

Minnesota Forest Resources Council
Minutes
Minnesota DOT Training and Conference Center – Shoreview, MN
25 March 2009

Members Present: Dave Epperly (Acting Chair), Wayne Brandt, Alan Ek, Dale Erickson, Shaun Hamilton, Rob Harper, Bob Lintelmann, Gene Merriam, Dave Parent, Kathleen Preece, John Rajala, Don Arnosti (alternate for Joel Koemptgen), Mike Trutwin (alternate for Bob Oswald), Bob Krepps (alternate for Bruce Cox)

Members Absent: Al Sullivan, Bruce Cox, Joel Koemptgen, Bob Oswald, Shawn Perich, Mary Richards

Guests: John Bathke, Steve Betzler (MN Power), Kayla Block-Torgerson (UMN), Rick Dahlman (MN DNR), Dick Rossman (MN DNR)

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

Chair's Remarks

Dave Epperly opened the meeting with a round of introductions. Al Sullivan was out-of-state and unable to attend the meeting. In his absence, Al asked Dave to serve as Acting Chair. Dave noted revisions to the draft agenda: Kathleen Preece will introduce the fire funding resolution from the Information Management Committee (IMC) and Dave Epperly will introduce the Landscape Program discussion.

Dave expressed condolences to Bruce Cox and his family on the recent death of Bruce's mother.

Public Input/Communication to the MFRC

None.

*** Approval of 4 February 2009 Meeting Minutes**

Wayne Brandt moved, and John Rajala seconded, approval of the 4 February 2009 MFRC meeting minutes. *The minutes were approved.*

*** Approval of 25 March 2009 Meeting Agenda**

Kathleen Preece moved to approve the revised 25 March 2009 MFRC meeting agenda. Bob Lintelmann seconded the motion. *The revised agenda was approved.*

Executive Director Remarks:

Dave Zumeta said Shawn Perich was unable to attend the meeting due to weather on the North Shore. Dave provided an update on the Governor's sub-cabinet on forestry and forest products, which at its March 3 meeting directed DNR and MFRC to develop a coherent strategy relative to the use of woody biomass energy in the state. Dave will send Council members a draft strategy document for review and comment. The effort will address concerns such as supply (physical, economic, ecological) and impacts on the existing forest products industry and the environment.

Dave Epperly added that he recently attended one of the biomass field days, sponsored by MFRC and others, and noted that the workshop was well done and well received by participants.

Committee Reports:

Personnel and Finance

Dave Zumeta, in Al Sullivan's absence, distributed a summary of the March 12th Personnel and Finance Committee meeting. Topics discussed included personnel updates, FY2009 expenditures, prospective budget FY 2010-11, the March 25 MFRC meeting agenda, and prospective agendas for remaining meetings in 2009.

Site-level

Dave Parent reported that the Site-level Committee held a meeting on March 24th. Committee members discussed the Council-approved recommendations from the recent monitoring program review by Clarence Turner and concluded that monitoring should be done every other year. Data analyses and report writing would occur during non-monitoring years, with a goal to better serve partners and organizations through improved reporting. The committee is not recommending a change in the number of sites visited; however, Rob Slesak and Rick Dahlman will assess the existing database for variability and provide future recommendations based on those results.

Dave Zumeta recommended the Site-level Committee develop an action item whereby the monitoring recommendations would be forwarded to the DNR Commissioner. Dave Parent responded that the committee will provide more information at the next MFRC meeting in May, with a potential action item to be developed for the July meeting.

Alan Ek noted that the monitoring database will become increasingly more important for environmental review and is valuable because of its long-term nature. Dave Parent added that, by statute, monitoring data is to be reported at the landscape level and that this has not been done.

Don Arnosti commented that he had been hoping MFRC would view prospective changes to the program as an opportunity to take on additional monitoring (e.g., carbon or forest easements). Don is looking for synergies between monitoring efforts. Dave Parent responded that he is opposed to increasing the information we collect just because we have a monitoring program. Rick Dahlman acknowledged that there are many different monitoring efforts and it is important that we make an effort to coordinate the standards applied for measuring similar things.

Members discussed opportunities to improve our understanding of sociological information regarding forestry and forest ownership. Potential recommendations to improve the NIPF (non-industrial private forestland) response to monitoring included: solicitation by someone outside DNR (e.g., University of Minnesota Extension); promotion by regional landscape committees; and legislation to get access for sampling. Rob Slesak invited additional suggestions.

Landscape Planning and Coordination

Dave Epperly stated he would like to have all MFRC committees consolidate ideas about outreach and recommended this for discussion at a future Council meeting. Shaun Hamilton responded that he supports any efforts to help connect landowners and regional activities.

Shaun reported that the Landscape Committee met on March 5th. He asked Council members to review the Landscape Program update and the MFRC meeting minutes from February 4th, with respect to the upcoming agenda item on the relationship of MFRC, the regional landscape committees, and the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council (LOHC). Shaun also noted that Lindberg Ekola included a number of supplementary documents in the meeting mailing (e.g., Sustainable Forest Resources Act [SFRA], process and flow of committees).

Information Management

Rob Harper reported that both he and Jim Sanders attended the last Information Management Committee (IMC) meeting. Jim will not attend the next meeting, so Rob will take over as IMC Chair. Rob deferred to Calder Hibbard for an update on IMC activities. Kathleen Preece added that the meeting update was provided in the MFRC meeting mailing.

Calder reported that the committee discussed MFRC-sponsored research, activities of the Interagency Information Cooperative (IIC), preliminary results of the forest inventory survey, and development of a fire-funding resolution. He added that the IMC has chosen to concentrate on the carbon sequestration issue for the remaining meetings this year.

Rob asked that we work to ensure linkages between work of the Governor's Forestry Sub-cabinet and the Minnesota Climate Change Advisory Group. Dave Zumeta responded that he will attend an IMC meeting and give an update on the activities of those groups.

Written Communication to the MFRC

None.

As a footnote to the Executive Director remarks, Dave Zumeta stated that Bob Oswald is undergoing medical treatment and is doing pretty well but will have to miss the March and May MFRC meetings. By statute, if a Council member misses three consecutive meetings, they are removed from the Council. Dave requested that the July MFRC meeting, tentatively scheduled to be held in Grand Rapids, be held in Cloquet so that Bob can attend the meeting, health permitting. The Council informally agreed to hold the July meeting at the Cloquet Forestry Center.

***Information Management Committee recommendation regarding USDA Forest Service fire funding**

Kathleen introduced the proposed fire-funding resolution from the meeting mailing. Calder reviewed development of the IMC recommendation regarding USDA fire funding, a topic first discussed at the December 2008 MFRC meeting. The recommendation has three parts: the resolution, a list of recipients, and an internal recommendation to the Council's regional landscape committees.

The resolution reflects information including: shifts in the USDA Forest Service budget at the expense of other needs; specific impacts in Minnesota; annual budgeting problems; and increasing funding needs for fire as a result of climate change and demographics. Council members discussed problems associated with fire suppression costs and current proposed legislation (the "FLAME" Act) to establish a separate funding process for catastrophic fires.

Calder reviewed three recommendations in the resolution: (1) to support a separate funding process for catastrophic fires (similar to the proposed mechanism in the FLAME Act), (2) support for reinvestment in program areas that have experienced funding erosion, and (3) to encourage promotion of activities that will decrease the occurrence, severity, and/or financial impact of large-scale fires in the future.

Rob suggested adding a statement that we support the idea of prohibiting funding transfers. He also commented that language regarding the creation of a new "Fire-Ready Communities" program (similar to the FLAME Act) would establish some local ownership of the effort.

Wayne Brandt moved the resolution. Alan Ek seconded. Wayne then moved to amend the resolution to include a statement regarding prohibition of funding transfers. Alan Ek seconded

the amendment. Discussion regarding the value of adding a recommendation to prohibit funding transfers ensued. *The motion to amend the resolution passed unanimously (9-0, with abstentions by Rob Harper and Dave Epperly).*

Gene Merriam commented that the resolution is a good idea, but cautioned we ought to be careful in suggesting that funds be locked up for specific uses, particularly in reference to the current economic situation. Don responded that this is about honesty in budgeting, to demonstrate what is really being spent on fighting fires. Wayne added that the agency spends four times the amount on fire that they spend on on-the-ground management. *The resolution as amended was approved unanimously (9-0, with abstentions from Rob Harper and Dave Epperly).*

Wayne Brandt moved to approve the additional two recommendations regarding resolution recipients and landscape committee participation. Kathleen Preece seconded. *The recommendations were approved unanimously (9-0, with abstentions from Rob Harper and Dave Epperly).*

Committee of the Whole: Discussion of roles and relationships between the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council, MFRC, and regional landscape committees

Shaun Hamilton introduced discussion of Council and regional landscape committee roles and relationships with respect to the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council (LOHC) and other potential funding entities, noting that he hoped the discussion would clarify how we can best take advantage of the independent nature of regional committees.

Lindberg distributed a packet with background information on the Landscape Program. He commented that the Landscape Committee recently discussed (1) the importance of the autonomy provided to the regional landscape committees; and (2) the tensions that will inevitably develop as the regional landscapes strengthen and increase implementation activities. He asked “How does the Council balance empowering the regional committees versus guiding them?”

Lindberg reviewed establishment of the Landscape Program, working principles, funding, resources, and current projects of committees, noting that the roles of the committees are expanding. He discussed recent efforts focused on strengthening the working relationship between MFRC and regional committees and described how projects are developed to advance regional plan implementation. Lindberg described opportunities and challenges for the Landscape Program, stressing the need for advocacy of landscape management and collaboration.

Lindberg reviewed the different phases of landscape management and described some of the roles and responsibilities of participants, stating that new funding opportunities are affecting how we think about landscape management. Shaun added that the 2008 constitutional amendment establishing the LOHC and funding for conservation is bringing a wave of new activity into the landscapes and asked Council members to reflect on the appropriate role of the landscape committees, both as representatives of the MFRC and also as regional actors.

Dave Parent raised the question of whether the landscape committee activities must be consistent with specifically endorsed goals of the Council. Shaun responded that the committees are collaborative and that the MFRC has not served a fiduciary role for any of the implementation projects. He suggested that the LOHC should look to the landscape committees not for approval of proposed projects but for “improve-al” (i.e., for ways to improve the projects that the LOHC is funding). Dave Zumeta commented that there are clear goals in landscape plans and a good number of proposals made to the LOHC would help implement landscape plan goals.

Don commented he has long thought the Landscape Program was critical and noted we are now entering an era in which we will be able to fund achievement of specific objectives. He suggested it will be important to find a way for partners to submit proposals to the regional committees for review and recommendation to the Council. Partners could then advance project applications that have recognition from the MFRC.

Gene reminded members that the MFRC is statutorily charged with advising on policies and practices for sustainable forest management. In the broadest sense, it is important to impart that to organizations like LOHC; however, Gene doesn't think the MFRC should get into a position of endorsing specific projects. Rob Harper concurred, suggesting that the current discussion be grounded by our statutory authority (versus that of the landscape committees). Dave Zumeta responded that he has taken that approach thus far through statements to the LOHC in which he described the four MFRC policy issues and the regional landscape plans and activities. During his presentation to the LOHC, Dave acknowledged that some regional partners may request funding, but stated that MFRC would not request funding.

Alan added that the Council should not be aggressive on specifics in order allow for effective delivery of key policy perspectives. Don agreed, but warned that if we are too timid, the MFRC may become irrelevant and people with less information will be making the decisions. Rob suggested that our policy priorities and written correspondence can be influential and remain true to our statutory direction.

Wayne agreed that providing information on MFRC work and priorities needs to be done. He does not think MFRC, or its landscape committees, should be a fiscal agent. Nor does he feel the Council should spend the time required to evaluate and endorse specific projects. Wayne supported committees working with the partners to promote and seek funding for projects that would help implement landscape plans, but he cautioned that we need to keep our eyes open with respect to the use of the MFRC name. Don also warned that it is in the Council's best interest to control the use of the MFRC name and stressed the importance of providing information on whether or not projects meet landscape goals. Wayne suggested that information could be provided through a "meets Council objectives" process.

Dave Epperly stated that he has heard clear indications from Council members that they do not want to play an advocacy role. Dave Parent added that the test of a project is whether it meets landscape goals, and that the place to assess projects is within the Landscape Committee.

Bob Krepps noted that we are challenged by the immaturity of the LOHC and the initial nature of its relationship with MFRC. He suggested that if we build a relationship and continue to affirm our goals and objectives, the LOHC may include in its criteria consideration of whether a project fits within the MFRC regional landscape plan. Dave Zumeta responded that we have a bit of a precedent in the relationship we have historically had with LCMR/LCCMR: we have never asked them for funds but have advised them at their request as to whether projects fit within the SFRA.

Discussion of process for amending the Northern Landscape plan

Shaun reviewed the unique economic and ecological challenges of the Northern Landscape region and noted that the current plan was approved with idea that it would be revisited as more ecological information became available. Since plan approval, forest certification has come online and some of the regional partners have embraced use of the Ecological Classification System (ECS). Shaun asked Council members for advice on a formal MFRC process for amending the Northern Landscape plan.

Dave Zumeta provided additional background information, noting that International Falls is the cornerstone town in the region and Boise is incredibly important with respect to jobs. Between 1990 and 2000, Koochiching County was the only major forested county in Minnesota to experience a population decline. The current plan was developed in the shadow of litigation over the proposed Boise plant expansion. Development of a collaborative landscape plan was quite difficult, and there was concern from some industry and county folks about ecological aspects of the plan. Dave stated that support for plan amendment is a 180-degree shift in perspective by Northern Landscape committee members and is a clear success story.

Lindberg commented that the Northern Landscape committee would like to complete their review of draft text and reconvene for committee approval at its September meeting. The committee plans to bring the amended plan to the MFRC in the fall for formal approval. Lindberg added that the SFRA did not establish a formal review process for landscape plans.

Dave Parent stated that the committee will need to explain the “what” and “why” of the proposed amendment and provide for public involvement. Lindberg responded that the committee is considering several public outreach approaches, such as placing the plan amendment text on the MFRC website, placing announcements in the Environmental Quality Bulletin, and sending out letters to major landowners. Don suggested that contacting “major landowners” is probably inadequate and more will need to be done to engage local landowners, such as placing notices in newspapers. Shaun agreed, saying notices should highlight successes of the planning process (e.g., the established landscape plan has helped counties acquire forest certification).

Dale Erickson suggested that there needs to be additional effort to get the word out to the western communities in the Northern region, noting a clear east-west division in the landscape. He added that the committee needs more citizen representation from the west. Other suggestions were to include folks with agricultural interests and more participants from the Red Lake Reservation.

Shaun asked Council members to comment on the difference between a plan revision and a plan update and asked whether it is sufficient that we allow the committees to come forward with proposed updates as information becomes available. Lindberg mentioned potential items that could trigger a plan amendment, such as monitoring information, new data, new technology, emerging issues, changing land ownership, major policy initiatives, or new funding resources.

Rob stated that the public will need advance notice and information with respect to providing comments. Lindberg described how the previous draft plan was distributed for public review. The committee then responded to public comments and the plans were revised as appropriate. Shaun stated that information on the amendment will likely be more of an informational outreach piece because the committee has already created and developed the information.

Lindberg stated that the Northern Landscape committee will revise their amendment approach and keep the Council updated. Dave Epperly commented on the connection between the regional landscape committees and the DNR subsection forest resource management plans (SFRMP) and suggested that it may be appropriate to have Jon Nelson (DNR Division of Forestry) come to a Council meeting and give an update on these plans.

Update on MFRC-sponsored research and accomplishments of the Interagency Information Cooperative

Dave Epperly invited Calder Hibbard and Alan Ek to provide updates on MFRC-funded research and the Interagency Information Cooperative (IIC).

Calder reviewed five projects currently supported by the MFRC, including research on the ecological effects of woody biomass harvesting, factors influencing public stumpage costs, forest parcelization status and policy recommendations, forest inventory methods, and an assessment of forests resources research in Minnesota. Through legislative appropriations, the MFRC Research Advisory Committee (RAC) funded the woody biomass harvesting and public stumpage research. Calder reviewed the research questions, study design and status of the RAC-funded projects. For the woody biomass harvest project, the RAC is supporting data collection and analysis pre-harvest and for two years post-harvest. The project was funded with the expectation that investigators will acquire additional money from other sources in order to collect long-term data. Individuals working on the public stumpage project have conducted paired-bidding auctions, are currently administering a survey, and will convene focus groups in June. Rob Harper was interested in whether federal contracts would be considered in the research and was advised to follow up with Mike Kilgore, the project's Principal Investigator.

The forest parcelization project is moving forward and will include an assessment of parcelization trends, effects, and drivers; an assessment of policy responses, and recommendations to the legislature. Discussion regarding whether parcelization is assumed to be positive or negative ensued, with Calder stating that the research will identify both negative and positive impacts and provide recommendations for the mitigation of negative impacts. Rob added that the parcelization study could also inform fire policy discussions. The parcelization research will be completed by the 2010 legislative session.

The IMC and MFRP conducted a forest inventory survey of land managers within the state, with results indicating that a strong majority of managers feel funding and staffing for inventory is inadequate, most current inventories are considered outdated, and that inventory information is inadequate for forest harvest scheduling/modeling and with respect to providing information on forest health. Based on survey results, the MFRP will be hosting a meeting to advance discussion on the tools and models needed to improve information acquisition and utilization. Don Arnosti recommended consideration of other variables to collect during inventory (e.g. carbon and soils). Shaun suggested the possibility of incorporating monitoring data.

Calder described the goals of and process being used to do the Forest Resources Research Assessment. He reviewed members of the advisory panel. The research assessment process will include a survey of current research and capacity, identification of research needs by the panel, public review and comment through forums, and communication of a research strategy.

Alan reviewed the direction to the IIC from the 2008 legislative session, including: development of a common inventory format; key resource analyses; development of managed growth and yield models; establishment of a forest planning cooperative; development of a wildlife habitat model; compilation of family forest ownership information; and a survey of silvicultural practices.

Growth and yield models are currently being tested in 14 or 15 cover types. Alan anticipates rolling those models out for use in the next year. Howard Hoganson is initiating a planning cooperative with county landowners. The cooperative will use forest harvest management scheduling models for scenario development. The IIC has been conducting research and development on the wildlife habitat model, which will be a computerized look-up with respect to which species are likely to be at a site, based upon environmental conditions. Alan hopes to connect the wildlife habitat model to the forest harvest modules. Mike Kilgore is developing an information database on the state's family forest ownership and Tony D'Amato is conducting a survey on silvicultural practices to update the survey last done in the late 1990s.

Alan stated that there are some potential additional roles for the IIC as things evolve. For example, it may get more involved in the demonstration of silvicultural practices, expanded technology transfer, and continuing education. Alan added that the IIC participants are working to leverage funds to meet project needs.

Shaun asked whether a goal in the development of the harvest models is to provide a tool to assess different scenarios with the inclusion of social management considerations. Alan responded that the planning models will provide options including current management activities and more aggressive scenarios. Dave Parent asked whether the models could include measures of carbon sequestration. Alan responded that carbon sequestration rates are highly variable at the site-level, but that there are good estimates on a forest-wide basis.

Dave Zumeta noted that the silvicultural practices survey will provide information on what has occurred with management since the GEIS was completed. Dave is also particularly interested in the forest planning cooperative and extending management across multiple ownerships.

Dave Epperly stated that he is glad that the cooperative is taking these steps and he is particularly interested in the wildlife habitat and forest planning cooperative models.

Public Communications

None.

MFRC Member Comments

None.

The meeting was adjourned.