Minnesota Forest Resources Council

Meeting Minutes
Minnesota State Horticultural Society
March 16, 2004

Council Members Present: Al Sullivan (Chair), Wayne Brandt, Mike Carroll, Katie Fernholz, Shaun Hamilton, Wayne Hammer, Norm Moody, Jim Sanders, Bob Oswold, Dave Parent, Roger Scherer, Bob Stine, Matt Norton (alternate for Jan Green), Dick Walsh, Shawn Perich, Jim Jones (in lieu of Dave Sterr)

Council Members Absent: Jan Green, Greg Damlo, Dave Sterr

Guests: John Bathke – MFA, Lois Norrgard – American Lands Alliance, Rick Horton – Ruffed Grouse Society, Bruce Cox – Clearwater County, Clyde Hanson – Sierra Club, Mitch DeJong – University of Minnesota graduate student, Al Mitton, Charlie Blinn – University of Minnesota Department of Forest Resources

Staff: Dave Zumeta, Dave Miller, Mike Phillips, Jenna Fletcher, Chad Skally, Lindberg Ekola, Clarence Turner

Chair's Remarks

Al Sullivan presented thank you letters to departing council members: Norm Moody, Wayne Hammer, Roger Scherer, and Greg Damlo. Al said that a professional facilitator is being chosen for the July 28th Vision Session. In order to guide and shape the Vision Session, Dave Parent and Bob Stine will join the members of Personnel & Finance Committee to serve as a Vision Steering Committee. This committee and MFRC staff will plan and prepare for the session. A portion of the next Council meeting will be used as preparation for the Vision Session.

Public Input/Communication to the Minnesota Forest Resources Council

Clyde Hanson distributed copies of Sierra Club's public comment on the National Forest Plan revision for Chippewa and Superior Forests. Their comments included a statement that they had anticipated more than minimal contribution to MFRC landscape goals from the preferred alternatives. Sierra Club concludes that Alternative D contributes considerably to MFRC's landscape goals, and therefore hopes that MFRC would take a deeper role in reviewing alternatives to ensure contribution to landscape goals.

Approval of January 27, 2003 Meeting Minutes*

Bob Oswold moved to approve the minutes, Dave Parent seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Approval of March 216, 2004 Meeting Agenda*

Dave Parent moved to approve the meeting agenda, Jim Sanders seconded. The motion carried.

Executive Director Report

Dave Zumeta reported that Chad Skally is leaving service with the State of Minnesota. Dave reported that he will not fill Chad's position before July 28th Vision session, an possibly much later. In the meantime, salary savings will be used to obtain GIS support, and Dave Miller will take over leadership of the SE Landscape Regional Committee. Dave Zumeta cited an acknowledgement in the recently published Wisconsin Forestry Forest Management Guidelines of the excellent work that Mike Phillips and MFRC had done in the area of forest management guidelines. Finally, Dave described his testimony regarding H.F. 1166 to the House Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee which would dedicate ¼ of one percent of state sales and use tax receipts to hunting, fishing, habitat, parks, trails, zoos and water quality. Dave's basic point was that the role of forests in obtaining the bill's basic goals should be considered.

* denotes action item

MFRC Committee Reports

Personnel and Finance.

Al Sullivan (Chair) reported that the Personnel and Finance Committee met on February 26th to discuss upcoming Vision session, Chad Skally's departure, MFRC budget and spending, and protocols for Council alternates on committees.

Guideline Implementation Monitoring

Dave Parent (Chair) handed out a summary of GIMC activities. The three-year report on baseline monitoring of the voluntary guidelines is expected later this spring. Dave also reported that sites to be monitored this summer have been selected, and staff is now contacting landowners for permission to conduct the monitoring activities. A Request For Proposal for a 3rd party firm to conduct the monitoring was advertised in the EQB Monitor, resulting in three bids. The committee selected TetraTech, a large national and international consulting firm. The Principal Investigator will be Harry Parrot, a former Forest Service employee. Katie Fernholz asked if the firm has similar experience in monitoring, and asked if our calibration training will be as extensive as in past years. Mike Phillips replied that the firm has had prior compliance monitoring experience, but MFRC will conduct calibration training (one day classroom, three days of field calibration) to ensure that the firm understands and is consistent in interpreting Minnesota's voluntary guidelines.

Ad Hoc Guideline Review/Revision

Dave Parent (Chair) shared that current guideline revisions are out for public comment until April 23rd.

Landscape Planning/Coordination

Bob Stine (Chair) handed out two updates. He reported that NE Region Landscape Implementation committee is getting started, and will be chaired by Milo Rasmussen. The North Central region implementation committee is still in the formation stage. SE Landscape is beginning coordination and implementation activities.

The East Central landscape planning committee is meeting for the first tine on March 30th. Bob sought input from MFRC members on how to address the issues at hand with the Northern landscape planning process.

Forest Resources Information Management

Norm Moody (Chair) reported that the request for timber sales in 2002 and 2003 has gone out to the National Forests, 14 counties and six Indian bands. Dave Zumeta also noted that there is a bill in the Legislature that would move the Interagency Information Cooperative from the DNR to the University of Minnesota – College of Natural Resources under the Dean, Susan Stafford.

Written Communications to the MFRC

Dave Zumeta distributed copies of Clyde Hanson's comments re: the Northern Landscape Plan. He also distributed copies of a letter from Paul W. Taylor - Native American Rainbow Network commenting on a national proposal from President Bush to end the 100-foot protective buffer zone on streams and rivers to favor mining companies.

Status of Forest-Related Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) Proposals

Mike Carroll gave a brief description of the 13 forestry-related projects submitted to the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR). Six proposals have direct relevance to the MFRC. Five proposals result from the Governor's Task Force report on the Competitiveness of Minnesota's Primary Forest Products Industry, and one proposal would undertake a review of the GEIS. Dave Zumeta clarified that the GEIS LCMR proposal is not intended to update it, but rather to provide a "report card" on GEIS implementation and recommendations about what should be included if an update was done. Mike Carroll noted that Gene Merriam is supportive of this idea.

* denotes action item

Al Sullivan said that LCMR is asking the MFRC to review the 13 forestry–related proposals in terms of how well the proposals advance MFRC goals, then asked for volunteers. Jan Green was nominated, and Wayne Brandt, Jim Sanders, Shawn Perich and Dave Parent personally agreed to work with Dave Zumeta on this task.

Riparian Area Effectiveness Monitoring LCMR Proposal and Project Update

Charlie Blinn reported on research into the effectiveness of MFRC's riparian guidelines by studying eight streams in northern Minnesota. He is seeking continuation funding through the LCMR (Note: no other funding sources are pending). Jim Sanders asked if this research addresses watershed questions, and Charlie responded that upstream and downstream conditions are being examined, but additional work would be needed to extrapolate findings to a watershed. Dave Parent suggested that MFRC should allocate time and funding for periodic long-term monitoring of these sites.

Resolution to Create a Riparian Science Technical Committee*

Dave Parent and Shawn Perich reviewed the proposed options within the RSTC process document. Norm Moody made a motion to accept the entire resolution, and Wayne Hammer seconded. In the ensuing discussion, several members questioned the role of economists relative to the RSTC. It was proposed that 2-3 economists work in a "parallel" process that begins after the RSTC has completed a portion of their work. Council members recommended that there be effective communication between the two groups, and that RSTC's output be examined by the economists before consideration by the MFRC.

Mike Carroll pointed out that the selection of scientists is critical. Council members wish to have final approval for the composition of the RSTC.

Council members commented on the language included in the process document. Norm Moody agreed with Shawn Perich that water quality is the primary key goal, and suggested deleting the other values listed in bullet three on page 2. Jim Sanders commented on page 10 that it is probably going to be too difficult to get a majority vote/one answer, and suggested that the RSTC provide 2-3 answers with pros and cons. Wayne Brandt suggested an additional question/topic/issue be added on page 5 that directs the RSTC to ask whether current fixed buffers are producing the desired results. Shawn Perich expressed concern that quantitative confidence ratings will overshadow the qualitative rationale.

Following discussion, the resolution passed unanimously. Dave Parent reminded MFRC members to suggest scientists for the RSTC to staff by April 26th.

Resolution to Approve Changes to Public Concerns Registration Process (PCRP) Procedures*

Shawn Perich highlighted each of the proposed changes to the PCRP procedures, then made a motion to accept the procedures as suggested. Dave Parent seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution to Approve Amendment to West Central Landscape Plan*

Bob Stine moved to accept the proposed resolution approving the amendment to the West Central Landscape plan. Dave Parent seconded the motion. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.

Potential Great Lakes Accord

Mike Carroll reported to MFRC members that after a recent conference hosted by the Great Lakes Forest Alliance, a Great Lakes Forestry Accord was drafted that will be signed by Ontario, as well as Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The intent behind this high-level accord is to create regional commitment to a plan of action directed at maintaining and developing a vibrant forest products industry that will be recognized as a regional center of excellence in sustainable forest management practices. After the Accord is signed, it is expected that there would be a media event.

* denotes action item

Preliminary Results of Analysis of Forest Land Use

Clarence Turner presented a preliminary summary of an analysis of forestland uses conducted by staff of Resource Assessment in the DNR Division of Forestry. Using satellite imagery for about 70 percent of the state from July 1999 to August 2002, 12,676 sites where identified to have changes in the forest canopy which indicated forest management activities (e.g., harvest) or potential land use changes. Based on data from these sites, estimates of the rate of conversion of forests to other land uses are very low. Annually, approximately 0.02 percent of Minnesota forestland is 'developed' for home sites, roads, and other non-forest uses. Approximately 0.001 percent is converted to agricultural uses. The methods used in this study do not detect changes that are small (< 2 acres) and likely do not detect changes that involve only partial removal of the canopy. As a result, they may underestimate development activities on forestland. The methods used in this study also do not document increases in forestland resulting from reforestation.

Next steps include applying the change detection methods to parts of the state not yet sampled and comparing these results with estimates obtained by others. Norm Moody suggested that parcel maps documenting known land use changes in Cass County would be and excellent source of information for evaluating the sensitivity of satellite-based detection methods.

Sustainable Forestry Incentives Act Status

John Hagen presented information on the status of the Sustainable Forestry Incentives Act. In the most recent enrollment period, 184 applicants enrolled 33,570 acres. This compares to the prior year's enrollment of 310 applicants with 494,935 acres. Together, these numbers are short of the original estimated enrollment figures. The incentive payment for first year enrollees was $3.19 per acre. This amount may go up in future years since the calculation for the payment depends in part on stumpage values, which are increasing. John outlined administrative issues that will be addressed through a revision of the 2004 enrollment application. He also said that Department of Revenue will be conducting an audit of every enrollee in 2002 and 2003, which will include a request for a copy of the enrollee's tax statement and covenant.

Dave Parent commented that the $3.19 incentive payment is quite high and should attract additional enrollees. Also, he pointed out that the $3.19/acre payment is taxed, and the covenant is a "cloud on the title."

Norm Moody argued that we should ask if the program is producing the desired benefits. For example, one of the original goals was to not increase the overall tax burden, but he believes that some counties have lost tax revenue due to removal of the Tree Growth tax program. Therefore, Norm suggests revising the law to improve it and address unintended consequences. For example, he noted that there is no requirement for producing timber. Several enrollees are hunting clubs, and therefore this incentive payment in effect subsidizes their clubs. Norm feels that there are other ways (e.g. state purchase of conservation easements for timberland) to achieve the original purpose of this program. In summary, Norm thinks this is bad public policy.

Public Communications to the MFRC

None

MFRC Member Comments

Roger Scherer offered his best wishes for the future, and observations of his time on the MFRC. He complimented MFRC on its civility regarding a topic that is divisive -- use of natural resources for recreation and for livelihoods. He often observed good humor, thoroughness and goodwill. He advised the remaining members to view topics from each other's perspectives as well as their own perspectives, and keep the discussion simple and understandable. He stated that he believes that this group has the best chance to address these issues and avoid the severe conflict that has affected forestry in other parts of the country.

In reaction to Clyde Hanson's earlier comments (see Public Input/Communication to the Minnesota Forest Resources Council on page 1), Jim Sanders suggested that the Forest Service present at the May or July MFRC

* denotes action item

meeting to show how the Chippewa and Superior plans support MFRC's landscape plan goals. Shawn Perich requested a presentation about the Forest Legacy Program.

May 25, 2004 MFRC Meeting Agenda Ideas

In addition to the above ideas for agenda items, MFRC members suggested these additional future agenda ideas: preparation for July's Vision Session, a briefing on Ecological Classification System, a review of Anthony Snider's research on parcelization, and information from Forest Service State and Private Forestry programs that relate to MFRC (including the Forest Legacy Program).

Jim Sanders moved to adjourn. Dave Parent seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

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