



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

December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Google Meet 1pm – 3pm

Bryan Seipp, Chair  
Ecotone  
Forest Hill, MD 21050

Kim Finch  
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  
Donnelle Keech  
Gary Allen  
Beth Hill  
Fred Johnson

DNR Staff

Anne Hairston-Strang  
Daniel Rider  
JT Bowers  
Alanna Crowley

Action Items:

- Plan SFC Retreat for MD Forest Action Plan revisions for new priorities
- Dan and Anne follow up on NLEB rules with Heritage staff

Chair Bryan Seipp called the meeting to order at 1 pm. Voting minutes was deferred for a longer review time.

Anne Hairston-Strang, State Forester, provided a DNR update. She noted that staffing has continued to be active, with MD Forest Service currently at 106 regular positions with the addition of 9 contractual conversions approved in the FY25 budget, the highest staffing level in 15 years, although still below 1990s levels. She highlighted the progress that Chris Smith as the new Associate Director of Statewide Programs has made significant progress in modernizing grant billing and bringing invoicing and reports current. She described the fiscal environment as tightening at the state and federal levels, but that staff loss was not currently projected. The increasing rate of tree planting towards the 5 Million Trees goal was noted, as well as the challenge of finding qualified, cost-competitive contractors for planting and especially maintenance.

Grant funding was discussed. Maryland Forest Service has some fully executed federal Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grants, and some significant ones submitted for landowner assistance under the Forest Stewardship IRA provisions. The future of IRA/BIL grants was characterized as uncertain, particularly for funding not fully executed in agreements. JT Bowers described the great demand for the Community Forestry Catalyst Fund (CF2), an IRA-funded grant; applications from the 2<sup>nd</sup> round requested over \$10 million for a variety of communities across the state to advance capacity for urban and community forestry, more than five times the expected amount that could be awarded in that round.

Dan Rider outlined the three applications for the Forest Stewardship Underserved Landowner IRA funding, a \$500,000 grant focused on outreach for the program and two applications over \$4 million each for Notices of Funding Opportunity for resilience and carbon sequestration. He noted that the definition of underserved landowner included new landowners owning property less than 10 years, usually a majority of customers seeking forest management plans from MD Forest Service. The projects set up strong partnerships including Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, American Bird Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Ruffed Grouse Society, and UMD Extension, and would make funding available to private landowners for practices that will improve forest health and productivity. Dan also related the successful National Forest Stewardship Program

meeting Maryland hosted in September 2024, the first in over four years, highlighting Maryland's work on water supply watersheds and in building Forest Stewardship Networks.

The federal guidance on Northern long-eared and Tri-colored bats was discussed, with members noting that the lack of clarity in needs for compliance was a frustration being shared from many partners. The next steps were reviewed, with the State-level guidance from the Heritage section of DNR Wildlife and Heritage being the upcoming step.

Dan Rider reviewed the wood energy tour to New England in November with participants from Frostburg State University, Garrett County, and more. He described the partnership with Maryland Clean Energy Center and the preparations for explaining wood energy issues during the upcoming legislative session.

Anne described the severe Fall 2024 fire season and the conditions that led to the state's first statewide burn ban in almost 20 years; with the help of the burn ban and extensive state and local fire response, the extent of wildfire was limited to less than 1000 acres despite above normal fire starts. On the restoration side, Anne noted that a good response was seen for Whole Watershed restoration proposals.

Bryan asked about plans for rollout of the new Technical Manual for the MD Forest Conservation Act changes going into effect over the next two years. JT Bowers explained that MD Forest Service staff would be providing a webinar to review FCA changes and Technical Manual provisions in late winter. He raised the possibility of holding training in house for Qualified Professionals for FCA, as is done for agency Roadside Tree Experts. Gary Allen asked about effects from data centers, and Beth Hill had questions on how it applied to solar projects.

Bryan opened the topic of the upcoming Maryland 2025 Legislature. Gary Allen outlined some potential legislation that he was working on with interested legislators, including a renewal of the Maryland Forestry Education Fund, extending it to 2031, a Forest Stewardship bill to incentivize forest management for broad objectives, and a forest license plate bill. He noted that the forestry education fund was passed for a two-year term but not funded.

Beth Hill shared the planned Forestry Day at the Annapolis Legislature, a partnership of MD Forests Association, Society of American Foresters and more. She shared the location at the Governor Calvert House, the keynote speaker on communicating forestry, planned panels, legislator visits and a State House tour. Beth noted that legislation was being pursued to allow Maryland to include bat species in the list of species for which a Habitat Conservation Plan could be developed. She said the ribbon-cutting for the Nassawango Trail signs interpreting forestry along a young to old forest gradient was being postponed until after legislative session and expressed hopes that SFC members would attend when it was rescheduled.

Members discussed priorities for a retreat for more substantive discussion of ways to advance sustainable forestry. Potential locations raised included the Frederick Area and the Eastern Shore. The potential for 5-year revision of the Forest Action Plan was considered a good framework for reviewing the range of issues and identifying actions for short, medium, and long terms. Topics raised included progress on CF2 grants, Dynamic Forest Restoration Blocks, 5 Million Trees, and Forest Markets/Workforce. Dates after the end of the legislative session were discussed, including mid- and late April.

Brian adjourned the meeting at 3:05 pm

Respectfully submitted,  
Anne Hairston-Strang