



Sustainable Forestry Council

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

December 9th, 2025

2pm – 4pm

via Google Meet

SFC Members

Bryan Seipp (Chair)
Tony DiPaolo
Donnelle Keech
Gary Allen
Fred Johnson
Kim Finch
Steve Resh
Bill Rees

DNR Staff

Anne Hairston-Strang
Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

Other Attendees

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:

- Minutes Approval
 - Bryan Seipp confirmed approval of the previous meeting minutes. Tony DiPaolo moved approval and Fred Johnson seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.
- Chair Bryan Seipp called the meeting to order.

DNR & Maryland Forest Service Updates – Anne Hairston-Strang, State Forester

5 Million Trees Initiative

Anne reported that the 5 Million Trees Initiative continues to progress well, with approximately 1.5 million trees planted to date. The annual planting rate has increased as anticipated, with acreage planted rising from approximately 400 acres last year to 1,010 acres this year. The annual progress report, including a breakdown by partner, will be shared with Council members once finalized.

Forest Action Plan – 5- Year Midpoint Review

Due to the complexity of the federal review process, the Forest Service will not undertake a full rewrite at this time but will instead focus on the required annual progress summary due in January. The core goals of the plan (maintaining forests, forest health and fire, clean water and air, community forestry, and climate change) remain unchanged, with forest markets embedded within the forest retention and community forestry goals.

Staffing and Nursery Transition

The Forest Service is anticipating transition at the state nursery, with the upcoming retirement of the nursery manager and potentially the assistant manager. To ensure continuity of operations and seedling supply, the Forest Service has proactively placed three staff into training roles, including two staff from the 5 Million Trees initiative and one staff member shadowing the assistant manager.

Prescribed Fire and Forest Health

Donnelle emphasized the importance of expanding prescribed fire as a tool for climate adaptation and forest health. Anne confirmed that prescribed fire aligns with Forest Action Plan Goal 2 (managed forest and ecological health). She reported that partners conducted 7,291 acres of prescribed fire this year, compared to more than 8,000 acres last year. Progress includes establishment of a Prescribed Burn Council, a prescribed burn association for private landowners, and new investments through Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding.

Financial and Federal Grant Update

The DNR Forest Service budget for FY 2026 is \$20.6 million, reflecting a reduction of slightly more than 7 percent, largely attributable to changes in pass-through funding. The agency lost three staff through the voluntary separation program and experienced one permanent position reduction, but overall staffing remains stable with 112 filled permanent positions. Federal grant funding is slightly reduced under the continuing resolution, particularly for urban and community forestry.

New Opportunities and Partnerships

- Maryland Forest Service staff will assist with Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data collection to double sampling intensity, improving data quality for carbon modeling and timber markets.
- A portion of the Mid-Atlantic Climate Pollution Reduction Grant will support planting of bald cypress, Atlantic white cedar, and shortleaf pine on the mid- and lower Eastern Shore, along with invasive species control.
- New cost-share programs targeting underserved landowners—including new landowners, veterans, and low-income individuals—are in development. The Forest Stewardship for Underserved Landowners program is expected to launch in early 2026 in partnership with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay.
- A new competitive grant program, Forests for Habitat, will focus on Southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore, emphasizing restoration at the landscape scale.
- Emerging forest products and markets include InventWood’s production facility in Frederick, partnerships with Cambium and Unified Wood Economy, and research into thermally modified wood for structural uses.
- The newly adopted Chesapeake Bay Agreement (December 2, 2025) renews emphasis on trees, conservation, and improved land-use decision support tools for local governments. Bryan underscored the importance of stewardship of existing forests, which Anne confirmed is a core intent of the agreement.

Legislative Updates and Discussion

Tree-Mendous Fund Expansion (Departmental Bill) - Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

This proposed technical amendment would expand allowable uses of Tree-Mendous Fund revenues. The change would allow funds to be used to advance forest health and resilience through planting and maintenance of native trees and shrubs. This flexibility would support program promotion, tree maintenance, and invasive species management on public lands. While current funding levels are modest, the change would enable funds to be directed toward the most critical needs for tree survival.

Foraging Program Bill (Delegate Charkoudian) - Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

This reintroduced bill aims to establish a DNR foraging program. The proposal distinguishes between cultivated “edible forests” on state land and foraging in designated forested areas under a permit system. - -

- Concerns were raised regarding liability, enforcement, administrative challenges, and impacts on existing informal foraging practices, particularly mushroom harvesting.
- DNR proposes piloting the program within State Parks, contingent upon availability of program-generated funds. This bill does have a significant fiscal impact to the Department.

Forest Stewardship Act (Concept Proposal) – Gary Allen

This draft legislative concept is aimed at codifying the ecological service benefits of forests and creating new financial incentives for private landowners who commit to long-term forest stewardship. The proposal includes establishment of an Ecological Services Investment Fund and a potential ecological services fee tied to large-scale developments.

- Passage of the bill could be challenging due to the state’s fiscal environment.
- Council members expressed support for advancing the conversation.

Forest Conservation Act (FCA) Implementation

Kim raised concerns regarding rumors of legislation to delay implementation of 2023/2024 FCA requirements. While previous ratio-related proposals were withdrawn, new bills may still emerge during the legislative session.

DNR is finalizing mandated regulation changes and the new Model Forest Conservation Ordinance. Kim Finch emphasized the need for clearer feedback on alternative local ordinances already under development.

DNR staff described planned outreach, including a webinar with the Maryland Association of Counties in January, and noted efforts to hire a Forest Conservation Program Manager to support implementation.

Northern Long-Eared Bat (NLEB) Guidance - Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

The guidance establishes primary and secondary buffers around known hibernacula and summer occupancy areas, with no-cut zones and habitat retention requirements. Concerns were raised regarding calculation of retention requirements, impacts on small private parcels, and limited publicly available mapping data. DNR continues to gather additional input from State Forest managers, share relevant research, and plans to engage the Maryland Forest Association to leverage experience with habitat conservation planning.

Roundtable and Closing Remarks

Steve raised a question regarding the Natural Resources Careers Camp and the need for guidance on addressing issues involving transgender students to ensure a safe and inclusive environment while maintaining program integrity. The issue was noted for further discussion and guidance from DNR leadership.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following completion of agenda items.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Triplett-Peltzman

Associate Director – Policy and Planning

Maryland Department of Natural Resources – Forest Service