

Forest Practices Advisory Board

October 23, 2024

Members present: Joan Nichols, Bruce Spaman, Brennan Sheahan, Jovan Bryan, Barbara Kelly, Ian Branson

Absent: Dr. Mark Ashton, Dr. Jeff Ward, Chris Martin

Guest: Allison Rau (DEEP Legal Staff), Nick Zito (DEEP Forestry), Sheila Hoefle (DEEP Forestry, recorder)

Review/approve notes from June 12, 2024 meeting - Ian moved to approve, Jovan seconded. Unanimous vote to approve as written.

2025 Legislative Update – no updates

CEU update: Rachel and Allison's analysis reveals that Forest Practitioners' participation on boards or commissions does not qualify as CEUs. DEEP could support this participation, but a regulatory change is needed. Nick is willing to rewrite regulations and move to a one-hour, one-credit system. Board members agreed that nonprofit leadership roles, engaging with the public, and running meetings are educational opportunities.

The motion to amend certification regulations to allow CEU credits and change the system from 1 CEU for 3 hours to 1 CEU for 1 hour is unanimous. Board members should review these changes for the February meeting. Board members discussed reducing the number of CEUs supervisors need after a specified certification period, with the option to be available for good operators with no violations and a minimum of 8 years of experience.

FPAB Vacancies: There is one general public vacancy. Dr. Jeff Ward will be resigning from the Board, creating another vacancy.

Enforcement actions, Exams –. Three enforcement actions are being worked on: CT River Valley State Park, Bloomfield Flood Control Area #3, and Lamentation Mountain State Park. Moosehead Industries was working on a job in Enfield without a certified practitioner. They were told that the job was a land clearing job for a change of use to agriculture, but there were no municipal permits in place. Moosehead Ind staff took and passed the forest practitioner exam.

Exams are being conducted monthly for DEEP staff hired without licenses, with a low pass rate for foresters. Christopher Teter was let go due to failing the exam. Exam revisions should be complete before January 2025.

DEEP Legal responses concerning municipal regulations are currently pending, particularly regarding the involvement of the Gateway Commission. Lyme is in the process of revising its regulations.

Proposed regulations from Woodbury are also on hold as they await an official draft. Municipalities are suggested to adhere to Best Management Practices (BMP) guidelines. East Haddam has submitted changes to Nick; these documents are currently under review by the Land and Water Resource Division, and Nick expects revised regulations soon. Additionally, Watertown has non-compliant zoning regulations that are projected to be resolved by the end of the year.

BMP Smart Phone App Demo – Nick to send recording of the app demo for members to review.

Timpro is interested in applying for the USDA Wood Innovations Grant, specifically for the Skidder Bridge Cost Share Program. This initiative will implement a rent-to-own model, as USDA Forest Services prefers not to label

it as a cost share program. The grant application period is currently open, with submissions due by December 27, 2024.

Nick plans to meet with Timpro to discuss the application process. The State of Connecticut is required to act as a pass-through for funds to Timpro, releasing payment upon the delivery of the bridges. Maine's program tends to favor smaller crews, particularly those with fewer than ten individuals, and there are restrictions on the number of bridges, or the total cost involved. Additionally, there are strict accounting requirements for the bridges, which must be accounted for at all times.

Applicants may reapply each fiscal year, with a maximum grant amount of \$500,000. Nick has an Excel spreadsheet to assist Timpro with their application.

As for survey results, there were 17 responses as of last week, indicating significant interest in timber mats compared to steel bridges, primarily from larger crews utilizing mechanized equipment. There is also a plan to purchase at least one truck bridge for rental, which will be stored at a sawmill with monitored use. Timpro will incorporate administrative costs into its strategy. Mandatory reporting of the locations of mats and bridges will be required. After the meeting with Timpro, specific parameters for the program will be established to ensure equitable resource allocation, preventing the largest companies from monopolizing the available mats and bridges.

Timber Harvest Notification Form update: The latest version is well-received, and the CT Assoc of Inland Wetlands has been contacted for their approval. Barbara's efforts to access CT Assoc of Inland Wetlands board meetings have been challenging. Various presentation options for the conference have been proposed. If no response is received before the conference, there's a board meeting scheduled during the conference and Barbara will attend. The conference attracts around 400 attendees each year. The form has been proven effective in engaging stakeholders; if there's no response from the CT Assoc of Inland Wetlands, we will move forward. Ian made a motion to move forward with DEEP legal review; Barbara seconded a unanimous vote.

Division of Forestry Staffing – Tom Trask is the newly hired Forest Protection Supervisor. Tom will be required to pass the Foresters exam within the first six months of his employment. Danica Doroski will be out of the office on parental leave beginning in November.

Additional items of interest:

Joan asked about the status of wallet ID cards for forest practitioners. Nick shared that we continue to work on having a new ID printer installed. Once installed IDs will be distributed to practitioners.

Chris, Nick and Sheila met with other DEEP staff to explore the possibility of moving to the e-licensing platform. The platform would allow practitioners the ability to apply for exam or certification renewal online as well as track their CEU and annual report submissions. May also provide applicants with an online exam on demand.

The third Sunday in October starts National Forest Products Week, which is a great chance to promote wood energy projects. A meeting with Timpro and the DEEP Commissioner is being organized to discuss innovations and initiatives.

There is an existing MOU between DoAg and DEEP for CT Grown Forest Products. Nick hopes to reinvigorate the program with the assistance from Board members.

Brennan made a motion to adjourn, Bruce seconded. Unanimous at 11:30.