Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting  
Thursday, November 10, 2016, Preston Community Center

Commissioners present:  Nate Veranth, forest landowner (Chair); Dick Ryon, forester; Rex Thompson, forester/land use consultant; Andy Chittick, forest landowner/sawmill operator; Amy LaBarge, forester; Grady Steere, Campbell Global; Steven Mullen-Moses, Snoqualmie Tribe; Monica Paulson Priebe, Green River College; Daryl Harper, forest landowner

Guests: Michael Brathovde; Bea Covington, King Conservation District; Green River College students

King County Staff:  Michael “Murph” Murphy, Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD); Bill Loeber, WLRD; Kristi McClelland, WLRD; Richard Martin, WLRD; Kelly Heintz, Parks Division; David Kimmett, Parks Division; Fereshteh Dehkordi, Dept. of Permitting and Environmental Review; Linda Vane, Commission Liaison

Chair Nate Veranth called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Motions

Motion 1- 1116   That the minutes of the September 8, 2016 meeting be approved. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion 2- 1116   That the meetings of the Rural Forest Commission be held on the third Thursday of the month. The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers 2017

Nominations were opened for the positions of Chair and Vice Chair in 2017-18. Monica Priebe nominated Nate Veranth for the position of Chair; Rex Thompson seconded. Nate nominated Rex Thompson for the position of Vice Chair; Monica Priebe seconded.

Two at large members of the 2017-18 Executive Committee will be selected at the January 19 meeting. Nate asked for suggestions.

2017 Meeting Schedule

Chair Nate Veranth proposed that the commission henceforth hold its meetings and conference calls on the third Thursday of the month instead of second Thursdays. He explained that second Thursdays had created scheduling conflicts for some staff. Monica Priebe moved that meetings be held on the third Thursday of the month and Dick Ryon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Comprehensive Plan Hearing November 28, 2016

Nate announced that the King County Council would hold a final hearing to hear public comment on the 2016 Comprehensive Plan on November 28. He asked if anyone would be interested in representing the commission at the hearing and possibly commenting on the proposal to strike the provision for a mine reclamation demonstration project from Policy I-203. Dick Ryon said that the commission had written a strong letter on the topic and recommended that the commission back that up by participating in the hearing.

Action: Four commissioners volunteered to attend the hearing.
Public Comment

Green River College forestry students provided comment on the definition of forestry.

Developing a comprehensive definition of “forestry”
Nate Veranth, facilitating

Nate prefaced the discussion by explaining that the Department of Development and Environmental Review (DPER) had asked the commission to assist them in an effort to make county code easier to use by updating the definition of “forestry” as it appears in KC Code 21A.06.531.

Nate facilitated an extensive discussion of a draft expanded definition based on the commission’s brainstorm exercise at its September meeting. The discussion began with scoping the purpose and need for an updated definition. Among the points made were:

- A number of other comments concerned including the ecosystem concept along with the outputs of forests and including ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water infiltration.
- It is impossible to put all possible meanings of forestry into one bucket. One should define forestry in broad terms and then define the limits clearly.
- Any good definition should have some breadth to it and language for avoidance of doubt. Do some work to make that distinction between what is forestry and what is not.
- Tribal identity and traditional uses are important to consider.
- A variety of different perspectives were offered on the ways that the growing and harvest of timber is and is not similar to agricultural crops.
- A definition would concern overall management of forests along with all the other associated resources. Start with a basic definition and then add a list of recitals that one can add to or subtract from over time as needed.
- Take into consideration the problems have come up in using the current code.
- Make the definition more inclusive to help people keep their forests longer while at the same time excluding some of the cheaters or gamers.
- Ultimately we are trying to make the permitting process more efficient so the permitting process will be quicker. That would benefit the county and the people trying to get permits.

Action: A committee was formed to produce a revised draft of the definition of forestry.

King County conservation easements administration
Michael “Murph” Murphy
Land Conservation Program Manager, Water and Land Resources Division

Michael “Murph” Murphy presented an update on the county’s work toward its goal of protecting all remaining high value conservation land in the county within a generation, known as the “Land Conservation and Preservation Initiative.” He also explained the workings of the Transfer of Development Rights Program, one of the primary tools for achieving the county’s land protection goal.

Murph explained that the protection of all high value conservation land, roughly 66,000 acres, is a priority for the County Executive. There is an advisory group on which the commission Chair, Nate Veranth,
serves as the commission’s representative. The advisory group is about half way through their process and plans to give the Executive a recommendation on how to proceed in January 2017, he said. It is estimated that it would cost roughly 1.5 to 1.8 billion dollars to achieve the goal. It is estimated that the county could cover one-third to three-quarters of the cost with existing revenues, leaving a gap of 400-500 million dollars over thirty years.

Much of the goal would be accomplished through the Transfer of Development Rights Program. Other funding through private sources might be associated with future ecosystem service markets, said Murph. He went on to provide information on the status of the county’s efforts to protect high value conservation lands to date. A total of 830,000 acres are already in public ownership or protected by conservation easements in the county. The county holds 156,000 of these acres under conservation easements, according to Murph.

An extensive discussion of the details of the Transfer of Development Rights Program and the conservation easements associated with the program ensued. Murph answered questions from the commission. He explained that “protection” usually means protecting land from residential development that would need roads and other infrastructure. When asked if it would not be enough to simply guarantee that the land would remain undeveloped, he said that the land could have some other conservation values associated with it like ecosystem services or growing food. In the broadest sense “protection” would mean restricting residential development, but it also could mean requiring a forest stewardship plan to ensure that forest will remain healthy through time. Thus an easement could be more complicated that simply not allowing houses, explained Murph.

Following the presentation, the Murph said that there is perception that the length, detail and complexity of the county’s conservation easement agreements might be discouraging some property owners from pursuing conservation easement agreements with the county. Murph asked the commissioners to let him know if they know of this having happened.

In response to the commission’s previous recommendations, his staff would take the following steps:

- Prepare a “frequently asked questions” document covering each element of the basic conservation easement agreement.
- Make the Transfer of Development Rights website more user friendly. For example, explain more fully what does it means to be a sending site landowner and what it means to be a receiving site landowner.

Action: In response to a request from Murph for suggestions for making conservation easement agreements simpler and easier for the public to understand, a committee was formed to review sample easements and provide comments.

**Black Diamond forest stewardship plan and public engagement**
Kelly Heintz
Planner, Natural Lands Program, Parks & Recreation Division

Kelly Heintz solicited input from the commission on the Parks and Recreation Division’s public involvement process for the Black Diamond Area Stewardship Plan, which would include Black Diamond Open Space, Ravensdale Retreat Natural Area, and Henry’s Ridge Open Space. The area comprises a little over 1,000 acres located between urban and rural areas. It includes well-used trails.
Kelly explained that the county would host its first community meeting on November 30. The public meetings would blend information on the technical aspects of the project with information on ways for the public to get involved in stewardship. The public involvement process would result in a draft plan for managing public open space in the Black Diamond Area, including a public use component and guidance on actions to achieve improved forest health.

Kelly described the extensive public involvement effort associated with the Black Diamond Area Plan. A stakeholder steering committee, which would include nearby residents, user groups and technical experts, had been giving recommendations on communications strategy and materials. Public meetings and a field would be organized, followed by a design workshop to synthesize what had been heard in the community meetings.

Among the commission’s recommendations were:

- Has the county considered leaving one of the sections of forest unmanaged as an experiment and to provide a way for public to see the difference between an unmanaged stand and a managed stand?
- Consider the possibility that residents would want to collect firewood from slash piles. Would that be allowed or not?
- At the public meetings provide background information about forestry. Let the public know what sites would look like immediately after thinning and then five and ten years later.
- Use photos or take people to harvested sites; some may be shocked by the appearance immediately after thinning.

Green River College students question and answer session
Nate Veranth, facilitating

Nate invited the students and other guests to ask questions and comment on the Black Diamond Stewardship Plan presentation. Among the comments were:

- Look at the possibility of Firewise shaded fuel breaks and mastication of slash. Consider discussing residents’ concerns about wildfire risk.
- At the public meetings consider passing around cards for written comments from the audience.
- Show photos of really ugly aftermaths of timber harvests and then show what Parks proposes to do. It sounds like what Parks would do would not look bad by comparison.
- Laminated root rot is a serious problem in that area. In the public meeting Parks staff should explain that affected trees can look green and healthy but actually be a serious safety hazard.
- Explain the mechanisms for trees looking green although they are suffering. Consider that it is possible that 10-20 acre clear cuts may ultimately be needed to protect public safety given the extent of the root rot problem.

Staff and Agency Reports and Announcements

King County – Richard Martin reported that the response to King County’s coached forest stewardship planning course and forestry technical assistance has been overwhelmingly positive. He also said that in the first three quarters of 2016 the Forestry Program had helped with forest stewardship plans on nearly
1,000 acres, a significant contribution towards active management of privately-owned forests in the county.

Kristi McClelland added that many of those who took the forest stewardship course were from out of the area. They bought homes on forested property because of the beautiful setting. Many enrolled in the forest stewardship class in order to keep their property in a current use taxation program. Kristi described the enthusiasm that participants expressed for the course itself and for their new visions of what it means to be a forest landowner.

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

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on January 19, 2017, at the Preston Community Center.