



Policy Committee Meeting

NOTES

Thursday, June 22, 2023 | 10:00am – 12:00am

Present: Mike Kilgore – interim Chair, Jim Manolis, Pete Aube,

Absent: Rick Horton – Chair, Brendan Jordan, Keith Karnes, Bob Owens, Amber Ellering,

Staff present: Eric Schenck, Sadie Mathison

Guest: Julie Marinucci (St. Louis County, Kory Cease’s alternate)

Welcome/Introductions (5 min)

Mike welcomed the group, asked for agenda changes, and introduced Julie Marinucci. Hearing no change requests, Mike handed the meeting Eric for an update.

MFRC Update (5 min) – Eric Schenck, Executive Director

Eric shared that the Policy Analyst candidate turned down the offer. The P&F Committee discussed the budget as it relates to the goals of the Council and whether the Policy position is filled directly affects the budget and will be reviewed as part of the budget planning.

He also explained that the appropriation boost was a “catch-up” appropriation and was not tied to the IIC/Information Needs request which was not funded.

Legislative Update (20 min) – Rick Horton, Chair

The following information that was prepared by Rick Horton was shared with the committee as a document prior to the meeting. Policy Committee meeting comments shown in italics.

- State and County Forestry Funding: Secured \$3 million in General Fund and \$6 million in Capital Investment for reforestation, \$2 million for state and county forest roads, \$4.2 million for private lands forestry, \$800K for accelerated tree seed collection and \$10 million in Capital Investments for improvements to the state nursery.

Doug Tillma, MN DNR, will attend the upcoming July Council meeting to provide more detail about the funding appropriated by the legislature that is of interest to the Council.

- Timber payments: Payment to the DNR will now be considered on time based on the postmark date.
- Lowland Conifer Carbon Reserve: This Sierra Club proposal would have effectively prevented future timber harvest of lowland black spruce, tamarack, and white cedar in the name of carbon storage. This House provision did not survive the Environment conference committee. In a compromise they provided a \$500,000 grant to the UMN to study the concept by 2027.

Mike stated that this study has direct relevance to the MFRC Carbon Study and some of the same players will likely be involved. He believes this does bear some discussion at the July Council meeting. He supports a letter from MFRC to the University to suggest how this might relate to the ongoing work of the Council with respect to assessing carbon sequestration in forests and management options.

There was discussion that Marcella Windmuller-Campione of UMN Dept. of Forest Resources could join the discussion at the July Council meeting. Eric will touch base with John Zobel and Marcella.

- Tax-Forfeit Lands: In response to the US Supreme Court hearing a case involving disposal of tax-forfeited property six separate bills were introduced that would jeopardize retention of 2.8 million acres of county forest lands, responsible for 24% of the fiber production in Minnesota. These did not receive hearings, but we need to work to protect these lands between now and the next session. An MFRC Resolution encouraging the Governor and legislature to protect these lands may help set the legislative direction. On 5/25/23 the Court ruled unanimously in favor of the plaintiff.

Mike requested that Julie share details around the 6 bills attached to this. Julie explained how the program to resell tax forfeited land currently works and the “epic” implications of these bills on the ability to make long-term investments to manage these lands. For the Metro area, the bills make sense but not for those land managers that are maintaining and improving forest property.

County Lands Resolution (30 min) – Group discussion

Mike began by stressing how very important this issue is and it is appropriate for the Council to weigh in as their statutory responsibility.

Mike introduced the draft Council resolution 2023-4 “Resolution to adopt Retain County Managed Forestland in Minnesota as a policy recommendation of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council”.

A robust discussion yielded many edits to the draft resolution. Staff will compile edits, and forward to Rick, Kory, and Julie for review prior to presentation to the full Council.

Policy Analysis and Response Procedure (55 min) – Group discussion

Review 1996 Policy

Mike prefaced the conversation by providing the background on the 1996 criteria and procedures for addressing policy issues document. The document was created within the first year that the Council began meeting after its inception. It was meant to serve as a “triage” document.

Pete suggested an update and to indicate this by adding “reviewed and updated in 2023”.

The group would like to post the updated document to the website under “Reports” and on the Policy Committee page.

Mike asked for suggestions for the update of the document. He also discussed comments from other committee meetings that had been submitted earlier. The committee agreed to accept the edits submitted by Amber Ellering.

Rick included in the meeting packet a document suggesting the recent request by a forest products company for the Council to discuss ways of increasing the percent of harvested timber sourced from private and federal land be used to test the Policy Analysis and Response Procedure criteria. The Committee ran through the nine questions, finding the majority of the answers were not in the affirmative. Consequently, the group did not believe it is in the purview of MFRC to suggest the Forest Service and private landowners pursue forest certification. Each member views issues through a different lens and going through the criteria questions together is good not only for filtering, but also for engagement among Council members. The answers and discussions are good to use when responding to requests for action by the Council from outside entities/individuals.

Review MFRC Policy Committee Issue Engagement

Rick also included in the meeting packet a document for MFRC Policy Committee Issue Engagement. The document lists ways in which MFRC can meet statutory obligations (*Minnesota Statutes 89A.03, Subd. 2*) on issues that rise to the level of those obligations as well as a proposed process. Mike asked for discussion.

Some concern was expressed regarding the ability to move quickly under the “Legislative Analysis and Response” bullet. The committee agreed to work further on this document, possibly add some sidebars.

The committee agreed that having existing position papers can be helpful with time sensitive issues that come up. Position papers on certain topics could be created as a ways of communicating the

Council's position on a range of issues affecting the state's forest resources. This aligns with the purpose behind the Forest Caucus idea.

Regarding the current research being done for MFRC, a discussion of which of these tools could be used based upon the findings of the study would be of interest.

Mike stated that in the past, the "Council Member Comments" section of the Council meeting agenda has been a venue for members to raise issues that are important to them.

There was a suggestion for an addition to this document clearly stating different ways that topics can be presented to the committee, with encouragement to do so.

Another suggestion was to broaden this from legislative bills specifically to issues affecting Minnesota's forests generally and to add a new bullet or section that applies to Council or public issues. Somehow tie this to the 4th "Legislative Analysis and Response" bullet.

Staff will suggest refinements and forward to Rick before presenting to the full Council.

Next Meeting Topic

Mike asked if there were topic suggestions for the next meeting.

Sadie suggested the upcoming P&F discussion of the budget and Policy Analyst position and Pete suggested further discussion of the tax-forfeiture lands issue.

Adjourn