

Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection (DOF)

Tanana Valley State Forest Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting minutes

April 3rd, 2025.

Introductions of CAC members: Brad Cox, Value Added Processing, Jason Knoles, Industry, Kristin Timm, Recreation, Dan Reese, Private Forest User, Mike Spindler, Fish & Wildlife Interests, Tom Malone, Forest Science.

New CAC member, Stefan Milkowski, appointed by Division of Forestry & Fire Protection State Forester Jeremy Douse to fill the Environmental Interests seat. Stefan has been in Alaska almost 20 years, working as a newspaper reporter, then in business as a carpenter and doing firewood sales, long time user of state forest.

Online: Tom Paragi. Hosted virtually by DOF Forest Planner Trevor DoBell-Carlsson; hosted on-site by DOF Northern Region Forester Kevin Meany.

Minutes: draft 2024 minutes were approved after noting the need to correct spelling of a member's name. Minutes will be posted to the TVSF CAC website.

Motion to approve minutes, seconded and approved.

Re-appointed for 3-year term on January 1st, Reed Morisky.

Two vacancies prior to meeting, now 1—Kristin Timm knows an interested party.

Dan Rees talked about the upcoming SAF meeting & field trip, April 22nd-24th 2025.

Kevin Meany mentioned the conflicting public meeting tonight regarding the TVSF Forest Management Plan public review period (hosted by DOF Forest Planner Geneva Preston), and Trevor gave a short update on the differences between the two meetings (CAC & the public meeting).

Nominations for chair & co-chair. Dan & Tom re-nominated if willing; no other nominations. They will serve again.

Kevin Meany spoke about the carbon offset program Best Interest Finding (BIF): Working w/Trevor Fulton (DNR Carbon Offset Program Manager), went through the template for BIF for forestry; this is the 1st BIF that Office of Project Management & Permitting (OPMP) will be putting out, and so they've looked at all the different ways that DNR does BIFs, and chose DOF's template. Early in the process, no timeline.

Jeremy Douse: spoke with Trevor Fulton, still in the process of developing BIF—once the TVSF Forest Management Plan (FMP) is done, the BIF will be released.

Q: The BIF will focus on State Forest lands, not forest classified lands? Yes, that's DOF's understanding. Timeline? Jeremy guessing June. Jeremy: The contractors said they'd need to do fieldwork by August.

Dan: Would CAC submit a comment letter? Would the CAC comment? Would they have a meeting during the public comment window? Tom: They ought to do it about a week after they release it, give them a couple weeks to get something in writing and submit it.

OPMP hired a project manager/coordinator and we should expect them to reach out to DOF more.

Tom Paragi mentioned the workshop @ UAF that Chris Maisch and Tom Paragi organized about carbon offsets. SAF website has abstract of those talks, and some will be in PDF format.

Schedule of future CAC meetings. In the last April meeting (2024), there was discussion about having more meetings per year. In the past, meetings used to be more frequent; roughly 10 years ago there were quarterly meetings, then twice-yearly meetings, then once per year. Should more meetings be added based on when other public comment meetings are released?

Dan R: what activities are we expecting for the TVSF? More sales and more activity that the CAC might be interested in?

Kevin: We have long-term sales now, and expedited timber sales. We've seen an increase in out-of-region interest in our sales, such as offering TVSF timber to Southcentral operators. The FMP revision is a major topic; the carbon project and all the different things about carbon will be of interest.

Discussion about possibility of having a meeting during the five-year schedule of timber sales review period and other DOF products that have review periods. Do we want to schedule a fall meeting right now?

October 23rd works for everyone, and the CAC may have a meeting before then for the carbon offset BIF.

Requests were made to better publicize these meetings beyond the public notice system. Social media posts were suggested, with a link to get on the email list for future meetings. For this meeting, an online public notice was sent out but very few people apparently saw it.

Old business: TVSF plan revision 30-day comment period. Opportunity to look at the comments and our responses using the issue response summary. Did everyone get a chance to read through the 55 pages of comment responses?

Kristin: appreciates the clarification of table 4.2 [Recreation Developments of Public Interest] to make it clear that these are projects where the public has expressed interest, ideas that the Division can't take on, but likes that it was documented. CAC letter was pretty well covered; except the addition of the concise outline of projects that occur in the TVSF. Noted in Tom's email to Trevor DoBell-Carlsson on 4/2/25. Trevor & Geneva Preston will review that letter.

Comment, somewhat inaudible, regarding that there seemed to be a lot of comments on the TVSF plan about subunits, lots of discussion about subunits. Curious why those things are brushed off to the side.

Kevin: response summary was put together by Geneva in consultation with the Northern Region forestry staff. Regarding Annual Allowable Cut (AAC)—we did not change it and didn't intend to without doing more research. Hesitant to change it unless there's a purpose-driven change. AAC is based on volume blocks within the forest and then references Doug Hanson's work on TVSF inventory. Would Doug's inventory need to be re-worked? His was based on volume blocks and didn't necessarily break it down into subunit size. Noted that road system-accessible blocks were hit harder [with timber harvest]. The areas that are more easily accessible may be getting hit harder, and that's natural because that's near the market, and easy to access. You can really see the harvests as you fly over the area, see where the access is, the percentage of landscape with birch and birch that's been harvested is pretty high.

There was further discussion that expressed some concern about level of birch harvest and spruce harvest, and the State should look at it in the lifespan of the next plan. Noted that some of the comments on the plan expressed concern about the level of birch harvest, and the commentator said they felt like at the least, the State should acknowledge that something needs to be looked at within the lifespan of this next FMP. Good language in the FMP about the Parks Highway viewshed, but how do we log all the accessible birch without impacting the view here? And should we look at AAC in a more refined way, a finer scale, instead of a volume block level?

Jeremy: looking at a subunit level seems awkward. Moving sales around seems to make sense. The accessible spots are where the market is also. Tok & Delta don't have as many operators. In the next 20 years of this FMP, is there enough birch to go around? Consensus yes.

Question: quality of birch stump sprout versus seedling? There is generally good regeneration in birch sales, whether sprouts or through scarification.

From an operator's perspective, if 2/3 of a stand is high production rate, you can accept 1/3 at low production rate. The other way around will not work. If operators will stay viable, you've got to have quality wood. It can be a shame to use birch as firewood, but it's got to be viable, and this is where the money is. Concern was expressed that the high-quality birch that sawmills prefer is basically being used for firewood harvests because that's close to the accessible roads and the Fairbanks market. Will there be lower volume, lower quality, stands in the future with stump-sprout stands?

Tom P: Lots of birch stands are fire origin; well-spaced healthy trees, not dominated by grass. Start working on stuff towards Delta, lot more grass and more of a regen problem which is where scarification will be important. Currently, the AAC is calculated using the 4 area office scales. Could be worded in plan so it doesn't lock us in.

Discussion ensued that while the commentor feels like DOF tries to implement recommendations made by Tom Paragi & ADF&G, in the real world sometimes he feels like ADF&G recommendations aren't successfully implemented. Operators are trying to implement those things on a sale-by-sale basis, giving feedback on things that worked and things that didn't, and recommending things like orienting leave strips differently so they wouldn't have to be breached during operations.

Tom Malone: First several pages of response document, tried to mention that. Such as leaving islands.

Kevin: We are doing our best to implement these things on a sale-by-sale basis.

Is it reasonable for DOF to implement, and is it practical for the operator? Brad—it's not really but they try, and operators give feedback on ways the goals can still be achieved. Operators understand what they need to do, what they can do, and what they can work to adapt.

Stefan: TVSF FMP comment suggesting with regard to regeneration, that scarification be preferred rather than required. Did anyone else see that? Jeremy: flexibility is good, because some sites might not need scarification.

The FMP should have the full suite of tools; the individual sales should have public comments about leave strips, etc. The suite of tools DOF has is contained in the FMP.

Tom P noted his private comments were there, but the comments submitted through ADF&G appeared to be missing. More research needed on things like planting trials, and mentioned bison.

Jeremy update on timber lease bills (SB 72 & HB 75): nothing has changed on it. The bill is modeled after Canadian timber leasing where the state could lease tracts of land to an operator who would provide a Detailed Plan of Operations to the state, they could choose where roads would go, and be responsible for reforestation. Jeremy presented at legislature house & senate resources; hasn't been any follow-up, no further requests. No second hearing was asked for. May not be much legislative interest, sitting in committee.

This bill would automatically carry over to next year, and the Governor could theoretically negotiate to have it added.

Q: How does it differ from existing DOF long-term sales? Jeremy: The way the bill is written now, the differences would be, the operator would select units and roads. Operators would lay out the sales. The BIF would not be used. Still a constitutional requirement for notice, but no BIF. Also, FRPA would be more voluntary than required. Even industry would like to see FRPA put back in the bill and in the contract. Jeremy thinks there would need to be significant changes to the bill in order to move forward. The TVSF FMP would have to be opened up again for revision.

Expansion of TVSF: Dan Rees. Voted to write a letter when legislature is in session. In the plan update, there is a list of recommended additions. Dan would suggest working w/Tom to write a letter pointing out that language and having that be the CAC letter, and cite Joe Young's letter.

Question: Is there a downside to adding to the State Forest? Jeremy: some would say we're already nowhere near our AAC, and now we're adding another layer of bureaucracy to things like a mine, or oil & gas development.

Q: What % of sales come from State Forest land versus forest classified? Kevin says probably 80%/20%, pretty heavy towards State Forest land, but they do operate on Forest Classified land regularly.

CAC will write a letter in support of TVSF expansion.

Kristin: Regarding Tom's comment, Kristin was scrolling through the comment response—does there need to be something in climate change section about species that might be viable additional species for regrowth, with a longer growing season and warmer temperatures? Tom P says there's currently one topic on assisted migration, which is bringing native seeds from further south that might be suited for future growth. Kristin: Sees assisted migration as being slightly different from planting different species. Tom's letter to Geneva also mentioned non-native, non-invasive species. Discussion ensued that we don't want to introduce the next bird vetch, and that we are focusing on native species, and

perhaps prepared to bring seeds from southern seed zones slightly north to ensure climate adaptation, but no non-native species.

Area Updates: Kevin Meany, Northern Region Forester. Fairbanks/Delta updates: for 18 months they've been developing three requests for long-term negotiated sales and yesterday they got one contract signed, a 10-year contract for birch to Alaska Birch Works, a local industry. They have orders for seedlings and will look at planting this summer. 80,000 seedlings, white spruce through a Canadian grower on an as-needed 5-year contract, which will make annual orders easier to process.

Recently hired a new forester position for Northern Region—a new position that hasn't been here before. Will assist in Tok, Fairbanks, Delta and also provide for more FRPA inspections and reforestation efforts. Tom Cheney was in Fairbanks DOF Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA), then Ketchikan resource forester, and is now returning to Fairbanks. Fairbanks Area Forester Kevin Breitenbach, another FIA forester brought back into forestry. Having this much ground capacity is a big deal for DOF northern region and can add to our management strategies.

Tok: working on year 1 & 2 of their 5-year schedule. Will be an area that the new forester can make an immediate impact in.

Any capital improvement projects? No, not for this year. Outside of CIP, there was a Forest Service bridge loan program that DOF has been looking into and individual Area Foresters put in for some bridges, but it was something DOF was going after.

Jeremy Douse, DOF State Forester, Statewide update: new Deputy Director Ashley List who left DOF for the Forest Service, then returned as Deputy Director. Former Board of Forestry (BOF) liaison/special projects coordinator Shannon Miller has moved to a different Division; new person in that role is Lily Coyle, formerly DOF's Public Information Officer. The position is responsible for Interfacing with BOF, scheduling meetings and helping with legislative requests. Tom Cheney & Kevin Breitenbach as Kevin Meany mentioned, joined Northern Region. Legislative updates: the state forests bill is being negotiated & has not dropped yet. Jeremy expects it will drop this year but doesn't know what format it will take. Discussion about the proposed expansions to TVSF; proposed units have to be in an area plan and have a public process before they can be added, although a legislator could do a friendly amendment and have them added. Dan Rees: Joe Young was looking at lands that were considered during the establishment of the state forest.

China has banned all US logs and that is having effects in Southeast Alaska for second growth forests, small diameter wood which was being sent to China—anything that couldn't be used for music wood was being sent to China. Afognak, where China was their

whole market, says they have about 3 months before they pull the plug and stop altogether. Alcan still has markets for cedar, but everything else is on hold unless it's really high-quality music wood like old growth Sitka spruce. DOF has been trying to keep them going, but this new China development has really hurt them. DOF is trying to find 10-20 acre stands with a higher cedar component, or using purchaser layout, trying to keep the industry alive. Some of the timber industry in SE may be in trouble. Last year, TVSF put out almost 10 mmbf while the Tongass put out 3mmbf. Forest Service is under pressure to get more timber sales out, but most of the NEPA cleared sales are meant for the China market which is now complicated.

Lots of interest in Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), using the State to help with FS timber sales. We've done a couple of GNA projects in SE. DOF is looking at developing a GNA program. DOF has a new PCN long-term non-permanent position that will be advertised soon to do more projects on FS land.

In this year's budget, Jeremy anticipates a flat budget or a little decrement, and next year would be a decrement. An additional forester in Haines was put in the budget. 29mmbf Baby Brown sale in Haines—still moving forward, put in a permit for a log transfer facility (LTF). Additional position request for a project manager/engineer position, someone who can work w/contractors to develop roads and replace bridges.

Forest Service had a temporary bridge program where bridges could be loaned out to operators to cross drainages. DOF put in for that grant and got the first one, Jeremy thinks.

Lumber grading: trained 112 people. More trainings scheduled for Tok and POW, recently had one in Juneau. Lots of interest for the training. Certification is great but we still need to work w/municipalities to change codes. Still need mill trainings also, even for small mobile mills. Probably will move in that direction. Doing a drying workshop through a wood innovation grant, agreement with University of North Carolina wood product specialist who will come and do a kiln drying training, registration on UAF lumber grading website.

Now that Alaska does not have any university forestry training, it's difficult to recruit foresters, find them in Lower 48 and bring them up. Better model would be to find someone w/ties to Alaska, and teach them to be a forester. Working w/university & Forest Service to maybe do a certificate program which would get people into a Forester 1 position.

In Fairbanks, CAC communication is great. Jeremy is thinking of doing something like an annual loggers conference, or something.

FS is basically in disarray. Second "fork in the road" email went out. More reductions in force, more early retirements. There are two vacancies in Ketchikan that could be filled by Forest Service foresters.

Public comments: Tom Paragi: Thanks to CAC, thanks to DNR. Been following CAC for 30 years.

CAC member comments:

Stefan: appreciates the opportunity and participating in the committee.

Jason Knoles: Noticed the amount of latitude DOF left themselves for managing, when looking through the FMP. So many interests, and so many variables, and lots of scenarios, when trying to facilitate other peoples needs.

Kristin Timm, no additional comments.

Mike Spindler, appreciate the job DOF is doing, and the process of revising and providing public input and opening it back up for the public. Would like to see more ways of advertising the meeting.

Dan Rees: enjoyed that diverse interests can come here and have a conversation.

Tom: Thanks to everyone who was able to make it tonight. Having an additional meeting will be better for our committee and they might be more helpful to the State.