

DCR FOREST FUTURES TECHNICAL STEERING COMMITTEE (TSC)

Doyle Conservation Center
325 Lindell Avenue
Leominster, MA 01453
Meeting #9 – November 10, 2009; 12:00 – 5:45 PM

MEETING SUMMARY

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

DCR/EEA Staff as Observers: Gary Briere, Stephanie Cooper, Bill Hill, Bob O'Connor, Dan Clark.

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

Observers: Dave Gafney, Claudia Hurley, Madhawa Palihapitiya, Mike Ryan.

Welcome

Facilitator Bill Logue welcomed the TSC noting that the group would continue to use an iterative approach in developing a recommendations report. The goal is to arrive at a *package* of recommendations that all can support. Where differences exist the group will articulate them and suggest changes and improvements to meet everyone's needs. If there are exceptions to minor points those will be built into the body of the recommendations. If substantial differences remain on a point, there will be a section of the document for "Different Perspectives" of TSC members. A key goal is for the public and agencies to be able to read the document and have a clear articulation of policy recommendations and choices. Chair Lisa Vernegaard noted that it is important to have thorough discussion of any differences and listed a number of areas where further discussion is needed or sections that need to be added. These include: FSC, Save America's Forest Act, highlighting the biomass issue, legal mandates, resource capacity of DCR, more clarity on the priorities, and revisiting the vision statement from the spring.

The group discussed how the order of the recommendations will send a message and this should be discussed prior to their public release. As the implementing agency, and because they had been asked to provide information on several issues, Stephanie Cooper and Bob O'Connor were asked to join the TSC at the table.

Discussion

The TSC then discussed each of the draft recommendations.

Recommendation 1 – Elevation of the Role of Forests. The members all agreed that this was an important statement and discussed how specific recommendation should be with respect to where the elevated role should be placed within the structure of state government, e.g., DCR, the Department of Agriculture, and the difficulties of reorganization of state agencies and possible unintended consequences. The legislature has directed the Executive Office of Environment and Energy to examine the issue. The TSC agreed to set forth several alternative recommendations about how the issue might be resolved, all of which could accomplish the underlying goal of elevating the role of forests and avoiding further fragmentation of

oversight. The group recognized that addressing public forests in other agencies was not within their mandate but might be an issue that is highlighted as it relates to the elevation of the role of all public forests.

Recommendation 2 – Policies for Privately Owned Forests. The TSC discussed the implications of a recommendation that would require a licensed forester to sign off on all timber harvest plans. Most of the group agreed that this was desirable but had been a contentious issue for some time and was likely to continue to be so in other forums. This issue will be revisited prior to finalizing draft recommendations. A member noted that the Chapter 132 regulations should be incorporated in this recommendation and that the draft regulations, as yet unreleased, would require the knowledge of a licensed forester to implement. Chapter 132 is seen as a good educational tool and the group was encouraged to read Section 40 of the chapter.

There are a number of specific recommendations concerning promotion of good forestry on private lands, for example tax credits for management plans, and opportunities presented by new legislation such as the new state climate law. The TSC discussed if there was sufficient information about the fiscal and other impacts of each of these items to make these specific recommendations for implementation or whether they should be recommended as items to be carefully considered for implementation. An important element in the discussion was the desire to promote good forestry on private lands and how to create value in keeping lands as forests. Tom Walker will discuss with several members what language would make them feel comfortable. The TSC may also try to gain a sense of the sentiment of the various interests groups on the Advisory Group of Stakeholders (AGS) on this issue at the upcoming joint meeting.

Recommendation 3 – Ecosystem Service Priorities for State Lands. The TSC had framed the ecosystem services for DCR lands in a way that prioritizes those services which public lands are uniquely capable of addressing. The group discussed whether wood products should be prioritized as essential or desirable in light of a number of issues without reference to any particular harvest level. Those issues included: the goal of any forestry on DCR lands to model best practices and demonstration, the use of wood products by residents, benefits to the local economy, silviculture as a means of habitat diversification, sustainable harvesting that will not externalize to the detriment of other forests, and the promotion of higher level of expertise and equipment specifications that will influence private forest management. Several members felt strongly about this and others were cautious that prioritization as essential. After further discussion the group agreed that wood products be an essential ecosystem service on woodland but not on parks and reserves. The later discussion, some of which was deferred to future meetings, addressed to allocation to woodlands and possible caps on harvesting to prevent abuse of this ecosystem service.

DCR analysis of zones. During the discussion DCR and EEA responded as to the status of applying the landscape zoning model and criteria. Stephanie Cooper noted that DCR was continuing to develop better estimates of the allocation. At this point in time, they are looking beyond the initial estimate of parklands at 35,000 acres and continuing the analysis looking at issues such as trail density, household data (population proximity) and other factors. The number of acres in parklands is expected to increase significantly. Recreational uses within other contexts are also being examined. By way of example, she cited Mount Greylock which has a parkway, trails, a campground, and visitor center. A TSC member noted that the Audubon Losing Ground Report provides several useful criteria for looking at parklands. Stephanie Cooper noted that having multiple zones within one property seemed feasible from a management perspective but have multiple agencies managing different zones seemed much more difficult. The issue of potential double counting as both reserve and parkland in a place such as Mount Greylock was flagged.

As part of the discussion of recreation DCR staff noted that if recreational uses were to change, they would have to engage in an outreach process concerning any changes.

DCR is also continuing the analysis of reserves and woodlands. The current estimate for reserves including existing reserves and patch reserves, adding the core areas in the TNC analysis and from the TSC straw proposal indicate at least 74,000 as reserves from existing DCR lands. Additional analysis is ongoing.

In looking at places that might be most appropriate as woodlands DCR is using criteria including: forest soils, vegetation suitability and active forest management model (see attached handout). DCR is building a computer model which classifies the land based on these criteria and the initial impression is favorable in terms of non-overlap with parklands and reserves. DCR will provide additional information in the near future.

Recommendation 4 – DCR Landscape Planning Model. The TSC confirmed the landscape zoning model discussed at previous meetings. They also agreed to ensure the language is clear that for reserves natural process will be allowed to dominate even though this may significantly change the appearance of the landscape and perhaps the type or level of biodiversity. By having reserves and woodlands it will provide for a variety of approaches to natural, invasive and anthropogenic processes.

The group agreed that language and terminology needs to be consistent throughout the recommendations. Discussion of the allocation among the zones was deferred until more information from the DCR analysis is available.

The TSC discussed the possibility of creating a wilderness designation within some reserves. In these areas there would be no mechanized uses. The areas are intended to create a different type of visitor experience and no new trails would be established in these areas. After discussion the TSC agreed that, because they are in keeping with indigenous practices, they would recommend that on a site-by-site basis wilderness areas might allow fishing and bow hunting but not other forms of hunting.

Recommendation 5 – Management of Reserves. The TSC noted that the recommendations parallel DCR's current management practices for reserves. Several member expressed concern that invasive species could have significant impact on reserves. The facilitator noted that, given the prior controversy, the TSC may want to closely examine the decision making process and public involvement should any active management be necessary to address invasive species control.

For reserves the minimum discussed at the prior meeting included adding large reserves in two of the ecological landscape units not represented in the current reserve system. An AGS member noted that the AGS reserves work group had suggested greater redundancy in reserves.

Recommendation 6 – Management Approaches for Parklands. The TSC discussed the implications of allowing or not allowing revenue from timber sales as a result of cleanup or other work on parklands. All recognized that the agency is under severe fiscal pressures. Visitors have expectations about the appearance of parklands and there are safety concerns. A member expressed the concern that if revenues are not retained then some parks could be forced to close. Others noted that there was little or any net revenue from parklands. The suggestion was made for a recommendation to retain a higher percentage of user fees for maintenance of parklands. The group agreed that language be highlighted that any harvesting

be for the purpose of recreational use safety and enhancement not for the purpose of deriving general revenue. The TSC discussed whether DCR might be able to enter partnerships with others concerning recreational facilities and how this might reduce overhead. Stephanie Cooper noted that this was being discussed now with respect to some ice skating rinks and swimming pools. The group confirmed they were comfortable with the recommendation and that they would address the revenue question in the recommendation on resources.

Recommendation 7 – Management approaches for Woodlands. Joe Zorzin noted his initial impression that the primary difference of where the recommendation may differ from the Save America's Future Act is that the latter does not allow for any even-aged management techniques. The current recommendation calls for the ability to perform over story removal up to five acre and for any larger openings that a public consultation process be required. Consequently, in tertiary forests even aged management, including shelterwoods, would be permitted up to 5 acres. All agreed that forest managers should have all silvicultural methods available to them but that necessity of using some of the techniques should be rare.

The TSC agreed that an explicit statement on biomass harvesting will need to be included in the recommendations. One way it has been addressed implicitly is through a recommendation that tops and branches be left in the forests after a harvest. Chair Lisa Vernegaard will draft a paragraph to address biomass. The group may also want to consider recommendations placing an overall limit on the removal of wood from DCR forests. The group will revisit other aspects of cutting practices including improvement of best management practices.

Recommendation 8 – Organizational Structure of DCR, Decision-making and Planning. The TSC was comfortable with this recommendation.

Recommendation 9 – Improving Public Process. This recommendation will be redrafted to make it parallel to other recommendations and generalize it to all DCR lands.

Other Topics:

- Legal. Bill Logue will reach out to Kate Connolly about the legal mandate issues.
- Resources. The TSC will consider what recommendations may require resources and email their thoughts directly for Tom Walker.

Upcoming Meeting:

The TSC schedule another meeting for November 24 from 8 – 11 AM. At the meeting they will discuss FSC certification, receive additional information on the allocation from among the landscape zones, and ???.

Future Schedule:

The current plan is to have a joint meeting with the AGS in early December to discuss the recommendations followed by TSC meeting to finalize a draft for public release in early January 2010. There will be public forums and a public comment period.