

MINNESOTA FOREST RESOURCES COUNCIL

Personnel and Finance Committee

1:00 – 3:00 pm, Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021

Personnel & Finance Committee Chair Pete Aube called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. Council members in attendance were Pete, Mike Kilgore, Forrest Boe, Jim Manolis, Rick Horton, and Kim Berns-Melhus. Also present was Eric Schenck, MFRC Executive Director.

Schenck provided an update on the FY22 Budget Status referring to a Managers Financial Report dated December 6, 2021. MFRC has \$272,043 of unobligated funds available for a Council approved project. This is largely due to salary savings associated with vacant MFRC staff positions. Questions and discussion by several Committee members occurred about amount that is budgeted for salaries, which Schenck referred members to the Salaries table of the report showing \$388,375. That amount supports two existing staff positions plus staggered hiring of new staff in 2022. Unexpended amounts in FY22 carry over into FY23.

Schenck provided a brief overview of the \$75K grant awarded to IIC/UMN in FY21 for developing a Forest Carbon Strategic Plan. Schenck described how that project relates to the work of the DNR Natural and Working Lands subcommittee that is developing a Climate Action Framework for Governor Walz. Upon several questions and discussion by Committee members, Schenck clarified that items listed on the agenda as “NRRI proposal modelling carbon stored in long-lived wood products” and the “USFS proposal for carbon stock/emissions assessment for harvest wood” were only project ideas being brought to the Committee’s attention that might fill information gaps important to the Forest Carbon Strategic Plan. Discussion occurred regarding a yet unscheduled RAC meeting that will help with interagency coordination on forest carbon plans in advance of January 18 Council meeting, which also is the expected draft release date of the Governor’s action framework. Aube encouraged Council member engagement.

Schenck provided an update on now fully executed agreement for MAD contractor to assist with the development of position descriptions and interview questions for hiring three vacant MFRC positions. Schenck referred to a spreadsheet shared with P&F Committee that provides position titles, responsibilities, and qualifications for use by the contract. Previous input from the P&F and other MFRC Committees was acknowledged. Aube pressed that getting positions posted as soon as possible by priority is tantamount.

Schenck report that Chris Edgar, director of the IIC, has sent an email that the IIC will not be meeting due to lack of funding. Schenck also shared an updated version of his report and recommendations to the P&F following guidance from Aube.

Schenck updated Committee members on state teleworking and COVID policies—which continue beyond January 1 until future notice. It is important that the Council’s January 18 meeting follow protocols.

Schenck provided a review of the November 17-18 Council meeting, logistics and evaluations, noting that there was support for one 2-day meeting a year, possibly more if the second day was optional. Forrest Boe voiced support for returning to a 9 am – 3 pm schedule for in-person Council meetings and Jim Manolis emphasized the need to move Council meetings around geographically and not forget the Southeast. Mike Kilgore asked about a request from Council members Kathleen Preece and Janet Erdman for a meeting with a focus on private lands. Schenck responded that he had talked to them about having a full day private land program perhaps in conjunction with a May or July Council meeting. Committee support was given for planning a return to Cloquet Forestry Center for 2-day Council meeting in September, 2022.

Schenck indicated that Ken Smith, CEO of Ever-Green Energy, has offered MFRC a conference room for the Council's January 18 meeting. Ever-Green Energy is a business enterprise that includes St. Paul Co-Generation, the plant that uses local woody biomass to generate electric and thermal energy. A tour of the plant may be possible. Discussion about Council agenda topics included the Governor's Draft Action Framework, Minnesota low carbon fuel standard panel, an update on the Forest Carbon Strategic Plan, among others. Discussion occurred about more input from Council members on agenda items and the need for more advanced planning. Aube indicated he wanted agendas to be action oriented and timely, in terms of current issues. Having Council action on markets for woody biomass is important for this next meeting.

Schenck acknowledged Sadie Mathison had been attending an on-line seminar on climate change migration. Mathison reported that the seminar was important to understanding how climate change will drive migration of people out of impacted areas, but it is difficult to predict areas of future relocation.

Aube mentioned that he and Executive Director Schenck have an introductory meeting with Rachel Ganani, Environmental Policy Advisory to Governor Walz on Monday, December 13. Ganani also has accepted Aube's invitation to attend the January 18 Council meeting.

Meeting adjourns