

Minnesota Forest Resources Council
Minutes
Northland Arboretum
May 19, 2015

Members Present: Bob Stine (Chair), Susan Solterman Audette, Greg Bernu, Forrest Boe, Alan Ek, John Fryc, Shaun Hamilton, Darla Lenz, Bob Lintelmann, Gene Merriam, Tom McCabe, Bob Owens, Dave Parent, Shawn Perich, Kathleen Preece, Wayne Brandt

Alternate Members Present: Mary Richards (alternate for Deb Theisen), Tim O'Hara (alternate for Wayne Brandt), Jan Green (alternate for Gene Merriam)

Members Absent: Deb Theisen

Staff Present: Dave Zumeta, Lindberg Ekola, Calder Hibbard, Rachael Nicoll, Rob Slesak, Clarence Turner, Jeff Reinhart, Michael Lynch

Guests: Jennifer Corcoran (MN DNR), Amber Ellering (MN DNR), Alexis Grinde (NRRI, UMN), Bryan Lueth (MN DNR), Duane Lula (Arrowhead Regional Development Commission), Jim Manolis (TNC), Leslie McInenly (MN DNR), Mike Schrage (Fond du Lac), Dan Steward (BWSR), Mike Trutwin (former MFRC member – labor representative)

Chair's Remarks

Bob Stine opened the meeting with a round of introductions. He remarked that the council sent a letter to the Minnesota federal delegation regarding federal wildfire suppression funding. The letter included the November 2014 resolution passed by the MFRC. Bob also noted plans for a potential meeting between the MFRC and Minnesota Forest Resources Partnership to discuss implementation of the forest industry competitiveness report recommendations. Finally, Bob discussed a number of transitions within the council: John Fryc, Tom McCabe, and Deb Theisen have replaced Mike Trutwin as Labor Organizations representative, Dale Erickson as Commercial Logging Contractors representative, and Mary Richards as Resort and Tourism Industry representative, respectively. Also, Dennis Becker, University of Minnesota Forest Resources Department, was appointed as MFRC Chair, but he has accepted a position at the University of Idaho. Kathleen Preece will apply to become the new MFRC chair. In the interim, Bob will remain Chair for several months.

Approval of Meeting Minutes*

Mary Richards approved, and Alan Ek seconded, the meeting minutes. *The minutes were unanimously approved.*

Approval of Agenda*

Dave Parent approved, and Shaun Hamilton seconded, the draft meeting agenda. *The agenda was unanimously approved.*

Executive Director Remarks

Dave Zumeta noted that this would be his last remarks as Executive Director. After 33½ years with the Minnesota DNR, he will retire on July 7. He spoke about his fulfilling career in Minnesota and thanked everyone for their many contributions to Minnesota forest resource management and protection. Dave also remarked that he has completed orientation for all three new MFRC members

Committee Reports

Personnel and Finance

Bob Stine reported that the committee has not met. He deferred to Forrest Boe who noted that the DNR has posted the opening of the MFRC Executive Director position. However, the number of applicants was limited due to what Forrest characterized as restrictive qualifications, so the DNR will extend the posting period. Interviews are planned for the latter part of June.

Site-Level

Dave Parent reported that the committee has not met. The Site-level Committee will hold a meeting in early July.

Landscape Planning/Coordination

Shaun Hamilton reported that the committee met on May 6. Lindberg Ekola provided the meeting summary as a handout. The committee discussed two issues: 1) updating the 25-Year LSOHC Forest Habitat Vision in a collaborative effort with the council, and 2) coordination of MFRC landscape plans with other planning efforts and revision of current landscape plans, specifically the North Central and West Central Plans. Dave Zumeta added that Jon Nelson is setting up a meeting to discuss better integration of DNR SFRMP subsection plans with MFRC landscape plans to increase efficiency and conserve staff time and funds.

Information Management Committee

Kathleen Preece reported that the committee met on April 13. The committee discussed the proposed federal wildfire act, SFIA recommendations and other statutory revisions. Rob Slesak briefed the committee on an LCCMR proposal, a collaborative project that would study factors affecting soil operability. This proposal is partly in response to the forest industry competitiveness report and in recognition of an important information need. Jennifer Corcoran presented on the forest disturbance and monitoring program. Jana Albers presented on dwarf mistletoe.

Bob Owens commented that he would like the council to hear from business owners that have considered investing in Minnesota in order to understand what our forest resource represents to them and why they are either interested or not interested in investing in Minnesota.

Written Communication to the MFRC

None.

Committee of the Whole: 2015 legislative session outcomes*

Bob Stine introduced Forrest Boe. Forrest noted he would speak to DNR interests regarding the budget, and Wayne Brand will describe items of interest to the industry. The DNR budget was passed on Saturday, and the Division of Forestry did very well. The Division's budget is above Governor Dayton's recommended budget in the first year of the biennium, and at the governor's recommended budget in second year at \$2.5 million and \$2.0 million, respectively.

Forrest explained that the Division of Forestry pursued three primary initiatives during the legislative session: forest management, forest health, and technology. The division did not pursue forest inventory-related changes due to budgetary reductions. The legislature allocated \$500,000 for the biennium for forest maintenance and stand treatments. Language regarding utilizing existing timber contracts for road maintenance also passed. The legislature also allocated additional funding for early detection and rapid response to regional and statewide forest health issues. This funding will increase the capacity to treat invasive species as they are detected on forest lands. The PlayCleanGo outreach program also received funding. Additional funding for technology will be put towards updating timber management modules and creating an online logger registration system.

Forrest also announced that the MFRC received the governor's recommended budget increase of \$200,000 per fiscal year to restore its baseline funding.

The Department of Parks and Trails received restoration funding to support operations. The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife did well during the session. The Clean Water Fund will probably see a reduction in funding; however, there is enough funding for the BMP monitoring program and forest stewardship program.

The legislature also created a School Trust Lands account, totaling approximately \$3 million. The account will encompass sale of state lands not in the Outdoor Recreation Act. The fund will go towards the purchase of lands with easements, water access sites, and old growth forests. However, leasing may be a better option for old growth lands since this designation does not follow regular section lines. In response to questions, Forrest did not recall the timeline nor the date the fund was added. Gene Merriam asked about state lands that are in the county forest base. Forrest responded that those would still be managed by the trust, but he does not believe that it is not the intent to sell these lands. Dave Parent spoke to the difficulty of tracking old growth forest. Forrest said there is a process to designate or undesignate old growth forest. Shaun Hamilton asked if the trust needs to maintain some old growth land for certification purposes. Forrest said there was some debate about compensating the trust, but he does not believe this is the case. Discussion ensued about the bill.

Forrest also mentioned changes to an auxiliary forests program created in 1927. Landowners could sign up for a 50 year contract in exchange for \$1/acre in property taxes. A percent of the timber proceeds went back to state. Counties lobbied to get the law rescinded, but some contracts remained. A major cleanup effort of the program occurred.

Forrest added that we did a lot of work on the SFIA. Unfortunately, and there was no tax bill this year. The program still exists as is. There was general support for the changes in the legislature. Dave Zumeta noted stakeholder groups deserve praise for their work on the SFIA.

Wayne Brandt added that the omnibus jobs, energy, and economic development funding bill passed. One provision was a recommendation from the MFRC forest industry competitiveness report regarding competitive energy rates. Wayne noted it was probably the most significant policy development in economic development in Wayne's career. Energy is a highly significant cost to industry.

There were also changes to the Wetland Conservation Act borne out of difficulties in finding replacement wetland sites. Companies were buying remaining uplands in counties with few remaining, and flooding lands in Aitkin County. The legislature made modifications to how mitigation replacement will be done. Significantly, BWSR has new authorities. The changes will also allow for streambed improvements and restore riparian areas.

Wayne added that a creative solution to the SFIA would have likely passed had there been a tax bill this session, including tiers of payment based upon length of enrollment. He hopes that changes to the program have a chance of passing in a future session.

Introduction of new MFRC members

Dave Zumeta introduced two new Council members, John Fryc and Tom McCabe, representing Labor Organizations and Commercial Logging Contractors, respectively. A third new member was appointed to the council, Deb Theisen, representing the Resort and Tourism Industry, but she was unable to attend the meeting. Dave and Mary Richards provided background information on the new members. Mary will serve as Deb's alternate for a period of time.

Both Mary and Mike Trutwin thanked the council and shared future plans.

MFRC member response to proposed Northern Long-Eared Bat regulations

Forrest Boe introduced Amber Ellering, DNR Division of Forestry, and Bryan Lueth, Forest Wildlife Habitat Team Leader for the DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife. Bryan explained that the DNR wanted to engage in protection of the northern long-eared bat (NLEB) while maintaining flexibility in natural resources management, working in partnership with federal agencies.

Amber Ellering added that the DNR has had discussions surrounding the balance of minimizing the risk of NLEB losses and the risk to forest management and the forest products industry. Ultimately, the DNR was very successful in coordinating actions to communicate with partners regarding concerns about the proposed listing. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service has announced their final decision to list NLEB as threatened and released additional special rules in an Interim 4D Rule.

*Many of the legislative outcomes discussed were part of the omnibus environment and natural resources bill were vetoed by Governor Dayton and passed during a special legislative session.

Bryan noted that this is an interim rule that will allow for additional time to create new exemptions and edit existing exemptions for different industries/activities. The rule exempts several “purposeful takes,” including research activities. It also creates a white nose syndrome buffer zone: 150 mile radius surrounding positive detection of the fungus by county line. Some exempted activities that have incidental take are allowed, including forest management, prairie habitat conservation, and tree removal. Restrictions occur near known hibernacula and roost trees. Areas that receive federal funding must be held to a higher standard.

Tim O’Hara asked why recommendations are made if it is known that bats move around trees. Bryan replied that it is considered important to protect roost trees, plus the recommendations provide additional habitat for other species. The specifications of the interim rule avoid going into formal consultation requiring written approval. Tim inquired further if the state will push to remove the buffer. Amber replied that the state is pursuing this.

Susan Solterman Audette asked if the DNR has reached out to any specific organizations. Amber said they had and hope to continue communications in June. In response to a question regarding white nose syndrome, Bryan said aggressive federal research is ongoing, and there are some promising leads. The possibility of immunity is still unknown; there is evidence that some populations aren’t completely decimated. Amber added that populations do not rebound quickly, and there are a lot of uncertainties surrounding potential treatments.

Gene Merriam inquired about known hibernacula and roost tree restrictions. Amber and Bryan explained that hibernacula restrictions will occur year-round, and roost tree restrictions will run from June to July. Landowners should contact the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service for more information.

Darla explained that federal land managers are required to submit management plans and consult with the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service on management decisions. The Chippewa National Forest opted for conservation measures that align with the Interim 4D Rule.

Preliminary results from guideline monitoring conducted in 2014

Forrest Boe introduced Jennifer Corcoran, DNR Research Analyst. Forrest and Jennifer provided background information on the forest watershed monitoring effort. Jennifer explained that the monitoring timeline will follow that of the MPCA’s WRAPS program. Disturbance mapping is being done by DNR Resource Assessment. Monitoring of four watersheds will occur every year on a recurring cycle. There are 30-40 harvest sites per watershed. Statewide mapping will still occur every other year.

Jennifer shared preliminary results of the disturbance mapping. Cumulatively, forest management does not cause much disturbance. However, some of the watersheds that have less forest cover continue to experience disturbance, so relative impact is higher on existing forests in these areas. A lot of ground reference data is needed to determine whether these disturbances represent land use (e.g. timber harvest) versus land conversion. Dave Zumeta emphasized that classifying disturbance is extremely important as timber harvesting does

receive negative attention for water quality impacts that are much more attributable to land clearing, road projects, etc.

Alan Ek asked if Jennifer has been able to reconcile disturbance areas with FIA data. Jennifer replied that certain disturbance type data are collected by a number of different organizations. The data may not be able to be combined or is missing or ambiguous. One can reliably combine FIA data at the county scale, but the reliability decreases at smaller scales.

Jennifer added that the main objective of the monitoring effort is to identify key factors to determine relative risk to watersheds. Different watersheds are variable in key attributes: percent forestland; waterbodies, rivers, and wetlands; road cover, disturbance, and monitoring. Identifying these factors could influence operational effectiveness and engage stakeholders and partners.

Vision for The Nature Conservancy forestry programs in Minnesota

Shaun Hamilton introduced Jim Manolis from the Nature Conservancy (TNC). Jim has been with the TNC's Forest Conservation Program for nine months. Jim explained that TNC is pursuing a growing emphasis on partnerships across landscapes. Traditionally, TNC has focused on preservation and conservation easements.

Jim provided information on the Restoring America's Forests Initiative. TNC is working closely with partners, including the USDA Forest Service through nearly 150 different agreements in priority areas. Several issues TNC is working on in the Minnesota and Dakotas chapter are birch dieback, jack pine mortality along the prairie-forest border, deer browse impacts, invasive species.

The TNC's Forest Conservation Program has several central themes including improving conditions of the forest and resilience to climate change and other threats. The goals of the program are to improve forest condition and resilience, establish common forest restoration priorities, and increase forest restoration funding. TNC would like to work with MFRC landscape committee to pursue these goals. Jim also described restoration/resilience treatments. TNC promotes silvicultural management for complexity and is working on a long-term adaptation forestry experiment monitoring assisted tree migration in Northeast Minnesota as well as collaborative patch ownership projects.

TNC wants to more than double the amount of priority landscapes and forest restoration sites. The approach has been ad hoc, and the TNC is determining how to prioritize across the landscape. Possible intersecting components for future prioritization include the LSOHC 25-year vision and resilience mapping. TNC has developed a solid foundation of collaboration, but there are many challenges.

Shawn Perich asked how TNC defines restoration. Jim replied that it's making sure the forest is healthy and resilient to stressors. Dave Parent asked if TNC has a plan in place for monitoring. Jim said there is a Plan, and TNC is working to revise it. Jim is also involved in monitoring

program for the Northeast Landscape Plan. Darla Lenz asked how resiliency mapping has been done. Jim was not familiar with the details, but it will be about a two year analysis. TNC may start mapping the Northeast region first to have access to this data more quickly.

Long-term trends in forest bird populations on the Chippewa and Superior National Forests

Darla Lenz introduced Alexis Grinde, PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota Duluth and Natural Resources Research Institute research assistant. Alexis provided information on the long-term bird monitoring project ongoing by NRRI, started in 1991. She noted major bird population losses but explained that forest restoration and creation projects can support these populations. Current issues in Minnesota in relation to bird populations include loss of forest land, declining forest harvest, fragmentation, agriculture, and climate change.

Ongoing monitoring in the Superior and Chippewa National Forests has been taking place; 326 stands are surveyed each year. Alexis covered data collection methods and explained that most detection is done through bird song and call. In the Chippewa National Forest, 89 percent of species are either stable or increasing. Ninety percent of species are either stable or increasing in the Superior National Forest. Collectively, 85% of species are either stable or increasing in both national forests (a smaller number of species are tested when combining national forest data).

Alan Ek commented that in comparison to GEIS projections, these results are similar to those found 10 years after the GEIS. Jan Green added that she presumes rare species are not tracked in this monitoring due to their small numbers. Some species have been significantly decreasing for some time. Alexis agreed and added that she is looking to see if there are environmental conditions that have favored species whose populations have increased.

Alexis described an additional project which is analyzing the spatial distribution of birds across forested landscape. Results have shown that many bird species avoid “hard forest edges.” The ovenbird, for examples, needs at least a 40 meter buffer from non-forested habitats.

Susan Solterman Audette inquired about policy implications. Alexis replied that recommendations could include cutting more forest in larger patches and reducing hard edges through edge feathering. Jan emphasized that it is all about management diversity. Greg Bernu asked if there is a specific recommended feathering distance. Alexis said that most bird species need a 30-40 meter buffer from forest edge. Alan added that in terms of the forest management guidelines, where residuals are best left may vary between bird species and other wildlife.

Potential for elk reintroduction to eastern Minnesota

Bob Lintemann introduced Mike Schrage, Wildlife Biologist, Fond du Lac Resource Management Division. Mike explained that prior to European settlement and subsequent overhunting and habitat conversion, elk were present in much of the state. Groups attempted several reintroductions in northern Minnesota, and two small populations emerged from these introductions. At present, there are an estimated 131 elk in Minnesota. There are several

challenges inherent to elk management in Northwestern Minnesota, especially damage to agricultural areas. The DNR manages for limited elk populations.

The Fond du Lac Band is looking to restore elk to its historical range in the 1837 and 185 ceded territories in eastern Minnesota. Lands in these areas are more suitable for elk due to the greater abundance of public land and lower prevalence of agricultural land. However, local government, public, and landowner acceptance will be crucial. Abundant young forest habitat outside of the primary moose range is also important. Examples of potential introduction areas are the Cloquet Valley State Forest, Fond du Lac State Forest, Fond du Lac Reservation, and the Nemadji State Forest.

Mike also provided several benefits of restoring elk: diversifying and restoring traditional wildlife heritage, diversifying ecosystems, and elk hunting/tourism. However, there are a number of challenges to elk restoration, including gaining public support, garnering necessary DNR support, finding disease-free elk herds and willing donors, and predation. The introduction would be at least a 10-year process. Feasibility studies need to take place first, followed by planning and fundraising efforts.

There is not much research on the interactions of elk with white-tailed deer, but there are no reported conflicts in Minnesota and other eastern states. Elk are susceptible to brain worm but perhaps, not as much as moose.

Gene Merriam asked if there are any disease-free captive elk herds in potential release areas. Mike responded that the feasibility studies would need to look for this.

Shawn Perich commented that the DNR very aggressively eliminates wild elk that get near captive elk herds. Mike replied that a management plan would need to address this.

Bob Owens asked Mike to clarify if the elk reintroduction would take place on state lands or on the reservation. Mike replied that there are state lands on the reservation. The reintroduction could occur here or elsewhere. Bob also inquired if the majority of funds for the reintroduction would come from tax revenue, but elk hunting rights on these lands would be for Band members only. Mike responded that Band members would have hunting rights consistent with the treaty, but the elk would not be tribal animals.

Shaun Hamilton asked if there would be a risk of migration to Wisconsin if the band were to establish a herd in the Nemadji State Forest. Mike replied that the state forests he spoke about were only examples.

Mary Richards inquired about the potential to establish an elk herd in the White Earth Reservation. Mike replied that if the White Earth Reservation is interested in restoring elk, a feasibility study would be necessary to determine if the forest habitat in that area is suitable.

Public Communications to the MFRC

None.

MFRC Member Comments

None.

Shaun Hamilton moved, and Mary Richards seconded adjourning the meeting. *The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.*