

Minutes
King County Rural Forest Commission
May 14, 2003
Preston Community Center

Commissioners present: Bill Kombol, Fred McCarty, Doug McClelland, Dave Warren

Commissioners absent: Jean Bouffard, Gordon Bradley, Rudy Edwards, Steve Ketz, Ken Konigsmark, Matt Mattson

Exofficio members:

Staff: Bill Loeber, Kristi McClelland, Benj Wadsworth

Guests: Dennis Dart, Kirk Hanson, Lee Kahn, Fred Sayer

Doug McClelland called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

Benj distributed a suggested timeline for RFC meetings through the rest of 2003.

Minutes Approval

There was not a quorum present to approve the April meeting minutes.

WADNR Small Forest Landowners Office

Kirk Hanson gave an update about the WADNR Small Forest Landowners Office (SFLO). WADNR is going through a great deal of change right now due to budget limitations. The SFLO office is likely going to be merged with the Forest Stewardship Program since both offices provide assistance to similar constituencies. The SFLO currently has 6 employees in Olympia and 6 field foresters. They are going to lose 4 employees in Olympia, including Steve Stinson, the head of the program. The riparian easement program will probably be cut. Rather, the focus will shift to the alternate planning process, which provides landowners with an alternative option for meeting the state forest practice rules. The Forest Stewardship Program will be cut from 17 foresters to 11. 100% of the state funding for the Stewardship Program was cut.

Dennis Dart asked who was going to cover the SFLO during the fire season, as many of the SFLO staff are involved with fire fighting. In the past, landowners have had to be patient. Dennis expressed concern that if the office's focus is going to be on alternate plans, then there needs to be staff available to provide assistance. It is important that small landowners have an advocate to guide the plans through the beaurocratic process.

Dennis asked how WADNR is going to pay for the new RMAP bill that subsidizes culvert replacement for small forest landowners. Kirk is hoping to bring in grant money. The Salmon Recovery Fund board has allocated \$2 million for culvert replacement on forestlands. Kirk will focus on grant writing in the coming year(s). He feels that there is still a fair amount of federal and private foundation money available. The Forest Stewardship Program will definitely be focused on RMAPs and alternate plans. There is no talk about making the regulations tighter to cover for the lack of assistance available. If anything, the regulations might be relaxed.

Kirk feels that the best hope for small forest landowners is the creation of new business models such as forest coops, marketing of local wood, or multi-landowner habitat conservation plans. He is involved with the Family Forest Foundation in Lewis County, which he thinks has a lot of potential.

Doug McClelland summarized that there is not much the RFC can do other than be aware that there is not likely to be much state funding for small forest landowners in the near future. The staff working on alternate plans will likely be wildlife biologists rather than foresters, which could present a challenge to the process.

Kirk commented that he feels that the legislature does not have a good understanding of the small forest landowner demographic – they do not understand the scale of the problem. If he remembers correctly, 30% of the timber harvested in WA comes from NIPF lands.

Kirk elaborated that there is a need for some sort of business incubator program at the state level. The riparian easement program provided money on a continued basis. It would be better if the state's role was to help landowners help themselves by providing assistance with business development.

Bill Kombol commented that one alternate business model is for landowners to sell their land for development. He feels that it is naive to think that a coop can be a substitute for the development value of the land. Kirk commented that a number of surveys have found that most small forest landowners are not interested in developing their land. They bought it for reasons other than its development potential.

Kirk equated the concept of marketing local wood to the organic food industry. He feels that there is potential to educate landowners about the benefits of buying local wood.

Vashon Forest Stewards

Fred Sayer gave a presentation about the efforts of the Vashon Forest Stewards. The landowner population on Vashon is probably “greener” than the population in the rest of KC, and most of the forest landowners do not own their land for its development potential, but rather for aesthetics, wildlife and as a personal refuge.

The coop was formed as a result of the Forest Stewardship programs that have been very successful on the island. Roughly 230 people have taken the Forest Stewardship class, and there are about 1300 acres currently enrolled in Cut programs, mostly small (5-10 acre) lots. There are roughly 15,000 forested acres on Vashon (of 25,000 acres total land). Much of it needs active management to restore it to a healthy forest.

Most of Vashon was clearcut in the 1880s and early in the 20th century. Following the harvest, much of the island was converted to farming. By 1960s, much of the agriculture industry had disappeared as truck farming on the mainland took over. As a result, the forest has regenerated, mostly without management. Many of the stands are overcrowded, and invasive species are a serious problem.

The Forest Stewards are focused on ecological restoration, wildlife habitat enhancement, recreational trails and ecologically sustainable harvest. They focus on education about the meaning of good forest stewardship and the development of value added forest products such as flooring and decorative structural beams. They never take all of anything from the forest. The group hosted a field day this past winter to show the community some of the low-impact harvest techniques that are possible using new equipment.

Fred showed slides of a number of products using wood from the island. Bill Kombol asked if those purchasing wood were concerned about using unstamped wood. As long as it is full-dimension lumber, there is not a problem.

The Forest Stewards are hoping to do a thinning project on Agren Park, which is managed by the Vashon Parks District. The Stewards did a preliminary inventory and found that a thinning should generate enough profit to fund some trail work in addition to covering the costs of the thinning.

Discussion about Small Forest Landowner Issues

Doug led a discussion about what the RFC should focus on with regard to small forest landowners. He feels that the RFC should focus on educating political leaders about the importance of forest stewardship. He suggested that the RFC should address the forest health issue and the lack of funding for forest conservation. He feels that there is a need for leaders to

understand the issues facing small forest landowners. Kristi commented that there is a need for a new business model that focuses on using local wood to build smaller homes. She suggested that the project in Juanita would be a good demonstration site. The Cascade Land Conservancy is involved with this project.

Doug asked everyone to make suggestions as to what the RFC should address:

Bill Kombol suggested the need to reform the CUT program to address the proportionality issue discussed at the March meeting.

Kirk Hanson suggested that the RFC focus on educating political leaders – perhaps by giving a presentation on the value of family forestry. He also suggested the need for a comprehensive list of conservation tools that is available to landowners.

Dave Warren emphasized the need to educate about the connection between forest conservation and sustainable building.

Dennis Dart commented that there is a need for the County to keep up its end of the deal with regard to the fish passage issue. He gave an example of the small landowner that has to replace a culvert when there is a KC Roads culvert 100 yards downstream that is not being addressed. He also suggested the need to complete inventories on County-owned forestland and begin harvesting so that the forests can be used to educate about forestry.

Lee Kahn suggested the need to address the issue of the demographic of small forest landowners – that many of them are getting older and will soon be faced with estate tax issues. She also feels that the TDR program needs to be more effective.

Benj suggested the need to look at infrastructure and marketing. He found a website for a program in Montana that links small-scale timber producers with consumers. There already exists a program in KC for exchanging used building materials and one was just started for selling used household “junk.” It should be easy to establish a similar system for wood products – if there are enough suppliers. The first step would be to find out if there are forest landowners who are interested. Another possibility would be for the County to purchase a portable mill to help small landowners process their timber.

Bill Kombol suggested that the County should consider refunding the timber excise tax to small forest landowners.

RFC membership

Ken Konigsmark is likely going to have to step down from the RFC due to his new position at Boeing. Doug suggested that Doug Schindler, also with Mountains-to-Sound Greenway Trust, would be a good candidate.

Steve Ketz may also step down due to Weyerhaeuser's changing ownership in KC. Doug suggested that perhaps a representative from Hancock would be appropriate.

Staff Report

Benj commented that the new appointments and re-appointments will go before the Natural Resource, Parks and Open Space Committee on June 5. There will be an opportunity for staff to give the committee an update about forestland issues in KC, and he is looking for input. Benj suggested the need to start planning a summer field trip for Council members – perhaps to the Polygon property. Council is on recess the first half of August, so it might make sense to do the trip at the end of July, as they are often very busy when they return from recess. The RFC decided at the beginning of the year not to have a July meeting, so maybe the field trip could take its place. Dave Warren suggested that the Agren Park thinning project will take place between July 16 and September 1, so that might be a good opportunity. Doug suggested using the June meeting to plan the trip.

Benj distributed the new KC Forestry Program brochure.

Dennis Dart announced that the Washington Farm Forestry Association will be hosting a twilight tour on one of his tree farms in Thurston County on July 9. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Next meeting

Wednesday, June 11, 10:00 – 12:00, Preston Community Center.