



Sustainable Forestry Council

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

March 16th, 2026

Google Meet and in person – 2:00 – 4:00pm

SFC Members

Bryan Seipp
Tony DiPaolo
Donnelle Keech

DNR Staff

Anne Hairston-Strang
Daniel Rider
Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

Other Attendees

Fred Johnson
Kim Finch
Steve Resh
Bill Rees

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

Action Items:

- Ashley Triplett-Peltzman: Expand legislative update distribution list and include relevant industry members.
- Dan Rider: Write a summary blurb regarding the forest market subcommittee opportunity for the full council.
- Bryan Seipp, Dan Rider, and Steve Resh: Assist with planning and logistical mapping for the fall forest market meeting
- Ashley Triplett-Peltzman: Distribute annual work plans link and the feedback Google sheet to council members.
- Ashley Triplett-Peltzman: Investigate the low engagement of Citizens Advisory Committees and explore restaffing via forestry boards.

Chair Bryan Seipp called the meeting to order at 2 pm.

DNR & Maryland Forest Service Updates

- The FY27 budget proposal of \$24.6 million is similar to the FY25 budget and an increase from the FY26 budget. It includes 116 budgeted positions, with no new permanent positions anticipated.
- Maryland provided interstate assistance to Texas with 2 bulldozer crews due to severe drought. Maryland remains several inches below normal rainfall, but wildfire activity in-state has been modest.
- Significant progress has been made on prescribed burns, with 8,000 acres burned across partners, aided by ignition drones.
- The department has made progress on the 5 Million Trees Initiative, including hiring one position as a public information officer. Upcoming steps for this program focus on improving communication regarding both the progress made and providing assistance to people interested in planting trees.
- The transition for the structure of the forestry boards involves maintaining the county forestry boards as volunteer organizations under the Maryland Forestry Foundation. The plan is to establish regional forestry boards in four regions for official business, composed of the chairs of the local boards, with the goal of reducing bureaucracy at the county level and increasing regional interaction of chairs, supported by DNR Community Forestry Coordinators.

Legislative Update

- The Tremendous Maryland Program Fund bill passed unanimously, expanding funding use to include stewardship and maintenance of urban forestry.
- The Mel Nolan Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund bill passed both chambers, requiring that DNR check that funding due to WIF is appropriately received. .
- The Edible Forests and Foraging Program bill and Forest Conservation Incentives Pilot Program bill are unlikely to advance this session due to fiscal and operational impacts in this year of tight budgets.

Market Coordination and Utilization

The Council is considering a gathering in the fall to connect timber producers with in-state buyers to address marketplace inefficiencies or identify steps to improve forest markets for implementing sustainable forestry. It was proposed that the Council could form a subcommittee or standing committee to address marketplace inefficiencies and identify opportunities and barriers, which Bryan Seipp and Steve Resh expressed interest in participating in.

State Forest Annual Work Plans

The SFC is being given a standing request to review the annual work plan, which could occur concurrently with the public comment period or simultaneously with the Citizens Advisory Committees. Ashley Triplett-Peltzman confirmed that Donnelle Keech can expect a prompt with a link when it is time to review the plan. Ashley Triplett-Peltzman also stated that after the current review cycle, they will look into other ways for involvement in the future and will include Council members in the stakeholder review process prior to the public comment period. Annual work plans will be posted for a 30-day public comment period in late March or early April.

Annual State Forest Audit

Dr. Anne Hairston-Strang reported that the annual independent forest sustainable certification audit is expected in April. The upcoming annual audit in April will focus on Chesapeake Forest Lands and Pocomoke State Forest.

Donnelle Keech inquired about a distribution list for information on opportunities to participate in the audits; Dr. Hairston-Strang -DNR- offered to consult with Rob Felt regarding this. Dr. Hairston-Strang confirmed that the auditors conduct a stakeholder outreach process every time, and they expressed hope that the participants are on that list, though they noted the list may be rotating due to logistical constraints. Donnelle Keech mentioned that a team member had already received information from Rob Feldt regarding the audit, which is scheduled for the week of April 20th.

Maryland Forest Inventory and Analysis Update

A joint venture partnership has been established with the US Forest Service for Maryland's forest inventory and analysis. Rob Feldt, Alanna Crowley, and Ryan Niemi are currently being trained to assist with the field collection of data on permanent plots statewide, with the aim to double the plot intensity for better regional precision in the data. This effort should result in more precise data on forest inventory in about seven years, which is crucial for carbon accounting, growth and yield estimates, and managing big trends statewide.

In addition to the annual State Forest audit, Maryland has been selected to be audited for compliance with the national Tree Farm program this year.

Roundtable Topics:

Prescribed Fire Support & Strategy

Donnelle Keech outlined a proposal for the NFWF grant (deadline April 9th) to bolster the statewide collaboration between TNC and the Maryland DNR. The project aims to inject much-needed capacity into the prescribed fire program to resolve existing bottlenecks. While the scope is statewide, specific implementation will focus on the coastal plain and Western Maryland, with a goal of creating a "burn ready" project pipeline in the western region.

Private Landowner Engagement

Tony DiPaolo highlighted the recent success of the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program. The program has driven a significant uptick in private landowner interest in early successional habitat management and burning, particularly around the Nassawango preserve. There is a strong collective hope that this funding remains available to continue incentivizing forest management across the state.

Wood Utilization & Market Challenges

The committee discussed the ongoing struggle with "soft" hardwood markets, which have not fully recovered from a 2017 export shock due to retaliatory tariffs. Central Maryland was noted as a particularly difficult region for all wood products, while the midshore region faces specific product-based challenges. Steve Resh emphasized the urgent need for better market data—specifically for low-quality hardwoods—to help balance forest production with actual utilization opportunities.

Emerging Markets & Innovative Technologies

To combat the issue of underutilized species and "high grading," several new strategies are being explored:

- Research via Virginia Tech is looking into using yellow poplar, red maple, and black gum for Cross-Laminated Timber (CLT), while others are experimenting with yellow poplar for thermally modified wood.
- There is regional interest in a Renewable Fuel Standard grant for sustainable aviation fuel.
- The group discussed the potential for using wood as a fuel source (likely in combination with others) for a proposed data center in Westernport.

Brian adjourned the meeting at 3:20 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

Associate Director --- Policy and Planning