

DCR FOREST FUTURES TECHNICAL STEERING COMMITTEE (TSC)

Doyle Conservation Center
325 Lindell Avenue
Leominster, MA 01453
Meeting #8 – October 27, 2009; 12:00 – 5:15 PM

MEETING SUMMARY

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

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

Facilitators: Loraine Della Porta, Bill Logue. **TSC Technical Coordinator:** Tom Walker.

Observers: Dave Gafney, Chris Matera, Madhawa Palihapitiya, Mike Ryan.

Welcome

Facilitator Bill Logue welcomed the TSC, reviewed the agenda, outlined the purposes and the desired outcomes of the working meeting. He emphasized that the group would be using an iterative approach during the day and in developing a recommendations report. Chair Lisa Vernegaard noted the importance of identifying gaps where additional attention is needed.

Landscape Scale Zoning Concept

TSC members confirmed that the landscape scale zoning concept based on ecosystem services and laid out at the prior meeting was an appropriate approach. In discussion they noted the importance of clearly defining and articulating the zones to avoid confusion and misinterpretation. They also discussed the impact of terminology in naming the zones which are currently being called Reservelands, Woodlands and Parklands. Several points and suggestions were made including:

- Some people may equate woodlands with smaller woodlots and using "forests" might convey the larger blocks the zones will be addressing. Variation might be "working forests" and "forest reserves."
- The Harvard Forest Wildlands and Woodlands might offer some precedent for use of terminology more familiar to the Massachusetts public.

The upcoming draft of the recommendations will offer options for different terminology appropriate to the report.

Allocation Among Zones

The TSC engaged in discussion concerning possible allocation of DCR lands among the zoning categories based on preliminary criteria. Chair Lisa Vernegaard noted that the goal in setting allocations was not to produce a specific map of DCR properties but to set parameters and criteria and use mapping exercise to perform preliminary ground truthing to test the concepts. The discussion was designed to gain a sense of

the minimum, or floor, for each zone and/or identify what additional information might be needed to determine this. The goal was to go through an iterative cycle at the meeting and through future drafts to arrive at recommended criteria and gain a sense of their practical viability on DCR lands. Through the iterations, allocations will be added until all lands are accounted for at a coarse level. DCR has been asked to apply the criteria of the zones at a rough level and inform the TSC of the results to aid in the deliberations.

Reserves

The TSC first discussed large ecological reserves. The group agreed that the scientific criteria established through The Nature Conservancy process and used to identify the current reserves are appropriate and should continue to be used. Through that process, 24 blocks of intact forest in 11 different ecoregional settings were identified in Massachusetts through remote spatial assessment. The recent planning process selected reserves in 9 of the settings and set aside 38,000 acres of DCR lands and about 12,000 acres of other state lands as reserves.

Andy Finton informed the TSC that he held a conference call with members of the AGS Reserves Work Group. He noted that the Work Group generally agreed with the scientific criteria but wanted the TSC to understand that they see a need for extensive reserves, perhaps beyond all state land holdings, which create greater redundancy in ecoregions and land volumes. Further they desire greater clarity on any compelling reasons for active management including a rationale for any timber extraction.

Based on the criteria and priority ecosystem services for the reserves, the members discussed a floor of one large reserve of 15,000 acre in each of the 11 ecoregions. This would total 165,000 acres with 88,000 from existing DCR properties and the remainder in acquired lands or other existing protected open space. In making this assumption, various TSC members noted that it must be made very clear that:

- Although biodiversity is a significant ecosystem value in the reserves, management will allow natural processes dominate. Consequently, some biodiversity may diminish or the public must be educated that the impacts of those natural processes, climate change and other processes may result in a forest with an appearance very different from what they are accustomed to or might anticipate. Examples were given of climate change and invasive species changing the type of trees and ecosystems dependent on those trees. A member noted that the scale of reserves would provide resilience that, even though impacted by anthropogenic disturbances, might recover to a different type of forest.
- A member stated that where biodiversity is desired as a primary ecosystem service that active management and invasive species control may be necessary.
- A member noted that, given the demand for wood products, establishing a very large network of reserves could displace demand to other parts of the country or world thereby negatively impacting those areas.
- A suggestion was made that the TSC consider a recommendation that a percentage of future acquisitions be allocated to reserves.
- The members noted the importance of monitoring reserves.
- A member noted that this floor, when combined with parklands, creates a large percentage of DCR lands that would be managed with little intervention.
- Patch reserves and special places might be overlays of reserves on other zones.
- The group noted that both reserves and parklands result in "net costs" to manage although they produce other non-monetary benefits to the public.

Parklands

DCR provided information that at a minimum 33,000 acres would meet the parklands criteria discussed by the TSC. Most of the initially identified area is inside Route 128. The TSC asked that additional analysis be performed by the agency. A member noted that the parklands would function in a similar fashion to reserves in many respects as they will have very modest levels of management.

Woodlands

As noted above, the title for this zone may change. DCR was asked to identify lands that have the potential to be managed as woodlands. Based on what they have heard at TSC meetings they are using the following criteria to gain a sense of scale. Those criteria, as articulated by the agencies, include:

- Services for forestry not provided on private land
 - Early successional habitat in best places without creating fragmentation/erosion
 - Identify areas to demonstrate good forestry – high visibility. These could be small areas near where people live so the general public will see it and areas close to private landowners – where they will see it
 - Uneven age management – for carbon sequestration, this approach requires patience and time to transition from even-age to uneven-aged and acts as a model for private landowners.
 - Restoration of high-graded areas which could be prioritized for early successional habitat
 - Promoting buy-local initiatives according to criteria to be established in areas near infrastructure to process the wood and near where people will use that material.
 - Forestry that the state can do that is not being done on private land – raising the bar on forestry standards e.g., through use of specified equipment and mandating its use
 - Master loggers to promote the highest standards
- Demonstration areas would be distributed across the state, most likely in medium-fragmented lands that DCR owns which are good for forestry.
- Basic criteria include: how much has DCR has managed an area in the past e.g., if 3 rotation cycles – change from even-aged to uneven-aged, low slope, good soils.

A TSC member stated that demonstration patches could be as small as 20 acres and he felt that 100,000 in woodlands would allow for good demonstration. Other members noted the need to relate the woodlands allocation to criteria and ecosystem services.

Management Practice By Zone

Reserves

The TSC continued their previous discussions of management practices in reserves where the basic conclusion was that intervention would be minimal by allowing natural processes to dominate and provide limited exceptions for threats to immediate safety and invasive/non-native species of all types – during the meeting the group quickly reviewed the existing DCR language concerning reserves. The group agreed that monitoring, data collection and adaptive management are important elements of managing reserves. When reviewing draft recommendations at the next meeting the group will need to clarify the level of intervention, if any, in reserves.

The group discussed whether to recommend setting aside some reserve lands as “wildlands” (or wilderness) where there would be no interventions and tighter restrictions on the types of human access (methods, trails, etc.) Several members felt this would be worthwhile in order to:

- Act as a control area for other reserves and woodlands.
- Act as a model for other states and/or be more familiar to people from other states (the Adirondack wilderness system was cited as an example)
- The social significance of having areas where nature takes its course without any intervention.

Others expressed reservations in that:

- The anthropogenic influence in Massachusetts is such that true wilderness may not exist or be possible so the designation may not be meaningful.
- There is a potential to confuse the public and land managers which could undermine the other portions of the reserve network.

The group discussed the implications for the planning process especially if people became concerned about invasive species in wilderness areas. The TSC asked Technical Coordinator Tom Walker to examine how New York and Federal agencies define wilderness areas. He will also make suggestions about alternative language/terminology which might address some of the issues.

Parklands

Heather Clish noted that the recommendations should include management for parklands where they are the dominant zone within an area and other management methods where the parklands are embedded within woodlands. The latter would include trails, rivers, etc. and should be addressed through collaborative process and memoranda of understanding between parkland managers and foresters with park and recreational staff making decisions based on input from foresters.

Gary Briere of DCR noted that if designations could put severe restrictions on the recreational use of land that regulations and other stakeholders would need to be consulted.

Woodlands

Bruce Spencer outlined three levels of management for woodlands. He noted that all three levels could be used in forests but that legacy trees, stands, and other unusual settings should not be harvested and should be recognized as such by foresters. He focused primarily on level 2 and level 3 management. Level 2 is managing for late successional habitat with selection methods of trees/patches up to $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ acre. This allows the working of uneven aged stands to create late successional habitats. This sequesters carbon and creates a visually attractive forest. The Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences has produced documents on ways to measure this. Level 3 is primarily for managing tertiary forests (those that are first returning from agricultural use) and would include openings up to $\frac{1}{2}$ acre – and would include a mix of even and uneven aged management.. He noted that a goal is to maintain a regenerating forest. Openings would be limited to 5 acres maximum and if a larger opening is required, for example an old plantation, that this decision should involve broader consultation and public participation. The group agreed on the language of “selection systems” as terminology for silvicultural practices to determine which trees are harvested. Bruce Spencer noted that the as yet unreleased draft §132 regulations do not accommodate single tree selection.

In discussion members noted that a primary purpose is the demonstration of good forestry at all stages of the process in order to model and influence this on private forests. Members noted the importance of follow-up research on management practices and the role of adaptive management.

In discussing the issue of biomass the group agreed that promoting hand felling and requiring the equipment used in harvesting to match the silviculture prescription and avoid damage will discourage the destructive operations often associated with biomass harvesting for large power plants. In addition they noted that by limiting harvesting to a percentage of growth, requiring the tops of trees be left in the forests to regenerate soil nutrients and formation the forest will be protected, whole tree harvesting will be avoided and destructive harvesting for biomass will be uneconomical. Over recent years DCR has harvested approximately 17% of the forest growth. The recommendations will be crafted to address desired future conditions.

Private Lands

The TSC held a brief discussion on private lands. They agreed that landowners did not appear to fully appreciate Chapter 61 and other incentive programs and, while there are differences about the reasons for this (desire for privacy, lack of desire for harvesting, a poor impression of harvesting, lack of awareness), the group agreed that plans should be prepared by licensed foresters. This will increase private landowner knowledge of stewardship programs. The loophole with short-term cuttings plans should be eliminated. The suggestion was made that for land in the Chapter 61 program the state could pay towns for lost tax revenue.

The group also agreed that point preference in awarding contracts on DCR lands be given to master loggers to help support quality work and the availability of high quality professionals for private work.

The TSC discussed how to elevate the role of forestry. Keith Ross had suggested that there be a Commissioner of Forests others suggested that the same goal could be accomplished through strengthening the role within DCR. All agreed on the need to elevate forests in some fashion to ensure that those interests are adequately represented in policy and budget discussions. After discussion the group agreed to consider a recommendation that set forth the goal, stated that a commissioner of forests might be a long-term goal and that in the near term DCR create a Division of Forests on an equal footing with other divisions. The option of having service foresters report to a Commissioner of Forests overseeing private forests was proposed. The upcoming draft will provide a number of options for resolving this issue. Stephanie Cooper of DCR cautioned that if a Commissioner of Forests was created and DCR forests were moved to that agency it had the potential to create confusion and implementation problems on the ground. Bob O'Connor noted that in the current environment the creation of a new agency could be difficult. However, he felt that a statement of importance could be useful and that the elevation to a division or a department of forestry for private lands would be received more positively.

Gap Identification

Matt Burne and Loraine Della Porta will bring recommendations concerning public process to the next meeting.

The group will revisit the biomass question to ensure that it is addressed appropriately in the recommendations.

Kate Connolly will look at the issue of conflicting statutory mandates and after reviewing materials prepared by DCR and AGS members Dave Gafney and Claudia Hurley consult with them as she feels is necessary to further clarify.

The group will review FSC certification with one member feeling vehemently opposed to it because of the cost and outside intervention in DCR and other feeling that it has acted as an incentive for some changes in management practices that might not have otherwise occurred, e.g., creation of some plans, better coordination of rare and endangered species protection, creation of reserves, better stand mapping, improved timber inventory, and better inter-agency collaboration.

Upcoming Meetings and Tasks

The next meeting of the TSC was confirmed for November 10 from noon to 6 PM.

Following that meeting a draft will be circulated to the AGS and DCR for comment at a joint meeting. In drafting the report the group will attempt to achieve consensus and where disagreements exist they will be articulated and the supporting rationales will be articulated within the report.