



**New Jersey Community Forestry Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Virtual Meeting**  
**March 10, 2022; 10:00 AM**

The March bi-monthly meeting of the New Jersey Community Forestry Council (Council) was called to order by Chairperson Brash at 10:00 a.m. and the Open Public Meetings Act notice was read. The notice was also available in the meeting packet. The roll call was taken by Ms. Slack.

Members Present: Bill Brash, Kristin Ace, Mark Beamish, Neil Blitz, Carl Bowles, Steve Chisholm, Donna Drewes, Lori Jenssen, Vinh Lang, Robert Lee, Lisa Simms, Matthew Simons, and Pam Zipse

Excused: Wayne Dubin, Barry Emens, Dr. Jason Grabosky, and Dr. Melanie McDermott

Absent: None

NJ Forest Service Staff Present: State Forester John Sacco, Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator Carrie Sargeant, Technical & Operational Advisor Terri Slack, Assistant Regional Forester Michael Martini, and Grants Administrator Patricia Shapella, and Forestry Technician Emily Farschon

Quorum was met upon completion of roll call.

**Minutes:**

The meeting minutes from January were reviewed and Donna Drewes motioned to approve. Vinh Lang seconded. Chairman Brash called for a vote on the minutes as sent. Steve Chisholm abstained as he was not in attendance at the last meeting. The vote was unanimous to approve the minutes.

**State Forester's Report:**

State Forester John Sacco gave the report. Mr. Sacco reported that the forestry program is being reorganized and while details are still to be finalized, some information has been shared. The state lands program and forest health will move under Greg McLaughlin, Chief Fire Warden for Forest Fire; other elements of the NJ Forest Service will remain under John, i.e., private lands, Forest Resource Education Center/tree nursery, and urban & community forestry (UCF).

There has been some discussion with the Commissioner's Office to increase UCF staff, but with the budget process underway, we won't know until July 1<sup>st</sup> if we've been successful.

The spending plan which includes funding for 2022 round UCF Stewardship grants is still with the Commissioner. There has been no indication this plan will not be approved.

Mr. Sacco stated that he did not have an update on federal infrastructure funding. Ms. Sargeant has been in contact with her federal counterpart; there is still a lot of forestry funding coming to the states through the infrastructure bill. She reported that there was an appropriation for Emerald Ash Borer announced this week -- the State Urban Forest Resilience Grant and that she and Mr. Sacco will need to determine the best way to release this federal Request for Proposal (RFP).

Chairman Brash then opened the floor to questions for Mr. Sacco.

Ms. Zipse asked if the reorganization will have any impact on our federal pass-through funding structure. Mr. Sacco responded no; it should not have any impact.

Ms. Ace asked why the reorganization was happening. Mr. Sacco responded this is common with new administrations, and while this is not technically a new administration, DEP Commissioner LaTourette is new. He also noted that the component forestry programs have been moved mostly intact and that the elevation of our Parks & Forestry Director to Assistant Commissioner level may provide the program with better access to top levels of DEP management.

Mr. Lang asked if Senator Smith's new forestry task force will affect the Council and if so how. Mr. Sacco responded that there has been no impact yet, but there could be in the future. The task force will seek consensus on forestry issues, which in turn may find their way into legislation, and could affect UCF and the Council if UCF issues are addressed. He believes, however, that the focus of the task force is more management of public lands. Ms. Sargeant asked Mr. Sacco to provide information on the timeline for the taskforce and how Council would be engaged in the process. Mr. Sacco had no information as to the timeline, but suggested Council forward their concerns or comments to him to forward upward to Assistant Commission John Cecil who is forestry's rep on the taskforce. Ms. Zipse reported that Dr. Grabosky has is seeking a seat at the task force table. Ms. Jenssen noted that the NJ Forestry Association has Andrew Bennett on the task force. It is her understanding that the task force will be open to all; she will check on this with Mr. Bennett.

Ms. Drewes asked if the reorganization of state lands and this stewardship task force initiative are connected/congruent. Mr. Sacco does not believe so. Moving state lands and forest health to forest fire, which has greater overall staffing, could create synergies which enable the forest program to move forward with state lands initiatives. Chairperson Brash agreed that it might be easier to implement some projects on state lands if there is a forest fire component. Ms.

Jenssen reminded Council of the package of stewardship related bills from last session, which were controversial in some respects and for which Senator Smith was not able to get consensus on. The task force may be a way of cutting through the resistance to those bills.

### **Chairperson's Report:**

Chairman Brash thanked Council for their prompt response to the Governor's request for updated contact information and congratulated Ms. Drewes on her reappointment to Council.

### **New Business:**

#### Urban and Community Forestry Report.

Ms. Sargeant reported that the fiscal numbers are similar to those shared in November as we have not received any large deposits for No Net Loss (NNL). She reminded Council that the spending plan is awaiting approval for the 2022 round of Stewardship grants and confirmed for Ms. Drewes that there is \$3 million uncommitted with 2.2 million of the \$3 million earmarked for the stewardship grants. She also informed Council that the program hopes to release the 2020 Stewardship Grant Request for Proposal (RFP) on Arbor Day (April 29<sup>th</sup>) and is working to have everything ready to prevent delays once the spending plan is approved. Chairperson Brash thanked the NJUCF staff for their efforts in getting this funding out to the municipalities.

Mr. Martini provided updates on Community Forestry Management Plans and Stewardship Grants.

#### Community Forestry Management Plans (CFMPs)

- One new plan submitted since the last Council meeting
- 252 currently approved plans – 46 first years, 64 second years, 68 third years, 72 fourth years, and 2 fifth year plans. There are 10 plans that are older that need to be addressed.
- The Demarest plan was reviewed and approved unanimously and will be sent to the committee for approval

#### Urban & Community Forestry Stewardship Grants

The Program has put in significant hours on the 2021 grants.

- NJUCF has one Green Communities grant open and one on the way
- 19 stewardship grants open and 36 in process for the 2021 Stewardship grants

Mr. Martini alerted Council that the total for the license plate money should be \$41,856.29. He and Ms. Shapella are revising the 2022 Stewardship Grant RFP document to budget information; edits expected to be complete on the overall RFP within the next week or so. Mr. Martini also mentioned that the Program plans to conduct a webinar on the RFP for potential applicants

Ms. Farschon provided updates on NJUCF Accreditation and Annual Accreditation Reports (AAR).

### NJUCF Accreditation Update

Ms. Farschon reported that last year's end-of-the year CEU initiative was a big success; many issues were caught early and addressed.

- 139 on time AARs, 63 missing (as of February 15, 2022)
- Received submissions are in process of review; late submissions are being tracked down; and the accreditation report is being updated in preparation for release of the 2022 Stewardship Grant RFP

One takeaway from the AARs reported by Ms. Farschon is a high demand for online asynchronous training formats such as Core training, which starts next week. Ms. Zipse confirmed there are 108 registrants and counting! Additionally, Ms. Farschon reported that should she be successful in getting all the delinquent AARs submitted, NJUCF could potentially have 178 Accredited communities. Mr. Martini asked Council members who may be working with towns delinquent in their AAR submittal to assist the program in getting these reports in. 178 Accredited communities would be a significant increase from 154 Accredited last year. This is a testament to the efforts of Ms. Farschon and Ms. Harrje. Ms. Farschon agreed to send a list of the delinquent towns to Council members.

Mr. Martini mentioned that the Program plans to do significant outreach regarding the 2022 Stewardship Grants to get the allotted \$2.2 million awarded. Current Accreditation status is paramount in making this happen.

Ms. Sargeant also acknowledged the impressive work of her "team that makes it happen" – Mr. Martini, Ms. Farschon, Ms. Shapella, and Ms. Harrje – as Accreditation numbers are going up, grants are being closed in a timely manner -- all this despite the difficulties of dealing with Covid, staffing, etc. Chairperson Brash seconded the work of Program staff with respect to the grants, accreditation, and responsiveness.

### Legislative Issues

Ms. Slack provided Council with legislative updates and briefly discussed. She noted that there were several bills introduced just days after the legislative update was shared and that she will forward an updated legislative report including information on these bills.

Ms. Jansen mentioned that a bill has been introduced transferring the NJ Forest Service Program to the Department of Agriculture. Ms. Slack confirmed the bill was introduced (A3443) and that we don't know if it will move this session or the reasons behind it. It has not, however, moved in past sessions. She will continue to track it.

### NNL Program Reports

Ms. Sargeant reported that there are no new NNL projects and that the Program still has a vacancy to fill. If Council knows of anyone who might be interested, reach out to Ms. Sargeant so that she can send out the job description.

### **Council Sub-Committee Reports**

#### Community Forestry Management Plan Committee

Mr. Martini confirmed that Demarest submitted a plan which was approved by the committee. Ms. Zipse noted that the plan included an inventory and a good interpretation of same. Ms. Sargeant thanked the Committee for their efforts in keeping these plans moving forward.

#### Community Forestry Management Plan Guidelines Committee

Chairperson Brash reported that the Committee met in February and developed a tentative schedule for unveiling the new guidelines, anticipated to occur at the NJ Shade Tree Federation Conference this October. A stakeholder meeting with consultants was discussed for May before their farmland assessment caseload gets too heavy. Chairperson Brash reported that Ms. Sargeant is working on the framework for the guidelines to send to the Committee to flesh out and that this is needed ASAP to meet the timelines the Committee has chosen. Ms. Sargeant confirmed that she is working on the framework and is about halfway through. There was some confusion/miscommunication regarding when the Committee and program staff would be working collectively on the document. Ms. Sargeant agreed to send the Committee the document she is working on and a procedure for Committee engagement. Ms. Zipse agreed to canvas the Committee regarding this draft and join Ms. Sargeant on the next NJUCF guidelines work meeting to share comments received.

#### No Net Loss Committee

Ms. Sargeant reported that there are no plans to review.

### **Council Business**

#### Council support letter re: federal infrastructure bill funding for NJ Forest Service

Chairperson Brash and Dr. Grabosky have had initial discussions on what to include in the letter; It should be drafted within the next week or two, then provided to NJUCF for review.

#### Council Conservation Forum

Mr. Sargeant explained that the "Conservation Forum" is the name she chose to describe the event/initiative Council may want to take to respond to the NJ Forest Forum (Forum) which was discussed at the last Council meeting. Ms. Zipse reported that she attended the January Forum and is supportive of a Council response to same. Ms. Zipse will forward to Council the link for presentations from the Forum.

Mr. Lang also believes it is important that the Council collaborate and respond to the Forum. He stated that NJ has been doing essentially pro-forestation for a very long time. NJ's forests are in their current state due to pro-forestation in some sense, because forest management is not happening. Pro-forestation is a narrow-focused view in that it preserves forests solely for carbon; it does not address water quality, biodiversity, i.e., the whole spectrum. Ms. Sargeant explained that "pro-forestation" is essentially doing nothing to the forest (leaving the forest alone to grow how it's going to grow) with the belief that doing so will maximize carbon sequestration. Ms. Ace asked why we can't put out a document that clearly outlines why forests must be managed. Ms. Zipse pointed out that in silviculture it is appropriate under certain circumstances, for example, in the short term, to "do nothing" as the forest is doing fine. Therefore, we want pro-forestation to be a tool for forest management, but it can't be the only tool. Mr. Lang noted that the push for pro-forestation is causing issues when other types of forest management tools need to be used. Permits from the Pinelands Commission now have a particular focus on pro-forestation. The pro-forestation voice is strong, and other voices need to be heard. Circling back, therefore, how are these other voices heard?

Ms. Drewes stated that it starts with educating private lands owners those others who are only hearing one side. Ms. Jenssen stated that the NJ Forestry Association does already have a means to reach private forest owners through their Backyard Forestry in 90 Minutes program. The Association is open to using these sessions or other collaborative ways to get the word out. Ms. Zipse suggested that Rutgers could act as the impartial forum to bring all the diverse sides together. Ms. Drewes said that if there is some confusion regarding definitions, it may be useful to do some educational outreach in advance to build your diverse constituencies' (for example, private forest owners, municipalities with woodlands) knowledge and comfort levels regarding the issue(s). Ms. Ace reminded Council that the local Shade Tree Commissions are a great educational link between government and the public; they could be utilized too to get this information out.

Ms. Zipse noted that the NJ Shade Tree Federation has been discussing initiating a monthly on-line forum for its members to discuss current issues. This could be one of the forum topics.

Ms. Sargeant suggested a "forester's toolbox" series – each session focusing on a different silviculture practice – as the "pre-education" to the Rutgers/Council forum. Chairperson Brash stated his support for use of the Shade Tree forum and the idea of the forester's toolbox for pre-education. He suggested a joint effort between the Shade Tree Federation and NJ Forestry Association to use these pre-existing outreach venues to get this information out. Mr. Martini suggested Council utilize its Education and Training subcommittee to effect same. Ms. Zipse agree to lead this educational effort. Ms. Drewes suggested that a session on forestry management specific to working in the Pinelands would be a topic to include. Mr. Lang recommended the development of a statement document with information on forest management techniques; Chairperson Brash concurred and suggested this should be the first action taken by the subcommittee. Ms. Sargeant noted that the updated State Forest Action Plan (SFAP) has a list of stakeholders Council may want to review to determine entities to reach out to. The SFAP is a good reference to draw material from for these educational units. (Link to plan: <https://nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/forest/njsfap/>)

## **Council Unfinished Business**

### Council Letter in Support of Fully Staffing NJ Urban & Community Forestry Program

Chairperson Brash reported that he has been in touch with Dr. Grabosky, and they hope to have the letter drafted and shared with NJUCF staff for review within a week or so.

### Proposed updates to Council bylaws

Ms. Drewes reported that she and Chairperson Brash have drafted proposed changes to the Council bylaws as requested regarding membership on the Council, for example a procedure for requesting reappointment, and having all Council members' terms start and end on the same dates. This was shared with Council members during the meeting. Ms. Sargeant agreed to put this on the agenda for the next Council meeting and include the Word document in the Council packet. She also alerted Council to the fact that the current NJUCF staff position to assist Council is vacant and has not been put in for a backfill. The Program is submitting a hot issue on this.

### Ethics and Cannabis Training

Ms. Slack reported that most Council members have completed the two ethics trainings and acknowledged receipt of ethics documents. Those who have been remiss, need to complete these trainings. Ms. Slack then notified Council that they will be required to complete an Outside Employment Questionnaire (OEQ), the purpose of which is to help the DEP staff determine if a Council member should be recused from any item of discussion. Ms. Slack will send an email to Council regarding the OEQ with a link to the document. Council should complete the form and submit a copy to Ms. Slack promptly.

### Public Comment:

Chairperson Brash then opened the floor to comments from the Council. Mr. Blitz alerted Council that several years ago, legislation was passed which requires companies to have an apprenticeship program to obtain a public works certificate. If a municipality needs to hire a vendor/contractor to do public works, the contractor must have a certificate. Mr. Blitz noted that many of the smaller contractors do not have these certificates, so the pool of bidders is now reduced. Ms. Sargeant asked Mr. Blitz if he was aware of this bill fostering or assisting companies with developing the needed apprenticeship programs. Mr. Blitz responded he is not aware of a plan by the state to assist with the development of these programs. Ms. Jenssen reported that the NJ Nursery and Landscape Association became a registered apprenticeship program with the US Department of Labor to support its members. If Council members have questions regarding the apprenticeship process, they can reach out to Ms. Jenssen. Mr. Chisholm reported that the tree care industry has also gone through the process of setting up an apprenticeship program.

Ms. Zipse reported that the dates and location for this year's NJ Shade Tree Federation Conference will be October 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, at the Crown Plaza in Cherry Hill.

Ms. Zipse invited Council members to attend the women in forestry forum being presented by the Rutgers Forestry Club. It will be on Tuesday, March 29<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 – 7:00pm, with Ms. Simms and Ms. Jenssen on the panel. Pam will send the link to Council.

Mr. Bowles reported that the NJ Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA) is sponsoring an Expo show on April 12<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 am – 1:00 pm at the Raritan Expo Center in Edison, NJ. He offered to have the APWA wanted reserve a space for NJ Community Forestry Council members for that day. Let Mr. Bowles know if you're interested.

Chairperson Brash then opened the floor to members of the public. No comments from the public were received. Chairperson Brash then closed the meeting.