

Wisconsin Council on Forestry: Thursday, May 21, 2026

Location: State Natural Resources Building (GEF 2), Room G09, 101 S. Webster Street, Madison, WI 53707 and via Zoom – [Register for the Zoom meeting here](#)

Council Members

☒ Tom Hittle, <i>Chair</i>	☒ Henry Schienebeck	☒ William Van Lopik
☒ Matt Dallman, <i>Vice Chair</i>	☐ James Hoppe	☐ Brad Dorff
☒ Heather Berklund, <i>Chief State Forester</i>	☒ James Kerkman	☒ Adena Rissman
☐ Senator Romaine Quinn	☒ Eric Olson	☒ Buddy Huffaker
☐ Senator Jamie Wall	☐ Janelle Crocker	☒ Rebekah Luedtke
☒ Representative Jeff Mursau	☒ Jordan Skiff	OPEN-Builders
☐ Representative Lori Palmeri	☒ Erik Rantala	

Agenda

Welcome & Member Introductions (Chair Hittle)

9:00 – 9:10 a.m.

Chair Update

9:10 – 9:25 a.m.

Notes:

- *Chair Hittle attended the MNFRC meeting on May 19. He provided an overview of the Council and introduction to some ongoing efforts. MN will provide a similar update later in today's agenda. Continuing to discuss avenues for collaboration.*
- *DNR FWP Outdoor Consortium held their first meeting recently. There is opportunity for forestry to contribute to the work in this division. First meeting largely focused on budget topics. Looking for a council member to take over representing the Council on Forestry in this group.*
- *Chair Hittle shares reflections and highlights from the recent Markets Matter meeting in Madison. Meeting's intent was to bring people together from a national audience to discuss issues and develop solutions.*

Open Forum for Council Members

9:25 – 9:45 a.m.

Notes:

- *Matt Dallman: Recently in conversation with a reporter who tuned into the FRM topic at the March Council meeting and was disappointed that deer impacts were not covered. Lots of interest in this topic and it has been brought up at CoF before but hasn't gained traction. Dallman is looking for ideas on how to proceed with this item of interest.*

- *Adena Rissman: Working with DNR and My Wisconsin Woods on a story about landowners identifying old, possibly disease resistant, elms. She is hopeful that this outreach will lead to conservation efforts.*
- *Buddy Huffaker: 30 mid-sized white and red Leopold pine trees lost at the Aldo Leopold Center due to recent storms and other thinning activities. Looking for meaningful, high-profile opportunities to use this volume of wood.*
- *Jim Kerkman: The old Council on Forestry website appears to have been hacked and now leads to inappropriate content. Council hopes to elevate this concern and find a way to bring down the site.*

Legislative Updates

9:45 – 10:15 a.m.

Notes:

- *Kate Thickens on behalf of Senator Wall's office: Governor signed the SAF bill into effect in April.*
- *Rep. Jeff Mursau: Statewide disappointment that dollars in the last budget did not get spent. Currently in campaign season, capitol will be quiet until November.*
- *No updates from the Quinn office or the Palmeri Office.*

State Forester and National Forest Updates

10:15 – 10:45 a.m.

Notes:

- *No representative present from USFS.*
 - *Janelle Crocker is stepping away from CNNF to take on a role at Tongass National Forest in Alaska. Steve Kuennen will be supporting the CNNF in her absence.*
 - *USFS reorganization: the Forest Products Lab is a congressional line item, so it will not go away with reorganization of the USFS, though there could be some shakeups. The region 9 office in Milwaukee may go away, but there is talk of a new office in Madison.*
 - *Henry Schienebeck provides an update on federal forests in the western region.*
- *State Forester Update (Jake Walcisak)*
 - *Division wide vacancy rate is about 9%*
 - *New forester/forestry technician classes and LTEs started this week.*
 - *Integrated Team Leaders and the Forest Protection Section Chief position are in recruitment.*
 - *The first edition of the Forest Management, Ecology, and Research newsletter was released in February, and the second edition was published in early May. This is a new method of communicating research and other efforts conducted by the Forest Economics and Ecology Section.*

- *The Trillion Trees program celebrated Earth Day and Forest Appreciation week with the release of the 2025 Trillion Trees Report, highlighting the planting of over 54,000,000 trees in Wisconsin since 2021.*
- *2025 Water Quality BMP report is now available.*
- *Nine new FRM technicians started as the 2026 field season kicks off.*
- *DNR was represented at the International Mass Timber Conference in Portland, OR.*
- *Over 4 million seedlings were distributed this spring. 56,000 of those were distributed statewide for the annual 4th Grade Arbor Day effort.*
- *An American Elm Screening trial is being established in partnership with the US Army Corp of Engineers and the US Forest Service. Large survivor American elms are being propagated and tested for resistance to Dutch elm disease.*
- *The Community Tree Management Institute (CTMI) 6th cadre is nearing completion, after which the program will have trained urban forestry staff representing a population of nearly 3 million people.*
- *Aeronautics section has seen a busy season with fire patrol and severe weather response.*
- *Currently finding solutions to conduct necessary aircraft inspections and maintenance due to a sudden and unexpected reduction in DOA aircraft mechanics.*
- *The division is working through the federal grant process for FY27 and developing Budget Initiative requests. These are now at the secretary's office for consideration.*
- *The next annual Forestry Core Series training kicks off in June with the new cohort of Foresters and Technicians who started this week.*
- *In 2026, 296 fire departments received \$1.1M from the Forest Fire Protection grants.*
- *The prescribed burn program has conducted 310 prescribed burns amounting to just under 33,000 ac (FYTD), roughly 2,000 acres over division's 5-year average.*
- *The recently launched Wisconsin Certified Burn Boss Program currently has 9 applications in final review. Interest from the burn community and the number of new applicants continues to climb.*
- *The Partner and Private Lands Data Entry Tool is now live. This tool provides a portal for private businesses, municipalities, organizations, and individuals to voluntarily document their burns.*
- *Have seen high fire activity in the past few weeks with dry conditions. 509 fire YTD, comparable to 10-year average.*
- *Chief State Forester Heather Berklund approved the use of emergency Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP) funding for those*

landowners affected by the tornadoes and severe storms in April across the state.

- *The 2026 Cooperating Forester meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2026, in Marshfield.*
- *State Lands timber harvest evaluation goal has been set at 17,487 acres; an approximate 500 acre increase from recent years.*
- *The Tax Law section will be sending reminder letters for mandatory practices and expiration letters to landowners in the near future.*
- *The Tax Law Section is drafting proposals to reintroduce the items for the next legislative session that were not taken up last session. They are also refining proposals to enhance clarity of statute. Any suggestions from the Council can be shared with [R.J. Wickham, Tax Law Section Chief](#).*
- *The Natural Resources Board approved the North Central Forest Regional Master Plan at their meeting on April 15, 2026.*
- *The division has kicked off a project to update Administrative Code Ch. NR 47 related to state aid and grant administration. The team expects to seek approval of the scope statement at the Natural Resources Board meeting in October. Once the scope statement is approved, rule drafting may begin. The Council will be engaged throughout the process.*
- *Wisconsin and Over 20 states are engaged in a lawsuit with the USDA as a result of upcoming GNA contract changes.*

Break: 10:45 – 11:00 a.m.

Budget Priority Discussion (Jordan Skiff, Wastewater Superintendent, City of Sheboygan)

Action Item: Approve Budget Recommendations

11:00 – 11:45 a.m.

Notes:

- *[FY27-29 Budget Recommendations](#) document was drafted by Jordan Skiff with input from several members of the Council on Forestry Funding Subcommittee. It outlines 13 budget recommendations to be brought forward. Formal letter to Secretary's Office will be drafted based on approved recommendations.*
- *Chair Hittle and Vice Chair Dallman will meet with Secretary's Office on June 12th and will provide the letter ahead of time.*
 - *Today's goal is to approve the content of the letter.*
- *Council members discuss draft budget recommendations.*
 - *[Buddy Huffaker] Motion to approve budget recommendations 1-13 with the understanding that more detail/clarity may be needed in advancing recommendations.*
 - *[Jordan Skiff] Seconded the motion.*

- *No other discussion on the motion.*
- *Chair Hittle offers the opportunity to conduct an individual voice vote. Hearing no requests, unanimous consent procedure is used to pass the motion.*
- *Motion passed.*
- *A formal letter to the Secretary's Office will be prepared.*

Lunch: 11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Update and Discussion

- Background and Update (Calvin Boldebuck, DNR Legislative Liaison)
- Council Discussion (Chair Hittle)

12:30 – 1:10 p.m.

Notes:

- *Chair Hittle introduces the topic of Knowles-Nelson, noting that he senses it will continue to be discussed in the future.*
- *Calvin Boldebuck shares background on the program and its trajectory into current status.*
 - *Comparisons were drawn between current law, the governor's proposal, and the proposed legislature (version that passed through the assembly).*
- *Council engages in discussion.*
 - *Sticking points for the CoF historically have been interest payments and accumulation of debt.*
 - *Tim Gary provides an explanation for how stewardship debt is paid for. Approx. \$13.5 million (roughly half) by the forestry seg account and the balance is paid by GPR (sales taxes). This accounts for less than 5% of state debt payments consistently.*
 - *The Council discusses the question of "how much public land is enough". Several perspectives are shared.*
 - *There is general agreement that it would be useful to have shareable information on how much public land Wisconsin has, how much other states have, other relevant comparisons.*
 - *Chair Hittle and Vice Chair Dallman will work over the summer to gather information that the Council will need to drive this conversation forward.*

MN Forest Resources Council Introduction (Eric Schenck, Executive Director & Pete Aube, Council Chair)

1:10 – 1:40 p.m.

Notes:

- *Eric Schenck, executive director of the MN Forest Resources Council, provides an overview of the Council, including structure, priorities, and initiatives. [View the MNFRC Introduction Presentation](#).*

WI Forests FIRST Update (Camoin Associates)

1:40 – 2:25 p.m.

Notes:

- *Camoin Associates shares an update on the WI Forests FIRST project. [View the May Update Presentation](#). Goals for the update include:*
 - *Understanding engagement with stakeholders across the state.*
 - *Insight into how market trends, emerging opportunities, and disruptive forces will be explored.*
 - *Data and methodology overview.*
 - *Next steps and what to expect moving forward.*
- *Council members have an opportunity for questions.*

Break: 2:25 – 2:40 p.m.

Division of Forestry Strategic Planning Discussion (Lenny Betker, DNR Division of Forestry Planner & Amanda Koch, DNR Division of Forestry Policy Advisor)

2:40 – 3:30 p.m.

Notes:

- *Lenny Betker, DNR Division Planner provides an overview of the strategic planning process and how stakeholder input fits in. [View the presentation on strategic planning](#).*
- *Council members have an opportunity to weigh in on priorities and items that they see needing more attention or less attention in the upcoming strategic direction.*
 - *Council members share concerns about how this feedback will be incorporated.*
 - *It is suggested that a summary of all stakeholder input and how the input is addressed in the strategic direction is shared with Council.*

Reforestation and Red Pine Discussion (Chair Hittle)

3:30 – 4 p.m.

Notes:

- *Chair Hittle is looking for more input on what the Council wants to know about regeneration/reforestation from the DNR.*
 - *There are lots of anecdotal stories, but the Council will need data to produce meaningful recommendations.*

- *Chair Hittle provided some “high level” questions for Carmen Hardin and her Applied Forestry staff to investigate.*

Adjourn: 4pm