

MINNESOTA FOREST RESOURCES COUNCIL

Policy Committee

Thursday, December 9, 2021 - 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

NOTES

Members present: Craig Engwall, Jim Manolis, Katie Fernholz, Pete Aube, Rick Horton, Stephanie Pinkalla, Amber Ellering, Mike Kilgore, Brendan Jordan, Bob Owens

Members absent: Keith Karnes

Staff present: Eric Schenck, Sadie Mathison

Guests: None

Introductory Remarks, Roll-call, and Introduction of Guests (Craig Engwall):

Craig announced a reordering of the agenda items and Pete asked that there be a discussion of the MNDOT/Dept. of Ag low carbon fuel standard.

MFRC Update (Eric Schenck): Eric mentioned the two concurrent efforts: one by MFRC to develop a forest carbon strategic plan, the other the Governor's Climate Action Framework. The Climate Action Framework is to be announced on January 18, the same day as the next full Council meeting. The RAC is planning a meeting between key climate action team players and key players from the forest strategic plan team to improve coordination and collaborate and to identify information gaps.

Eric announced that the next meeting will be at the Ever-Green Energy facility. CEO Ken Smith will join virtually as he will be out of the country.

MFRC Issue—"Increase Nursery Capacity" (Jim Manolis): Craig introduced this topic by reviewing the discussion that occurred at the November meeting of the Council in which there was consensus for a Council resolution on the topic of increased nursery capacity.

Jim presented a document of a draft resolution. He hoped that this committee could come up with a resolution that the Council could adopt at the next meeting. The committee engaged in robust discussion while Jim integrated ideas into the draft resolution. Jim will present a draft to Eric and Craig next week for review before bringing it to the full committee via email to prepare for presentation to the full Council at the upcoming January meeting.

MFRC Opinion on “Woody Biomass” Definition (Eric Schenck): Eric reviewed the ask that came to the Council from the Sierra Club and Rep. Lippert to comment on a consideration to pass legislation with a purpose to define woody biomass in terms of what would be eligible for incentives to establish new markets. Eric stated that the stakeholders have been watching for a year. They feel shut out and are frustrated. They want to know what the process is going to be and how they will be able to provide input. We need to respond and he is looking for guidance.

MFRC Issue—“Market Development For Forest Residuals as BioEnergy Feedstocks” (Brendan Jordan) Brendan noted that this committee created a document on this topic and brought it to the full Council. That document states that the Council will do three major things: discuss and consider appropriate sources of material that will be considered biomass, complete an assessment/research project to scope out and define, and gather stakeholder/public input. Out of that work will come a recommendation. The skeletal structure is there but needs details and a timeline to move forward.

With assistance from the committee, Eric will develop a resolution stating that the Council will adopt recommendations from the RAC Climate Change report to develop markets for the use of forest residuals as energy feedstock markets for forest residuals. The resolution is to be ready for a vote at the January 18 meeting of the full Council.

MNDOT & Dept of Ag low carbon fuel standard (Eric Schenck):

Eric introduced an exploration of a low carbon fuel standard by MNDOT and MN Dept. of Ag which came out of the Governor’s Climate Action Framework. There are informational sessions next week and the Governor is looking for public input. This standard could open the door for forest residual options for fuel and is an opportunity for MFRC to put forestry on the radar in the development of the standard.

The committee agreed to advise Eric to get involved in this process and represent MFRC’s interest in being a part of this process.

Eric mentioned that a new draft of the Climate Change Action Framework has been released and the lead introduction makes reference to the wildfires in Minnesota this past season. This is a perfect entry point for the MFRC to talk about woody biomass as a climate friendly fuel with the potential to reduce wildfire incidence.

Forest Caucus Update (Eric Schenck)

Eric shared with the committee recent guidance to halt the development of a forest caucus at this time. The Council is made up of appointees of the Governor and it is advised to not get in front of the Governor in an election year with an initiative that the Governor might not think is a good idea.

Eric clarified that this should be considered an MFRC idea. If there is no stakeholder energy behind it, it will likely not get off the ground. Eric will be presenting this idea to the Partnership at their meeting next week.

Meeting adjourned