



King County
Rural Forest Commission

Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting Thursday, March 15, 2018, Preston Community Center

Commissioners Present: Nate Veranth, forest landowner (Chair); Rex Thompson, forester (Vice Chair); Andy Chittick, forest landowner/sawmill operator; Kelsey Ketcheson, Washington State University Extension; Li Hsi, forest landowner; Wendy Davis, forest landowner; Grady Steere, Campbell Global; Bernie McKinney, conservation advocate/forest landowner; Dick Ryon, rural cities; Daryl Harper, forest landowner; Laurie Benson, WA Dept. of Natural Resources; Steven Mullen-Moses, Snoqualmie Tribe; Brandy Reed, KCD.

Guests: Steve Horton, rural forest landowner; Mari Knutson, Green River College

King County DNRP Staff: Richard Martin, Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD); Bill Loeber (WLRD); Wendy Sammarco, (WLRD); David Kimmett (Parks); Daphne Payne (Parks);

Chair Nate Veranth called the meeting to order at 8:39a.m.

Motions

Motion 1-0315. That the minutes of the January 18, 2018 meeting be approved. Grady motioned, Rex seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Motion 2-0315. To allow the executive committee to schedule a meeting with the Ag Commission executive committee to discuss a possible joint Rural Forest Commission – Agriculture Commission meeting. Dick motioned, Daryl seconded and the motion passed unanimously

Motion 3-0315. To have the executive committee write a letter to the Executive in general support of certification in accordance with the proposal offered by Parks. Steven motioned, Dick seconded; 9 voted in favor, none opposed, one abstention (Andy).

Motion 4-0315. To adjourn the March 15, 2018 meeting. Dick motioned, Grady seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Chair Report, Nate Veranth

Nate urged Commissioners to complete their financial disclosures as soon as possible. Forms need to be filed by the end of March.

Nate reminded Commissioners of previous discussions about a possible joint meeting of the Agriculture and Rural Forest commissions. Nate suggested that an initial meeting of the two commission executive committees could be held to explore the need and timing of a joint meeting. That initial call could identify concerns of the two commissions and whether there are shared issues that could be addressed in unison and whether there are issues that the commissions are in conflict. A motion passed to support an initial call among executive committee members of the two commissions to explore a possible joint meeting.

Nate reminded Commissioners that there will be a need to fill three Rural Forest Commission positions after September, when Rex, Dick and Nate all reach their term limits. Nate stressed that there would also be a need to replace the chair and co-chair and described the general responsibilities of those two roles and the role of the Executive Committee. There was general discussion about possible candidates for the Chair, and targeted areas of expertise for other Commission members. Li expressed his belief that it is helpful to have commission members with both farming and forestry experience since many larger parcels include both working farms and forests. Wendy noted that we should reach out to the leaders of Carnation Farms, which has large forest and farmland holdings. Rex commented that it may be time to have a professional forester as Chair. Commission members will pass along recommended new Commission members to Richard. Bernie offered to serve as a mentor for the new chair and, possibly, to serve as vice-chair to help with the transition. Several other sitting Commission members expressed interest in one of the executive positions or were mentioned as good candidates but there were no solid nominees for the positions. Recruitment will be revisited during the May meeting.

Private Forest Carbon Pilot Project, Richard Martin

During the March meeting, Richard described in general the County's proposed private forest carbon project and was able to provide greater detail during this meeting. Richard described previous efforts to explore the potential for a carbon project on County-owned, Parks-managed lands and how the proposed carbon project was determined to not be feasible, due to current forest conditions and the relatively high carbon baseline that apply to public lands. County staff then focused attention on the possibility of developing a carbon project on private lands, in both urban and rural landscapes, that could provide support for the Land Conservation Initiative. There are approximately 38,000 acres of LCI priority forestlands that currently exceed the regional carbon baseline; thus, have potential for immediate carbon sales. Approximately 12,000 acres of those identified rural lands are considered the highest priorities. Carbon projects that cover rural lands will likely be certified through one of the internationally recognized carbon protocols (e.g., CAR, VCS). Rural carbon credits will be generated through Improved Forest Management (i.e., manage to achieve carbon stocking that exceeds regional baseline) and Avoided Conversion. Urban forest carbon credits will primarily be generated through Avoided Conversion and an estimated 750 acres urban and have been identified a potentially qualifying through Urban Forest Carbon Credits, which is somewhat less cumbersome than CAR and other forest carbon offset protocols. There were many questions about program details, economics, risk, etc. that will only be answered by working through a series of examples. The goal is to investigate opportunities, challenges and costs as a pilot project in 2018 and then return to the Commission to report back and get guidance about whether it is feasible and prudent to expand the program County-wide.

Brandy noted that KCD and Pinchot are also working together on small acreage forest management and forest carbon. Brandy urged Richard to ensure that the County's and KCD's programs are fully leveraged. Richard will schedule a meeting with Brandy and the new County hire who will be leading the forest carbon projects going forward.

FSC Certification of County Lands, Dave Kimmett

Dave provided a brief review of FSC certification of Island Center Forest. There were only a few harvests on ICF and no premium was generated from the sales of certified timber, but certification was thought to be a valuable tool as part of the public outreach/engagement program. Parks is now considering significant harvests on Taylor Mountain (150 ac) and Black Diamond (150 ac) and other sites that support forests in relatively poor condition; all are proposed conversions of hardwood dominated forest to more natural mixed conifer forest. Certification provides additional affirmation that the County's forest management plans are ecologically responsible and ensures additional review of plans so that important resource issues are not missed. Rex noted

that certification can provide support for public outreach efforts but the highly fragmented nature of County forest lands increases challenges with outreach because there is significant development adjacent to Parks units. Li asked whether there were any substantial differences between FSC certified management and state FPA requirements and suggested that if the differences were great, whether PBRs/CUT should require FSC certification as a condition of program enrollment. Dave stressed that private lands are managed for a variety of needs and desired outcomes and a one-size-fits-all approach is probably not appropriate for private lands but does make sense for County-owned lands. Amy described why certification makes sense for Seattle's Cedar River Watershed (enrolled as "High Conservation Value Forest" because of drinking water implications). Dave provided a breakdown of cost \$3,400 to enroll about 3,000 acres and there is an annual inspection/maintenance fee of about \$1,100. There would also be some additional staff time for enrollment and reporting, but that would not be a significant addition to the anticipated public outreach/education effort. Andy noted that the relationship with NNRG, which holds the group certificate, represents the landowners during the audits, which reduces the landowner's time commitment. In comparison, Laurie noted that a number of DNR staff spend several days each year preparing for and participating in the annual certification audits (DNR holds an individual certification). Laurie also stressed that there was no simple way to measure the value of certification since there is no current premium paid for certified timber.

Dave requested Commission support to move forward with certification of five sites and about 3,000 acres (Taylor Mt. Forest, Henry's ridge, Mitchell Hill, Black Diamond/Ravensdale Retreat, McGarvey Park); all sites are proposed for forest restoration harvests over the next few years. Amy asked Dave why if there was effort to expand certification, why the county was not proposing to certify all lands. Dave responded that this was a measured next-step to cover lands with proposed harvests but that, ultimately, the County would like to enroll all properties.

Nate asked for a motion to authorize the commission to write a letter of support to the Executive branch of King County to support the Parks' proposal for certification. Nate called for an informal vote of support, which garnered eight votes of support, none in opposition and four abstaining (Darryl, Bernie, Andy and Grady). Darryl and Bernie voiced concern about not having sufficient information about how all of the proposed forest management proposals interacted. Andy because of NNRG's role in certification and Grady abstained because he has not position on a particular certification program (FSC and SFI). Nate provided some clarification about the certification request, costs and benefits. Brandy stated that although KCD is a non-voting ex-officio member, they support the County's efforts to expand certification. A motion passed to have the RFC executive committee write a letter to the King County Executive in support of the recommendation by Parks staff to expand certification.

Bass Lake Natural Area Management Recommendations, Mari Knutson

Mari provided a summary of her natural resources capstone project on development of a management plan for Bass Lake Natural Area. Bernie introduced Mari to Bass Lake Natural Area and mentored her during her capstone work. Mari based her recommendations on past land use, current conditions and desired long-term ecological conditions. Bass Lake Natural Area is highly diverse with a varied land use history so development of management recommendations was challenging. Mari focused on invasive species control, restoring native forest cover and repairing hydrology; there is a significant role for volunteer stewards.

Landowner Alliances, Bernie McKinney

Bernie talked about the Bass Lake volunteer program and his history with the area. He noted how important it is to expand community engagement during development of public lands management plans and the need to educate landowners about the value of PBRs/CUT. Green River Coalition is focused on developing local "friends of" groups and has plans to launch Friends of Bass Lake later this year to serve as a catalyst for greater local engagement and communication with County land managers.

Nate asked Bernie what he thought the County could do to help facilitate creation of local community groups. Bernie suggested that the County could provide lists of PBRs properties in an area that could serve as a starting point for outreach. Bernie suggested that lists of CUT program landowners could also provide names for potential new RFC members. He also mentioned that there was a need for more frequent County outreach to landowners enrolled in CUT programs. Brandy offered to provide KCD forest team resources to help with prioritizing landowners for outreach.

Agency reports and announcements

Richard reported that in spite of being short staffed for much of 2017, the King County forest team approved 31 new forest plans, 17 plan updates and participated in coached forest stewardship planning workshops for 71 landowners. Richard also provided an update on the search to fill the position created by the retirement of Linda Vane. 72 applications received, 30 candidates were found to be minimally qualified (Andy helped score applications) and the 6 highest scoring applicants were interviewed (Dick served on interview panel). The plan is to complete the hiring process in the near future and have the new hire on board early spring.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on May 17, 2018, at the Preston Community Center.