Commissioners present: Nate Veranth, forest landowner (Chair); Rex Thompson, forester (Vice Chair); Bernie McKinney, Green River Coalition; Andy Chittick, forest landowner/sawmill operator; Amy LaBarge, forest ecologist; Brandy Reed, King Conservation District; Monica Paulson Priebe, Green River College; Laurie Benson, Washington State Department of Natural Resources; Kelsey Ketcheson, Washington State University Extension.

Guests: Greg Wingard, Green River Coalition; Dave Warren, Vashon Forest Stewards; Li Hsi; Wendy Howard; Don Davis; Tish Davis; Steve Horton

King County Staff: Richard Martin, Water and Land Resources Division; Fereshteh Dehkordi, Department of Development and Environmental Services; Linda Vane, Commission Liaison

Chair Nate Veranth called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

Motions

Motion 1- 0518 That the minutes of the March 16, 2017 meeting be approved. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff and Agency Reports and Announcements

- **King County** – Richard Martin reported that the Forestry Program was in the process of hiring a Forester II to fill a position that was vacated by a retirement. He also reported on the county’s progress toward meeting a Strategic Climate Action Plan goal of planting 1 million trees by 2020. The project is an initial step in achieving a large scale vision of reforesting King County within 30 years. According to Richard, the County was on track to exceed its internal target of half of the 1-million-tree goal and would be working with partner agencies on a plan to achieve the other half.

- **Vashon Forest Stewards** – Dave Warren provided an update on the activities of the non-profit organization, which include leading ecological forest thinnings on public and private land and operating a sawmill and log yard that serve Vashon Island. He described some of the work that the Stewards had undertaken on forested parks and open spaces on the island. One such project was the thinning of 25 acres owned by the school district, primarily to remove diseased trees for public safety and to improve forest health. The Stewards then milled wood from the site, which was used in the construction of Vashon’s new high school, according to Dave.

Dave praised the County for its ongoing efforts to preserve forests and to retain large blocks of contiguous forestland. He provided a brief history of the county policies and programs that support such efforts, going back to the 1996 Farm and Forest Report. Dave encouraged the County to do more to support locally grown and locally produced wood products. Among Dave’s suggestions were looking at the Current Use Taxation Programs to make sure that adequate accessory uses that support forest management were allowed. He also encouraged the County to seek potential profit by sending the logs from the Forest Stewardship Council-certified Island Center Forest to an FSC-certified sawmill. Milling of local FSC-certified wood at a local FSC-certified mill could benefit the rural economy as well as the County government, Dave said.
Update on proposed mine conversion project near Black Diamond
Greg Wingard, Green River Coalition

Greg Wingard provided an update on the reclamation process taking place on the Reserve Silica Mine site near Black Diamond. He said that one of the challenges of the mine reclamation and clean-up process had been coordinating the overlapping authorities of the various agencies involved. Greg explained that the agencies concerned met recently to determine how to work in a more unified fashion and to clarify the schedule for completing the clean-up. The agencies, which are in charge of the mine reclamation permits that cover the range of Reserve Silica’s mine reclamation activities, included:

- Washington State Department of Ecology, Model Toxics Clean-Up Program – In charge of contaminated site clean-ups. Permits cover discharges of groundwater and surface waters into adjacent water wetlands, according to Greg. Currently the Reserve Silica site is out of compliance for pH and arsenic.
- Seattle/King County Dept. of Health - In charge of the current landfilling with inert waste, which consists primarily of construction and demolition debris.
- King County Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (DPER) – In charge of the mine closure plan for the site.

The agencies held a second meeting with the owners of the property, according to Greg. While Reserve Silica owns the land as is responsible for a portion of the clean-up, Holsim, Inc. has taken charge of cleaning up two pits that they have been filling with cement kiln dust. It was agreed that after Reserve Silica and Holcim cleaned up the site, the entire site will be inspected for contamination and a preliminary report would be issued. The report would go to the Department of Ecology, which would be responsible for determining the clean-up goals and the options for meeting pursuing those goals.

Greg said that the government agencies involved in the Reserve Silica mine reclamation and clean-up would meet with the Greater Maple Valley Area Council on June 5th to provide the public with an update on plans for reclamation and clean-up of the mine site. Greg commented that in the last 6 months there had been a watershed change in the way the site had been managed, increasing the chances that the land could be returned to forestry use rather than being developed.

Greg responded to questions from the commission. A discussion ensued.

Proposed King County code changes
Nate Veranth, Commission Chair, facilitating

Two topics were introduced for discussion: (1) Accessory living spaces in the Forest Production District; and (2) Regulations pertaining to forest management activities under King County jurisdiction.

(1) Accessory living spaces in the Forest Production District

Linda Vane provided an introduction to the topic. In previous meetings, the commission had developed a list of ideas for additions and changes to the code affecting forested properties and had been deliberating on each of the proposals in turn. On this day the first topic of discussion would be proposals to allow accessory dwelling units or worker housing in the Forest Production District (FPD). Linda explained that currently such units were not allowed in the FPD. She said that the King County Comprehensive Plan states that the main purpose of the FPD is growing trees, whether for commercial timber, recreation, environmental protection or other uses. However, the Comprehensive Plan also recognizes that people may need to live on the land in order to manage it, so single family residences are allowed, she said.
Linda shared a GIS analysis of private properties of less than 80 acres in size, with or without residences, in the FPD. In this analysis a “property” could comprise more than one parcel. The analysis showed that the preponderance of residences were to be found on properties that were less than 40 acres in size. They tend to be clustered near a major road, commercial area, or an amenity like a lake or scenic river, according to Linda.

A discussion ensued. Three potential approaches to accessory living spaces emerged:

- accessory dwelling units,
- accessory living quarters, and
- temporary worker housing

Fereshteh Dehkordi provided an overview of the current code associated with each type of living space. A discussion followed, which served to clarify the distinctions among the different housing options and what conditions such as minimum lot size would apply in the zones where such living spaces are currently allowed. Fereshteh further explained that on any parcel, clearing for a single family home is limited to 3 acres, regardless of the number or size of structures on the property. In addition, any structure with cooking facilities that include a sink, must have a separate septic system hookup.

An extensive discussion of the potential benefits and limitations of the three housing options ensued. It was agreed that it was important to keep non-industrial forest land is forestry use and that it was vital to protect the integrity of the Forest Production District. It was also recognized that some small forest landowners needed ongoing assistance to manage the land, whether that assistance came from live-in family members or from hired workers.

Several people addressed similarities and differences in the workload and timing of what needs to be accomplished in the agricultural setting and on forestland, respectively. Agriculture was generally understood to have a fairly constant need for labor, while forest management labor needs can vary. In summary, one landowner might require only intermittent efforts of a major kind, timber harvest for example, while another landowner would require help for ongoing vegetation management such as tending of young trees or noxious weed control.

It was said that the issue of having contractors or even family managing the land has typically been taken care of informally. One has a crew come in for a couple of weeks to do some thinning. They camp out, bring a trailer in, and are gone after a while.

Others provided examples of the benefits of having multi-generational families living on the land if the landowners were doing the bulk of the forest management work themselves.

The Commission discussed options for addressing these and related issues. The discussion concluded with a planning session that determined next steps.

**Regulations pertaining to forest management activities under County jurisdiction**

Brandy Reed introduced the second topic of discussion, which would be on the agenda again at a future meeting. She explained that most forest management activities are regulated under the State [Forest Practices Rules](#) by Washington State Department of Natural Resources. However, the state does not issue permits for activities that take place within a tree length and-a-half (150 feet) of structures. She explained that this means that forest management activities within the 150 feet are regulated by the County, which treats forest management activities near structures as “clearing.” Brandy said that this is creating
confusion for landowners, particularly if they have a county-approved forest stewardship plan and/or want to do simple work like pruning vegetation. (There is no equivalent to a Class 1 State Forest Practice in County Code.) Brandy said there would be an opportunity at a future Commission meeting to discuss recommendations for addressing the problem.

Nate commented that a rural landowner could easily be in a situation where they face a $50,000 permit to clear some bushes.

Dave Warren added that a $100 State Forest Practices permit would include a state forester coming out to look around and approve of the proposed work. In contrast, he had observed that landowners do not thin their decaying alder within 150 feet of structures because it would be $3,000 for a county clearing permit for starters, and the landowner cannot sell those decayed logs to recoup the cost of the permit.

**Additional Reports**

Andy Chittick reported that the Northwest Natural Resource Group (NNRG) had applied for a grant to work with Oregon State University on researching the economics of thinning as an alternative to traditional clearcutting on small lot private forest land. The research could support some of the Commission’s questions regarding the economics of forest management, he said, observing that most small forest landowners don’t clear cut all at once. Instead, they stagger harvests and other forest practices. If successful in winning the grant, NNRG would start work on the project in early 2018, according to Andy.

**Public Comment**

Linda Vane read comments submitted by Sandy Miller.

The following individuals commented:
Li Hsi
Wendy Howard
Don Davis
Tish Davis
Steve Horton
Dave Warren

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

**Next meeting**
The next meeting will be held on May 20, 2017, at the Preston Community Center.