

MINNESOTA FOREST RESOURCES COUNCIL

Site-Level Committee

1:00– 3:00 pm, Friday, December 2nd, 2022

Members present: David Wilson, Katie Fernholz, Ashlee Lehner

Members absent: Kory Cease (Chair), Scott Pittack, Rick Horton, Deb Theisen

Staff present: Anna Stockstad, Eric Schenck, Dick Rossman

Guests present: None

1. Meeting convenes and introductions (as needed)

Eric announced that he would be leading the meeting because the Chair was absent.

2. Discuss recommendations for areas identified as needing further review (mainly RMZs, leave trees; also review invasive species, climate)

The Committee discussed the document that they have reviewed with recommendations for the FMG sections that needed further review. They agreed that the recommendations presented by staff are accurate and relevant for where the Committee is in the revision process. Staff will continue to communicate with stakeholders that submitted concerns about RMZs.

Riparian management zones

There was a discussion of variable width RMZs. It was brought up that there could be additional questions asked during monitoring to capture instances of slumping on steep slopes. Reviewing the monitoring protocol may be beneficial at the end of the revision process. Some small language changes were suggested for the recommendations, but the recommendations in their current form should be presented to the group reviewing these recommendations. Techniques to avoid slumping on steep slopes should be emphasized during training. Another potential addition to the RMZ section could include language that encourages users to reference local riparian experts when certain conditions are met (i.e., for RMZs located on steep slopes). The group was reminded that steep slopes are defined as slopes greater than 35%, and this should be referenced clearly in the RMZ section if not already.

The Committee decided that increasing RMZ width to cover the full width of the floodplain is not practical or reasonable. The recommended language could be slightly changed to "... when compatible with **wildlife** management or other objectives..." Other wildlife sections in the guidelines should be referenced as staff reviews the proposed language. One member of the group also suggested that the FMGs should not be used to resolve internal agency issues. When considering adding wildlife language to the proposed recommendation, the group was reminded that wildlife corridors are a landscape-level issue, not a site-level issue. The RMZ section should reference the wildlife and landscape-level sections

of the FMGs. The priority should be to keep these guidelines operationally simple to maintain high implementation.

Leave trees

The issue of counting RMZ area towards the 5% leave tree retention area was discussed. Counting RMZs toward the leave tree retention area improves the operability of some sites, and it improves implementation of the leave tree guidelines. The Committee agreed that this FMG should not be changed based on the monitoring data and the lack of support from the literature.

The Committee agreed with the rest of the leave tree recommendations proposed by staff in response to concerns submitted by stakeholders.

It was brought up that the minimum basal area for leave tree clumps is different (80 sq. ft.) than the 60 sq. ft. for RMZs. It was suggested that these values could be harmonized. Increasing the RMZ basal area to 70 or 80 sq. ft. could be used to help address concerns submitted by stakeholders. A consideration could be added to the RMZ section: “If using RMZs to meet leave tree retention requirements, consider increasing the minimum basal area to match the minimum leave tree clump basal area of 80 sq. ft.” Some members of the group raised the concern that changing this guideline could present issues with certification and may “open a can of worms”. Consensus was reached and the group agreed that the minimum basal area for RMZs should not be changed.

There was support to add monitoring of leave trees greater than 12 inches in diameter to the FMG monitoring protocol.

Landscape-level considerations to leave trees

The recommended language for landscape-level considerations could be added to the planning or landscape-level sections, as is it not easily applicable to site-level decisions – these are decisions for land managers and planners, not operators. Adding language about “landscapes that have been recently affected by a windstorm or fire that changed resource availability” may be beneficial for this section as well.

Invasive species

The invasive species language proposed by Rob Slesak during the 2012 revision was reviewed. The group agreed that these invasive species recommendations should be brought forward to the full Council again. The consensus was that the guidelines cannot be silent on invasive species. Language may be added that clarifies who implements these invasive species guidelines (the planner or the operator?), especially in regard to the guideline about pre-operation treatments. These guidelines need to acknowledge the operational ability and budget of loggers to implement these guidelines.

3. Review recommended minor revisions.

Committee members supported with the recommended minor revisions and agreed that staff should move forward with these recommendations and consult experts as needed.

4. Other agenda items as proposed by Committee members.

Next steps:

Staff should meet one-on-one with Committee members who were not present to discuss the recommendations presented in this meeting.

A meeting between staff, a representative of a Committee, other stakeholder representatives could be held to discuss potential recommendations – “a multi-disciplinary, expert peer review group”.

An ideal goal would be to present these recommendations to the Council at the March meeting, based on the Committee Chair’s recommendations, with a potential “soft release” of these recommendations beforehand.

At the next Committee meeting, Council members could be invited to sit in on the Committee meeting, depending on what the agenda is for that meeting.

Another option to update Council members would be to have staff record a presentation that fills in Council members on the full revision process and findings to date.

Staff could add the draft language to the existing guidelines to show the additions in the context of the rest of the guidelines. Staff needs to find a Word doc version of the guidelines.