



Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting
Wednesday, March 19, 2008
Preston Community Center, Preston, Washington

Commissioners present: Julie Stangell, Lee Kahn, Ron Baum, Doug McClelland and Doug Schindler (mill tour only)

Commissioners absent: Len Guss, Kevin Buckley, Alex Kamola and Matt Rourke

Ex officio members present: Jim Franzel, Brandy Reed, Amy Grotta and Jon Pederson

Ex officio members absent: Marilyn Cope

Staff: Don Harig, Parks Division; Alan Sinsel, Parks Division; Joelyn Higgins, Dept. of Development and Environmental Services (DDES); Julia Larson, Office of Business Relations and Economic Development (BRED); Bill Eckel, Office of Rural and Resource Programs (ORRP); Kathy Creahan, Farm and Forest Programs Manager, ORRP; Kristi McClelland, Forester; Bill Loeber, Forester; and Linda Vane, Liaison for the Commission

Guests: Lauren Clarke and Jennifer Harrison-Cox, People for Rural King County; Boyd Norton, Washington DNR; Randall Nelson; and DeeAnn Hansen, forest land owner

Meeting Summary

Minutes:

There was not a quorum so adoption of the minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

Chair Julie Stangell called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Staff Reports

Announcements/Administration – Linda Vane

Linda introduced Don Harig, who is the new Park Operations Manager in charge of resource management. Don said that part of his responsibilities are to oversee management of County working forest lands.

Linda reported that on February 25, 2008, the County Council added to the Rural Forest Commission (RFC) an ex officio non-voting position for a representative of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Jim Franzel, District Ranger, will serve in that position.

DDES Update - Joelyn Higgins

Joelyn reported that quarterly meetings between DNRP Forestry staff and DDES Forestry staff have been instituted to coordinate on issues of concern. She also reported that a new task force is

being formed to look at DDES permitting processes and costs. The first meeting is scheduled for April. There is a forestry representative on the task force, said Joelyn.

Comprehensive Plan Update – Kathy Creahan

The Comprehensive Plan Update has been transmitted to the County Council, reported Kathy. With regard to the Preston Mill zoning, it had been proposed that the sale of products milled at the site be considered, but a P-suffix Forest zoning did not allow that. The Comprehensive Plan Update proposes that sale of products milled on site be allowed with a 2,000 square foot limit to the size of the sale area. This would be apply anywhere with Forest zoning. The RFC wanted to avoid conditional use permit because of a concern with the cost.

Tour Preston Mill Site Tour

Alan Sinsel, Manager, Snoqualmie Maintenance District, King County Parks & Recreation Division with Randall Nelson, Preston native

The RFC and guests toured the mill site. The mill operated until 1990 when it was destroyed by fire. King County purchased the property. Recently the County awarded a grant to the Preston Community Council to study possible uses for the site, including rebuilding a mill facility on part of the site, recreation, forestry education and habitat restoration.

Partnership for Rural King County (PRKC)

Lauren Clark and Jennifer Harrison-Cox, Partnership for Rural King County

Lauren said that the organization was formed as a neighborhood hub for eastern rural King County to ensure the long-term sustainability of working farms and forest lands and biodiversity of native habitats. Some of the projects they have worked on during the last eighteen months have been restoration projects, a possible land acquisition and most recently, plans for a tour of working farm and forest properties in June for County Council members. They hope to showcase the symbiotic relationship between urban and rural communities in the county.

Lauren said that she and her husband own a sawmill in Issaquah. It is the second oldest business still operating in the city. They do a lot of custom milling, decking and fencing.

Rural Economic Strategy

Julia Larson, Office of Business Relations and Economic Development

Julia explained that at the January RFC meeting, she worked with the commissioners to brainstorm a list of those things that are working well in forestry today as an economic activity in the county and those things that are not working well. Julia distributed copies of the list. The brainstorm list is also summarized in the minutes from the January meeting.

Julia asked for RFC to add to the list activities that are currently accepted uses or that might become accepted uses. Julie Stangell suggested that to the list of recreational uses in forested

areas be added fishing and ATVs. Doug McClelland agreed that there are no designated areas for ATVs in the county. He said that target shooting, extreme mountain bike courses, hang gliding, small scale lodgings and accessory educational programs could be added to the list. Ron Baum suggested brush cutting and native plant propagation as possible additions to the list of value added forest products. Julie suggested that training sites for search and rescue teams be added.

Regarding forestry-related activities, Kathy asked if there are things that the County should be facilitating. Ron Baum said that craftspeople of the type that one sees in the farmers markets are very often offering value added forest products rather than agricultural projects. Lee said that Christmas trees are usually considered agriculture, but they can be grown in the Forest Zone if they are interspersed with timber trees and not irrigated. There are, however, complications like diseases being transferred from the larger trees or the larger trees shading out the Christmas tree, said Lee

Regarding the potential for recreational use of forests, Doug M said that the liability and insurance costs associated with letting people on your land is a strong disincentive to recreational uses for private landowners. Julie said that if you charge a fee for people to use your land, you are liable. Generally speaking, if you do not charge fees you are not liable (recreational immunity). Ron added that there are somewhat different rules for different recreational uses under state law. Ron raised the possibility of the RFC looking at the question of extending recreational immunity to more types of activities. Julie said that there has been a effort to introduce legislation at the state level to leave recreational immunity in place, but allow landowners to charge enough to cover the costs of administering a recreational access program. So far this legislative effort has not been successful.

Doug McClelland suggested that a category be added for potential income to forest landowners from transfer of development rights, tax incentive programs, sale of carbon credits and the like.

In conclusion, Julia said that she would like to look at the reasons for the seeming lack of economic opportunities in value added products and see if there might be ways the County could improve opportunities. Amy said that the value added products will always be secondary to timber harvest. She suggested an inventory of who is involved in value added timber or non-timber forest products and what the demand might be. There are some state-wide reports on wood products already. Doug M said it would be good to go through the list and identify which elements could be influenced by King County.

Doug said it would be valuable to bring proposals to the County Council related to forest-based businesses. Ron said that the farmers markets could provide a good model for ways to provide additional income opportunities for forest landowners and to showcase the value of protecting forests from conversion to other land uses. There was discussion of the growing demand for native plants in landscaping. Brandy said that there is room to grow a plant production market. It is more like an agricultural product, so it is not completely clear how that relates to forest

conservation. For habitat restoration, nursery stock is more reliable. However, there have been efforts to connect the growers and users of these plants and such efforts could be resurrected. Gathering materials such as mosses or greens of more tied to the floral industry. The conversation turned to issues related to timber forest projects. Julie suggested that transport issues be investigated. Amy suggested that linkages to the green building industry be explored. Julie pointed out that contrary to what is often stated, there is enough timber being harvested to keep a mill operating full time with the proper coordination among forest owners.

Suggestions for future agendas

1. Tour of the sawmill in Issaquah
2. Report on a request from a Vashon group that the County consider third party certification of Island Center Forest
3. Projected reductions in the King County budget

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, May 21, 2008. The meeting after that will be held on July 16, 2008.

Staff Liaison: Linda Vane, at 206-296-8042 or linda.vane@kingcounty.gov