

Forest Practices Advisory Board

March 2, 2017

Members attending: Christopher Martin, Bruce Spaman, Benjamin Oko, M.D., Ian Branson, Dr. Mark Ashton (11:30am departure), Joan Nichols

Guests: Douglas Emmerthal (DEEP-Forestry), Jennifer Hockla (DEEP-Forestry), Sheila Hoefle (DEEP-Forestry, recorder), Eric Hammerling (CFPA), Brennan Sheahan

Absent: Patrick Comins, Peter Nieman, Joe Theroux

Chris thanks all for attending especially based on weather conditions.

1. Review/approval of minutes from June 23, 2016 and October 6, 2016 – June 23, 2016 minutes, reviewed and approved as written motion by Ian Branson, seconded by Joan Nichols, unanimous. October 6, 2016 minutes, reviewed and approved as written by Mark Ashton, Bruce Spaman seconded, unanimous

2. 2017 Forest Practice Act Legislative Proposals & other legislative action

When agenda was distributed there was only one legislative action that was proposed with potential impacts to the FPA program. Since then, several additional actions are noted.

[SB461](#) – AN ACT EXCLUDING APPROVED BUILDING LOTS FROM LANDS CLASSIFIED AS FARM LAND, FOREST LAND AND OPEN SPACE LAND FOR TAXATION PURPOSES. Purpose: to remove certain property tax exemptions for land that constitutes an approved building lot. No action on bill since January.

[HB6122](#) - AN ACT CONCERNING THE VALUATION AND TAXATION OF FARMLAND. Purpose: To reevaluate the existing valuation and taxation structure for farm land. A Public Hearing was held on 3/2 with the Environment Committee. Several members of the Board will be testifying at the public hearing.

[HB6123](#) – AN ACT CONCERNING TREE REMOVAL ALONG LIMITED ACCESS HIGHWAYS. Chris shared information about the [StormWise Program](#) coordinated by Tom Worthley at UCONN and that the CT Department of Transportation is under pressure to change roadside pruning/removal practices in part due to obligations with Federal Department of Transportation Highway Division. Discussion took place regarding current staffing at DEEP and DOT and the prospect of DEEP reviewing all DOT vegetation management plans. The Agencies are exploring funding positions to complete the work. Dr. Ashton is in favor of DEEP reviewing DOT plans in order to achieve a more comprehensive vegetative management plan including handling water runoff and fish habitat concerns. Chris shared that past experience with a request to DOT to leave residual trees has not met much success. Contracts for DOT tree trimming are based on the number of days a contractor will take to accomplish the scope of work. It is not in the best interest of a contractor to finish the work before the scope ends as they would be shorting themselves some money.

[SB507](#) – AN ACT AUTHORIZING CERTIFIED FORESTERS TO SERVE AS TREE WARDENS. Purpose: To authorize certified foresters to serve as tree wardens and not have to complete certain tree warden coursework if their training and experience otherwise includes knowledge of such coursework's information. The language of the proposed bill reads “certified commercial forest practitioner” which would include all levels of certification, Forester, Supervising Forest Products Harvester and Forest Products Harvester. The Board would like the proposed bill to be changed to only include Foresters. This bill will likely help small communities with volunteer tree wardens. Joan suggested making Tree Warden training available online rather than missing work days to attend Tree Warden School. Tom stated that there is currently a \$70 fee to belong to the CT Tree Wardens Association (CTWA). He questioned what the fee is used for. According to the CTWA webpage the benefits of membership include: access to a network of professionals, twice yearly editions of the CTWA Newsletter, notifications regarding legislative updates and educational opportunities, reduced rate entry into workshops presented by the CTWA.

SB834 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE FOREST PRACTICES ADVISORY BOARD AND GRACE PERIODS FOR THE RENEWAL OF CERTAIN PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS ISSUED BY THE COMMISSIONER OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION. Purpose: The bill streamlines the forest practitioner certification and pesticide applicator renewal processes. Currently, forest practitioners who fail to renew their certification and those who are without examination, but possessing certified forester credentials from the Society of American Foresters, are subject to examination and often wait up to six months before the next available examination is offered. The

3. [PA490 Forestland Regulation Revision update](#)

Update seeks to clarify various points in the regulation. A public hearing was held on January 5, no one came. Three comments were filed, two in favor one opposed. Chris believes that the clarifications are critical because NRCS and the DEEP Wildlife Division have been encouraging young forest establishment and maintenance and the clarification regarding cumulative density will help properties that are enrolled stay enrolled.

4. Oak Wilt

Oak Wilt is a threat to Connecticut's oak trees. Residents should be on the lookout because three confirmed locations have been found in New York. Oak wilt is capable of killing infected trees within weeks or months. More information will be shared with DEEP Forestry Division staff at the CAES Forest Health Workshop.

5. DOF Staffing & DEEP Budget update

Chris shared that the agency is expecting a minimum 5% rescission which results in an \$800,000 cut to the Bureau of Natural Resources for the FY 17 and FY18. The agency is shifting personnel costs from the General Fund to federal funds or other funds where possible. Proposed budget allocations reduce DEEP in the mid 70's through 2019. The majority of reductions will be through retirements, the Commissioner is trying to avoid layoffs. Additional cuts are possible because the state budget is not approved as yet. The Agency currently has 600-700 employees, in 2004 there were 912 fulltime permanent employees. The Environmental Quality (EQ) side of the Agency houses the bulk of DEEP employees and EQ staff rely

more heavily on EPA funds for salary. Eric shared that the Appropriations Sub-Committee held a meeting for DEEP Environmental Conservation (Bureaus of Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation) and it was announced that 50 staff members have planned retirement by April 1. Eric also shared that 2 Environmental Conservation Officers were recently hired partly due to the prioritization and direct tie to public health and safety. Eric asked if the vacant Fire Control Officer request for position action (refill) had highlighted the portion of the job that connects with public health and safety. Jen suggested an approach that would encompass recent events in the US, catastrophic weather events, insect and disease increased tree mortality and an increase in catastrophic forest fires. Chris shared that voicing those concerns have not carried the day in refilling the FCO position in Western CT and that in recent years budgeting for seasonal employees is a challenge. Eric suggested that a fact sheet would be helpful to those that want to write letters of support for position refill and that rather than broadly stating that DEEP needs more staff a more targeted approach may be more successful.

Jennifer will retire as of April 1, 2017. The Forest Practices Act work will be assigned to other division employees to continue the program because her position will not be refilled. Ways to streamline the administrative work of FPA is also being looked at. Chris is advocating for self-certification of CEU's for Certified Forest Practitioners as one way to save staff time. Joan asked if the Service Forestry Program will be effected by Jennifer's retirement and staff reassignment. Service Foresters play a large role for private consulting foresters and NRCS as referral agents. Doug shared that Service Foresters provided 600 technical assists last year and that number can be expected to go down this year as a result of the coverage requirements for FPA. Based on the Yale Woodland Owners survey we know that forest landowners like to get information and unbiased opinions from government foresters.

The Board was made aware that over 50% of Division staff are eligible to retire. Currently there is no successional or transitional plan and that is very concerning. The volume of federal funding that the Division receives will likely decrease as general funded staff retire unless the Division can still meet required federal match requirements.

Doug shared that he had a discussion with staff at NRCS yesterday regarding gypsy moth and drought killed timber and applying for Cap 106 Plan. NRCS is going to considering using an emergency cutting plan practice rather than a management plan to approve funding.

6. Publications:

Doug distributed copies of [Agriculture, Forestry & Connecticut's Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act brochure](#). This brochure will be added the Forest Practitioner Study Guides, sent to municipalities, and distributed to all CT Certified Forest Practitioners. Doug is working with staff from the DEEP Inland Wetlands Division to present trainings centered on the new brochure, dates TBD.

Next meeting – to be scheduled late September/early October. Joan offered the Farm Bureau conference room as a meeting location. Chris to send out a Doodle poll with dates.

Other Items

Timpro will hold an annual meeting on April 29 at the Lockwood Pavilion. Joan has requested CEU's. The meeting will be an education program for 5-6 hours followed by a business meeting then dinner. The meeting will focus on timber frame structures, Steve Strong will be presenting. Chris Martin will give an update on the certification regulations, Jeff Ward is scheduled to speak about Gypsy Moth, Eric

Chamberlain is going to give an update on USDA APHIS movement of ash in EAB Quarantine areas. Joan is also planning a talk on 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly' of timber harvesting". She has requested that Board members forward any pictures to her that might be useful. No details about locations or operators will be shared. Joan stated that over the 20 years of the FPA program the logging industry in Connecticut has come a long way.

Chris shared that the Northeast Area State Foresters Association was awarded a Landscape Scale Restoration that produces an application for smart phones called About My Woods. The same application has been successful in northern New England and will be tailored for southern New England. Included items are: mapping, tree id and where to go for assistance. Chris will share the information about the grant and app at the Connecticut Conference on Natural Resources on March 18. Chris has coordinated help with local Supervising Forest Products Harvester Jerry Bellows and Forester Eric Hansen for footage for a short training film. Chris hopes the app will be ready to be introduced at the next Board meeting.