



King County
Rural Forest Commission

Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting
Wednesday, July 17, 2008
Preston Community Center, Preston, Washington

Commissioners present: Doug McClelland, Matt Rourke, Ron Baum, and Doug Schindler

Commissioners absent: Alex Kamola, Julie Stangell and Kevin Buckley

Ex officio members present: Jim Franzel

Ex officio members absent: Marilyn Cope and Amy Grotta

Staff: David Kimmett, Parks Division; Bill Loeber, WLRD Forester; Joelyn Higgins, DDES; Kristi McClelland, WLRD Forester; Kathy Creahan, WRLD; Linda Vane, Liaison for the Rural Forest Commission.

Guests: Sandy Miller of Wabash Farms

Meeting Summary

Action Items:

1. Finalize and mail the Chair's letter to Executive Sims regarding the 2009 budget planning process.
2. Seek input from absent RFC members regarding a proposed pilot project on Island Center Forest involving third party certification.

Minutes:

Motion 1-0708 That the minutes from the May 21, 2008 meeting be approved. Approval of the motion was unanimous.

Vice Chair Doug McClelland called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Update on the Rural Forest Commission's Response to Business and Strategic Planning for the Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD)

Group Discussion

In response to a presentation at the May meeting by the WLRD Assistant Director, Rural Forest Commission (RFC) Chair Julie Stangell drafted a letter to Executive Ron Sims, which will provide input to the County's budget planning process. The letter will articulate the value of the County's services to rural forest landowners and offer suggestions for funding sources other than Surface Water Management fees. At this meeting the RFC reviewed and commented on the draft letter.

Jim Franzel suggested that a statement be added to the letter about the significance of reauthorization of federal funding under the Secure Rural Schools Act of 2000. The Forestry Program receives funds under Title III to support its youth in forestry grant program [Natural Resource Stewardship Network].

Ron Baum said that the role of forest conservation in responding to global warming in King County should be included. It is a policy priority, he said. Doug S. said that the RFC has been appointed by Executive Sims to advise on actions that affect forests. Doug S. said that by not meeting with commissioners the Executive appears to be leaving the commission out of a critically important process.

Action: Finalize the letter and mail to Executive Sims with copies to all Councilmembers.

Short Reports and Announcements

Doug Schindler reported on the Partnership for Rural King County (PRKC) “Walk the Line” Tour of working farms and forestlands for decision makers. He commended PRKC for being a force in retaining rural economic activity.

Doug S. recognized the Forest Service for a stewardship thinning project that has been proposed for the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Doug S. said it is exciting to see that the Forest Service is undertaking a forest health practice. Doug S. encouraged everyone to go to the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest website and comment. Jim Franzel added that this is their first project under the federal Healthy Forests Initiative.

[<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/projects/i-90-corridor-thin/index.shtml>]

Kathy Creahan announced that an ordinance was introduced at the Council to repeal the contested section of the County’s rural clearing limits, which currently require that 65% of a property’s area be left in native vegetation.

Update on timber harvests & certification proposal for Island Center Forest

Bill Loeber, King County Forester

Bill provided a brief update on timber harvests on Vashon’s Island Center Forest and asked the RFC members to provide input on a proposed pilot project on the property. The pilot project would involve third party certification of the forest through the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Bill said that the proposal for FSC certification came from the Vashon community. Community members and island non-profit organizations perform a significant amount of the forest management of Island Center Forest in cooperation with the County, which owns the land.

Bill said that he has reviewed changes in the FSC program that have occurred since 2005. The changes include alterations in FSC Pacific Coast Standards, lower costs for certification and a clear guidebook for inventorying and monitoring. If the County were to undertake the pilot project, the income from timber harvests is likely to be sufficient to cover the additional expenses related to third party certification according to Bill.

Doug M. said that FSC certification is supported by individuals who are among the most active proponents of active forest management by small forest landowners in the county. However, said Doug, if the County decides to do FSC on Island Center Forest, they need to have a Forestry Program to provide the technical expertise to implement the pilot project. Doug M. said that Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) changed their view on FSC certification of state forests as things changed with FSC. WDNR has found that the certification program works well for them, said Doug. The County probably should look at this and try it out, he said.

Jim F. said that if the RFC is being asked to change its 2005 policy recommendation on FSC certification, then the RFC would need an agenda item to reconsider the policy decision. That does not mean that Bill cannot take their comments and make his own recommendation as a staff member to the Parks Department.

Action: After some discussion, the commission decided that as key members were absent from this meeting, they should be consulted. The subject will be addressed at the next RFC meeting.

DDES Technical Advisory Committee on permitting

Dan Bruner, Consulting Forester

Linda introduced Dan Bruner, who is serving on a new technical advisory committee to make recommendations regarding lowering building and land-use permit fees and streamlining processes at the County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) [<http://www.kingcounty.gov/council/news/2008/May/DDEScmte.aspx>]. The advisory committee will submit its recommendations to DDES in the fall of this year.

Dan Bruner said that among the most important issues for forest landowners are uncertainty about regulations and high fees. People want predictable outcomes in terms of their time and money spent, he said. In his experience as a consulting forester, said Dan, he has observed that if a forest practice permit requires a lot of money, people will just do nothing even if the health of their land suffers.

Regulatory uncertainty is created when multiple permits are required in a certain area, said Dan, for example when permits from both the state and the county are required. He said that standardization and simplification of regulations would help forest landowners. By way of example, Dan said that approved Forest Stewardship Plans should be emphasized as they can provide a streamlined route through DDES permitting processes.

Brandy Reed said that agricultural practices are permitted differently by DDES because the County acknowledges that agriculture is different than building practices. DDES set a cap on the cost of permits for agriculture, and forest practices should be treated the same way, she said. She further recommended that the County consider forest practices on even very small acreages to be significant forest stewardship actions and not set a threshold on the size of properties eligible for a permit fee cap.

Dan agreed there should be a cap on permit costs when an approved Forest Stewardship Plan is in place. Because the number of such permits is relatively low, he did not think that the cost to the County would be particularly high.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, September 17, 2008. The last meeting of the year will be held on November 19, 2008.

Staff Liaison: Linda Vane, at 206-296-8042 or linda.vane@kingcounty.gov