Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3)
Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date: September 29, 2022

Meeting Time: 11:00 – 12:30 PM

Zoom Recording: Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Working Group Recording

ATTENDANCE: GC3 Working Group Members in bold

Name:
Alanis Allen
Francia Alvarez
Paul Aresta
Mark Ashton
Rob Beach
Ashley Benitez
Dave Boomer
Lori Brown
Mary Buchanan
Barbara David
Chris Donnelly
Robert Fahey
Amanda Fargo-Johnson
Rebecca French, Director, Office of Climate Planning
Chelsea Gazillo
Rosa Goldman
Eric Hammerling
Lisa Hayden
Elizabeth Hopley
Christopher Martin, Co-chair
Adelaine McCloe
Joan Nichols
Joseph Orefice
Hannah Reichle
Kayleigh Royston, Co-chair
Janna Siller
Jean de Smet
Andrea Urbano
Brad Weeks
Jason White
Thomas Worthley
Joanna Wozniak-Brown
Ann and Frank Zitkus

AGENDA & NOTES

Welcome: Rebecca French, Director, Office of Climate Planning
Ground Rules:

- Meeting is recorded and a link will be posted
- Announcement that the chat is public record, but may be used for questions and comments by working group members
- Working group members are asked to post their names and affiliation in the chat
- Reminder that the discussion portion is reserved for working group members
- Announcement that non-working group members should mute and turn video off until public comment

Welcome and Introductions: *Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt, Dept. Of Agriculture, Chris Martin, DEEP Designee for Deputy Commissioner Mason Trumble, Kayleigh Royston, Dept. Of Agriculture Designee for Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt*

- Chris Martin gives brief overview of agenda and explains focus on forestry topics

GC3 Background and Outcomes from the Working and Natural Lands Forests Sub-group: *Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest and Park Association*

- Background on previous GC3 efforts:
    - Previous effort generated 61 recommendations encompassed within the sub-group report
    - 6 recommendations were specific to forests
        - Called for stakeholders to develop Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future (PRFCT)
    - Finding consensus was difficult due to a diversity of backgrounds and opinions
    - Connecticut is 59% forested
        - Eric provides context about Connecticut's forests
        - Details increasing forest fragmentation
        - Over 80% of Connecticut forests are 60+ years old
        - Most carbon-dense in the Northeast
    - Significant inequity inherent in tree canopy distribution
        - Poverty and lack of tree cover has serious health implications related to heat, poor air quality, and more
- Recommends presentation from July 2020 on Health Disparities and the Environments
- Climate Change:
    - Threat to forest resiliency and capacity to act as a carbon sink
- Report recommendations:
    - No-net-loss of forests in Connecticut
    - Details new state policies:
        - Increase tree canopies
        - Compensatory reforestation
        - Forest fragmentation in development considerations
        - Extension of corporate tax incentives to individuals for open space conveyance

Forest Carbon, Resilience, and Climate Smart Forestry Practices Primer: *Lisa Hayden, Outreach Manager, New England Forestry Foundation*

- Primer of climate smart practices in forestry
    - Climate smart practices have carbon benefits and help forests adapt to climate change
    - Forests may need assistance adapting to constant climate disturbances
    - Forests present a significant opportunity for mitigation
        - Sequestration
        - Storage (increases with age)
    - Piloting programs in Massachusetts:
        - Identified 14 forest management practices with climate adaptation and carbon benefits
- Forest Management Practices:
    - Keeping existing forest land (avoid loss)
    - Grow new forests and trees
        - Consider diversity of trees
        - Green already developed areas
    - Intentional passive management
        - Create forest reserves
    - Reduce Stressors
        - Important adaptation approach
        - Remove and control invasive plants
        - Use deer protection to ensure regeneration
    - Active Management Practices:
        - Enhance adaptive capacity
- Account for "leakage" in climate policy
    - Should we be doing our share to grow locally to meet our production needs?
    - 150 forests throughout New England that are sustainably harvested
- NEFF Exemplary Forestry
    - Increasing quantity and quality of wood products over time
    - Details wood types encouraged for forestry contexts
    - Standards were developed with umbrella species in mind
    - These principles can result in significant outcomes:
        - Remove CO2 from the atmosphere
- New England Climate Smart Forest Partnership:
    - 30 million grant to develop pilot programs alongside partners
    - In early stages, but have recruited partners across New England to support efforts

Dept. of Agriculture, Climate Smart Agriculture and Forest Grant Program: *Chris Martin, DEEP*

- Notes that the practices and implementation programs being discussed today are likely new to working group members, but these practices can be informed and firmed up through working group participation
- Provides DEEP Forestry Division's mission statement

- Funding components:
    - Climate Smart Farming ($7 million)
    - Climate Smart Ag. And Forestry Practices ($7 million in bond funds)
- 2020 Forest Action Plan:
    - Conserve forests
    - Protect forests from threats
    - Enhance public benefits
- Climate Smart Ag. And Forestry Concepts:
    - Significant overlap between the two
    - Anticipate there will need to be technical assistance for many woodlands owners to implement climate smart forestry practices
    - Also anticipate the need for financial assistance
        - Municipalities typically do not receive funding for woodlot management
        - We can provide these funds in Connecticut
    - Need to offset the costs for protecting land
        - Fees for attorneys, etc. can add up and disincentivize easements for land owners
    - Emerging carbon credit market that also presents opportunities
        - Need to implement standards (VERRA)
    - Can develop incentives to purchase low impact forestry equipment
        - Includes retrofitting, as well
    - Urban Forestry grants
        - Significant inequity in Connecticut related to tree canopy
        - Need to increase urban tree canopy
    - The working group can help refine design of programs and flesh out what they look like
        - In the long term, we need to have monitoring to substantiate outcomes and prove to the public that these practices are worth implementing
- Timeline:
    - Intend to develop grant program design by Q1 2023
    - Begin accepting applications by Q3 2023

Discussion of Climate Smart Forestry Practices: *For full comments please see the Zoom recording and/or audio transcript*

- Chris Donnelly: Can the working forest definition be expanded to working trees? How do we reach individual, private owners that own very few trees in urban areas?
- Francia Alvarez: Points out missed opportunities for how we use edge forests, particularly in coastal areas. Noting clear cutting along corridors without any tracking of what is going on. There is no interaction between towns and utility companies and no oversight or accountability. Suggests conducting a tree canopy assessment along edge forests, ideally provided by DEEP funding. Critiques 8-30g for lack of environmental assessment.

- Andrea Urbano: Appreciates the development of climate smart policies across both urban and rural landscapes. Notes we need to increase our capacity to conduct education to woodlot owners in order to affect impact. Staffing capacity will make outcomes possible. Notes that we should also focus on sustainability wood markets.
- Robert Fahey: Notes it would be useful to create a statewide vegetation management task force.
- Francia Alvarez: Wants to follow up on the discussion with Eversource, as she notes their cease and desist was lifted
    - Chris Donnelly responds: Getting to a larger point of where trees fit in our urban areas in the long term. Where will we reserve space for larger trees?
    - Robert Fahey: Notes they are developing targeted planning and planting so municipalities can determine where the plantable spaces are
- Joanna Wozniak-Brown: Interested in reducing barriers between programs and agencies across different government levels to maximize efficiency

Public Comments: *For full comments please see the Zoom recording and/or audio transcript*

- Thomas Worthley:
    - Does not want to lose sight of potential redevelopment opportunities of currently substandard areas
    - Need to foster low- and high-grade markets of high-quality wood and trees; need to create incentives for establishing wood that keeps it within the state
    - Harmony between practices that govern forests, species, carbon sequestration and storage all require intensive management practices and necessitate education and workforce training
- Jean de Smet:
    - Concerned that part of the resiliency planning program involves cutting down trees near lines
    - Chris responds and says that PURA has put a cease and desist out, but that it was limited to high-outage areas
- Joseph Orefice:
    - Wants higher consideration given for loggers, who are an aging population with high barriers to entry
    - Conversely, he notes that there are many programs available to farmers to break into the field

Adjourn and Next Steps:

Kayleigh announces the next meeting for 10/28 and provides closing remarks. Chris reiterates how appreciative the co-chairs are for the participation of the working group members.

Submitted Public Comments:

Frank Zitkus and Ann Zitkus:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment regarding the GC3's Climate Smart Working Group Meetings.

The designation of "Old Forestland (Growth) Management Sites" in Connecticut public land forests by the DEEP Forestry Division in its Forest Management Plans is commendable. Such designated forested areas should be promoted by DEEP to the general public, municipalities, Land Trusts and other interested parties as such designation signifies an understanding that forests left unmanaged and allowed to grow to Old Growth Forest status provides for the greatest benefit to our ecosystem, its inhabitants and, of course, our own well-being.

Old Growth designation, however, currently represents only a small percentage of our public forests and a very small percentage of overall forest coverage in Connecticut. Greatly increasing the protection of public forest lands from disturbance, allowing them to reach Old Growth status, provides a means of climate mitigation that is the most effective, least costly manner to confront climate change.

Forest ecologists report that Old Growth forests provide for the highest degree of carbon sequestration and carbon storage as compared to managed forests, for instance. Old Growth forests' dense tree canopy (and rich vertical structure) sequester great amounts of carbon while such forests carbon storage capacities are enormous. Often it is stated by DEEP Forestry Staff that young forests sequester more carbon than Old Growth Forests. That simply is not logical. While young trees grow faster than more mature trees (deemed rate of growth), young forest's tree canopies are much smaller than older ones, hence they sequester significantly less carbon.

As long as the economic value of a forest is based on the wood product from felled trees instead of its ecosystem services (especially carbon storage which directly mitigates climate change) when forests are allowed to live and support biodiversity, our economic processes will result in the current continued destruction of life. The GC3 Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Working Group should invite climate scientists and associated forest ecologists to develop strategies to mitigate climate change rather than relying on the framework of "forest management for wood product" as the basis for forest conservation, as is currently being done. A novel strategy such as Ecosystem Service Payments based on carbon storage/acre would conserve forests with a maximum amount of carbon stored in the quickest time. This is what the times call for.

While recognizing that some forest wood is desired for wood products, a clear public communication that harvesting our adult / maturing public land forests has many adverse environmental impacts is lacking. One of these adverse impacts is that timbered forests are net carbon emitters for at least a decade, while its storage and sequestration abilities, obviously, are greatly reduced. (There are numerous other adverse impacts of timbered forests, including the loss of habitat and increased susceptibility to an invasion of non-native plant species; damage from drought, erosion, wind, severe fire, and pest infestation, including jumping worms.)

In sum, substantially increasing the percentage of public forest land as permanent Old Growth designation (also referred to as Proforestation) would greatly benefit us in our climate mitigation efforts. The GC3 Working Group hopefully will recognize the many benefits of Proforestation* and incorporate and promote this as a primary manner to confront climate change's many adverse effects. Perhaps the Working Group should reach out to Climate Scientists and Forest Ecologists on this matter.

*In addition to climate mitigation benefits, Old Growth Forests contain the highest degree of plant and wildlife biodiversity (the significant loss of which is a major worldwide concern), are more resilient against drought and severe fire (since the forest floor is shaded by understory trees; larger trees generally withstand a fire better than young, thin ones), against wind and flood damage (tree root interconnections stabilize the trees and soil), and against non-native plant species and damaging pest infestations. Over time, Old Growth Forest is more diverse and has healthier soils than managed / disturbed forests.

Respectfully submitted –

Frank Zitkus and Ann Zitkus, 91 West Street, Hebron, CT

Chat Record:

00:18:50 Amanda Fargo-Johnson: Amanda Fargo-Johnson, CT Resource Conservation & Development - hello fellow WG members!
00:19:00 Lori Brown: Lori Brown, Executive Director
CT League of Conservation Voters
00:19:11 Chelsea Gazillo: Chelsea Gazillo -- American Farmland Trust/ Working Lands Alliance. Hello everyone!
00:19:12 Eric Hammerling, CFPA: Hi All, Eric Hammerling with the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA). Thanks for coming!
00:19:22 Hannah Reichle: Hello All, Hannah Reichle- CT MetroCOG Regional Planner.
00:19:23 Jason White, CAES Director: Jason White, PhD; Director of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES)
00:19:29 Andrea Urbano, CT DEEP Division of Forestry: Andrea Urbano, CT DEEP Division of Forestry
00:19:32 Lisa Hayden: Lisa Hayden, New England Forestry Foundation
00:19:40 Christopher Martin, DEEP Forestry: Welcome everyone. Glad you can join us today.
00:19:48 Robert Fahey - UConn: Good morning! Robert Fahey, UConn Department of Natural Resources and the Environment
00:20:32 Chris Donnelly: Chris Donnelly - retired DEEP urban forestry. licensed arborist and forester. CT Urban Forest Council
00:21:59 Mark Ashton - Yale: Hello all. Mark Ashton, Senior Associate Dean at the Forest School at the Yale School of Environment
00:22:22 Mary Buchanan: Mary Buchanan, Community Resilience Planner at CIRCA, and liaison to the EEJ working group
00:27:10 Rebecca French, CT DEEP: For those joining later...in case you missed it, if you are working group member please feel free to be on camera and introduce yourself in the chat. You can also rename yourself with your affiliation next to your name.

00:27:52 Rebecca French, CT DEEP: For those joining the working group meeting from the general public, thank you for being here. If you would like to sign up to provide a public comment when we reach that portion of the meeting, please send me a direct message.
00:40:40 Chris Donnelly: A clarifying question regarding Eric's presentation. Eric, you mentioned that tree cover is correlated with income level - a statement that is probably true with regards to urban areas. However, if we looked at just rural areas, I wonder if this would still be true. It might well be the reverse in rural or semi-rural areas - greater canopy cover is reverse associated with income level. This brings up the question of the potential economic value of rural forests.
00:41:46 Eric Hammerling, CFPA: Good point, Chris! You're correct that my framing was focused on tree cover in urban areas rather than rural areas.
00:52:40 Ann and Frank Zitkus: The amount of sequestration in adult / old growth forests is much higher than in young forests...the higher "rate of sequestration" in young forests is continually mentioned, and while the case, this statement does not clearly state that carbon sequestration in adult / old growth forests is more critical in the efforts to mitigate climate change impacts than timbering forests in favor of young trees over older ones. Also, as alluded to, timbering is a carbon emitting event for decades. These comments are made in reference to our Public Forests (not privately owned land where landowners are free to decide how to steward their land).
00:58:26 Andrea Urbano, CT DEEP Division of Forestry: a friendly reminder to submit public comment requests to Rebecca French and to reserve these comments/questions until the public comment portion of the agenda.
01:08:42 Jason White, CAES Director: I have to leave for another meeting; thanks for the very informative presentations
01:10:46 Amanda Fargo-Johnson, CT RC&D: Very informative today, thank you. I need to jump for a 12pm meeting. See you all next time.
01:11:09 Robert Fahey - UConn: Chris mentioned recent work on developing a research agenda and demonstration sites focused on Adaptive Silviculture for Climate Change practices that can be applied in southern New England, details here:
https://www.adaptivesilviculture.org/SNEoak
01:11:22 Rebecca French, CT DEEP: Please use raise hand function for working group member discussion.
01:11:27 Chris Donnelly: I have a couple of comments
01:11:30 Rebecca French, CT DEEP: Chat at this time is reserved for working group members
01:19:20 Robert Fahey - UConn: We are working with DEEP to develop statewide urban tree canopy assessments and also plantable space assessments to help facilitate tree planting/planning initiatives - we will be sharing those products as a they are finalized
01:26:18 Jean de Smet: I'd like to speak in public comment. Jean de Smet
01:26:43 Eric Hammerling, CFPA: Absolutely agree, Tom. Good point!
01:28:13 Rebecca French, CT DEEP: if anyone else would like to provide public comment, please send me a message
01:29:23 Andrea Urbano, CT DEEP Division of Forestry: great points Tom, for whatever it's worth I agree it would behoove us to invest in the future forestry work force, it's a grim looking at the numbers and demographics (age) of licensed practitioners in CT
01:29:59 Robert Fahey - UConn: Workforce training should also focus on urban tree/forest maintenance especially in environmental justice communities
01:31:35 Eric Hammerling, CFPA: I believe PURA's cease and desist was lifted earlier this month. This remains a concern

01:31:42 Joan Nichols: Good point Tom! Other states have established work force development recently highlighted in SAF Forest Source. We need more foresters and forest technicians providing boots on the ground landowner support. (no pun intended).
01:32:41 Chris Donnelly: Following up on Bob's comment - it is also a great opportunity to work across the urban/rural divide. There is no reason, except perhaps for transportation issue, that someone who lives in Hartford cannot work in Tolland, and vice versa. Good opportunity to promote those sorts of cross-connections.
01:34:36 Joan Nichols: To Joes' point, we need workforce development for the logging industry as well. Similar to ME and some of the southern states.
01:34:47 Ann and Frank Zitkus: We (Ann and Frank Zitkus) sent a letter into the Group yesterday which we would like to ensure it is part of the public record. Besides for this and an earlier chat comment, we need to view our forests as primarily providing ecosystem services and that living trees are our allies in fighting climate change. More passive management is needed (allow forests to naturally grow to Old Growth status). One other comment. There is never mention of the adverse impacts of manmade forest disturbances (timbering)...including the likely
01:35:14 Ann and Frank Zitkus: introduction of invasive species.
01:35:21 Alanis Allen, DEEP Office of Climate Planning: DEEP.ClimateChange@ct.gov
01:36:09 Eric Hammerling, CFPA: My understanding is that the cease and desist was imposed on August 23rd and lifted on September 6th
01:38:30 Chris Donnelly: Thanks Bob
01:38:30 Joanna Wozniak-Brown, CT OPM: My apologies for missing the public comment period. I'd like to introduce myself as the new Climate & Infrastructure Policy Coordinator at OPM. I look forward to hearing the recommendations/updates from the working group and the evolution of the programs you've described today.
01:40:19 Joanna Wozniak-Brown, CT OPM: Joanna.wozniak-brown@ct.gov
01:41:59 Eric Hammerling, CFPA: Next meeting of this Working Group is on Friday, 10/28 from 10-11:30, I believe.