

Site-level Committee Meeting Summary

DNR Regional Office, Grand Rapids, September 16, 2011, 9:30 am – 2:00 pm

Members present: Dale Erickson, Bob Lintelmann, Dave Parent, John Rajala

Members absent: Gene Merriam, Shawn Perich, Mary Richards

Staff: Rob Slesak

Guests: Tim O'hara (MFI), Gary Erickson (SAPPI)

Rob informed the committee of a request from DNR asking for a formal letter from the MFRC to allow deferment of implementation monitoring in 2013. Rob will provide some background and outline the request at the Council meeting in October, with a planned action item for the November meeting.

The riparian evaluation began with a review of the assessment information Rob prepared and the proposed evaluation structure that identified 5 major topics: watershed-scale considerations, recommended RMZ widths, recommended RMZ residual basal area, RMZ area counting towards leave tree area, and seasonal ponds. Discussion related to watershed-scale considerations ensued. The committee agreed that watershed condition would have a strong control on hydrology and habitat functions, generally agreeing on the need for a watershed guideline. After further discussion, it was recognized that there is insufficient data to establish threshold restrictions on harvesting within a watershed that would encompass the range of geomorphology, climate, and harvest patterns that occur in the state. Discussion turned to creating a more general guideline that would recommend landowners and managers evaluate watershed condition before making management decisions. Dave directed Rob to draft language related to the recommendation and to develop a list of metrics/resources that could be used to assess watershed conditions and the watershed level (scale) most appropriate for consideration.

Evaluation then turned to RMZ widths. The committee began by reviewing a document that assessed the two main views presented in the scoping comments, the recommendations of the RSTC, and the supporting information for each. Dave recommended that the Committee focus on the recommendations of the RSTC. Much of the ensuing discussion focused on the beaver and windthrow risk factors outlined in the RSTC report, which served as the basis for their recommended widths. After much discussion, John noted that since the RSTC report is serving as the technical basis for evaluation, there is little to argue against the recommended RSTC widths. There was general agreement with this pronouncement, and Dave called for vote on adopting the recommended RMZ widths. Several committee members wanted to evaluate the remaining topics before voting, so the vote was temporarily tabled.

The RMZ residual basal area discussion opened with Rob summarizing existing research in MN, and an assessment of early successional habitat near riparian areas. A lively discussion ensued on what minimum RBA was needed to maintain longer-lived conifers / hardwoods in RMZ areas. John noted that uneven-aged management could be problematic in those areas, and that RBA would eventually have to be low to regenerate even-aged stands over long time periods. He generally thought that the 75 ft² recommended by the RSTC was too high and restrictive for some silviculture applications. There was a general agreement among members on the need for flexibility and a lower RBA than the RSTC recommendation. Dave suggested using the existing range and several members were supportive of this suggestion. Rob inquired what the justification for this suggestion might be. None was given, but there was acceptance that whatever recommendation was made would need to be strongly justified. The committee directed Rob to talk with faculty at UMN and members of the RSTC to assess what range of RBA might be appropriate to allow for management flexibility while maintaining core riparian functions.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 pm