



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

March 25th, 2025

Google Meet and in person -- 2pm – 4pm

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
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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
Beth Hill
Gary Allen
Fred Johnson
Kim Finch
Steve Resh
Bill Rees

DNR Staff

Anne Hairston-Strang
Daniel Rider
JT Bowers
Alanna Crowley

Other Attendees

Alberto Goetzl

Action Items:

- Plan 2025 SFC Retreat for the fall
 - Select a date
- MFS will continue to update the council members on passed legislation as the session concludes
- MFS continues to work with WHS on clarifying the guidance for forest management as it concerns NLEB protection

Chair Bryan Seipp called the meeting to order at 2 pm. Voting minutes was deferred for a longer review time and will be done via email.

Anne Hairston-Strang, State Forester, provided a DNR update. She reintroduced newer staff members to the group and gave a brief overview of how staffing structure has changed in the last year.

- MFS has recently promoted Jamie Weaver to Baltimore/Carroll Project Manager (backfilling for Rob Prenger's old position when he moved into his current role as Central Regional Manager).
- The Carroll County Forester position is being advertised in the coming months.
- The new statewide Recreation Planner position has been filled by Sara Kramer
- Greg Geesaman has been hired as the new Eastern Urban Forester

Noted that Staffing is at 106 positions, the highest it has been in over 20 years. This increase in staffing is allowing us to execute on the 5 Million Trees Initiative. The state planted the millionth tree in the latter half of 2024 and the department intends to ramp up efforts to meet the goal by 2031.

Anne highlighted that the MFS is looking at how we manage our State Forest lands to expand recreation opportunities, as we continue to manage for high quality timber in a way that expands habitat diversity. The Forest Service has also done a lot of work in the past year to support forest landowners. In the last fiscal year, over 500 plans were created, touching 25,000 acres of forest.

Anne also touched on the revisions to the Forest Conservation Act and the public information session that Gary hosted where Dan Coy (Program Manager - Urban & Community Forestry) presented updates on the technical manual and distribution of the changes to the jurisdictions.

Anne provided some updates to the Fire Program – procurement of more equipment, expanding the drone program, increasing training for CDL drivers. The program is pretty sustaining with the revenue the program receives from out of state fire response.

Donnelle asked for more information on the State fire suppression efforts. NRP has a new helicopter that can be used for fire support going forward.

Gary asks that Anne to share information regarding Federal guidance and how that may impact State DNR operations; Emphasizes that he and the council would like to be useful to the Department in any way that they can through advocacy.

Anne emphasized that the resources that the US Forest Service has established are invaluable tools for the DNR and we're certainly trying to help people understand the federal role for improving state capacity. Right now, it is imperative that we communicate to legislators how important federal forestry is to our operations at the State level. The MFS is not in danger of needing to terminate any of our contractual employs due to Federal funding changes.

The next item on the agenda was the discussion of 5 bills that are relevant to forestry. Gary characterized the 2025 legislative session as the most difficult one he's seen in many years, largely due to a budget shortfall that limited flexibility and resulted in many new programs being defunded. Despite this, natural resources agencies—such as DNR, MDE, and Agriculture—were relatively protected in the Governor's budget.

- **HB530/SB467 Maryland Forestry Foundation Education Fund - Mandatory Fund - Extension – Gary Allen**
 - Purpose: Restore funding to the Forest Education Fund, originally passed in 2023 but zeroed out in FY25 due to the budget crisis.
 - Status: Strong support during hearings, no opposition, but stalled due to its fiscal note; did not meet crossover deadline.
 - Outlook: On pause for now, but will continue to be a priority in future sessions. The Maryland Forest Service is exploring ways to support similar outreach and education goals without legislative funding.
- **HB717 - Natural Resources: Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding – Ashley Triplett-Peltzman**
 - Purpose: Authorizes DNR to partner with affiliated foundations (like MFA) for fundraising; allows Program Open Space funds (over \$80M threshold) to be used for operations and staffing; mandates new staff (PINs) for every 400 acres of land acquired.
 - Status: Passed the House; Senate hearing underway.
 - Support: Broad departmental and stakeholder support; considered a positive step toward sustainable management of newly acquired public lands.
- **SB946/SB894 – Endangered and Threatened Species: Incidental Taking – Bats – Beth Hill**
 - Purpose: Adds bat species, including the northern long-eared bat, to a state list allowing for the development of habitat conservation plans.
 - Status: Unanimously passed both chambers; expected to move forward.

- Impact: Enables proactive conservation without targeting forestry practices. Lightheartedly noted for its “bat tie” campaign among supporters.
- If we can work out state level guidance that is flexible enough, we would not NEED this bill in place, however if we can't, then we will have the habitat conservation plan as a tool in the toolbox.
- **SB699/HB1224 – Forest Conservation Act: Linear Projects – Alteration – Ashley Triplett-Peltzman**
 - Purpose: To define what a "linear project" is within the FCA. It seeks to exclude new transmission or distribution lines for the definition of a "linear project" which would cause the construction of new transmission or distribution lines to be subject to FCA requirements, including afforestation requirements, when they otherwise would not be. We believe the intention is to mitigate the proposed Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project that would run through several counties in Central Maryland using eminent domain.
 - Status: Withdrawn; did not cross over in either chamber.
 - Concerns: Confusing language; unintended impacts on small projects; opposed by DNR and others due to flawed understanding of existing review mechanisms.
 - Outcome: No further action expected.
- **SB399/HB1270 – Natural Resources: Wildland Areas – Overhead Transmission Line – Ashley Triplett-Peltzman**
 - Purpose: Would allow construction of NextEra Energy transmission lines through designated Wildlands (Big Savage, Bear Pen, Dan’s Mountain) by redefining boundaries.
 - Status: Passed House and Senate with amendments; hearings ongoing.
 - Concerns:
 - Opposed by environmental groups for setting a precedent that undermines Wildland protections.
 - Multiple routes proposed: only one goes through Wildlands but it is the most direct. DNR is assessing the trade-offs, including potential forest impacts of alternate routes.
 - No full inventory data currently available for the affected forest areas.
 - The bill enables—but does not mandate—the Wildlands route, keeping all three options open pending further environmental review.

After some discussion on the bills presented, the group proposed date for the fall retreat in October. A few weeks were held for the final decision to be made at a later date.

The summer SFC meeting will be held on June 30th 2025.

Forestry Date was recapped. Bryan Seipp opened the discussion with a request for updates and highlights from the event. Beth provided a comprehensive summary, noting that the event was successful with approximately 100 attendees, including legislators, staffers, and federal partners, despite last-minute scheduling conflicts due to session.

Key highlights included:

- **Speaker**: Ethan Tapper from Vermont, author of *How to Love a Forest*, received overwhelmingly positive feedback. His talk resonated well and drew attendees specifically interested in his message.
- **Awards and Recognition**:
 - **Legislators of the Year**: Senator Kagan and Delegate Jacobs, recognized for their continued support and engagement.

- **Landowner of the Year:** The Nature Conservancy, honored for their partnership on a trail project in Nassawango (ribbon cutting expected in May).
- **Partner of the Year:** Jen Walsh (Tri-County Council), recognized for her ongoing efforts in forest markets development and biomass initiatives.
- **Program Elements:** Secretary Kurtz gave opening remarks, and a well-received panel discussion was led by Carl Anderton (Commerce), with participants from the Maryland Clean Energy Center, Unified, and the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy. Discussions emphasized a holistic view of tree care—rural and urban alike.
- **Engagement:** The presence of key partners and organizational displays provided valuable visibility to the legislative audience, reinforcing the coalition's impact.

JT then gave a brief description of the Forestry Board Reorganization Proposal (see State Forester Newsletter for more details).

- The proposal introduces regional administrative frameworks to reduce burdens on individual boards while maintaining their local engagement and flexibility.
- The goal is to improve coordination, reduce silos, and support underperforming boards by replicating the practices of strong, high-functioning boards.
- Clarification was made that local boards are not being dissolved, but rather supported through regional systems to comply with state requirements and better share resources.

Donnelle highlighted progress on landscape-scale forest condition monitoring in Western Maryland, utilizing data from a Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) grant. Collaborative work includes ecological condition assessments and planning for forest resilience, with engagement from partners like NRCS and Maryland Forest Service. There's interest in expanding the model statewide, using it as a planning and monitoring standard.

The Nature Conservancy's carbon modeling expert, Cat Chamberlain, is analyzing the climate benefits of land protection and forest management techniques, including thinning from below. Anne expressed interest in integrating this work with existing carbon grant efforts and possibly inviting Cat to present findings at a future retreat. Keech emphasized that while Cat's time is limited, they are open to sharing resources and findings where feasible.

The meeting concluded with a reminder about the upcoming summer meeting (June 30), and a general appreciation for the collaboration, legislative efforts, and shared updates.

Brian adjourned the meeting at 4:10 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

Associate Director --- Policy and Planning