007 as a result of a pass-through grant and a direct appropriation for forest-related research. He reviewed the committee members and activities. The RAC is required to periodically conduct a research assessment and identify forest research needs. The RAC recently completed these evaluations and produced *Minnesota’s Forest Research: Assessment and Needs*. Allen commented that the RAC will be meeting soon and is focused on staying current with respect to advising the Council as well as increasing collaboration and linkages on the identified priority topics. He then asked Calder to provide a review of the report.

Calder thanked the Dean for his leadership on the RAC. He provided additional background on the RAC and the process followed in developing the assessment. The RAC did not feel they had the capacity to address all of the research contributions and needs. As a result, the committee identified and convened an advisory panel of experts from around the state. Research priorities were identified within a framework of resource conditions, agents of change and manipulative tools as well as within the context of geography and ownership. The advisory panel spent a good deal of time in the prioritization of issues. After the panel identified priorities, the assessment went through additional external review via a public comment period and public forums (held in Duluth and St. Paul). After a final RAC review, two tiers of priority research topics were identified.

Tier 1 priority research topics included: forest health threats; implications and mitigation of climate change; forest fragmentation, parcelization and development; changes and losses in biodiversity and wildlife habitat; and woody biomass harvesting and energy. The advisory panel developed a suite of priority questions for each of the Tier 1 topics. Tier 2 priority topics included: methods of forestland management/silviculture, water quality and forests, health of the forest products industry, forest productivity concerns and implications, and long-term ecological impacts of timber harvesting.

The intention is to use the report to inform federal, state and private decision-makers; encourage investment in priority research; and work to increase collaboration and create efficiencies between research organizations, disciplines, researchers and practitioners.

Shawn asked whether the public input ended up as Tier 2 priorities. Calder responded that there was a great deal of external support for the Tier 1 issues at the public forums and that Tier 2 priorities were added to the assessment as a result of public comments. Shawn asked whether the report adequately responds to the public. Calder felt that it did; the first five priorities were strongly supported. Shawn commented that he believes we may have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to look at fire disturbance in Minnesota. The past three large fires probably represent the largest fire occurrence in 80 or 90 years. He asked whether anyone is studying the fires from that context. Alan responded that Peter Reich's lab has plots all over those sites that were in place before the fires; they are developing a body of documentation.

Calder commented that, with this report, Council members and colleagues can take priorities to the Legislature, foundations and Congress. Dave Zumeta added that LCCMR staff showed considerable interest in the report. He also anticipates that the Forest Service will make good use of the information.

Shaun commented on the synergy of the research priorities and policy priorities and noted there would be value in sharing this with the Northwoods Climate Change Response Framework (CCRF) audience in the coming months. Wayne stated that the Secretary of Agriculture speaks frequently and passionately about renewable energy, which is one of the Tier 1 issues.

Gene asked how long the report has been done, noting that the data on funding are quite old. Calder responded that the process started about a year and a half ago. It was difficult to get fiscal years to match up and find available reports for recent years. As a result, the most recent data available were for fiscal year 2009.

### **Update on Northeast Landscape Plan revision and Climate Change Response Framework**

Shaun Hamilton introduced Leslie McInenly and Lindberg Ekola to present an update on the Northeast Landscape Plan revision and the CCRF. He added that the Northeast plan update is closely tied with the CCRF and the Boreal Forest and Community Resilience Project, a model of leveraging resources.

Lindberg reviewed the process and schedule for the Northeast plan revision and provided a quick review of the MFRC Landscape Program and components of landscape planning. He commented on activities and the status of plans and projects in the six MFRC planning regions. The Northeast Landscape Plan revision is anticipated to take 15-18 months and will include eight planning committee meetings in addition to the quarterly meetings of the Northeast Landscape Committee. A kickoff meeting held on December 1-2, 2011, was attended by about 40 stakeholders within the region. The December meeting included a systems mapping process, facilitated by members of the Boreal Forest project, to help identify issues and important trends to be addressed in the revision. Lindberg stated that the plan revision is scheduled to be complete by spring 2013.

Leslie provided an overview of the CCRF initiative, schedule, coordination and science team activities and upcoming events. On October 25<sup>th</sup>, the MFRC hosted a Northern Summit meeting with representatives from the three northern regional committees. The summit focused on sharing climate change-related actions and planning among land managers and provided a review of the CCRF Ecological Vulnerability Assessment and Forest Adaptation Resources documents (with examples from Wisconsin) and the Minnesota DNR's Climate Change and Renewable Energy Management Foundations documents. The following day, a Science Roundtable was convened, with representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, MN DNR, academia, tribes and private companies, to examine potential changes in Minnesota forests. The results of the Science Roundtable will contribute to an Ecosystem Vulnerability Assessment for northern Minnesota. The CCRF Science Team is currently focused on drafting the Forest Ecosystem Vulnerability Assessment for northern Minnesota as well as developing an accepted process for framing climate-related projections and conclusions in a manner that references the native plant communities (NPCs). The team is looking for a few managers who would be willing to review the Vulnerability Assessment and/or participate in a June workshop to help draw conclusions from the climate model results. Leslie noted that the collaboration among the Northeast Planning Committee participants and the CCRF teams resulted in our ability to "pass the hat" and cobble together funding for the development of a potential Native Plant Community map for the Laurentian Mixed Forest in Minnesota.

### **Public Communications to the MFRC**

None.

### **Member Communications**

Gene reported that the legislative session is heating up and noted that School Trust lands are likely to be a hot topic. Dave Zumeta suggested it may be timely to have a presentation on the School Trust Land issue at the March meeting.

Mary Richards moved, and Dave Parent seconded, adjournment. *The meeting was adjourned at 3:17 pm.*