



Sustainable Forestry Council
580 Taylor Avenue – E-1 • Annapolis, Maryland 21401 • 410-260-8531

December 19th, 2023

Google Meet 1pm – 3pm

Bryan Seipp, Interim
Chair
Ecotone
Forest Hill, MD 21050

Kim Finch, co-chair
MNCPPC,
Prince George's Co.
Planning Dept.
Upper Marlboro, MD
20772

Gary Allen
Maryland Forestry
Foundation
Annapolis, MD 21401

Elizabeth Hill
Maryland Forests
Association
Linkwood, MD 21835

Donnelle Keech
The Nature Conservancy
Cumberland, MD 21502

Bill Rees
Catonsville Tree Canopy
Committee
Catonsville, MD 21228

Steve Resh
Allegany College of
Maryland (Retired)
Cumberland, MD 21502

Tony DiPaolo
Pixelle Specialty
Solutions
Delmar, Maryland 21875

Frederick Johnson
M-NCPPC Department of
Parks and Recreation
Upper Marlboro, MD
20774

SFC Members

Bryan Seipp
Tony DiPaolo
Bill Rees
Donnelle Keech
Kim Finch
Gary Allen
Beth Hill
Fred Johnson

DNR Staff

Anne Hairston-Strang
Daniel Rider
JT Bowers
Alanna Crowley
Kamil Williams

Action Items:

- Anne and JT follow up on Climate Pollution Reduction Grant with MDE
- Dan and Anne follow up on NLEB rules with Heritage staff
- MFS pursue staff training on stream restoration topics

Interim chair to the Maryland Sustainable Forestry Council (SFC), Bryan Seipp, called the meeting to order at 1:03pm. Voting on the October 27th meeting minutes was deferred for a longer review time. Alanna Crowley, the Chesapeake Watershed Forester, was introduced. Anne Hairston-Strang, State Forester, provided a DNR update, marked by substantial transition and the most rapid pace of hiring that most of us have seen: 24 people in the last six months, including some promotions, for a staff of less than 100 regular employees. Changes include Rob Prenger as Central Regional Forester, filling in behind Rob Feldt, now our Planning lead. Ten of 13 positions for the 5 Million Trees efforts were filled, but some hired through that effort have already transitioned to other permanent positions on staff, including Katherine Phillips as the Western Region Urban Forester and Ryan Mayenschein as the Volunteer Coordinator. Bryan raised the question of training, and Anne replied that extensive training is underway and more planned. Dan and Bryan discussed the staffing changes and training needs relative to program changes underway, such as for Forest Stewardship. Gary Allen noted that it was a time of

unprecedented change and opportunity at the Forest Service. Tony asked about hiring progress at the field staff level, and Anne reviewed the hires of Alex Fignar (Mid-Shore Project Manager), Noah Peregrim (Talbot/Caroline Forester), Will Dyer (Lower Shore Project Manager), Brian Young (Green Ridge State Forest Assistant Manager), and other offers in the works. JT Bowers reviewed progress on the Urban & Community Forestry Inflation Reduction Act grant that is passing through \$4.8 million dollars over the next four years to communities, providing technical assistance and capacity building support around tree planting and other urban forestry issues such as health or utilization. Maryland has multiple means now of funding tree planting, so the Community Forestry Catalyst Fund is designed to wrap around some of those funding sources. It can fund site preparation and longer-term maintenance, as well as being able to fund tree planting itself.

Gary asked about involvement in the large federal Climate Pollution Reduction Program, and MFS staff said they would follow up with MDE contacts. Anne mentioned the Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant that Elliott Campbell initiated with NRCS to fund tree planting and invasive control work. Dan Rider

described the green workforce grant that is partnering with Chesapeake and Coastal Services on for an application to NOAA. Kamil discussed grant coordination ongoing with the Governor's Office.

Gary and Anne discussed the Forest Board Summit planned for May 2024, with training resources to better support forestry board volunteer efforts and provide more information on new priorities such as climate and equity.

Dan Rider reported some brief discussions with Heritage staff on the northern long-eared bat issue and some stalled timber sales at Green Ridge State Forest. Mapping is continuing but federal guidance has been pushed back a little farther. The SFC discussed the need for communication, the widespread impacts of the bat protection rules, the challenges of major transitions in staffing, and the importance of considering biodiversity as well as economic and social impacts.

Anne asked Dan Rider to provide an update on wood as a contributor to Climate Smart Energy. Dan summarized the November wood energy tour to Vermont and New Hampshire, which included the president of Frostburg State College, the Garrett County Director of Facilities, and John Ackerly, the Executive Director for the Alliance for Green Heat. Returning from that trip, Frostburg State University stated their commitment to investing in wood energy and taking the next step of the engineering analysis for the best opportunities on their campus. The representative from Garrett County, initially very skeptical about the potential, learned many of the kinds of opportunities and benefits possible and returned to look around for the best opportunities to support cost-effective wood heating opportunities that also support local businesses. The Greater Cumberland Committee has identified wood energy as one of their focus topics for their PACE legislative event in January 2024. Gary Allen asked about Maryland Energy Administration and CHP, combined heat and power. Dan explained the current leadership of former State Senator Pinsky and that CHP plants are only a fit for larger facilities with significant heat demand. Dan relayed that a Clean Heat Standard is one approach other states have used legislatively and may be an option for Maryland, which would provide credits for various renewable energy sources used for heat rather than electricity.

Anne asked Dan to brief members on the wood energy supply study, to provide data on scale and nature of wood supply available if woody biomass projects were developed. Dan explained that Maryland Clean Energy Center pursued and received funding from the Rural Maryland Council, and contracted with Renewable Resource Solutions out of Wisconsin. He said that RRS is finalizing a deep dive into wood supply likely available for wood energy, pulling from US Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis data, Timber Products Output data, and Forest Product Operators lists for Maryland. Gary asked how it differed from past efforts and Dan explained that this differentiated between wood likely to go into other markets, such as sawtimber, and excluding that as available for lower-value uses such as wood energy, and developing estimates on a regional basis, allowing more realistic estimates of wood available for energy without threatening forest sustainability.

Bryan opened the topic of the upcoming Maryland 2024 Legislature. JT summarized Delegate Watson's expected bill on Licensed Tree Experts, addressing number of companies on a license, fees and fines, and investigation process. Gary brought up an expected bill to remove incineration of trash for energy from crediting systems, noting that it will be important to look at definitions, especially in light of a potential future Clean Heat Standard that would include wood. JT outlined the recent planning meeting for the Private Forest Conservation Incentive work group that was called for in the FCA bill Senate Bill 526, and the challenges ahead. Beth said that MD Forests Association was focusing more on one-on-one meetings with legislators rather than a full Forestry Day in Annapolis to be able to pursue more detailed discussions around key issues such as wood energy and upholding easements on conserved land. SFC members discussed support letters from individual organizations for the easement issue, and not opening all eased land to solar

generation projects that would not maintain rural working lands and habitats. Roundtables on forest conservation incentives were mentioned in conjunction with Stewardship Program revisions.

Bryan asked Kim Finch to present on the Prince George's County Tree canopy assessment. Kim explained that the first tree canopy assessment was done in 2009 in advance of their first green infrastructure plan in 2010, with others done in 2013, 2018, and 2020, all through the leading edge work at the University of Vermont spatial lab. This study was just released in September of 2023, and showed with high-resolution data that the County actually gained tree canopy from 2009 to 2020, even with the significant development going on in the county. Gary raised the question about other data sources being used by the County Dept. of Environment and MD National Capital Park and Planning Commission that showed significant net forest loss, and urged close coordination for the Summit MNCPPC was planning and tree canopy/forest issues in general. Fred said that Parks was looking at other data such as the Harry Hughes Forestry Technical Study, and closer local coordination was needed. Members discussed the county revisions to local ordinances to implement new changes in the Forest Conservation Act, and the coordination already occurring among multiple local agencies for ordinance revisions underway.

Bryan moved to the next topic of stream restoration and forest loss and noted strong interest in the topic and potential legislation. Anne said that Francis Smith had participated in a presentation on stream restoration with more focus on forest retention and restoration. Gary said they had conducted a webinar on forests and stream restoration and had nearly 200 people in attendance, a strong interest; he noted that many public agencies continue to contract for this service and DNR's Chesapeake and Coastal Bays Trust Fund awards grants to carry it out. Bryan indicated that many practitioners focused on the instream practices and room remained to improve vegetation management as part of the process, and more fully integrate it into the design. He suggested that companies were moving to increase forestry expertise on their staff to better address the issue, where trees could be managed more like timber stand improvements than removals. Bryan pointed out that this issue intersects with the bat habitat one, where retention of certain trees could be particularly important.

Gary offered congratulations on the State Forester appointment and commended the Administration on strong staffing choices at many levels and leadership on new issues.

Brian adjourned the meeting at 3:02 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Anne Hairston-Strang