

MINNESOTA FOREST RESOURCES COUNCIL

Site-Level Committee

1:00– 3:00 pm, Friday, February 10th, 2022

In attendance: Kory Cease (Chair), Katie Fernholz, David Wilson, Ashlee Lehner

Staff in attendance: Anna Stockstad, Dick Rossman, Eric Schenck

1. Meeting convenes and introductions (as needed)
2. Discuss January 27th FMG focus group.

Anna gave an overview of the focus group – the reasoning for holding it, who was there, and what were the results. David confirmed that monitoring of larger leave tree diameter classes will be added to the monitoring protocol for the 2023 season. The specific size classes need to be determined ASAP. He also shared hydrogeomorphical risk model with the group, which was presented during the focus group. Training to help users identify areas of risk would help to reduce the occurrences of these slumping issues. It was brought up that as more 40-50 year old aspen stands are being harvested in some MN forests that this may be causing concern for some within the focus group.

David shared some data on the age distribution of aspen in Minnesota. On the larger forested landscape in MN, there's still an observed abundance of older aspen, even though there may be declines in specific areas or ownerships. It is important to remember that aspen is a relatively short-lived seral species. Additionally, for the site-level guidelines, the main focus should remain on forest conditions found throughout MN rather than on individual landownership categories. To that end, there is a need for the committee's decision-making to be supported by verifiable data related to leave trees and RMZs. This will also help inform members of the Council who may have similar concerns to the focus group participants.

Staff were contacted about the application of RMZs on intermittent streams. In the older guidelines, there was additional information that clarified that the RMZ requirements did not apply on non-trout intermittent streams, but this was removed. There was desire to clarify this language so that users can fully understand where the RMZ guidelines do and do not apply. This would be an easy clarification to the guidelines.

3. Review potential revisions as drafted by staff.

The Committee liked the idea of the “climate consideration” section. With this section, there is a need to be aware of the tense – present or future? Present tense is best for this section and there is also a need to be judicious about the resources included in this section. It needs to be a short, actionable list that relates to on-the-ground operations decisions. For resources, the vulnerability report is very long – appendices for site-level considerations may be easier. Tree Atlas would be a better resource to include perhaps. Listing document references may be easier than website since hyperlinks change.

Relevant resources to include:

<http://glifwc.org/ClimateChange/TribalAdaptationMenuV1.pdf>

<https://forestadaptation.org/learn/resource-finder/tree-species-projections-ecological-sections-minnesota>

Additional research can be done into looking at zoning regulations for setbacks from a bluff edge for those applications. Any number put forward in this consideration for the width needs to be backed up by an existing precedent. It may be useful to add the original high bank forest figure back in.

A sentence could be added to floodplain forest consideration with another reference to climate change impacts. A reference to the invasive species section could also be included in this consideration and at some level, we should address the diversity of these ecosystems and the complexity of concerns.

Leave tree documentation and recording can easily become more of a administrative/ monitoring issue rather than a site-level forest management activity issue. Alternative language could instead talk about instructing operators where to leave reserve trees/clumps. There was consensus to remain mindful that “document” and “record” requirements can easily fall outside the scope of the guidelines as an administrative/ monitoring issue rather than a site-level issue. Discussion should continue on adding language on how leave trees should be a consideration during the planning process and when planning a harvest, to ensure that you are not harvesting clumps of trees designated as leave trees. The General Guideline section of the FMGs already has a section on Communicating Information which includes recommendations to “Document the configuration of leave tree clumps or scattered individual leave trees within the general harvest area”. There was also consensus on the importance of communication by landowners on the long-term intent and purpose of leave tree clumps and individuals on a site during the planning process. This includes communicating the planned intent within a harvest area without tying the hands of future managers. FMG review should continue on what is being communicated within the FMGs as the long-term function of leave trees and the role they are intended to serve.

Moving ash down to the fair suitability rating is reasonable as it not being removed entirely as a suitable leave tree. Leave tree species are important when considering climate adaptation. At the end of the day, the site dictates what leave trees are available to retain. The climate logo should be added to the leave tree suitability table. An additional note could be added that references cultural importance as each landowner may have different leave tree preferences. Another element that can be acknowledged is that some leave tree preferences are driven by the goal of maintaining species diversity on a site.

In terms of the bat HCP, a specific reference to the HCP might not be necessary since the site-level guidelines have to apply to ALL landowners, and the HCP does not necessarily apply to all landowners. It's important to remember that referencing the NHIS should be avoided since NHIS is cost-prohibitive.

Care must be given when developing landscape-level additions to the FMGs because the FMGs are designed for site level practices, any landscape considerations should be aligned with issues that bridge that site and landscape levels such as the “landscape implications” found in the Wildlife Habitat section of the FMG's.

Next steps:

There's been a desire to engage the RAC in development of climate change as well as other considerations. This should be a formal engagement process to (not just sharing drafts with them) for

providing science-based input to the FMG revision process. Background information on the FMG review process to date would be helpful in refining the FMG areas where science review is needed.

A cost-benefit analysis should be completed when we have final language. The RAC can be involved in this process to determine if there are economic impacts from the revisions.