



MFRC Landscape Advisory Committee

Time: Oct 12, 2022 10:00 AM

Location: Zoom Meeting

Attendance

Members present: Jim Manolis, Janet Erdman, Keith Karnes,

Alternates present: Michael Stansberry (1st half)

Members absent: Craig Engwall, Deb Theisen, Kim Berns-Melhus, Rick Horton

Staff Present: Jaimé Thibodeaux, Eric Schenck

Guests present: Patty Thielen, Jen Wahls, Larry Gates, John Bathke, James Aasen (2nd half)

MFRC Team Updates

Eric announced that the MFRC Ad-Hoc Committee on Climate and Carbon is drafting two requests for proposals. One on the forest carbon lifecycle and comparison of forest product alternatives. The second is for a baseline of Minnesota carbon and carbon emissions in Minnesota's forests.

Eric noted that MFRC is scheduling interviews for the Forest Science position, which will be the staff liaison to the Research Advisory Committee.

Eric also updated the group on the budgeting process for the biennial budget. Staff are working on getting the regional landscape program report for the council Nov 1st, and to the legislature no later than February 1st.

Finally, Eric noted the recent pre-proposal for a private lands outreach project from the University of MN. The project would research marketing strategies to improve response and involvement from private landowners, with a focus area of the Mississippi Headwaters watershed. The project was approved by the MFRC Personnel and Finance committee and will go to the council for review.

Jaimé provided the dates for upcoming Landscape committee meetings:

- Northern: Oct 20th in International Falls
- North Central: Nov 22nd, likely in Bemidji
- Jaimé will send announcements to all council members.

Regional Landscape Chair Reports

- John Bathke -The Northeast committee has a tentative committee meeting date of Nov 17th on Zoom. The goal will be to re-connect with key committee members. John is especially

interested in presentation ideas. He one presentation from Lorentian RC&D and would like update from MFRC. He is also interested in further advancing the Arrowhead project.

- The Southeast Committee was grateful for the recent council communications. They submitted a Landscape Scale Restoration grant with BWSR and MFRC staff assistance. They plan a committee meeting in about another 2 months.

Private Lands Working Group After-Action-Review (see attachment)

Jaimé introduced the September 19th Private Lands Working Group meeting document crafted by Janet and described MFRC's recent efforts to become more involved with private lands management. The Sept 19th meeting served to inform the council and council members of issues associated with management of family forests and the existing framework of agencies and programs working with private landowners.

The Southeastern and Northeastern committee chairs echoed the importance of working with private landowners and challenges of working with limited capacity from private forest management. Both committees have recently applied for grants specifically to work with private landowners.

Eric noted the working group will likely need to keep working for a while to prioritize the actions and recommendations from the September 19th meeting. He recommended involvement an additional LAC member join the working group. Items and issues brought up in the meeting may be assigned to various MFRC committees.

Regional chairs and LAC discussed potential collaborative statewide efforts with private lands through the MN Stewardship Committee and with Minnesota Forestry Association. John Bathke is on both the MFA board and the Stewardship committee and offered his assistance. The group also discussed the recommendation that the Stewardship committee be more inclusive of non-agency partners. Several people also noted the working group recommendations could be made through the Stewardship committee but can also be made directly to DNR and private lands partners for specific topics. The Southeast Committee noted that several of the items listed they could likely take action on for their region.

Regional Landscape Program -5-year workplan (see attachment)

LAC and Regional Chairs discussed the need for regional plan updates -specifically for the Northern and West Central regions. LAC members also discussed plan formats and the need to determine what the best format is most useful for committees. The original plans were quite elaborate, and for updates they may not need to be as extensive. John Bathke also expressed interest in a 10 year update in the form of addendums to the Northeast plan.

Eric also pointed LAC and regional chairs to the 2 and 10 year "work-plan" addendum for the North Central plan that could aid committees in coordination and collaboration. He also pointed to the regional forest metrics dashboards on the MFRC Regional Committee pages to aid in planning and coordination. There was some follow-up discussion on how 10 year work-plans may be too lengthy and that 5 year plans may be more practicable.

Regional chairs pointed to the challenge of inter-agency planning due to lack of tracking between agencies. They find it difficult to plan the “next steps” if they are unsure of the effectiveness of their past work. The meeting attendees noted that if the council worked with DNR to develop tracking and monitoring implementation it would help their coordination and implementation efforts. Some members also suggested MFRC compile data applicable to multiple regions for statewide numbers for more efficient tracking. All agreed we should further investigate options for tracking and what can be used.

There was discussion on scheduling. Jaimé noted the plan is by no means a limitation for regional committees but to rather set timeline expectations of MFRC’s capacity for leadership and assistance on specific issues. Regional committees with capacity to move ahead of schedule are supported and encouraged if they choose to do so.

There was general consensus on the 5 year Landscape Program work plan with slight changes reflecting the above discussion.

Regional Landscape Program Budget (see attachment)

Eric introduced the topic of a Landscape program budget, noting that for the landscape program to meet its goals, MFRC will need to bring more capacity to the program. Jaimé added that originally the landscape program had 3 fulltime employees, but over time became just one landscape program coordinator. After reviewing the current operations and talking with committees, MFRC staff propose a change to the program budget to provide financial assistance to local committees for their time and resources used coordinating regional meetings. Additionally, MFRC should keep a programmatic budget for regional committee plan updates and small financial contributions for regional committee projects.

Financial support for staff time is important for organizations such as SWCD’s who are completely funded by “soft money”. They must track and charge their time to specific programs that they have received funding to implement or coordinate (Clean Water, Private Forest Management). The proposed MFRC staff budget would be a programmatic change for the landscape program. Funds to regional committees would be provided through the form of joint-powers agreements with SWCDs or other local governments. In summary, the staff-proposed budget for the landscape program would add:

1. Funds for regional chairs to pay for their time in coordination. This can be done using administrative contracts or joint powers agreements.
2. Technical service funds to allow for a rotating update of landscape plans.
3. Project-based funds for regional landscape committee projects.

The staff-proposed budget would need support from the LAC to go to the council for approval, then through the legislative budgeting process prior for any changes being made.

LAC members questioned if the proposed budget is enough and that it should also include funds for tracking of implementation. There was also a discussion of project-based funds and if that was needed.

Regional chairs liked the staff-proposed budget and 5-year work plan and agree that SWCDs are a great organization for collaborative work and leadership.

Eric and Jim noted more discussion is needed to provide clear direction coming from the LAC to the council. Changes would be difficult to get through the FY24 budget. Between now and the next council meeting, there may be email discussions and/or a follow-up discussion at the next LAC meeting.

Jaimé and Eric will also work with Jim to discuss items in FY23 that can be done with salary savings.

Next meeting agenda topics

- Updated Regional Landscape 5-year Work Plan (if needed)
- Regional Landscape committee budget
- Tools for tracking on-the ground activities (Beltrami SWCD and TNC examples)

Attachments:

- Draft 5-year workplan
- Draft Budget
- Private lands working group notes