



STATE OF VERMONT
General Assembly

Vermont Forest Carbon Sequestration Working Group

MINUTES—October 15, 2019

The Vermont Forest Carbon Sequestration Working Group met on Tuesday, October 15, 2019, beginning at 12:10 p.m. in Room 10 of the State House in Montpelier, Vermont.

Working Group Members Present

Michael Snyder, Chair
Rep. John Bartholomew
Rep. Mark Higley
Sen. Ruth Hardy
Sen. Corey Parent—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 and Wildlife
Mark Perrault, Joint Fiscal Office
Becca Washburn, Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

Chair Snyder welcomed the group and all members introduced themselves. The members of the staff present were then introduced. The members of the public present also introduced themselves: Jared Carpenter of the Nature Conservancy, Dylan Zwicky of Leonine Public Affairs, Robert Lehmert of Berlin, and Ed Larson. Chair Snyder asked if anyone wanted to propose changes to the agenda. NativeEnergy was invited to present but declined, so the presentation by NativeEnergy was struck from the agenda. Senator Hardy requested the Group discuss the recent article in *Seven Days* that discussed their work. Chair Snyder stated that the discussion could take place during the “Updates from Members” portion of the meeting.

Chair Snyder asked for a motion to approve last meeting’s minutes. Mr. Byrne moved to approve last meeting’s minutes. Mr. Turner seconded. Senator Hardy stated that the minutes from the last meeting are excellent. Chair Snyder agreed. The Group approved the minutes.

The next item on the agenda was updates from the last meeting. Chair Snyder stated that he has been impressed by the hard work of the Group and the thoughtful discussion of the subject. He hopes the Group will be close to finishing the report in November, but there is still a lot of work to be done on it.

Senator Hardy stated that she recently included information about the Group’s work in her regular newsletter to constituents. She stated that she received multiple replies from constituents. She learned that Quebec has a forest carbon sequestration program that may be relevant to the Group’s work.

She then asked if the Group has a specific goal related to its work. She asked: Is the goal of looking at forest carbon sequestration to preserve forests? Is it to develop a new source of revenue? Is it to sequester carbon to mitigate climate change? Act 83 is not clear on the reason for evaluating forest carbon sequestration programs. Senator Hardy said that she thinks the Group should state their goal in the report. Mr. Turner stated that he thinks having a clear goal will help the Group finish the work on the charges written in Act 83. Each member then spoke about the various goals and reasons for establishing a forest carbon sequestration program.

Mr. Byrne wanted to discuss the concern that carbon offsets can be considered double counting. Chair Snyder stated that this is a study committee that has been formed to evaluate the possibility of a program in Vermont for forest carbon sequestration. The Group is looking at whether the State should embrace or form a statewide program. Senator Hardy agreed and said that if the Group decides to embrace forest carbon sequestration, then they will need to address concerns like double counting and whether such programs mitigate climate change. Dr. Danks stated that the report could be framed to state the conditions needed for such a program to be recommended. Mr. Turner stated that the constituent comments sought to have the Group consider the many angles of this issue, and by discussing them at this meeting, the Group has been considering the issues. He believes that the Group has been thoughtful and careful in their work. Senator Hardy stated that she has heard from constituents concerns about the makeup of the Group. Chair Snyder stated that he did not want to be the chair of this Group or be on it.

Rep. Higley asked if there are carbon accounting rules. Mr. Turner stated that there are and that they depend on which market, either compliance or voluntary, and which registry the project is part of.

The next agenda item was a presentation by Mr. Turner called Financial Feasibility. He showed the Group a spreadsheet that he made that could be used to calculate costs associated with enrolling a parcel into a forest carbon sequestration program. It showed information including initial costs, periodic costs, annual report costs, and ending costs. He stated that timber harvest can be modeled into the spreadsheet.

Chair Snyder asked if there would be additional costs for public lands. Ms. Lazorchak said probably not because public land parcels tend to be larger and contain higher stocks, so there may be even less cost associated with projects on public land. Dr. Danks asked if this spreadsheet could be used for the test case on a public land parcel that will be in the report. Ms. Washburn said that they would look into it. Mr. Byrne stated that one of the costs associated with a project is verification and inventory of a property. He asked if the State does any data collection already that may be used for those steps and therefore save time and money. Chair Snyder said no. Dr. Danks asked if this type of spreadsheet could be created for the public. She suggested that the Group recommend in its report that the Agency of Natural Resources create it. Instead of recommending the establishment of a statewide forest carbon sequestration program, the State could create a tool that could help private landowners evaluate whether a project would be financially feasible. Mr. Turner agreed that may be a good option. He suggested that there could be a dedicated staff member to update the spreadsheet and assist the public in using it. The Group could recommend that the General Assembly allocate funding to develop the spreadsheet and fund the position. Mr. Turner warned, however, that the spreadsheet tool should not be too simplistic or general because it could hide costs from landowners and may be confusing. It would require lots of work to make an accurate tool for a broad range of land parcels.

Rep. Higley asked if the law currently allows for public land to be enrolled in a carbon sequestration program. Chair Snyder stated there is nothing in statute, however, each piece of property came to State ownership by different means and some have limitations on the allowed uses, so it is a parcel specific question. Mr. Turner stated that he had a slide listing the public lands with forest carbon projects that he could find.

The next item on the agenda was the Group's report. Chair Snyder asked for a status update on

each section of the report, as assigned at the last meeting. Mr. Turner and Dr. Danks are working on charge #1. There are many published reports that they will draw from. This section may also include trends in the industry. Charge #2 is still a work in progress, but subsections A, B, and C have been struck. Mr. Shallow has drafted some language for charge #3. The staff from ANR are also working on some information for this section.

Dr. Danks began work on charge #4, but would like assistance. Mr. Shallow and Chair Snyder will contribute to this section. Staff from the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation are working on charge #5. Dr. Danks will add some language about the Current Use program. The staff from Forests, Parks and Recreation will also contribute to charge #7 and include some information from the Keeton Report that the Group reviewed. Information from Mr. Turner's presentation is also relevant. Charge #8 relates to establishing a pilot program. Ms. Washburn is working on that.

The next item on the agenda was the agenda for the next meeting. Chair Snyder said that most of the meeting will focus on discussing the draft report and how to bring the Group's work to a close. Drafting the report will not be finished in two weeks. Chair Snyder recommended that they reschedule the meeting until more work is completed on the report.

The last agenda item was the opportunity for public comment. Mr. Robert Lehmert of Berlin spoke about the advantages of Biochar and pyrolysis. He stated that the Group should consider these things as alternatives because he believes that forest carbon sequestration projects will be obsolete in the near future.

The Working Group adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Czajkowski
Legislative Counsel