

Forest Practices Advisory Board
June 28, 2023

Attendees: Christopher Martin, Ian Branson, Brennan Sheahan, Dr. Mark Ashton, Barbara Kelly, Bruce Spaman, Joan Nichols, Dr. Jeffrey S. Ward

Guests: Nick Zito (DEEP Forestry), Sheila Hoefle (DEEP Forestry-recorder),

Absent: Patrick Comins

Chris called the meeting to order. Board members reviewed the minutes from the February 27 meeting. Motion to approve the minutes as written by Bruce, seconded by Barbara. Unanimous to accept as written.

2023 Legislative Update: Governor Lamont's budget passed which includes \$500,000 America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support urban forestry efforts. Specifically, these funds will support the Governor's goal of increasing tree canopy cover by 5% by 2040 in communities most vulnerable to heat island stress, see SB896. Board members discussed carbon system calculations. Eli (Elizabeth) Ward a staff member at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station will be making Connecticut specific carbon calculations.

Chris requested that Board members send him any considerations before October for the upcoming legislative session. Modern Wood Heat would be a good consideration, model after the Massachusetts program.

FPA Regs Update – Nick continues to review municipal forest practice regulations. Woodbury intends to adopt regulations. Lisbon and Wethersfield are now in compliance. Work continues with other municipalities to bring them into compliance as well. Darcy Winther has accepted a promotion and is no longer the contact for Inland Water Resources at DEEP. Nick has developed an updated Timber Harvest Notification Form that can be used by practitioners. The form should assist with gathering all of the information that municipalities may require when starting a timber harvest.

There has been a significant increase in the number of applications for exam exempt supervising forest products harvester certification.

BIL/IRA new federal funding review – FY23 IRA State Allocation (\$2.65 million) has been allocated to CT. The focus of these funds will be on urban forestry grants in federally defined disadvantaged communities and will compliment the Governor's goal of increased urban tree canopy cover.

Positions in DEEP Forestry will be created utilizing these funds: Fire Control Officer in western Connecticut, Outreach Forester in the Private and Municipal Lands Program, Durational Grants Administrator in the Private and Municipal Lands Program, Urban Tree Assessment Specialist in the Private and Municipal Lands/Urban and Community Forestry Program, and three Tree Equity Specialists in the Private and Municipal Lands/Urban and Community Forestry Program. The Outreach Forester will be communications specialist, workshops, social media, training and general public outreach and education. The Duration Grants Administrator will assist in administering \$600,000 annual IRA funded urban forestry grants.

Timpro has decided not to pursue the skidder bridge program. Nick to continue to reach out to other potential partners for cooperation in running the program.

Connecticut had applied for a Wood Innovations Grant that would be used to install efficiencies at the sawmill but was not awarded the grant.

The USDA Forest Service announced additional funds that will be available to service forestry. The funds will be targeted to underserved communities and rural poor woodland owners. More details will need to be worked out.

Forest Practices Advisory Board vacancies – the general public position remains vacant. Patrick Comins informed Chris that he plans to resign from the Board. Any suggestions for individuals to fill those positions should be forwarded to Chris.

Enforcement Actions, Exams – DEEP staff continue to work on several encroachments: CT River Valley State Park and Wadsworth Falls State Park.

One applicant passed the SFPH exam in March. The next scheduled exam on July 12 has several applicants for SFPH and FPH levels. The March Forester exam date was changed and several of the applicants couldn't take the exam due to prior commitments. They will take the exam in October. Nick reviewed the current certification numbers and noted that the number of SFPH and FPH certified individuals continues to diminish.

Nick met with Andy Fass of the University of New Hampshire Extension Service. Andy shared that they host a field day to provide students an opportunity to learn more about forestry work. There has also been a drop in enrollment for college degrees in the Natural Resource field. Barbara shared that Envirothon has also suffered a significant loss of participation due to COVID.

Joan asked about the number of certified forest practitioners that are solely using webinars to obtain the required amount of CEUs and the concern that it may be undermining the goal of the program.

SEP Funds that were collected as a result of enforcement actions have been utilized to help support a new BMP app. A new ID printer has been purchased to allow for better quality IDs for certified forest practitioners.

DoF Staffing – In addition to the new positions above DEEP Forestry will have a promotional opportunity to a Forester 2 in the State Lands Management Program in eastern Connecticut. Mike Kronick has been selected as the Fire Control Officer for western Connecticut. Mike comes to DEEP with over thirty years as a municipal fireman. Helene Hochholzer has resigned from her position at DEEP and will now be the Cooperative Fire Specialist for the Eastern Region.

Additional items of interest:

The Connecticut Farm Bureau will host two live webinars on 8/29 and 10/12 from 6-9 pm about PA490. Forest practitioners and municipal assessors will be invited to participate.

Kyle Roach is the new president at TIMPRO.

Celebrating Agriculture Day will move to the Brooklyn Fairgrounds.

Over \$50,000 has been raised for Log-A-Load and donated to the CT Children's Medical Center.

Yankee Society of American Foresters chapter will host a workshop on 8/25 with a USDA Forest Service Scientist.

Meeting closed at 11:08.