

# DCR FOREST FUTURES TECHNICAL STEERING COMMITTEE (TSC)

Doyle Conservation Center  
325 Lindell Avenue  
Leominster, MA 01453  
Meeting #5 -July 21, 2009; 9:15 AM – 1:15 PM

## MEETING SUMMARY

**Members present:** Matt Burne, Heather Clish, Kate Connolly, Andy Finton, Bill Moomaw, Keith Ross, Bruce Spencer, Charlie Thompson, Lisa Vernegaard, Joe Zorzin

**DCR/EEA Staff:** Stephanie Cooper, Bill Hill, Bob O'Connor

**Facilitators:** Bill Logue, John Goodrich. **TSC Technical Coordinator:** Tom Walker

**Observers:** Thom Kyker-Snowman of DCR Water Supply Protection Division

### Welcome

The meeting agenda was reviewed and Chair Lisa Vernegaard set forth objectives for the day. She noted that the issue of the group's scope of work had been raised a number of times and that the initial charge addressed the management of DCR forests. In early meetings the group felt that the issue of the larger context of all forest lands is important. The group has begun to articulate a vision for all Massachusetts forests and has the building blocks in place. That being said, the emphasis within the vision needs to be agreed on. She suggested that the group set that work aside and revisit it after taking on some of the substantive issues concerning management of DCR forests and parks, the influence on other DCR lands (watershed lands) and DCR's role in advancing a statewide vision on private lands through such things as administration of the forest cutting practices act and otherwise facilitating best practices by private landowners.

### 1. Forums, Walks and Other Public Meetings

The group heard a brief summary of the two site walks and public forums each of which was well attended (summaries are available on the DCR website). Each walk visited several timber sale sites including some of the controversial sales at Savoy State Forest. At Savoy Bill Hill of DCR acknowledged management and oversight issues concerning the site and share his thoughts on how future practices can be strengthened and the public more effectively informed. Regeneration is occurring at the sites but people are nevertheless concerned about the size of the openings created by the harvest. At each Forum the participants heard brief presentations on the DCR forests, an overview of the Vision process and held small group discussions. Heather Clish and Lisa Vernegaard facilitated two of the small groups at the Berkshires location and noted that there was a broad range of perspectives present. EEA sponsored a public meeting that looked at proposed climate change legislation and its intersection with forest management. While this meeting covered a range of topics, attendees' questions and comments focused on the concern over the degree of potential harvesting to meet the demands of proposed biomass plants.

### 2. Values Discussion

**Survey.** Tom Walker reported on the results of the simplistic values survey that 9 of 11 TSC members completed. The survey was conducted to gain a sense of the group's general sentiment. In discussing the results members noted how discussion and clarification might cause them to change some answers. For

section 1 (overall priorities), there is a large measure of agreement -- more than 75% of respondents felt that clean water, climate regulation, biodiversity and nutrient cycling should be high priority concerns for DCR. More than 50% thought air pollutant regulation, recreation and wilderness/old growth should be high priorities. At the low priority end of the scale, there seems to be less agreement. Wood products and education are identified by about 45% of respondents as lower priorities. The results for section 2 -- needed changes in DCR management emphasis -- also showed a somewhat wider range of views. Wood products dominated the 'too much emphasis' category, with 56% of responses agreeing with this. No other area received more than 25% of the responses indicating that there is currently too much emphasis. Alternatively, at least two-thirds identified aesthetics, climate regulation, education, and wilderness/old growth as needing more emphasis in DCR's management strategies. Similarly, at least 75% thought DCR's emphasis was about right for non-wood products, clean drinking water, water regulation, disease regulation, recreation and historical.

**Discussion. *Aesthetics.*** The TSC discussed a number of values and how they could be interpreted. One example is aesthetics where people might have different subjective perceptions of what is unsightly and situations such as a salvage cut of a dying stand that will be considered unsightly to almost all. The group agreed that things such as buffers may help with aesthetics and that DCR should pay more attention to the visual impact of cuts to minimize negative aspects. When a cut will be unattractive for some period care should be given to outreach and education about what will happen. During discussion the role of public expectations about the level and type of management and uses was mentioned by several members. One example was given of landscapes and forests in Europe which are intensively managed. Another was how public values and desired uses, such as allowing motor boats on the Quabbin Reservoir, sometimes outweigh professional management desires. In recognizing and addressing public desires forest managers paid attention to preserving specific trees, forest appearance near trails, roads and other places the public frequents.

Several members noted that addressing aesthetic issues would help rebuild trust with the public including knowing what they generally find acceptable (thinning and uneven age management) and what they do not (clearcuts). The Appalachian Mountain Club has Memorandum of Agreements (MOUs) with DCR and others which call for buffer areas and discussions with the AMC before work is performed near trails. All agreed that there should be site visits/walks prior to timber sales and where there are sensitive resources. This ties in with the value of DCR lands acting as an educational resource. When there is a change in management regime public understanding is important as is the public's level of acceptance of an amount of change. Different layers of education and understanding were mentioned -- public informed of decisions, the public understanding decisions, and pure public education.

***“Commercial Harvesting”/Reserves.*** The group raised the question of the level of harvesting on DCR lands, what motivations existed for it and the use of funds and wood products that result from harvesting. The relationship of land in reserves and amount of harvesting is intertwined and some stakeholders are suggesting a high percentage of land in reserves as a means of minimizing harvesting. Various members noted that:

- There are pragmatic aspects related to public desire for reserves (e.g., relationship to demand, heating fuel prices);
- Harvesting is dependent on management purposes and if usable wood can be sold that is acceptable but should be incidental to and not the driving purpose; and
- The importance of basing decisions on silvicultural values.

The group discussed the concept of intensive management areas and intensive reserves and how this might create clarity in purposes for certain lands and thereby reduce controversy. Some expressed concern about the impacts of this type of framework in that it might promote commercial harvesting in those areas. Questions to be addressed include: level of payments to towns, disposition of funds and disposition of wood products. Several members noted that it is important to understand the full array of costs (overhead, equipment, staff, etc.) for managing timber sales and for managing reserve lands.

Andy Finton provided the group copies of The Nature Conservancy's "Determining the Size of Eastern Forest Reserve" brochure<sup>1</sup>. He noted the importance of reserves as a source habitat for species requiring interior forests, the need for old growth forests by some species, and the need for large intact unfragmented forests to provide the entire suite of biodiversity and resilience over time to resist and recover from disturbances. These disturbances will create early successional habitat. The geographic distribution of reserves also acts as a surrogate for forest biodiversity. Others noted that smaller reserves lose some functions but are still important. One member noted that fragmentation is ill defined and that the biodiversity attributes found in old growth forests can be achieved in managed forests.

Bob O'Connor noted that only 3-4 DCR parcels are larger than 15,000 acres and these are watershed lands. He noted that DFW had determined that 5,000 acres reserves were sufficient based on their staff analysis. A group of a dozen scientists, mostly from outside state government, identified and weighted the 13 most important measurable and mapable criteria for ranking candidate reserve sites. EEA held 4 public meetings and received over 300 written comments on the proposed reserve sites with 250 letters supporting the mix of reserves and "green certified" managed forests. Based on the comments, EEA was able to expand certain candidate reserves. Private land surrounding most of the reserves were incorporated into the Habitat Reserves – a focus of land acquisition funds. In the past two years since the Habitat Reserves were identified, 10,000 acres of private land has been protected, much of it surrounding Forest Reserves. Additional sites and "sensitive areas" for smaller reserves were also added based on the 13 criteria.

The TSC agreed it needs to make recommendations concerning reserves. A small work group will start to draft thoughts around the issue. Andy Finton will take the lead with input from Heather Clish, Charlie Thompson and Joe Zorzin. The group did a quick process where each person stated their thoughts in about one minute. Key points by various members included<sup>2</sup>:

- An exact percentage of reserves can't be addressed without addressing other issues and must take into account practical, political, and financial questions.
- Reserves need to be embedded in larger forest tracts, Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) has a goal of 2.5 million acres of protected forest land with 10% as Reserves, principally by designating 50% of the existing state lands. W&W recommends that 1.5 million acres of the 2.5 million be protected largely via future Conservation Restrictions. The state used a rigorous process to designate reserves but this did not always meet the desired size threshold.
- The decision of reserves needs to be made in the context of all forest lands, public sentiment indicates a desire for more reserves, reserves should be designated not only for ecological but also for spiritual and other purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/berkshire/files/eastern\\_forest\\_reserves.pdf](http://www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/berkshire/files/eastern_forest_reserves.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> Note: these are not the consensus of the TSC, but a collection of comments heard from individual members.

- Reserves need to be designated for specific reasons not just an arbitrary number. New pressures of managing for climate change mitigation and biodiversity may mean much larger reserves. Priorities need to be set.
- More acreage in larger reserves is desirable and there need to be urban area reserves for reasons beyond ecology.
- The priorities used for the existing process need to be examined to determine if any were omitted.
- Criteria are essential and increasing the area in reserves, non-ecological criteria could include adding some parks such as 20,000 acres near Boston.
- There should be a large majority of DCR lands in reserves (80%) and the remainder in intensively managed for forest products.
- The public concern about a limited number of timber sales has created the desire for more reserves and “protected” areas which are less intensively managed.
- The process used to establish existing reserves was good and increases in reserves could be as much as a third of DCR lands and what the public views as old growth can also be preserved within managed forests and can be protected.
- Reserves should receive legislative protection to assure their status cannot be easily changed.
- Some stakeholders may be concerned that large reserves will not result in early successional habitat for some species desired by hunters and birdwatchers.

### **3. Discussion of whether DCR lands should have a role in producing wood products for societal consumption.**

The group discussed this issue and was divided. Several members noted that DCR can play a role in supporting a viable wood products industry; without DCR, owners of small woodlots cannot find the services they need to carry out work on their land (this is a threshold issue). The concept of increased logger standards and “master loggers” was suggested. Others noted the societal demand for wood products requires that forests be well managed in order to be sustainable. Others noted that private industry should not need the support of public harvesting. The group did agree that the state is in a unique position, as a long-term owner of large tracts with the capability of managing for particular purposes (be it old growth or early successional habitat) to manage its forests for different purposes or to higher standards than private lands.

Several members noted that they need to better understand the demand for wood products from state lands. The difficulty of finding locally produced products was mentioned and how this might be addressed through better public education both about obtaining locally grown wood products and as demonstration forests for model forest management practices. Harvesting can be done in a way that is compatible with biodiversity. Harvesting also can diversify the age structure, and help local economies. There was general agreement that decisions should not be primarily driven by commercial or biomass demands for wood products.

### **4. Discussion of DCR non-reserve woodland and ecosystem services and silvicultural treatments.**

Based on the values survey, it appears there is general agreement that top priorities should include climate regulation, biodiversity, aesthetics, wilderness and old growth. These priorities are rising in importance relative to past priorities given increasing concern about biodiversity, climate change and invasive species. A member made the point that all values need to be considered and that when a land manager looks at a particular property they can then apply the values within the larger context of surrounding lands. Bill Moomaw agreed to write an initial draft of relative priorities.

Bill Hill of DCR noted that the completed district management plans have listed underlying purposes and principles which he will have sent to the TSC. A TSC member who had been involved with the forest resource management planning process noted that it is thorough and takes time but that the issue for many stakeholders is how the district plans are translated to site-specific issues and cutting plans. A TSC member asked about the status of DCR's efforts to develop property-specific resource management plans. Bob O'Connor noted that developing site-specific plans is very difficult given DCR's current resources. DCR's Resource Management Program has inventoried existing and historical plans and is developing a matrix of priorities. The department is looking at clustering properties that will allow for more detailed planning beyond district plans and can be done within existing resources.

The group discussed whether any metrics can be determined which will measure values and the trade-offs among them. Charlie Thompson, with input from Bruce Spencer, Joe Zorzin and Tom Walker, will provide the group with a proposed framework/model of quantitative impacts of decisions.

The group discussed the role of silviculture treatments in promoting certain ecosystem service values. One member notes that once a priority value is determined then the appropriate treatment can be prescribed. Another member noted that for private lands the question is difficult because it is hard to know who will pay for certain values that are not now compensated (e.g., clean water). In response another member gave the example of values such as carbon sequestration for which there is now a market. Keith Ross will lead a small group in drafting what role DCR might play in facilitating good practices on private forestlands.

## 5. Upcoming Meetings

The TSC agreed to add a late August meeting to review and discuss progress and drafts from the work groups. At the September 16 meeting a portion of it will be joint with the Advisory Group of Stakeholders. At the September 16 meeting Bob Leverett will be invited to discuss old growth forests and Dave King and or John Scanlon will be invited to discuss managing forests for wildlife. Each will be asked to provide brief written information in advance so as to maximize discussion time and minimize presentation time. Jay McCaffrey of the Sierra Club may also have a very brief overview of the Google Earth map program for DCR forests. Joe Zorzin offered to lead a walk of the Gould Farm and model forest. This will likely happen in or around October.

Action Items	Who
<b>Qualitative Values</b> - draft with relative priorities, values unique to DCR lands and what values could be facilitated on private forest lands	Bill Moomaw
<b>Model of Quantitative Impacts of Decisions</b>	Charlie Thompson with Bruce Spencer. Joe Zorzin and Tom Walker
<b>Role of DCR in Facilitating Good Practices on Private Lands</b>	Keith Ross with Joe Zorzin, Bob O'Connor
<b>Reserves</b> – Overview of TNC model for establishing reserves and suggestions on how to supplement through additional reserves or definitions for non-ecological reserves or zones.	Andy Finton with Matt Burne, Heather Clish, Charlie Thompson, Joe Zorzin and Tom Walker
<b>Existing DCR Decision Making Processes</b>	Lisa Vernegaard