Response to the Report of the Climate Forestry Committee



Mohawk Trail State Forest, image by Paul Jahnige

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Background

The Healey-Driscoll Administration pursued the Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative due to the critical role forests play in addressing climate change. Conservation and effective management of forest land, based on the latest science, are an essential element to ensuring crucial carbon storage and advancing climate change resilience.

Removal of carbon from the atmosphere is necessary to attain global, national, and state climate change goals. Since there is no technology currently available that can remove carbon dioxide at scale, natural and working lands protection is a vital mitigation strategy. Forests are also a vital climate change resilience strategy. For example, as recently documented in A Century of Reforestation Reduced Anthropogenic Warming in the Eastern United States, forests in our region have been found to cool nearby air by almost 2 degrees Fahrenheit.

The forests of Massachusetts are living resources that connect people to the land and each other, contributing to our quality of life. With over 57% of the state forested, the state's very character is defined by forests. Forests contribute benefits to people in the Commonwealth every day by mitigating greenhouse gas emissions through carbon sequestration and storage, providing aesthetically pleasing landscapes for people to recreate and learn about conservation, fostering the state's wildlife biodiversity, acting as a natural filter for public drinking water supplies, and providing material for long-lived wood products. Forests as Climate Solutions at its core is about how we manage our forests to meet our legal obligations for mitigation while balancing the many benefits forests provide. The overall idea is to employ active and passive management strategies to protect our forest ecosystems and enhance forest cover, grow existing carbon stocks and sequestration capacity while also achieving other Commonwealth goals.

Since early in the 20th century, the Commonwealth has employed professional foresters and ecologists, biologists, and other natural resource managers to carefully steward the state's forest land for current and future generations, guided by a number of state laws. The state's forest management has evolved over time and is at a point where it is necessary to pivot again to address climate change. The increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, fire, pests and disease, and their impacts on our forests put a spotlight on our changing climate. At the same time, the trees in our forests have clear carbon sequestration and storage benefits, as documented in the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA) Land Sector Report. The role of forests is also recognized in the Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050 goal to conserve 40% of all the land and waters in the Commonwealth. To reach net zero by 2050 the Commonwealth will look to forests to sequester approximately half of the projected residual emissions. As such, forests are an essential climate solution to the Commonwealth.

Climate Forestry Committee

The Commonwealth is grateful to the members of the Climate Forestry Committee (CFC) for the time and expertise they devoted to providing recommendations for forest management on the public lands stewarded by the Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP) and the Division of State Parks and Recreation (DSPR) within the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) within the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Of diverse background and expertise, the 12 members of the Committee, all recognized scientific experts, brought tremendous knowledge and experience to their charge – development of a set of recommended climate-oriented

guidelines, based on the latest science, to be incorporated into the forest land management plans and practices of the three divisions. Their completed work, entitled "Report of the Climate Forestry Committee: Recommendations for Climate-Oriented Forest Management Guidelines" was issued in January 2024. The Report provides background information on the Committee and Massachusetts forests and details their thoughtful recommendations on forest management and the Initiative.

From the outset of the Forest as Climate Solutions Initiative, the Commonwealth has committed to employing a science-based, ecologically informed, landscape approach to forest management that prioritizes areas that will have the greatest positive impact and odds of success at sequestering and storing carbon while enhancing resilience, accommodating disturbances, restoring degraded ecosystems, protecting biodiversity, and transitioning highly stressed and vulnerable forests.

The Commonwealth is especially mindful that the decisions made today to incorporate the recommendations of the Committee into our work will shape our state's forests for generations. Climate considerations must be factored into stewardship decisions and prescriptions for forest management with renewed and enhanced commitment to meeting our climate goals. We also recognize that our goal of protecting natural and working lands intersects with other policy goals, such as generating and transmitting renewable energy. Accordingly, we are actively working to ensure that renewable energy infrastructure development avoids conversion where possible, and that the next iteration of solar development incentives do not encourage conversion of forested land.

Introduction

This document outlines intended implementation of the recommendations of the Climate Forestry Committee (CFC) that was convened by the Commonwealth to obtain scientific guidance on climate-oriented management of forest land held by state agencies.

In some instances, that guidance was straightforward and represented a consensus position on the part of the 12 members of the Committee. In other cases, the Committee was not in agreement as to the best way to proceed, making it more challenging for the Commonwealth to determine how to incorporate those CFC recommendations into agency forest land management. Also given due consideration were verbal comments received at two public meetings and written comments, including more than 100 pertaining specifically to the Report recommendations, some quite lengthy and substantive, offering varying perspectives and ideas as to what should be done to implement the CFC's suggested guidelines.

The following summarizes the ways the Commonwealth will protect and manage forest land considering the guidelines articulated by the CFC. Thereafter a table details how specific recommendations are being considered and provides an implementation schedule.

In addition to addressing intended policies, this response also outlines intentions for those forest management projects that were paused at the outset of the Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative, and how new projects will be selected, planned, and monitored in the future.

Communications and Transparency

EEA, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) will place a strong emphasis on ensuring public access to information about the Commonwealth's forest management goals and activities as well as offering opportunities to engage and shape them. As part of this effort to inform and involve the public, each agency will follow similar outreach and input processes developed with agency communications staff. This pertains to establishment and pursuit of objectives in long-term forest management plans as well as specific projects. Annually the agencies will issue a list that includes all priority projects, accompanied by cutting plans and other information on the intent and approach of specific projects to be undertaken that year. For example, when advancing a project intended to enhance resilience, agencies will be specific as to the forest element or characteristic to be made more resilient, the potential disturbance(s) being addressed, and the benefits of the proposed management prescription.

Data and Monitoring

Critical to public confidence in agency stewardship of state forest land is access to information on the status of forests, progress toward climate change commitments, the outcomes of management projects, and many related topics. Recognizing this, the Commonwealth is issuing an annual Climate Report Card to track progress toward Clean Energy and Climate Plan goals, developing a common web landing point to provide easier access to information about forests across the agencies, and a providing a "dashboard" to track metrics and progress toward them.

In addition, to provide more data on forests in Massachusetts and better inform land conservation and management decisions, the Commonwealth is significantly expanding the number of forest inventory plots, acquiring more forest inventory and analysis data from the federal government, and obtaining additional Geographic Information System (GIS) data and imagery. Data on harvested wood processing and utilization is also being procured to help shape efforts to sequester more carbon in long-lived wood products and better understand wood imports and the carbon footprint of our wood consumption.

A commitment to metrics and transparency also applies to documenting the outcomes of management projects. Final cutting plans verifying compliance with plan intentions and relevant regulations will be posted, agencies will conduct and report on long-term monitoring to determine whether project outcomes are as intended, and research will be undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of management approaches, such as the designation of additional reserves to advance carbon and habitat goals, in achieving desired outcomes.

Forest Land Conservation

The CFC emphasized the importance of keeping forests as forests, and the Commonwealth concurs. Retaining forests is foundational to effective management and to meeting our climate goals. Significant time, attention, and resources are being devoted to realizing land conservation goals and avoiding conversion of unprotected forest land to a non-forest use, such as development. Funding is being secured, grant programs created, agency conservation criteria modified, a holistic land use plan developed,

landowner incentives offered, a coalition of allies convened, and many other actions pursued to increase the number of permanently protected forested acres – both privately held, and state owned.

Forest Land Management

To realize the carbon, habitat, and other benefits forest reserves provide, the Commonwealth, in collaboration with other forest landowners, will seek to establish reserves on 10% of all the forested land in Massachusetts, about 300,000 acres across all ownerships, as recommended by the CFC. This represents more than a doubling of the amount of land currently held in reserves. The Commonwealth will pursue a more formal codification of those on state land to enhance their level of protection beyond what is today an agency-level administrative decision.

A key question regarding forest land management, whether the objective is a more resilient forest, protection of a public water supply, or carbon sequestration, is to what degree approaches from both the active and passive ends of the spectrum of management techniques are employed. As to this question, the CFC was split with some recommending passive management in most circumstances, and others endorsing active management as the best way to manage forests with climate change in mind. Similarly, cited research and other data reviewed by the Commonwealth support both active and passive management and public comment on this topic was evenly split.

Given divergent opinion and science regarding the best forest management approach, the Commonwealth will employ a mix of active and passive techniques, with preference for passive management techniques, which the CFC agreed would confer greater increases in carbon stocks compared with active management.

The Commonwealth will determine annually where and how to manage land outside reserves to achieve land management objectives, with active management projected to occur on very limited acreage, less than 1% of state forest land holdings, and passive management on the balance. This means careful consideration of the circumstances and locations in which active management is advanced and enhancing prior practice by utilizing climate forestry techniques recommended by the Committee.

Regarding management for habitat purposes, the CFC recommended reducing goals for early successional habitat on DFG land. Revised goals for specific habitat types are presently being considered via implementation of Executive Order 618 “Biodiversity Conservation in Massachusetts”. Recognizing the carbon implications, the Commonwealth will employ active management to sustain biodiversity for at-risk and *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* in selectively sited ecological landscapes. As with active management for other purposes, the full range of options to provide early successional habitat and the specific forestry prescriptions the CFC recommended will be considered to address climate change mitigation and resilience.

Resources

The Commonwealth has begun implementing many Forests as Climate Solutions commitments utilizing its annual capital funds and one-time federal funds. Specific scopes of work for other aspects are under development as indicated in the table that follows. To be clear, realization of intended actions in virtually every aspect of the Initiative will require additional funding and more staff capacity than the agencies presently possess. Prime examples include conserving an additional 685,000 acres of land, monitoring over 1,000 additional forest inventory plots, gathering information and analyzing the outcomes of various land

management approaches over the course of decades, and providing robust incentives to landowners to conserve and manage their forest land with climate change in mind.

Application of New Forest Management Guidelines

When the Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative was launched in June 2023, 66 forest management projects not yet under contract were paused by DCR's Divisions of Water Supply Protection and State Parks and Recreation and DFG's Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) pending recommendations to be issued by the Climate Forestry Committee. These projects were at various stages within the planning and pre-bid award process, though many were bid ready.

Following the issuance of the Report of the Climate Forestry Committee in January of 2024, the divisions, working together, carefully reviewed how the proposed forest management activities within those paused projects align with programmatic recommendations presented in the Report and with the climate-oriented forest management strategies contained in the tables in Appendix A of the Climate Forestry Committee's Report. To do so the divisions created a crosswalk of the three tables to group common themes and develop standard language to consider and explain climate-oriented practices that will be used by the Commonwealth for future prescriptions on state managed lands. Using a resulting Climate considerations worksheet and the recommendations contained in the Report, the agencies then reviewed the goals and prescriptions of all of the paused projects, grouped the projects into categories, and made recommendations as to how each should proceed which have been approved by agency leadership. The result is as follows:

- Projects in alignment with climate considerations and appropriate to advance - 29
- Projects modified to emphasize plantation removal or otherwise align with climate considerations and are now ready to advance - 18
- Projects that continue to be on pause pending policy updates (e.g., salvage harvesting) - 10
- Projects inconsistent with CFC recommendations that will not proceed - 9

Thus, of the 66 paused projects 47 will proceed to bid (18 with modifications), 10 await further policy development, and 9 will not be pursued. Many of the projects that are proceeding will be bid without further process (having completed the approval process previously), others did not complete the project approval process prior to the pause and will resume review from the appropriate stage in the process.

Finally, the three divisions are resuming their selection and vetting of forest management projects, applying the climate considerations and approach outlined below.

Response to the Climate Forestry Committee (CFC) Report: Detail and Implementation Schedule

The following table details the Commonwealth's response within major topic areas identified in the Climate Forestry Committee Report and provides a schedule for intended deliverables.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Communication, Transparency & Oversight of State Projects	The CFC report cites the importance of explaining how specific forest management projects connect to overall forest, habitat, and land management goals in order to help the public understand the longer-term outcomes the Commonwealth is seeking. It recommends that the Divisions develop an annual list of priority projects for active management and provide a clear rationale for each. The three divisions will make this information public, with increased focus on explaining the "bigger picture" context of individual projects. The Commonwealth will also provide more information about how passive management techniques are being employed in service of forest land management objectives. They will also follow similar public outreach and input processes, developed in collaboration with agency communications staff, for specific forestry projects, including advance public posting of forest cutting plans for state management projects. As part of this, DFW will implement an enhanced public process. The Divisions will augment communications and outreach efforts about forestry programs, including outreach to Environmental Justice (EJ) communities, through dedication of additional staffing resources. In addition, existing information on state land management is being made more readily accessible and data added to address gaps. Most notably, for each state management project, the Forest Cutting Plan, including the final post-project version where the service forester documents compliance with the plan and relevant statutes, will be publicly posted online.	Changes to the existing Mass.gov forestry pages to provide a common landing page will be made in the spring of 2024, and broader changes to address CFC recommendations will be made by the end of calendar 2024, such as the inclusion of information on the full continuum of forest management activities. In addition, the website will provide Forest Cutting Plans, including the final post-project version where compliance with the plan and relevant statutes is documented. Next, updates and enhancements will be made to the DCR Service Forestry webpage to include resources like the "forest cutting plan final inspection checklist," a sign off template utilized by Service Forestry staff. Finally, new project proposals will include expanded information (as described at left) and all new project proposals will be evaluated using the accepted guidance from the CFC recommendations. This process will be included as a component of the online updates.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Data	Online Dashboard: A proposal for dashboard content and appearance is under review. Land cover, forest types, carbon storage, disturbances (e.g., wildfire), and other data will be displayed and routinely updated enabling goal setting and progress tracking.	A proposal for the online dashboard is under review, a work plan is being developed to provide the necessary funding and staff, and the launch of the dashboard is expected by early 2025.
Monitoring	The three divisions presently conduct varying levels of long-term monitoring to evaluate forest conditions and measure how project goals are being advanced. Consistent with a CFC recommendation the Commonwealth will pursue a more robust common approach to long-term monitoring of completed land management projects and document outcomes, intended and otherwise. A proposal is being developed to detail the intended monitoring approach, which the Commonwealth plans to enhance over time through dedication of expanded resources. Regarding Continuous Forest Inventory (CFI) data the Commonwealth intends to: • Add about 1100 new plots to cover DFW lands and about 100 new plots to cover land that DCR recently acquired and former Metropolitan District Commission properties without them. • Explore enhancements to the data acquired on each CFI plot (e.g., soil data); and • Propose a staffing plan and budget for a single comprehensive program to monitor CFI plots across state land holdings. The Commonwealth intends to acquire additional Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data from the U.S. Forest Service, and a scope of work and budget are being developed.	• The number of CFI plots will expand modestly over the course of 2024 while a more detailed workplan is developed by the three divisions to increase CFI monitoring across all state lands in 2025. • Additionally, state lands managers will review the current monitoring practices on CFI plots and track the outcome of forest land management projects to identify opportunities to streamline and offer more transparency and expanded data collection to the work being done. • A scope of work is under development and the Commonwealth expects to enter into a contract in the fall of 2024 to acquire expanded forest inventory data and analysis that will be delivered in 2025 or 2026.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Biodiversity & Early Successional Habitat	• The Commonwealth is addressing a number of CFC recommendations related to land and forest management for habitat purposes by establishing early successional and other habitat goals pursuant to Executive Order (EO) 618 "Biodiversity Conservation". • The recommendations established via EO implementation will encompass not just state land holdings but all natural lands. • Recognizing the carbon sequestration and storage implications, when necessary to meet habitat goals the Commonwealth will manage land to sustain biodiversity for at-risk species and *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* in selectively sited ecological landscapes. • The Commonwealth will evaluate alternatives to cutting maturing forest to create early successional habitat and their costs that were suggested by the CFC and seek additional funding if these alternatives prove to be effective and cost efficient. • As with all forest/habitat management activities the Commonwealth will articulate habitat goals in planning documents and be explicit about those projects intended to realize them.	The DFG led effort to implement EO 618 - "Biodiversity Conservation in Massachusetts" - will release goals for a wide variety of habitat types, including early successional, in the fall of 2024. Several suggested alternatives to cutting mature forest to create early successional habitat are viable and being considered in certain locations. However, they are expensive, and a budget is being developed and funding must be secured before it will be feasible to implement them.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Soils & Best Management Practices	The Commonwealth agrees with the CFC that the best way to protect forest soils is to avoid activities that disturb or damage soils, a passive management approach that the agencies will be implementing as discussed in the section on sequestration. However, when management is prescribed to meet various ecological, water supply, recreational, and other goals of the Commonwealth the agencies will employ exemplary practices that reduce soil disturbance, compaction, soil mixing, and erosion as a necessary part of both planning and implementing management activities. To implement the recommendations of the CFC and protect the considerable amount of carbon stored in forest soils the agencies will: • Allow more forests to mature through passive management. • Produce, via an effort led by DCR's Service Forestry Program, an updated Best Management Practices (BMP) Manual that incorporates climate change considerations, such as greater stormwater volume from more frequent and intense storms. The Manual includes BMPs that are required under 302 CMR 16.00, the Forest Cutting Practices Regulations, that must be implemented for all forestry, regardless of ownership. The Commonwealth will require both the mandatory and recommended BMPs to be followed on state lands. • Perform exemplary forestry by limiting new forest roads and skid trails, incorporating to the maximum extent feasible recommended BMPs from the Manual into procurements and contracts as required elements and documenting project compliance, and otherwise employing practices that reduce soil disruption during harvesting. • Implement the Healthy Soils Action Plan including provision of incentives for public and private forest landowners to employ practices that protect vulnerable soils.	Already a variety of actions have been taken to enhance forest management practices. • Passive management techniques are being utilized in conjunction with landscape level planning and exemplary practices to disturb or damage soils as little as possible. • Active management techniques are being employed following BMPs and relevant CFC recommendations. • Exemplary practice is being embraced for all forest land management work. • Implementation of the Healthy Soils Plan is underway, including the review of projects proposed by municipalities, non-profits, and other eligible parties pursuant to a procurement issued by EEA. The announcement of a first round of funded projects is expected in May 2024. Release of a new BMP manual is expected in June 2025. New incentives that address best practices for soil management have already been introduced, including the Climate Stewardship Incentive (C-SIP) program. C-SIP Option 1 and C-SIP Option 5 and a new timber mat program all directly address soils. Both programs were launched in March 2024 as a component of the Private Lands Incentive branch of the Forest as Climate Solutions Initiative.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Invasive Plants/Pests & Pathogens	The Commonwealth agrees with the CFC on the significant threat posed by pests and pathogens, the need to respond on a case-by-case basis, and the benefit of using standardized decision-making frameworks where practical. The agencies concur with the CFC recommendations in this section of the report and will take the following actions: • Review existing early detection and rapid response principles, the NY Department of Environmental Conservation rapid response framework, and other similar resources, and work with the expanded Forest Reserves Science Advisory Committee and other partners to document, expand upon, and make available decision protocols for the benefit of all forest landowners and managers. • Pre-salvage harvest (the removal of vulnerable healthy or recently affected trees to improve stand resilience by stopping or reducing the actual or anticipated impact of insects and/or disease) will be avoided except where necessary to protect public safety and where there is clear evidence that it can significantly alter the rate of spread or mitigate the impacts of a pest or pathogen. • Consider altering the location or timing of planned forest management to account for current locations of pest/pathogen impacted forest stands, and areas of likely future spread. • Expand, clarify, and broaden the charge and membership of the FRSAC to advise the agencies on pest and pathogen threats in Reserves on all state lands. • Make efforts to maintain genetic pools and diversity of threatened species and manage certain sites to diversify forest species composition and help reduce the impacts of an invasive pest/pathogen. • Continue to collaborate with MDAR to pursue measures to reduce the risk of accidental introduction of new invasive pests and pathogens.	By the fall of 2024 each Division will complete an interim update of its existing assessment approach and decision tree. Following that an updated assessment and decision protocol to be used by all three divisions, a calculation of the resources needed for effective implementation, expansion of the FRSAC, and other related efforts will be all be complete and available by the end of June 2025.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Invasive Plants/Pests & Pathogens (con't)	• Develop a scope of work and budget for a long-term strategy to provide a response framework for addressing invasives that builds on related efforts underway at DCR and DFW and seek the additional resources required to hire a vendor to produce it.	

Reserves	• The Commonwealth will expand the number and size of reserves to reach 10% of forested land of all ownerships (about 300,000 acres) as recommended by the CFC.
	• To achieve 10% the Commonwealth will work to designate more state land as reserves, acquire land to expand existing or create new reserves, and engage with other landowners to pursue the designation of additional federal, municipal, and private land.
	• To inform its response to the occurrence of pests, pathogens, and invasive plants in forest reserves across land held for more diverse purposes than was previously the case (i.e., the addition of wildlife management areas) the Commonwealth will broaden the charge and expand the membership of the Forest Reserves Science Advisory Committee (FRSAC) to incorporate additional expertise (e.g., a wildlife biologist). The Committee was created to advise the Division of State Parks and Recreation regarding management issues in Reserves; the expanded Committee will advise all three divisions.
	• Work is ongoing in regard to establishing:
	  ○ Allowable activities within reserves (e.g., prescribed burns occur on a small proportion of reserves currently) and on the process for and degree of intervention that would be allowed to address disturbances.
	  ○ The best approach to codification of reserves on state land and the drafting and pursuit of legislation to implement it.
	  ○ The specifics of a monitoring protocol to compare reserve outcomes to actively managed areas.
		The Commonwealth will work to:
		• Have a reserve definition, including management and intervention protocols, established in the fall of 2024.
		• Issue a solicitation in the summer of 2024 for grants to support new reserves and begin agency acquisitions to expand reserves in FY25.
		  ○ $8 million in one-time federal funding has been set aside to acquire additional reserve land. As with all land conservation efforts additional permanent funding is needed to meet conservation goals.
		• Achieve the 10% of forest land managed as a reserve objective by 2030, with interim goals.
		• Have a monitoring protocol in place by the end of 2025.
		
		Conversations with other owners of conserved land with reserve potential will begin in the summer of 2024
		
		A proposal to revise the membership and charge of the FRSAC is under review and the Commonwealth intends to have an updated FRSAC in place in the fall of 2024.
		
		The filing of legislation to codify reserves on state land is anticipated at the start of the next legislative session.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Ecological Disturbance/Salvage Logging	The Commonwealth agrees with the CFC that salvage harvesting - the removal of trees that are dead, dying, toppled or damaged as a result of an extensive disturbance such as a disease or insect infestation, windstorm, ice storm, or fire - should be limited and guided by criteria for when it is appropriate to balance the carbon, soil, and habitat benefits of leaving dead wood in the forest. Draft conditions under which salvage harvesting will be considered have been developed. Work is underway to finalize and determine how policies and plans are best updated to apply them.	In the fall of 2024, the Commonwealth will adopt an updated salvage policy to be utilized by the three divisions. Pending the new salvage policy, hazard trees and those that may impact public safety will continue to be addressed on case-by-case basis.
Private Forest Lands	Funding for DCR's Working Forest Initiative has been increased to support Forests as Climate Solutions (permanent funding expansion is still needed). • Additional assistance is being provided to forest landowners to support development of management plans. • Climate forestry materials are available, and training is offered to licensed foresters. • A new cost-share incentive encourages landowners to develop and follow a climate forestry plan. • The Climate Stewardship Incentive Program (C-SIP) has been launched providing financial incentives to forest landowners to employ practices focused on soil protection, carbon retention, and increased forest adaptive capacity. The first of what are intended to be annual gatherings was held to discuss how forest landowners and forest-based businesses can provide needed wood products in more climate friendly and economically and environmentally sustainable ways.	In support of Forests as Climate Solutions, and to implement CFC recommendations, DCR's Working Forest Initiative offered a new landowner technical assistance program in February 2024 and the Climate Stewardship Incentive and timber mat reimbursement programs a month later. Evaluation of landowner incentive options will be complete by the end of fiscal year 2025 and a memorandum issued with recommendations, pertaining to Ch. 61 and other alternative approaches. The CANOPY forest forum was held in March, the first of an annual event series focused on providing wood products in climate and environmentally friendly ways. The Commonwealth will address updates to Chapter 132 and the associated regulations by the end of December 2025.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Private Forest Lands (con't)	As to development of new incentives for passive management and land conservation, data is being gathered (e.g., confirming estimates of the amount needed to achieve parity with harvest proceeds) and options explored (e.g., enhancements to the current use tax incentive, ecosystem services compensation, use of grants to encourage climate friendly actions, carbon credit acquisition, etc.) to inform the provision of additional incentives for passive management and land conservation . In regard to Ch. 61 review and enhancement EEA will examine Chapter 61 current use programs and otherwise explore incentives, including those for passive management. To promote compliance with Forest Cutting Plans and relevant statutes the Commonwealth plans to pursue updates to Ch. 132 and the associated regulations to provide service foresters with enhanced enforcement authority.	

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Sequestration	The CFC strongly agreed that MA forests can continue to store carbon for many decades, that it is not practical to manage forests to optimize tree age in an effort to maximize the sequestration rate, and that passive management intended to allow more trees to mature into old age generally confers greater increases in carbon stocks than active management. To implement CFC sequestration recommendations the Commonwealth will: • Strive to create forest reserves, the most passive of management approaches, on 10% of the forested land in MA (of all ownerships), including additional land managed by the three divisions. • Annually determine where and how to manage land outside reserves to achieve land management objectives, with active management projected to occur on very limited acreage, less than 1% of state forest land holdings, and passive management on the balance. • Establish and annually assess/update 3-year project plans. • Perform active management considering the recommendations of the CFC and other climate adaptation experts (e.g., retain some old trees by using multi-aged silviculture systems.) • Seek to maximize the amount of harvested wood in long-lived products. • Prohibit deliberate removal of older forest to create younger forests primarily for the purpose of enhancing annual carbon sequestration. • Work to address wood use and leakage concerns.	To address sequestration recommendations the Commonwealth will: • Seek to realize 10% of forest land (of all ownerships) held as reserves by 2030. • Employ passive approaches for almost all state forest land management and use active land management techniques on limited acreage, selected annually, projected to be less than 1% of state forest land. • Expand, over the course of FY25, efforts to get more harvested wood into long-lived wood products. • Work to reduce overall consumption and produce more wood consumed in MA on non-state forest holdings through research and other efforts funded in FY25 and beyond.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Resilience	While most CFC members agreed that age and species diversity increase resilience at a landscape scale, there was significant disagreement as to whether the Commonwealth should actively manage to enhance diversity. Consistent with the recommendations of some CFC members, the Commonwealth will augment natural disturbances with judicious active forest management focused on enhancing ecological integrity and function, that in turn increase forest resilience to climate change and other stressors. Active management that enhances the complexity of forest structure and diversifies species composition will help forests transition to future conditions that sustain societal ecosystem services expectations and reduce the potential for large swings in carbon stocks from disturbances. Managing actively may also help address data that shows carbon loss from tree death exceeding storage from growth in some stands. To address the concerns of some CFC members regarding active management, and to enhance current practice, the Commonwealth will adopt the CFC recommendations pertaining to how active management is best performed including: • Focus active management for resilience on areas recommended by the CFC and most at risk and in need of ecological restoration/climate resilience such as plantation monocultures, compositionally and structurally simple stands, forests heavily infested with non-native invasive plants, exposed stands, and forests with regeneration failure due to heavy deer browsing. Also, employ passive management techniques such as tree shelters, invasive species management, planting for increasing tree species diversity, etc. • Be specific and transparent when advancing a project intended to enhance resilience as to the forest element or characteristic to be made more resilient, the potential disturbance(s) being	CFC recommendations pertaining to climate considerate forest management, including those addressing utilization of active techniques, are already being incorporated into agency land management. The manner in which paused projects are being handled began to do this, and as new projects are selected and advanced the recommendations will be more comprehensively reflected. Among the changes to be implemented as new projects are initiated over the summer of 2024 is enhanced transparency – for example greater specificity will be provided for projects intended to advance resilience. The process of developing resilience metrics is expected to take nine months, with application to follow in 2025. A methodology to scientifically study the outcomes of a range of alternative passive and active resilience and adaptation strategies over an extended period of time will be developed for proposed funding in the FY26 capital budget.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Resilience (con't)	addressed, and how the proposed management prescription improves the situation. • Promote resilience when managing for other objectives. • Develop and use resilience metrics to evaluate and manage forests. • Engage in further study and discussion including the timeframes and metrics being used to quantify resilience and the potential for experimentation, trials, and evaluation of resilience and adaptation strategies on agency land (which will require additional funding).	
Water Supply Protection	The CFC did not reach consensus as to whether active forestry is necessary on watershed lands to support water quality. Credible science was cited both supporting and opposing active management. Given this circumstance, and that to date active management has contributed to maintaining a healthy forest filter that protects the water supply, the Division of Water Supply Protection will continue to utilize a broad range of forest management strategies across a spectrum from passive to active, with an emphasis on passive, to manage watershed forests. In so doing, it will assess where passive management can best achieve management objectives and otherwise ensure that the climate guidelines recommended by the CFC are reflected in the decision-making process and forestry operations.	The Division will demonstrate and expand the use of passive management, including the designation of Forest Reserves on Water Supply lands. Land management objectives will be clearly articulated both at the program and the project level and the forestry proposal process will be explicit, transparent and go through both internal and public review as documented in the Division's current Land Management Plans. Finally, CFC recommendations pertaining to performing forest management with climate in mind, including those addressing utilization of active techniques, will be considered in agency land management.
Wood Production	The Commonwealth does not presently manage agency land specifically to produce wood and has no intention of doing so. Wood production will continue to be an ancillary benefit of management for other purposes. When wood is harvested to achieve land management goals, the Commonwealth will	The Commonwealth will continue to fund and otherwise support research, development, production, and use of innovative long-lived wood products, especially those that provide a market for those tree species that lack commercial value

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Wood Production (con't)	seek to maximize the amount utilized in long-lived wood products. The Commonwealth will seek to demonstrate new and innovative techniques on state managed land as a model for other forest landowners. To produce more of the wood used in MA locally and in a climate-oriented and environmentally friendly way, the Commonwealth will provide training, incentives, and other tools to forest landowners and forest-based businesses as discussed under Incentives.	in order to help avoid high-grading and facilitate good forestry practice. See "Incentives" above for information on Commonwealth efforts to encourage climate-oriented local wood production. As state forest management projects are conceived going forward forest land managers will look for opportunities for innovative forestry as a model for others.
Landscape Scale Planning & Goals	To implement CFC recommendations the Commonwealth will: • Employ a science-based, ecologically informed, landscape approach to management that prioritizes areas that will have the greatest positive impact and chances of success at enhancing resilience, accommodating disturbances, restoring degraded ecosystems, protecting biodiversity, and transitioning highly stressed and vulnerable forests. • Incorporate into the holistic land use plan that EEA will develop, landscape-scale climate concerns applicable to forests and other natural and working lands to ensure their consideration as energy infrastructure and housing is developed pursuant to the recommendations of the Energy Infrastructure Siting and Unlocking Housing Production Commissions. • Pursue a mix of forest management approaches, from active to passive, strategically across the landscape to advance varying and complex goals, account for uncertainties in future conditions and ecosystem responses, and mitigate climate change risks. ○ Complete a forest vulnerability and risk assessment to inform forest management goals for carbon and climate resilience.	Agencies will assess current practice and develop an approach to enhancing landscape scale goals and planning strategies by the end of 2024. CFC recommendations will be incorporated into existing management and action plans as updates are made. Key plans to which this applies, and the pertinent timing are: • State Wildlife Action Plan - fall 2025 • Forest Action Plan - Must be reviewed in 2025 • DCR State Parks and Recreation Division Landscape Designations 10-year review - fall 2024 • Watershed Land Management Plan – DCR will utilize the upcoming mid-stage review as an opportunity to address CFC recommendations. • DCR Forest Resource Management Plan -Winter 24-25

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Landscape Scale Planning & Goals (con't)	○ Maintain a forest landscape with diverse age and size classes of trees to sustain both carbon storage and sequestration benefits over the long-term. • Advance landscape continuity and ecological integrity by promoting connectivity and conservation of forest blocks that represent the variety of MA forest types, managing adjoining parcels in a complementary way, and coordinating land conservation and stewardship across large areas. • Set management goals for all forest land, recognizing that state forests are inescapably linked to surrounding land and that decisions made regarding state forest management should reflect impacts outside state forests. • Develop and articulate a set of landscape goals shared across the three Divisions that address climate change. Underneath that umbrella, pursue and develop more specific programmatic goals. For example, DSPR will develop a Forest Resource Management plan, DWSP will update its 10-year management plan, and DFW will update the State Wildlife Action Plan. • Complete management plans to help prioritize annual work plans and inform land acquisition that consider agency land in the context of the surrounding landscape and seek to integrate agency management approaches with those of other landscape partners (e.g., municipalities, land trusts, & private forest owners).	Planning for the completion of a Holistic Land Use Plan is underway, and work on the plan will begin in earnest in the summer of 2024. A completed Plan is expected in early 2025. The proposed format under consideration is a GIS tool intended to facilitate collaborative attainment of multiple state land use goals, including housing production and land conservation.

Category	Implementation Intent & Status	Deliverables and Schedule
Permanent Conservation & Avoided Conversion of Forest Land	The CFC and the Commonwealth are generally aligned in regard to permanent conservation and other efforts to keep forests as forests. To achieve these objectives the Commonwealth will: • Conserve 40% of the lands and waters in the Commonwealth by 2050 (the current commitment, rather than an increase to 50% as the CFC suggested) in order to permanently preclude conversion and ensure the benefits of natural land including sequestration and storage of carbon and provision of clean air and water. • Establish goals for increased conservation and reduced conversion of forest land. • Incorporate into criteria used to prioritize parcels for conservation potential to sequester and store carbon alongside other priorities such as habitat and water supply protection and the provision of opportunities for outdoor recreation. • Conserve land with ecological integrity and other landscape scale objectives in mind (e.g., conservation of forest cores; blocks & corridors). • Collaborate, through the Resilient Lands Conservation Coalition, with municipalities, land trusts, environmental groups, and other partners to attain conservation goals via implementation of the Resilient Lands Initiative. • Pursue enhanced data gathering, mapping, analysis, and provision of land use and related data to inform land conservation and land use policies and programs. • Ensure that the Holistic Land Use Plan supports attainment of land conservation and avoided land conversion goals. • Pursue additional funding as it is necessary to realize conservation goals.	Goals for land conservation at time-steps through 2050 are being established to ensure the Commonwealth stays on track to meet the 40% goal, and simultaneously achieves specific land conservation objectives, such as draft forest land acreage conservation goals for 2030 and 2050 (under review) and those to be established pursuant to the Biodiversity Executive Order. The Commonwealth will establish goals for reduced forest conversion by early 2025 as part of developing the Holistic Land Use Plan. Enhancements to land conservation criteria to better consider carbon sequestration, ecological integrity, and other Initiative goals will occur as spending plans are developed and criteria for state grant programs reconsidered at the outset of each fiscal year. A completed “Holistic Land Use Plan” that reflects forest conservation objectives is expected in early 2025, likely in the form of a GIS tool that addresses collaborative attainment of various land use and land conservation objectives. The Resilient Lands Conservation Coalition will be convened quarterly, and additional subcommittee meetings held to facilitate collaborative realization of land conservation goals. The Administration will continue to explore opportunities until sufficient funding is secured to meet state land conservation goals.