



STATE OF VERMONT
General Assembly

Vermont Forest Carbon Sequestration Working Group

MINUTES—September 16, 2019

The Vermont Forest Carbon Sequestration Working Group met on Monday, September 16, 2019, beginning at 9:15 a.m. in Room 11 of the State House in Montpelier, Vermont.

Working Group Members Present

Michael Snyder, Chair
Rep. John L. Bartholomew
Rep. Mark Higley
Sen. Ruth Hardy—by phone
Jack Byrne

Cecelia Danks
Jim Shallow
Robert Turner
Stephen Webster

Staff Present

Deb Curtis, Office of Legislative Council
Ellen Czajkowski, Office of Legislative Council
Jane Lazorchak, Department of Fish & Wildlife
Mark Perrault, Joint Fiscal Office
Becca Washburn, Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation

Chair Snyder welcomed the group and had all members introduce themselves, particularly Dr. Danks, who was not present at the first meeting. Dr. Danks gave an introduction about her background and expertise related to forest carbon sequestration. The members of the staff present were then introduced. The members of the public present also introduced themselves: Alex DePillis of the Agency of Agriculture, Phil Huffman of The Nature Conservancy, Nick Richardson of the Vermont Land Trust, and Robert Lehmert. Chair Snyder asked if anyone wanted to propose changes to the agenda. No changes were proposed.

Chair Snyder asked if there were updates from the last meeting. He asked if anyone needed more background information on any of the topics after reading the material posted on the website. Rep. Higley asked for more information on the disparity between the prices on the compliance market and the voluntary market, as well as the difference between price per ton of carbon and price per acre. Mr. Turner said that price depends on the stock of carbon in the trees on the property and that the presentations at today's meeting would go into more detail on this. Dr. Danks added that it depends on who is buying the credits and what they are willing to pay, which can depend on how charismatic the property is and what town it is located in.

Senator Hardy said that the readings mention a Massachusetts program. She asked for more information on that program and other state programs. Dr. Danks stated that a lot of her research has focused on that and that she would present on that to the Group.

Chair Snyder next turned to the draft of the report. It was posted on the Group's website and Chair Snyder asked if anyone wanted to discuss it. Mr. Turner said that drafting the report led him to have more questions than when he started. He wondered about what the tone of the report should be and who would be its audience. Mr. Shallow agreed that writing led him to have questions that the Group will need to discuss and to also wonder who specifically will draft the report. Chair Snyder reminded the Group that there are some technical staff from the Agency of Natural Resources that may assist, as well as Mr. Perrault from the Joint Fiscal Office. Ms. Czajkowski from the Legislative Council will provide expertise on any potential legislation developed by the Group.

Mr. Turner and Rep. Higley both stated that they have additional documents they would like the Group to read. Chair Snyder stated that there are many articles and reports on the topic of forest carbon sequestration and the Group should consider the many perspectives and try to come to a consensus on their position, but that the report could include minority opinions if they could not reach consensus.

The next item on the agenda was press coverage, which was added to the agenda by Mr. Turner. Chair Snyder said that he has been contacted by multiple reporters about the Group's work. He told the Group that the members may speak to press if they wish, but to remember that this is an ongoing process and that no group decisions have been made yet. Rep. Higley stated that he has posted the dates of the future meetings on his Front Porch Forum and that people have reached out to him because they do not understand the work the Group is doing. Chair Snyder stated that the Introduction section of the report should explain the Group's work and that perhaps the report should include an Executive Summary.

The Group then heard presentations on forest carbon sequestration projects conducted by various groups. The slides from the presentations are available on the Group's website. First was a presentation by Josh Parrish from The Nature Conservancy, who spoke via phone about the Working Woodlands Program. Next, Nick Richardson, of the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) spoke about their Aggregated Forest Carbon Project. The ACR has a protocol for the aggregation of forest parcels, so they work within that. VLT provides upfront costs, so the project developer only gets 30%, which is lower than most projects.

Next, Mr. Shallow spoke about the Burnt Mountain Carbon Project that The Nature Conservancy is working on. The organization is working with BlueSource on the project and the land has a wilderness easement. The project is going to be in the California compliance market.

Next, Mr. Byrne spoke about the Middlebury College Bread Loaf project, which also used BlueSource as a developer. This project is 2,400 acres, which is small for a forest carbon sequestration project, but the land is very charismatic because Bread Loaf has a well-established reputation. The land has an easement on it that restricts timber harvest. Chair Snyder expressed concern that both Bread Loaf and Burnt Mountain are parcels that are not managed for forestry. Mr. Shallow stated that there are other projects in the State that will be on lands managed for forestry. Dr. Danks also added that her research has shown that early adopters of new programs, like forest carbon sequestration, may have different goals than those who participate after programs are more mainstream, so parcels managed for forestry may become more common as programs develop. Chair Snyder asked if Middlebury College is satisfied with the outcome of the project. Mr. Byrne said the college is very pleased, particularly because many alumni were happy to see that the land will be preserved long term.

Next, by phone, the group heard from Mary Kallock and Zach Barbane from Forest Carbon Works. The company has developed smartphone technology that has made inventorying trees on a parcel cheaper and faster. This company works largely with small parcel owners by aggregating plots together. Mr. Shallow asked what role the company saw the State playing in this system. Mr. Barbane responded that the State could help educate the public on the programs in existence and that the State could have a role in setting a higher price on carbon because the price of carbon offsets is low.

The next item on the agenda was the draft of the report. Chair Snyder suggested that the report should include more information on the carbon cycle and more information on public lands. Mr.

Webster asked that the author of each section be identified in order to know whom to direct comments and edits. Dr. Danks said that she agreed that an Executive Summary should be included. She asked how long the report should be. Chair Snyder said that a concise report would ensure that legislators read it. Mr. Turner asked what the timeline was for finishing the report. Ms. Czajkowski stated that Act 83 says that the report is not due until January 15, so there will be time to work on it after the conclusion of all of the Group's meetings. Chair Snyder stated that he would prefer that most of the report be written by the last scheduled meeting, which is November 1. The rest of the Group's meetings will be on September 27, October 15, and November 1.

Chair Snyder then stated that the minutes from the previous meeting had been posted to the Group's website. Chair Snyder asked if there were any additions or edits. There were none. Mr. Turner moved that the Group accept the minutes. Mr. Shallow seconded the motion. The Group approved the minutes from the August 16 meeting.

Chair Snyder then asked what the agenda for the next meeting would include. Dr. Danks volunteered to present on her research related to the subject. Mr. Shallow suggested the Group discuss a possible pilot project for public lands and what kind of legislation to recommend.

The last agenda item was the opportunity for public comment. Mr. Robert Lehmert spoke. He urged the group to consider BioChar as part of their consideration of innovative strategies for assisting forest owners and the forestry industry. Also, he mentioned that trees die eventually, decompose, and then release at least some of their carbon into the atmosphere. Mr. Phil Huffman of The Nature Conservancy thanked the Group for their work on this topic and suggested that a glossary of terms may be helpful to include in the report.

The Working Group adjourned at 1:00 p.m. The next meeting will be held on September 27, in Room 11 of the State House.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Czajkowski
Legislative Counsel