

DCR FOREST FUTURES TECHNICAL STEERING COMMITTEE (TSC)

Doyle Conservation Center
325 Lindell Avenue
Leominster, MA 01453

Meeting #7 – September 29, 2009; 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

MEETING SUMMARY

Members present: Matt Burne, Heather Clish, Andy Finton, Bill Moomaw, Keith Ross, Bruce Spencer, Tom Stevens (arriving part way through the day), Charlie Thompson, Lisa Vernegaard, Joe Zorzin. **Absent:** Kate Connolly.

DCR/EEA Staff as Observers: Bill Hill, Bob O'Connor, Thom Kyker-Snowman.

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

Observers: Mary Booth, Lexi Dewey, Sharl Heller, Madhawa Palihapitiya.

Welcome

Facilitator Bill Logue welcomed the TSC and outlined purpose of meeting and desired outcome of gaining a sense of the direction for recommendations on a variety of topics. Chair Lisa Vernegaard noted that the package of recommendations will be arrived at through an iterative process. Bill noted there would be a joint meeting with the Advisory Group of Stakeholders (AGS) on October 14 where they would hear about and discuss recreation, places of special significance and large reserves.

Brief Discussion/Review of Individual and Work Group Reports

A number of Technical Steering Committee (TSC) members and work groups had prepared brief internal recommendations for discussion. The TSC engaged in a quick discussion of each report to gain a sense of where they needed to spend their time during the day.

Values

Bill Moomaw had drafted a document identifying and prioritizing values using the Ecosystem Service categories of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and ranking them in four categories: 1) Essential, 2) Desirable, 3) Low Priority and 4) Excluded. Criteria for making these rankings include the unique aspects of State owned forestlands within the Commonwealth, the continuous long-term ownership by the State and the capacity to manage for non-market ecosystem services. He noted that a key issue is: What silviculture can do is derived from the purpose of the land. This will help determine what practices are needed. The group needs to address the priority of wood product production on DCR land. His opinion is that it should be low and as a by-product of other activity given the percentage of private forest land available. Members of the group expressed varying opinions on the level of priority of wood product production in the past on DCR lands and noted that both terminology –use of “primary purpose” – and public perception can be confusing. Most members agreed that removal of trees should a tool used to achieve desired end. Several members noted that interviews with DCR staff indicate that they do not feel they have consistent priorities and therefor the TSC should make recommendations about priorities DCR should set. The group reserved further discussion on this until later in the day.

Planning Piece/Zoning

TSC Technical Coordinator Tom Walker described a zoning concept for use in planning that derives from some of DCR current practices but is adjusted based on discussions with several TSC members. Three zones (wildlands/large reserves, woodlands, and parklands) would be created and then a determination made about which priorities are emphasized in each zone. Lastly a process can then be put in place to determine how much land fits into each zone. He suggested that, once defined the TSC could recommend to the Commissioner some options/criteria to identify land for the zones. A benefit for DCR is that they would be to identify the zones reasonably quickly and then do site specific planning as funding is available. The zone boundary designations could be revisited on a periodic basis. The members agreed on the overall concept subject to revisiting the terminology describing the zones.

A member noted that DCR uses zones in its District Management Plans and this will have to be compared with any proposed plans. Another member noted the importance of considering criteria relating to scale within zones – for example trails and logging roads that generate more activity and potential uses/incompatible uses.

Elements of Good Forestry

Bruce Spencer set forth possible elements of good forestry for woodlands. He noted that land could be described by forest stands/types in terms of origin and condition; namely primary, secondary, and tertiary. This will identify, and help explain, appropriate silviculture treatments. The forest would be in reserves, management for late successional characteristics and management that would encompass all levels of silviculture. He noted that this fits well with the zoning concept. After the forest is classified and mapped he proposed two levels of management (reserves are a category not addressed in his recommendations) with level one being managed for late successional conditions and level two being managed for identified ecosystem services. Each category specifies limits on the amount of growth that can be removed from the forest. He suggested proportionately that lands could be divided into 1/3 reserves, 1/3 late successional (managed for a specific forest structure) and 1/3 actively managed for specific prioritized ecosystem values.

Reserves

Andy Finton highlighted several issues in addition to what he had in earlier meetings about reserves. He noted that, like the values piece, biodiversity is primary driver. A primary challenge of reserve management is that all forests are anthropogenically altered in some way, e.g., 19th century land clearing, invasives, and climate change. Supporting biodiversity may also require different interventions – prescribed fire, etc. although in most situations there should be minimal to no intervention in reserves, especially for wood products and biomass. The existing reserves and their documentation are good on this and specify no salvage or preemptive logging associated with disturbance.

He recommends that large forest reserves should be identified and codified in law to preserve them in perpetuity. He also reiterated guidelines for infrastructure/regulations for reserves, e.g., wind siting, ORV's new roads, snowmobiles on 4" packed snow. A member concurred on the need to codify reserve protection and how this could be accomplished if land trust and other non-profit private land owners placed their land under the same restrictions in order to take the lead and demonstrate that this approach will work. A TSC member noted that in managed forests the primary goal is to enhance biodiversity and that management allows for biodiversity on a smaller scale and questioned if the proposed scale of reserves will be able to achieve biodiversity in 135,000 acres. Andy Finton noted the size of reserve network in conjunction with forested matrix will protect biodiversity at all scales. The group noted that there are a

number of tools to preserve biodiversity and that the context of DCR forests, state forests, New England and North American are all interdependent ecosystems.

Recreation/Special Places

Heather Clish reviewed criteria for identifying parkland and examined the question of what would forest management look like in parklands and how it interfaces with working woodlands. She noted that parklands include recreational areas and special scenic places, such as waterfalls. Most parkland management is relatively fairly straightforward – akin to urban parks (MDC) where the primary purpose/function of those lands is supporting recreation. This would allow for salvaging after ice storms, passive disease management, view maintenance (in consultation with local trail/park stewards to avoid controversy). If there are extenuating circumstances – stressed stand – interventions and more intense management would be allowed with the sign-off by recreation folks in DCR. She is proposing a collaborative planning and implementation model.

For recreation uses within working woodlands – what the National Forest Service would call General Management Areas – management would be done in consultation and in accordance with guidelines. These would include certain significant trails, “socially important”, scenic views, etc. She did not address the issue of motorized/non-motorized uses.

In discussion the group noted the need for a clear definition of parkland, the different training and knowledge required for management of those areas that impact how decisions are made. A member noted how the limited work in parks is usually fee for service, something that is difficult in the current economic times, and noted that DCR might consider having arborist crews to perform this work at lesser expense.

Adaptive Management

Charlie Thompson highlighted the importance of data collection and analysis informing decision making. He noted that this created an opportunity for efficiency among the divisions in EEA who currently have different inventory systems – opportunity for increasing analytical/modeling capability without adding staff. Adaptive management is a process for decision making in the face of uncertainty or changing circumstances; in essence, a feedback loop. A good example is its use in evidence based nursing. The parallel in natural resources is ensuring that the staff implementing and monitoring on the ground decisions are involved because they see how policy and other management decisions impact the forests. Adaptive management requires rigorous data collection to assess what is happening so that adjustments can be made that incorporate new scientific understanding. Modeling allows for prediction of the impact of a variety of different management decisions. In the face of climate change adaptive management is particularly important.

Private Lands.

Keith Ross reiterated that 90% of forests are private lands and that DCR has an essential role to foster good stewardships on those lands. He raised the question of why not have forest lands become equal within EEA (DEP, DFW, etc.) to the other divisions or agencies. (He noted that the same could be said of parklands.) He suggested that harvesting be done as demonstration harvests (walks before hand), showing why trees are marked the way they are, walks after harvests to explain how it was done, use of appropriate equipment, silviculture, etc. These can be used to educate private landowners and through public/private partnerships around how/why forests are harvested. He also recommended that all cutting plans need to be signed off by licensed foresters to create a method of accountability. He highlighted a number of other

suggested programs to assist private landowners to be good stewards on their land, e.g., access to GIS to help landowners know how they connect with the rest of the land; cost share programs to help private landowners protect their land from development; partnerships with land trusts; and information estate planning for example.

The group held a brief discussion about accountability and if sign offs by licensed foresters would sufficiently address this given that filing of short-term cutting plans could act as a means of by-passing the intent of such a provision. Keith Ross will look into this issue. The group discussed the elevation of private forests to a parallel status and the types of qualifications a director or commissioner in this role should have. The group was very interested in this idea and parked it pending discussion of structure and management processes.

DCR Structure and Planning

Lisa Vernegaard gave a brief recap of the interviews she had conducted with DCR management. From that derived a number of possible recommendations which address issues including:

1. Within DCR there is not clarity to staff about the mission of DCR and this contributes to confusion and conflict.
2. Very strong evidence that the planning process is fragmented and isolated with many examples where right hand did not know what left hand is doing. As a consequence, planning should happen in one place. She suggested that one option is to evolve the forestry group to a resource management group to think more comprehensively about how DCR delivers ecosystem services on the land – that group should include people with that background and have a strong leader.
3. Opportunities exist, because others within the state others addressing some ecosystem services, to partner with others to do some of the work the TSC recommends be done and avoid redundancy. For example involve DFW in any early successional habitat decisions.
4. For woodlands there may be opportunities to do something such as adopting Quabbin forest management practices and apply them to all working woodlands across DCR.
5. Exercising patience by not proceeding until there is good solid planning in back of a decision to intervene.

Public Process

Matt Burne noted some possible areas for public process that are critical because of public relations issues from past cuts. DCR needs to be able to clearly communicate what they are doing and why they are doing it. This can occur on a variety of different scales –

1. Establishing, opening, advertising, opportunities to interact and provide comment so public has a chance to react harvesting plans and actions. He feels that to develop trust DCR stakeholders need the opportunity to see and verify what they have been told.
2. DCR needs to encourage a culture where there is a positive and welcoming reaction to public input. He has spoken to DCR about current changes concerning harvest summaries, site walks and other efforts and is encouraged. He will summarize his recommendations.

Lorraine Della Porta of MODR will draft recommendations for TSC consideration about internal capacity building and system design to enable the agency to be better manage and be clearer in the type and purpose of input and internal and external expectations.

General Discussion

The TSC engaged in a wide ranging discussion that began to integrate a number of the components discussed earlier in the day. The discussion resulted in the development of a matrix depicted below. Key points are depicted briefly before the matrix but do not capture the detail of the discussion.

Key points:

- The group discussed how the proposed zones (reserves, working woodlands and parklands) fit with the elements of good forestry and late successional management. In general people felt they fit well together and some discussion was had about less or more zones. Members were comfortable with the three zone concept, subject to adjusting the terminology, and that there is a clarity to the concept that will help DCR and the public. A guiding principle appeared to be that the designation be based on “what the land is telling us.” This also allows for small or patch reserves within woodlands and for good ecological/silviculture management in support of ecosystem services. The group will need further discussion about how to address and/or resolve areas where zones may blend and overlap and how to address these patch reserves and special places.
- One question left for further discussion is whether achieving the desired ecosystem services is predicated on silvicultural intervention. Several members noted that human intervention has compromised or prevented natural disturbance processes in many forests.
- The group needs to be mindful of the appropriate time and scale for designations to achieve the desired outcome.
- Wood product production is one of the ecosystem service values but needs to be done with greater care and sensitivity to the cultural context and condition of the land.
- The desired future condition and how this relates to climate changes will need to be addressed.
- The sentiment was expressed that, with very limited exceptions, no timber extraction in reserves and for limited purposes supporting safety and recreation in parklands. Woodlands would serve as a model for silviculture on private lands.
- The group discussed the difficult of language that creates confusion by saying “management”/“no management” and all agreed that the types and levels of activity need to be clear in implementation. Activity ranges from monitoring and data collection to full silvicultural treatments.
- The group felt that they needed to be mindful of resources moving forward and examples of programs such as the Long-Term Ecological Monitoring effort were cited as examples of initiatives that are likely to stop due to insufficient funds.

Matrix

The TSC spent some time attempting to integrate the zone concept and ecosystem services. The following matrix was developed for discussion purposes during the meeting.

<p style="text-align: right;">Zone →</p> <p>Ecosystem Services ↘</p>	Reserves	Parklands	Woodlands
<p>Ecosystem Services Priorities 1st Degree</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity through natural processes • Carbon sequestration • Soil sormation and nutrients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation • Cultural values (aesthetics, spiritual, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity through active management • Demonstration education to leverage good forestry • Carbon sequestration and mitigation • Soil formation in secondary and tertiary forests
<p>Second Order ("Desirable")</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilderness recreation/Cultural Values (spiritual, etc.) • Research/education • Air quality • Provide clean water • Regulating services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Air quality • Clean water • Regulating services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation/cultural • Education • Air quality • Clean water • Provision of sustainably grown desirable wood products as by-product of demonstration education
<p>Management</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodland councils • Limitations on whole tree harvesting

Matrix Discussion

This section continues to capture key points flowing from the matrix discussion.

- Continued discussion about appropriate terminology, e.g., definition of "good", use of sustainable (option: "well managed").
- Clarity will be needed about management related to wood products, e.g., primary purpose vs. incidental, economic viability/in-kind services, etc.
- It may be difficult to address the issue of harvesting for biomass for power generation but it may be possible to address issues such as whole tree harvesting, soil mineral and nutrient depletion, leaving specified amounts/portions of the tree when harvesting, equipment specifications and impacts of large scale roads and infrastructure associated with larger harvesting operations. Several members noted the inter-relationship of this portion of the discussion with resource management planning and the role of strong leadership/voice on those issues and how the public is involved in the process.
- In the context of discussing elevating the role of forestry, the point was made that the TSC should consider framing recommendations as desired outcomes with potential activities to achieve them. Given that large reorganization efforts may be unpalatable the recommendations need to be such that there will be the political will to implement them. That being said all agree that forestry needs a prominent voice. A reservation was expressed that if a bold recommendation was dismissed it could cause other recommendations to be devalued. Others also wondered what AGS members might think of the concept. Lisa Vernegaard and Keith Ross will work on framing this option for further discussion and will inquire about what can be done in the discretion of the secretary of OEEA and what requires legislative changes.

Upcoming Meetings and Tasks

October 14 Joint Meeting. Bill Logue noted that Bob Leverett was confirmed to speak about places of special significance. Christopher Klyza had declined and he was reaching out to Professor Trembulak of Middlebury College. Bill Moomaw will assist in the outreach. Bill Logue and Lisa Vernegaard will continue outreach concerning an expert on recreation. Moomaw will contact him to come to meeting to do 20-30 minute presentation on large reserves – reflecting/augmenting rather than starting from scratch.

October 21 TSC meeting cancelled

October 27 TSC working session scheduled from 12:00 noon to 6 PM.

Tom Walker will contact individuals and work group members and begin to integrate the documents into a single first draft that can be shared more widely.

Bill Logue noted that the goal is to have final draft recommendations ready in December and provide notice and comment in late December/early including public forums. He will draft a proposed schedule.