

Wisconsin Council on Forestry: Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Lincoln County Service Center, Lincoln County Board Room, 801 N. Sales Street, Merrill, WI 54452
and via Zoom – [Register for the Zoom meeting here](#)

Council Members		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tom Hittle, <i>Chair</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Henry Schienebeck	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> William Van Lopik
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Matt Dallman, <i>Vice Chair</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> James Hoppe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brad Dorff
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heather Berklund, <i>Chief State Forester</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> James Kerkman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adena Rissman
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senator Romaine Quinn	<input type="checkbox"/> Juris Repsa	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Buddy Huffaker
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Senator Jamie Wall	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sitka Pence, <i>Interim Representative</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebekah Luedtke
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Representative Jeff Mursau	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jordan Skiff	<input type="checkbox"/> OPEN-Builders
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Representative Lori Palmeri	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Erik Rantala	<input type="checkbox"/>
Next Meeting: October 1-2, 2025 at Kemp Natural Resources Station		

Agenda

Tuesday, May 20	Notes: Decisions, Action Items, Assignments
9:00 AM Welcome & Member Introductions (Chair Hittle) 20 min	Council introductions and welcome. Council is joined by Janelle Crocker, incoming CNNF Forest Supervisor who will be the Council’s new USFS representative, taking over for Sitka Pence, interim representative.
9:20 AM Chair Update 5 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair Hittle attended the National Forest Foundation community dinner in Madison. The group engaged in discussions and had the opportunity to tour the FPL. • Period for comments on the Dispute Resolution Process closed May 15. Council expects to have an update in the future. • Letter to Governor Evers and standing forestry committees on federal budget impacts to forestry has been sent out and Chair Hittle is working to get this letter to federal legislators. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chair Hittle and Vice Chair Dallman have been in discussions with other partners regarding the federal budget and potential impacts on Wisconsin forestry ○ The President’s Fiscal Year 2026 “Skinny Budget” proposes the elimination of all statutorily-mandated USFS, State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs ○ This proposal came out after impacts letter was sent out. Individuals are encouraged to weigh in.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to engage with Green Fire and other partners regarding messaging and concerns of forestry community and “Forests at Risk” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discussed the potential opportunities, difficulties, and risks for the Council on Forestry increasing social media presence
<p>9:25 AM Open Forum for Council Members 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jim Kerkman completed an analysis of website pageviews and web users and finds an upward trend in both. • Bill Van Lopik attended an MTE symposium for graduates at MSOE and SOHE that developed projects following a tour of Menominee Tribal Enterprises. Encouraged by these projects and student engagement after exposure to the mill and forests.
<p>9:45 AM Legislative Updates 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rep. Palmeri: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Hearing for “This Land is Your Land Report” from WI Policy Forum a few weeks ago. Lots of engagement around this. • Rep. Mursau: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategic roadmap is priority. Advocating to spend forestry money on forestry. • Sen. Quinn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Waiting on language tweaks for forestry budget motions to secure funding for the roadmap plan. Motions ready for the Wildlife Habitat Management and Sustainable County Forest Administrator Grant. ○ Highlighting two other bills that are relevant to the forestry industry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tax credit for refurbishing short line rails and developing new spurs ▪ Sustainable aviation fuel tax credit (for agricultural products or forestry products). Opportunity to make use of pulpwood. ○ In agreement with Rep. Mursau that forestry dollars should be used for forestry. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supportive of ARIP- but hoping more can be allocated to forestry vs. Ag. • Sen. Wall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Forestry budget items are a small part of the budget. ○ Forestry corner of the legislature is bipartisan.
<p>10:05 AM State Forester Update National Forest Update 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heather Berklund: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NASF Fly-in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ combined 104 meetings between the Hill and the Administration ▪ Primary Focuses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix our Forest Act; Wildfire contributions by states • Appropriation needs of federal funds/grants to support states • Forest Stewardship: support for private landowners • States at table in discussions/structure of reorganization, etc.

- Heather also focused on: State-Pvt-Tribal Forestry organization structure integrity, FIA, Urban and Community Forests and GNA, EPA biomass and Rx burn
- Staffing
 - Wrapping up field forester hiring and will have 14 starting in June
- Fire
 - So far in 2025, there have been double the fires from the 10-year average.
 - 2 Fixed Wing Single Engine Scoopers on contract for assistance in fire suppression during critical time of need.
 - 2 UH-60 WI Army National Guard Blackhawks on standby to assist in critical priority missions.
 - Utilizing ArcGisOnLine (AGOL) to map fires and increase situational awareness in near real time.
 - Prescribed fire annual goal of 30,000 acres has been met with 292 burns at 31,820 acres.
 - Wisconsin Certified Burn Boss Program launches next month in partnership with Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council
 - Wisconsin hosted 4-person crew from Ontario (GLFFC) for prescribed burn experience in NW barrens
 - DNR forestry supported fire department organizations with training and support at the annual conventions for the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association (March 2025 in Middleton) and the next Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association (June 2025 at Wisconsin Dells).
 - Fire prevention media campaign geotargeted in high fire risk markets focused on escape debris burning; paid advertising on radio, weather apps, gas station pay-at-the-pump and social media graphics.
 - DNR and authorities investigating potential cases of arson
- Reforestation:
 - Trillion Tree Annual Report is available on the DNR's Trillion Trees Pledge webpage
 - In April, Bobbie Webster began with the Department as the new Trillion Trees Project Coordinator. She is working out Washburn and previously worked as a county conservationist and natural areas manager. We expect our engagement with partners and landowners to increase with this new investment in the Pledge.
 - Over 4.6 million seedlings were distributed this year by the State Nursery, with over 55,000 seedlings going to 4th Graders for Arbor Day.
- Urban Forestry
 - Program recently welcomed two interns to the Milwaukee office for a summer of tree surveys, analyses, and exposure to different aspects of

Wisconsin's forest community. This is the fourth year that Urban Forestry has hosted interns, but the first year within the State of Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship Program (SWSDIP).

- Public & Private
 - The Division of Forestry will be executing Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Agreement 3 with the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.
 - The Public Lands Handbook 2460.5 out for stakeholder input in May.
 - The Cooperating Forester annual meeting returned to an in-person event held on April 30, 2025 in Stevens Point.
- Tax Law:
 - MFL Plan Template updates Planned release is June 4, 2025. New template will be required for 2027 and future plans.
 - Certified Plan Writers will undergo additional training planned for June/July 2025 to cover MFL plan updates and WisFIRS enhancements
 - Working on revisions after stakeholder input on Chapter 310, Tax Law Dispute Resolution Process and Appendix 310A was solicited through May 15.
 - Large Landowner Account Handbook chapter update will be coming out for public comment in next few months.
- The Silviculture Guidance Team (SGT) is accepting applications for several standing and upcoming vacancies. A vacancy announcement was shared with Heather and CoF in late April and an additional notice was sent out via Gov Delivery on May 8.
- Timber Products Output Survey Update: The Forest Products Program staff are currently in the final stages of completing the USFS Timber Products Output (TPO) survey. The survey process has included outreach via mail, email, and phone, and has now progressed to in-person mill visits. Currently, the survey has achieved a 40% response rate. We aim to increase this rate over the next few weeks, with the goal of completing all surveying and data entry by the end of May. The FPS Team took this project over from the USFS in 2025 in hopes of having more timely access to TPO data and analysis.
- FPS Program staff are planning a Wood Symposium at the Milwaukee Art Museum September 23rd
 - Planning for an optional tour of the Ascent Building.
- National Forest Updates:
 - Leadership changes:
 - Tony Dixon, Regional Forester retired. Gordy Blum is now acting Regional Forester.
 - Deputy Regional Forester also retired and currently filled in interim by Fire Director Steve Miller.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shifting workforce is mostly affecting regional and Washington office staff: 15,000 staff USDA-wide have accepted deferred resignation/early retirement packages. More reshaping coming in the coming weeks. ○ Working to implement guidance from recent Secretary memo. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specifically related to timber production increase and maintaining shelf stock ○ Through restructuring, trying to maintain staffing on the ground relating to timber production, forest management, wildfire risk reduction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some paths for lateral movement to these “on-the-ground roles” are being outlined, though USFS is still in a hiring freeze.
10:25 AM Break, 15 min	
10:40 AM Red Pine and Oak Reforestation Update (Rebekah Luedtke, WCFA Executive Director) 15 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reforestation Roundtable to take place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Event to discuss topics ranging from regeneration to site prep to seed collection issues ○ Roundtable will be held on June 10th at the Lincoln County Service Center ○ Formulating agenda and finalizing guest list ● Would like some means to capture the information discussed during the round table
10:55 AM Biennial Budget Update (Chair Hittle) 10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chair Hittle sent out six of the budget motions that are complete <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These are recommendations to advise the government and legislature on budget related items ○ Waiting on finalized motions for the strategic roadmap and a request for increased DNR budget to support that program ● Chair Hittle believes Council is in a good place this cycle, urges council Members and constituents to voice their support for these motions. ● WCFA has been advocating for Council’s budget motions in addition to their own set of motions. ● A template email of support is discussed as something that will be useful in advocating for the budget
11:05 AM WEDC Update (Kietra Olson, Rural Initiatives Manager; Office of Rural Prosperity) 10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Office of Rural Prosperity having conversations with Tom to create a marketing piece for the WI Forest Products Industry. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inspired by a piece from “Made in Alabama” ○ Exploring avenues for how to tie industry impacts to rural communities ○ Working with people in Alabama, and looking for council input on a pitch for the WEDC marketing team
11:15 AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bowe gives an overview of local operations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 100,843 Acres of County Forest in Lincoln Co. ○ Management priorities have evolved for some resources

<p>Lincoln County Forester Update (Dean Bowe, Lincoln County Forest Administrator) 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessing Northern Hardwood shelterwood and even aged management where applicable ▪ Implemented canopy gaps with positive response ▪ Looking to promote more Red Oak regeneration and working with DNR personnel for scarification tactics ▪ Red Pine established in the 1930 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear cutting and regenerating some of the older stands, especially those that are in decline • Now using containerized stock and contracting with crews makes planting more efficient • Recreation in Lincoln County: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ County forests manage many trails, campgrounds, and parks either by distributing funds or by conducting in-house maintenance • Challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Markets, though fortunately Lincoln County is located near several mills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Closure of Verso Mill was still impactful and stumpage prices have declined ○ Infrastructure: lots of money spent to maintain roads ○ Invasives: Emerald Ash Borer, Garlic Mustard, Buckthorn ○ Overall budget: costs increase while stumpage revenue decreases
<p>11:35 AM Impact of Cultural Heritage on Forest Management in WI/MN (Ryan Hellenbrand, PhD candidate; UW-Madison) 15 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided an overview of Wisconsin's early forestry history and leaders, and described how forestry, cultural heritage, and narratives of belonging interact to impact management • Encouraged forestry community to consider these histories that are ingrained in forestry as we engage in forest management. • Presentation can be found on the CoF website.
<p>11:50 AM Lunch, 45 min</p>	
<p>12:35 PM NRCS Funding Update (Allan Braun, USDA NRCS Wisconsin State Forester) 30 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlined technical and financial assistance programs/resources that NRCS offers • Described several common forestry practices and how they meet certain forest management goals. • Presentation can be found on the CoF website.
<p>1:05 PM State Forest Action Plan 5-Year Required Reporting Discussion (Lenny Betker, DNR Division Planner and Abby Widell, DNR Associate Division Planner) 30 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DNR is putting together the 5-Year Highlights Report as part of a requirement of the SFAP. The report will share SFAP implementation success stories from the past 5 years. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DNR will gather input on accomplishments from forestry partners via a survey that will be open May 21st through July 18th. ○ Partners are encouraged to think about and share the top 1-2 accomplishments from their organization. Criteria and instructions can be found in the presentation on the CoF website or in the survey introduction.

<p>1:35 PM White Oak Initiative (Jamie Hedges, White Oak Initiative Network Manager) 30 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Oak is one of the most highly valued hardwoods, making it important to economic prosperity of rural communities • White Oak are aging and not being replaced with seedlings and saplings to sustain populations. • WOI mission is to advocate and be a catalyst for sustainable oak forest management • WOI audiences include policymakers/influencers, conservation agencies, technical experts and academics. • WOI will be at the Aldo Leopold Foundation on May 29th.
<p>2:05 PM Break, 15 min</p>	
<p>2:20 PM Biennial Report Final Edits, Approval, and Distribution Plans (Chair Hittle, Vice Chair Dallman) <i>Action Item: Approve Report</i> 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biennial Report must be submitted to the Governor’s office by June 1st. • Chair Hittle calls for any comments, suggested revisions, or feedback from Council members on the report. • Hearing none, Chair Hittle calls to approve the Biennial Report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Motion: [Henry Schienebeck] moved to approve the Biennial Report to be sent to the Governor’s office and distributed to other outlets. ○ Second: [Rebekah Luedtke and Bill Van Lopik] seconded the motion ○ Opposition: None ○ Vote: Motion Adopted • Abby Widell will make final, small adjustments to the report and send the final draft to Chair Hittle and Vice Chair Dallman for distribution. • Council members discuss a potential press release by DNR via GovDelivery, and circulation on other media platforms.
<p>2:40 PM Forest Health Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mike Hillstrom, DNR Plant Pest and Disease Specialist • Scott O’Donnell, DNR Forest Genetics and Ecology Specialist <p>60 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided presentation on current forest health issues and the use of forest genetics and planning for potential solutions; Presentations are posted on the CoF website. • An HWA (Hemlock Woolly Adelgid) plan is being developed by DNR Forest Health Staff and Council can expect updates on progress. • Discussion around how we can advocate for these forest health issues; and what types of resources are needed for effective solutions.
<p>3:40 PM ADJOURN</p>	