

Forest Practices Advisory Board
June 25th, 2015

Members Present: Dr. Mark Ashton, Ian Branson, Joan Nichols, Bruce Spaman, Thomas Degnan, Michael Bartlett, Chris Martin

DEEP Staff: Jennifer Hockla, Doug Emmerthal, Hannah Reichle (recorder)

Guests: Eric Hammerling

Members Absent: Joseph Theroux, Patrick Comins

Review/ approve minutes from January 22nd, 2015:

Thomas makes a motion to approve the minutes as written, Joan seconded. Unanimous vote to approve.

CT Forest Economic Analysis Report:

The last CT Forest Economic Analysis Report was written in 1998 by Steve Broderick. The current one was printed in large quantities to ensure that there will be enough copies until the next report is made. The reason that this report came to be is due to the fact that the Northern New England states such as NY, NH, ME got a grant to write a report based upon the forest of Northern New England and had money left over, so they generously offered to create a southern New England version as well. Eric suggested that copies should be brought to the legislator. Chris agreed and stated that the report came off the press at the end of session. It has gotten lots of media attention which is positive. He notes that some data came from FIA, which can have a sampling error attached to it. Chris stated that Chris Donnelly of CT DEEP looked into the data and asked questions such as the status and condition of hemlocks in Connecticut, something that was not thoroughly explained in the data. Chris suggests that the report be looked at more regionally than state based. It is clear that the economic role of the CT forest plays a large role. The question of forest recreation and what it means, implies and costs is brought up by Mark. Chris & Doug reply that it involves things like leaf peepers, hiking gear, bed and breakfasts, hunting fees but not park fees. Ecosystem services is something that also plays a large role. Jen brings up the fact that forests can impact water quality. Overall, it is clear that direct sales is easier to quantify in terms of economics compared to ecosystem services.

Doug would like to distribute the boxes to target focus groups. Certain possible groups include, municipal workers, last green valley, and timpro. Chris notes that the Yale's Landowner Objective report would also be a beneficial read because it looks at forests in the eyes of landowners and how they see the land. Joan suggests that the planners' listserv could be a viable option to distribute materials such as the Landowner Objective Guide & the Forest Economic Analysis Report. (PDF form is best)

2015 Legislative Update:

2015 is coming to a close. Chris often scans for things related closely to forestry. The biggest one currently is the firewood transportation bill that just got signed by the Governor this past week. Previously, there were no infractions in place for firewood violators and EnCon officers wanted to stay out of court for firewood cases.

Now, they will be able to issue infractions. First will come a warning, secondly a fine will occur in the form of \$200 for commercial acts and \$75 for residential small firewood bundle transportation. Currently Mike is hearing no back lash from the community. Chris mentioned that nobody wants to be a firewood cop, but DEEP is concerned with preserving the forest. People will need to carry a self-issued firewood permit stating where the wood is coming and where it is going to. It allows for public awareness and education. If they are going across state lines they will need to be issued permits from the CAES which is a 24 hour permit per job rather than a blanket permit. Bruce was curious to know if the DMV or weigh stations are involved. Chis explains that they are, and that in Union last year they checked firewood at a weigh station. Joan wonders if this is still for EAB prevention or ALB. Chris and Doug clarify that it is preventing ALB. Chris mentioned that the EAB spread is still very concerning if traveling into Rhode Island, where the insect has not been found. If a federal inspector catches someone transporting firewood from CT into RI, there would be lots of trouble.

Other bills that did not come to a final vote include Milford wanting to place a parking lot over endangered toad habitat. The tree liability bill did not pass either, but is likely to return at a later point in time. Open space bill to change watershed acquisition & the adverse possession bill did pass. Chris worked on the encroachment of state lands bill, which would require a public hearing to mitigate risk against encroachment. It may have addressed things like throwing invasive weeds into nearby woods. A good example is from a horse farm who extended their pasture into state lands. The horses destroyed 5 cords of trees. They had to purchase the wood that was destroyed. It comes down to trying to be good neighbors. (Eric believes this bill will be back)

The Farm Bureau explained by Joan, worked on raising the amount after which an inheritance tax would be imposed. They educated the General Assembly on the impacts it would have on landowners. While it would not be a large fiscal impact on the state, Joan talked about how it would be a huge impact to farmers once they hit a trigger point.

Northern Long Eared bat ESA listing update:

This listing, explained by Chris, is controversial because the demise of the bat is not related to habitat conditions. The bat population has been struggling with the white nose syndrome that is a disease that increases mortality. The species of bat should be considered endangered rather than threatened at this point in time. Chris mentioned that the state of Connecticut has an extensive amount of bat data and compared to other states, CT is ahead of the curve. Many forest harvesting activities that have a federal nexuses have been halted in states, including Connecticut, to conduct bat mapping and monitoring. During bat mating season harvesting projects are completely on hold. Ian mentioned that the hardest part about getting cleared to do his work is the lack of communication between US Fish & Wildlife, DEEP & NRCS. Chris & Doug spoke about perhaps conducting bat workshops for forest practitioners to be proactive as possible. Nobody wants to interfere with the endangered species act & by holding the workshops it can improve both the forest and the bat habitat. Bruce talked about how shagbarks are a natural bat cave and the importance of preserving them. It is mentioned that 38 states are the bat's natural range and that bats are coming out at different times of the year.

Communication with US Fish & Wildlife is key in proving that CT takes the issue seriously and is doing everything they can to help preserve the population. Some definition of the literature about preserving the bat is questioned by Jen, asking about people interpreting 'timber harvest management' differently. Chris mentioned that reaching out to forest practitioners is key in educating them and getting on the same page. Doug notes that this is so important because if the bat makes the endangered species list, things will get much tougher. Mark said that Yale is hosting a bat seminar this summer at the Yale Forest to educate the public on the species. Ian mentioned to everyone that the maps in CT of the population distributions are so pinpointed & DEEP did an impressive job. Mark mentioned findings of white nose syndrome in snake populations. Jen described past rattlesnake research on State lands found an unknown fungal growth on faces of rattlesnakes with potential impacts on number of young rattlesnakes emerging from denning sites in the Spring; wondering if the two are correlated.

Draft Revisions regarding PA 490 Forestland Classification Regulations:

Chris is currently seeking advice on the draft update. He stated he has seen mistakes from uninformed assessors. He would like to talk to SAF about it. The first item that is discussed is the growing concern of maintaining young forest habitats. Another problem is assessors take a 490 property and pull a building lot from it. Consequently, landowners usually do not have a say in the decision. A discussion of a landowner going through a subdivision, yet deciding not to act upon it could still qualify them for a 490 is brought up. Tom said changing this could have impacts, stating it is abuse of the 490 program. Chris talked about how assessors change over time and different standards are applied. Joan said in Lebanon that she has not seen this happen recently. She said that 15 years ago landowners would not ask why their taxes went up and were unaware of assessors pulling out a building lot from their property. Recently, an assessor will not pull a lot if the landowner does not want one. She mentioned that assessors always want updated forester reports and maps each 10 years. Eric wonders if they could be advocating for longer than 10 years and if a new classification for wildlife is still on the table. Joan stated it is so hard to define wildlife habitat land because it is constantly changing for each animal. Open space is much more commonplace. Chris talked about an incentive for active forest management versus people who do not touch their land. Some states require active management for tax breaks. Joan brings up the Yale publication regarding landowner goals and objectives. She explained to everyone that active management is very low on the list and that this would force people into something that they are uncomfortable with. Maybe a scale for benefits would be better (passive mgmt. vs. active would both have high benefits but active would get more after a certain amount of years).

Chris also talked about how on page 5 there is a very strict guide to the tools used for inventory. He suggests it is revised because it can cause problems for young forests. Doug mentioned how it can be difficult when there are very small or very big trees to get an accurate measure of density count. (Skewed results)

The issue regarding notice of compliance is brought up. Should there be more notice if a landowner is in violation? Joan feels strongly that this needs to be addressed. People assume taxes go up and fail to recognize if it is from a 490 issue. After an assessor defines characteristics; they need to alert the landowner if something does not meet compliance. There is such a small window to appeal

the issue and landowners do not know their rights. Bruce explains that the elderly and the absentee homeowners get hit the hardest. There has to be better communication.

Agriculture Forestry & Wetlands in CT Brochure:

Doug provided information, stating that the project is currently on hold. Court case is taking precedence. Most likely the legal proceedings will be finished in late summer. After that occurs, printing will move forward.

Forest Practitioner Study Guide:

Jen & Doug are currently redoing the study guide. It needs to be created from scratch because the owner of the prior study guide is unclear. They are reprinting 100 copies of the previous guide to hold them over til next year. 40-60 are given away each year. Next summer the new guide will be completed. At that time 400 will be printed. It will not be offered online.

Enforcement Updates:

Doug states that investigations have gone to judgment and are currently talking about penalties. There will not be a ruling til October. Doug & Jen found a person in eastern Connecticut working without a license on a number of jobs. He justified his doings by calling them 'Agriculture'. It is very difficult working a case with just the two of them as resources. Sometimes it is scary just to leave the office for the field because there is so much to do. It hard to do enforcement with such limited staffing and a lack of support. Eric wonders where the fine from cases go. Jen explains they go straight to the general fund.

Other business:

Joan recently received a grant. In September she will be creating a new 490 guide for landowners. She will also be putting on 3 outreach programs throughout the state & is hoping DEEP can aid though service forester assistance.

Joan also talked about Lockwood Farm & their new pavilion at the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station. She explains that it is 100% made from Connecticut grown products. She states that Emery Gluck had a large role in the sourcing of timber. They are hoping the pavilion will be done in time for Plant Science day on August 9th 2015. There will be plaques and signage explaining where each part of the structure came from and the history of the Connecticut forest.

Doug spoke about National Forest Product week in October, he would like to be involved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Hannah Reichle