

Meeting Minutes

Wisconsin Council on Forestry
Forest Products Lab - Madison, WI
March 8, 2006

Members Present:

Jeff Stier, Rep. Donald Friske, Rep. Mary Hubble, Bill Horvath, Fred Clark, Bill Ward, Mary Jean Huston, Robert Rogers, Jim Heerey, Paul DeLong, Troy Brown, Sen. Roger Breske, Ken Ottman, Michael Bolton, Colette Matthews

Members Absent:

Fred Souba, Leon Church, Sen. Russ Decker, Dennis Brown

Guests Present:

Earl Gustafson, Gene Roark, Roger Nacker, Mary Brown, Patrick Walsh, Anne Archie, Sterling Strathe, Tim Eisele, Steve Schmieding, Jerry Bartelt, Lawrence Matthews, Tim Van Deelen, Bill Vander Zouwen, Joe Kovach, Nancy Bozek, Rachel Collins, Roger Rivard, Jim Stoll, Bob Manwell, Scott Reimer, Mike Britton

Welcome

Vice Chair Mary Jean Huston called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m. in Chair Souba's absence. Members and guests introduced themselves. Paul DeLong welcomed Michael Bolton of the United Steel Workers to the Council. Michael represents the interests of unions affiliated with the forest industry, and replaces former member Jon Geenen on the Council.

Impact of Deer on Forest Ecosystems

Panel Presentation

Research on Deer Ecology, Management, and Environmental Impacts – Tim Van Deelen, Ph.D.

Before settlement by Europeans, northern Wisconsin was a very unfriendly place for white-tailed deer. The winters were severe and the forests were largely made up of mature trees. Hunting by Native Americans, skin and fur trading, settlement, market hunting and logging all influenced the early population, with the second wave of logging being followed by an upward population trend. Southern Wisconsin was a friendlier habitat with milder winters, oak woodlands and savannahs. Farming caused the population to decline severely in the early parts of the last century. Wisconsin has one of the most intense deer management programs in the country, and the herd has recovered as a result. But now there is an upward trend that seems to be growing out of control. Factors influencing the current population are:

- Increasing hunting regulations.
- Deer Management Units (DMUs).
- Variable quotas.
- Baiting and feeding.
- Agriculture.
- Milder winters.
- Active forestry.

Forest management and deer management are inextricably linked. In comparing data for areas in the state with different deer densities, the UW Botany Department found that in areas with higher deer densities, large saplings begin disappearing. Seedlings lose their ability to mature. Deer are clearly impacting northern white cedar in the Great Lakes region. The north woods have seen a shift to ferns and grasses, and a change in the structure of the plant community mediated by what deer like to eat and what is able to grow with browsing. In comparing data with that in John Curtis's survey from the 1950's, some broad trends have been identified in the north:

- An 18% average decline in native species in fifty years. Of this decline, 59% is from deer browsing, and 13% from succession.
- Loss of abundance and diversity of herbaceous and forest floor plants.

- Decreasing regeneration and altered composition of woody plants.
- Vegetation-mediated effects on insects, birds, and small mammals.
- High deer population may be preventing the reestablishment of moose.
- High deer population may be supporting wolf recovery.

Exclosure has been used in some areas to illustrate the browsing problem, but has been criticized because a situation with no deer is not realistic. Deer are a natural part of the landscape. The northern forests are becoming more attractive to deer. The carrying capacity in the northern units is now about 90 deer per square mile of deer range. We need to identify a responsible level of deer browsing. Wildlife and forest managers need to cooperate on sustainable management.

Impacts of Deer Overabundance on Forest Regeneration and Ecology – Joe Kovach, Silviculturist, WDNR
Overabundance of deer has significant negative impacts on achieving sustainable forest management goals and on meeting certification standards. Deer can cause substantial changes in the forest, which accumulate over time, making it increasingly difficult to reestablish previous conditions. The impacts of deer overabundance on forestry include:

- Failure of regeneration
- Increased regeneration costs
- Reduced tree and stand growth rates
- Altered timber productivity
- Altered composition of trees and understory plants
- Altered composition of plant communities, which in turn alter habitats for birds and other wildlife.

Foresters ranked deer as the number one barrier of artificial regeneration in a recent survey. They make regeneration efforts more costly and labor-intensive. Methods of protecting regenerating areas include:

- Fencing – The State of Pennsylvania Forestry Division fences every one of their timber sales, finding it to be the only way to get regeneration to occur.
- Tube Shelters – Expensive, but usually effective in artificial regeneration projects.
- Bud Caps – Effective, but time and labor-intensive.
- Repellants – Best in low to medium deer densities, but expensive and labor-intensive.

From a forest regeneration perspective, a population of less than twenty deer per square mile is desired. It's higher than that in most parts of the state, and is on the rise. Wisconsin has an ideal habitat for deer with its landscape of farms and woodlands. Even-age forest management, though effective, actually enhances deer habitat, particularly in cuts of under ten acres. Currently, management alternatives include:

- Doing nothing.
- Managing other species, such as spruce and red pine, which deer tend to avoid.
- Investing in methods of protection, such as fencing.
- Practicing more even-age management in patches of 40 acres or more.
- Landscape management.
- Participation in deer management, including advocating population goals of twenty or less deer per acre, killing more does, limiting baiting and feeding, documenting impacts, educating the public and policy makers, and improving access to impacted land.

Deer Management and Environmental Assessment – Bill Vander Zouwen, Wildlife Management, WDNR
Deer are a keystone species in Wisconsin, meaning they play a major role in the ecosystem. They play a major role economically and socially as well. Chapters NR 1 and 10 of the Wisconsin Administrative code tell us how to set population goals and what factors to consider in setting them. Some of the things that we look at are carrying capacity, positive social impacts, the ecological and economic impacts of what deer eat, disease transmission, deer/vehicle collisions, the Chippewa Treaty harvest allocation, hunter access, agricultural damage levels, and our ability to stay at goals. There are agricultural damage criteria in the code, but none for forest damage.

Items affected socio-economically by deer population levels:

- Hunting – contributes over 20 million tax-free dollars to the state each year
- Crop damage
- Vehicle damage claims

- Garden damage
- Forests
- Christmas tree plantations
- Sales of hunting and fishing equipment

Items affected ecologically by deer population levels:

- Wolf population – each wolf can eat eighteen to twenty deer per year
- Forest songbirds – habitats changed or lost
- Deer mortality and birth rate – mortality increases and birth rate decreases with high population
- Forest plants
- Moose – get brain worms from deer
- Ticks
- Small mammals – lost when vegetation lost

After looking at all of the data on the factors affecting the criteria, the next steps in goal setting are stakeholder involvement, tribal negotiations, development of recommendations by the DNR, submittal of the recommendations to the Natural Resources Board for approval, then submittal to the Legislature for approval. Factors that may affect keeping deer at the established goals are:

- Traditions – i.e., the 9-day hunting season, the preference for bucks
- Conflicts with other recreationists
- Hunter opposition to wasting
- Demand versus supply
- Mild winters
- Deer disease
- Private land access
- Baiting and feeding
- Development near forests
- MFL exemptions for public access
- Leasing of industrial forest land
- Parcelization

Balanced stakeholder input is the key to balanced deer population goals. Working with landowners on access issues while working with hunters on controlling the deer is the key to achieving these goals.

Council Discussion

The suggestion that the MFL negatively impacts herd management goals was debated during a question and answer session with the panelists. It was proposed that documentation be gathered on the impacts, but a survey would be time-consuming. Paul DeLong pointed out that MFL actually provides 1.5 million acres of open land, but noted that a growing percentage of smaller ownerships are closing their land to hunters. These owners may not even be aware of the negative impacts this could have. We need to find a way to educate them.

Some Council members asked if creating a market for venison might be the key to getting hunters to kill more deer. Bill Vander Zouwen pointed out that putting a value on wildlife tends to make it disappear. It can lead to poaching and other illegal activities. The DNR's experiences with offering monetary rewards to hunters in the CWD eradication effort have shown that financial incentives have no impact on hunters. There is a bill being debated in the Legislature that would allow for two free tags with each license in herd reduction units and unlimited additional tags for a \$2.00 processing fee.

Bill was asked about efforts to increase non-resident hunters. He replied that although we already have a lot of them, non-resident fees and access problems are disincentives. He pointed out that many states are seeing a decline in hunting, and that it is estimated that the number of hunters will decline in Wisconsin in the next fifteen to twenty years as we see more urban sprawl, and fewer children being exposed to nature.

Baiting and feeding does not prevent browsing. It does allow the deer to reproduce at a higher level. The tribes have been a positive influence in efforts to achieve population goals, as the preservation of plant species is very important to them, and antlers generally are not an incentive for them when they hunt.

DECISION ITEM:

- The Council will look at the impact of deer on forests in more detail and discuss what its role should be in relation to the issue at the June meeting.

Task Force Reports

- Woody Biomass – Bill Horvath

The major objective of the Woody Biomass Task Force is to get a comprehensive piece of legislation in place for the production and utilization of woody biomass. It has identified 30 components of that legislation so far, and is now working on the details of each. The task force hopes to have something ready for consideration by the State Legislature in 2007. A subcommittee is working on supply side issues.

Vernon County has been selected as a target area to demonstrate how to get into the transportation cost issue. The Task Force will be working with the Wild Turkey Federation to work with landowners, as landowners are generally more interested in wildlife than in producing timber.

Work is still being done on the Great Lakes Commodity Exchange, but funding of \$100,000 is needed before the next step can be taken.

The Task Force would like to see a Fuel for Schools program established in Wisconsin. The Vernon County area with its nine school districts would be ideal for the program, as would the northern part of the state. The Task Force will meet with Anne Archie, the County Forest Association, and the Wisconsin Professional Loggers Association in Rhinelander to look into stewardship contracting, which could present a unique opportunity to fuel some of our schools under a long-term contract.

In response to the Governor's mandate to find alternative fuel sources, the Task Force is working with the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point to pilot a wood-burning project. The Chevron Corporation has a program in place whereby it will capitalize the entire cost if fuel savings are found, and get paid back out of the savings. Chevron is working with the university now to analyze its system. If the project is a success, it is hoped that the technical schools and prison system will convert as well.

- Invasives – Fred Clark

The USDA Forest Service, State and Private Forestry has agreed to fund the Task Force's BMP project. It will provide \$60,340, the full amount that was requested, to the DNR Division of Forestry. Paul DeLong commented that the funding was a compliment to the quality of the proposal being made.

National Lumbering Hall of Fame – Roger Rivard, Scott Reimer, Mike Britton

The National Lumbering Hall of Fame was formed in 1982 in Rice Lake to honor the lumbering history. It is in the process of developing the Great Lakes Forestry Museum to collect, preserve, and display artifacts from the history and folklore of the forest industry, and would like to get support from the Council and other groups. The museum will be built on the site of the former Knapp-Stout sawmill, which, in the 1860s, was the largest sawmill in the world. The estimated 40,000 yearly visitors should bring a good deal of revenue to Rice Lake restaurants and motels and attract specialty retailers to the area. As of now, the site preparation is done, and a building plan for a 1500 square-foot building is finished. To proceed, three million dollars are needed. It is hoped that local, industry and public sources (namely, the State) will each contribute one-third of the funding. Several years ago, both the House and Senate had approved the funding, but it was dropped in a line-item veto.

State Forester's Report - Paul DeLong

'07-09 State Budget – Issues for Consideration by DNR & Governor

Chief State Forester Paul DeLong cannot discuss the '07-09 budget until after its approval by the Natural Resources Board in September. Under the current budget, the Division of Forestry was reduced by six FTE.

Funding was kept for the positions, which will be used to pay contractors to do the work. The Division received some funding for basic invasive plant work, for fire safety and communications, and for overtime. The Division is now moving to fill 50 vacancies. The budget that passed put the Forestry Account balance close to zero, but \$2,000,000 was returned to the account. Joint Finance increased the allotment for the WFLGP grant program for private landowners by \$400,000 and approved a biomass grant program. The mill tax was capped at 2.6% growth. It went below .2 mils for the first time since 1931.

Paul solicited opinions from the Council on priority funding items for the next biennial budget process. Suggestions included:

- An increase to the position allotment for support staff
- Investment in tools that would allow more effective preparation of MFL plans, such as a software system and standards for silviculture
- Funding for the five research recommendations contained in the Report on Forestry Research
- Expansion of private lands technical assistance
- Full funding of efforts to reduce and control invasive species
- Funding for continuous forest inventory
- Greater investment in effective strategies to address fragmentation
- Fragmentation research
- The Legacy proposal

Paul suggested that the Private Forestry Summit being planned by the Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association for next year might be a good place to do a fundamental assessment of whether the MFL could be used to get at bigger issues, such as invasives and deer browsing. There was some discussion about more county government involvement in private forestry.

ACTION ITEM:

- Paul DeLong will send the Council information on how the Urban Forestry Grant Program works.
- Paul DeLong will have staff prepare an issue brief on Michigan's experience with county-run private forestry programs for Council discussion in June.

'07 President's Budget Impacts

It is hard to gauge what changes might occur, but as it stands now, Forest Health funding for native and invasive pests is slated to be reduced by 40%, and State Fire Assistance by 30% in the President's budget. MacIntyre Stennis funding is slated for a massive reduction. Forest Stewardship and Urban and Community Forestry are taking smaller reductions. None of Wisconsin's Forest Legacy Program projects made it into the President's budget. With hurricane response and other national crises, domestic spending will be tight for years to come. We'll need to decide what priorities to focus our efforts on and let go of the less urgent ones.

ACTION ITEM:

- Paul DeLong will send budget updates to the Council as information becomes available.

Carbon Sequestration Initiative

The Division of Forestry is working with the Pinchot Institute for Conservation in Washington, DC. They are looking at the role of forestry in carbon offsets. Along with Maine and Pennsylvania, Wisconsin has been approached to explore the development of a forest-based carbon protocol for the East. Carbon is traded for a little over a dollar per ton on the Chicago Climate Exchange, while in Europe, where caps are in place, it's traded for \$20 to \$25 per ton. If caps come into place here, carbon will be sought after, and having a protocol in place would be helpful. They are looking at policies and procedures that would come into play. This is an environmental service that would use private, rather than public, funding and is an opportunity to further advance sustainable forestry on private lands. There will likely be a public forum in Wisconsin this summer. Council members are encouraged to attend.

Legislative Update - Rep. Don Friske

Rep. Friske distributed his report to the Council, and summarized the status of active bills.

AB 7 – Changes to Property Qualifiers for Managed Forest Law, has been heard by the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Insurance, and is awaiting action.

AB 59 – Right to Forest, has been signed into law.

AB 254 – Wisconsin’s Healthy Forest Initiative, was passed in the Senate by a vote of 32 to 1 on March 7th, and is awaiting a decision by the Governor.

AB 316 – Extension of County Forest Plan Length, has been signed into law.

AB – 686 – Worker’s Compensation Law Changes for Forest Products Industry, awaits consideration by the full Assembly. An agreement has been made with the Workers Compensation Advisory Council.

AB 810 – Adding a Non-Voting Member of the USFS to the Council on Forestry, was passed in the Assembly on a voice vote, and is awaiting action in the Senate. Because of the volume of bills being considered now, the Council was strongly advised to seek action on this today.

AB 1011 – Changes to the MFL Yield Tax Formula, is scheduled for action by the Forestry Committee on March 14th.

AB 1012 – Limited Purchasing Authority for the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, was heard by the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Insurance.

SB 353 – Changes to the Uniform Dwelling Code for Owner Cut Lumber, is slated for action by the Assembly Committee on Forestry on March 14th.

SRJ 69 – Honoring Wisconsin’s Professional Loggers and Forest Product Industry, was passed by the Senate unanimously.

SR – LRB 4684 – Management of the Nicolet – Chequamegon National Forest in Wisconsin, has not yet been introduced.

Rep. Friske reminded the Council that the bills are posted on the Assembly Committee on Forestry website.

DECISION ITEM:

- A motion by Colette Matthews (seconded by Bob Rogers) that the Council resolve to send a message electronically to Senators Schultz, Lasee, Kedzie, Robson, and Hansen urging them to pass Assembly Bill 810 by 3:00 PM this day passed unanimously.

June Field Trip and Meeting – Mary Jean Huston and Paul DeLong

Council members will participate in a field tour in the Wisconsin Rapids area the afternoon of June 12th focusing on deer, private land, and fire-related issues. The Council will be the guests of Stora Enso, who will sponsor an evening get-together and dinner.

The meeting will take place on June 13th at the Hotel Mead in Wisconsin Rapids. Topics may include:

- Impact of Deer on Forests and the Council’s Role
- Woody Biomass Task Force Discussion on Components of its Developing Legislation
- Other Task Force Updates
- Stora Enso’s use of Fiber and Biomass
- Review of Roadless Petition Data
- Budget Priorities
- DATCP/DNR Emerald Ash Borer Rules.
- Paul DeLong’s Speech on the Future of Forestry.
- Alternatives for Delivering Private Forestry.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 PM.

Submitted by:

Mary Brown
WDNR