

Illinois Forestry Development Council – Meeting Minutes

January 13, 2021

Location: Online Zoom Meeting

Attendees: Eric Holzmüller (IFDC Director), Jay Hayek (IFDC Chair, U of I), Paul Deizman (IL DNR-SAF), Kim Watson (ILDOC/Rep for Chris Meister); Lisa Helmig (FS/Shawnee); T.J. Benson (Wildlife Society); Lydia Scott (Environmental); Dale Shumaker (AISWCD); Dave Gillespie (SAF), Wade Conn (NRCS), Jenny Lesko(SAF); Elliot Lagacy (IDOA); Mike McMahan (IFA), Logan Wilhelm (IL Finance Authority); Austin Omer (IFB); Joel Pisoni (Procurement Forester); Steven Graves (Private Landowner); Robin Hanna (IIRA, WIU); and, Patti Cludray (Recorder-SIUC); Late additions: Rob Sproule (Urban); Casey Calvert (Private Landowner, Walnut Council).

Call to Order: 9:05 a.m. – Jay Hayek, IFDC Chair welcomed members and guests.

AGENDA ITEM: Review of Minutes of the November 2020 IFDC Meeting

- Patti Cludray reported that the notes of the November meeting, which were previously lost, were found. She will complete her transcription of the minutes within the next few days and send to the Director for distribution to the IFDC members for review/approval at the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM: Executive Director Report

Eric Holzmüller presents this report.

- IFDC Budget
 - Current the IFDC (SIU portion) of the FY 21 budget is underspent due to COVID 19 restrictions on travel, and the switch to virtual meeting format.
 - This means surplus could be used for funding of additional proposal, should the Council decide to do so.

AGENDA ITEM: Forestry Development Council Member Update

Eric Holzmüller presents this update.

- Working with Mike Brunk to make sure the member listing is updated and correct. This will give an accessible comprehensive listing of IFDC members.
 - Mike has done a great job of tracking down missing members.
 - Continuing to work to fill vacancies. There will be a new State Representative, since Rep. Reitz was not reelected. Patrick Windhorst remains and will continue to have a place on the Council.
- Jay H. asks if there are any timber producer/farmer openings on the Council?
 - Joel Pisoni replaced Stan Curtis on the Council, however there are still opening for one landowner, and one producer.

Jay H. asks if there are any questions for Eric regarding his executive report. None noted, Jay thanks Eric for this the Executive Report and Member Update.

AGENDA ITEM: Legislative Issues Update:

Jay Hayek opens this up for group discussion.

- Jay H. – since this is the last day of the Lame Duck session, which began on January 8, there may not be any issues of interest to the Council, however, does anyone know of anything that needs to be brought to the Council's attention?
- Dale S., - With the potential for funding reductions – we are a little encouraged about positive statements coming out of the new administration. We will continue to work with the AISWCD to maintain allocated funding.
- Austin O. – In the middle of the session; Farm Bureau has not heard of anything related to natural resources and forestry issues to report.

- Paul D., - Nothing to report from the lame duck session. Forest Service and IDNR signed a shared stewardship agreement on January 5th. Still need a permanent funding bill to fund Forestry in Illinois. Know that climate change is on the forefront so a bill that includes Forestry would be great.
- Elliot L. – IDOA does not have anything to report.
- Mike B., - No legislative update.

Jay asks for any further legislative issues to report. None noted. Thanks to all for sharing.

AGENDA ITEM: Urban Committee Report:

Rob Sproule presents this report to the Council.

- Committee met on December 8, 2020. Ten (10) members attended.
- Focus was on Mike Brunk's urban work.
- Group explored 2021 work plans; looking forward to working on urban outreach.
 - Expanding Tree City USA; Strike Team work.
- The committee looks forward to meeting again in February.

Jay asks for any questions for Rob, none noted. Jay thanks Rob for this report.

AGENDA ITEM: IDNR Forest Stewardship Report including Legacy Report

Chris Whittom is unavailable today; Paul Deizman presents this report to the Council.

- Chris is continuing to work on database; processing 100+ updates per month.
- Not sure of the status of the bi-annual mailing to participants.
- Continuing work on the White Oak initiative and the state and private stewardship programs.
- Chris would welcome phone calls/emails anytime.

Jay H. asks is there any questions about Stewardship or anything new to report on Legacy.

- Paul reports on Legacy program.
 - Legacy program is kept alive with a small amount of legislative funding; however, Illinois cannot really compete nationally. Leverage toward federal properties are very important so Illinois is handicapped. Expanding Legacy is difficult; would like to see a ring of properties around the Shawnee; reprioritizing drift-less area over Peoria Bluffs. The Shawnee and drift-less areas should both qualify.
 - Have to look at how to set priority areas; then it takes an assessment. For example looking at the drift-less area; once an area is identified a assessment of needs (new or amended) must be prepared. It takes collaborating with other groups to create a section on driftless areas. The see if it meets federal criteria.
 - Legacy program is always accepting applications.

Jay thanks Paul for this report and explanation, thanks to Paul.

AGENDA ITEM: IDNR -Urban and Community Forestry Report

Mike Brunk provides this report to the Council.

- A contractor is working on an Assessment of Needs.
- Urban forestry has a set of goals included in the Forest Action Plan (FAP).
 - Went through the FAP when it went through approvals and was submitted 2018. Paul and Mike polished and detailed the plan for 2020 – 2030.
 - Looking to set another set of goals for the next 5 years.
 - The USFS has a team of experts that reviewed our plan and gave excellent ideas for fine tuning it; making it better.
 - Must consider value of FAP; conjoined with potential for IL to acquire protected funding (5MIL) dollars relative to the FAP. There are other dollars (10MIL) on the side for other projects.
 - Bottom line is that FAP is a valuable tool with valuable potential.
- Been busy with Tree City USA applications relative to traditional forestry as well as invasive treatment/control. Seems to be more and more focus on climate change issues.
 - Going forward we need to make sure and situate our own IL urban areas as a base.

- Next, we must consider our tree diversity. This is going to be important for the future; so we do not create more problems.
- The bottom line is that a good start forward for many communities is to become a part of Tree City USA.

Mike indicates the end of his report.

Jay asks if there are any discussion or questions for Mike Brunk, none noted. Thanks to Mike for this report.

AGENDA ITEM: Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Report

Paul Deizman presents this report to the Council

- Mike touched on the FAP and its importance. The IFDC Summit was critical in the Action Plan; showing the FS that the IFDC supported this was a key component of the 2020-2030 FAP. The IFDC needs to sponsor more programs like this and must consider more ways to continuing reaching out to landowners for input, on a regular basis.
- Lydia S., to Paul D. Going back to Legacy program for a question. Why isn't NE Illinois included in any of the Legacy areas?
 - Paul D., short answer is that staff are really busy; those people who leave are not regularly replaced and we cannot seem to get over a certain level of employees. We do not get everywhere we would like to be. We push to get as far as we can.
 - Shared employee agreements may help. DNR leadership responds favorably to outside funding. Mike B., as an example in the new agreement with the Shawnee a shared employee is a part of that agreement.
- Eric H. – asks if there is any headway being made toward allocations for the 4% cost-share program?
 - Staff was reminded that 4% cost-share was promised to be brought back. Requested \$100,000, which is a nominal amount per year to be able to give back to landowners.
 - Staff capacity is low for getting paperwork done, however once the program us back up and running again, the hope was that additional staff could be hired.
 - Unfortunately, it was promised that the \$100,000 would be considered, however it was not allocated in this year's budget. Paul will now work to get that allocation into the FY 22 budget.
 - Paul wishes he had better news to report. Cost-share has always been a may-be-funded proposition. Not sure if the IFDC could help but Paul believes any show of support without making demands would be well received.
- Jay thanks Paul for this report; asks for any further questions or discussion. None noted.

AGENDA ITEM: Other Business New/Old

Jay Hayek opens this up to the group for discussion items or updates of interest to the Council.

- Eric H. Opens with Old Business.
 - There are two small project proposals presented to the Council at the last meeting and were to be considered and voted on at this meeting. (Complement each other to do invasive species at Touch of Nature (TON; setting up demonstration areas) the total requested for those two proposals was \$10,000.
 - Two additional proposals received yesterday and were forwarded to Council Members for review as well. The total request for those two proposals was \$7,000.
- Eric reports that the remaining budget for small projects is about \$12,000. However, he also reports that the portion of the budget set aside for SIU (due to a lack of travel) will have a balance of about \$10,000. Therefore, IFDC has about \$22,000 available to fund projects, which are completed by June 30, 2021.
 - Any remaining budget that is not used by the IFDC is returned to the IDNR.
- Question for the Council: should the newly received project proposals receive consideration in addition to the 2 previously received proposals already being considered for funding by the IFDC through small project funding? Council members consider and discuss this question and all proposals as presented.

- The 2-TON proposals are follow-ups on Phase I funded projects (invasive species control measures). Question is raised if the work can be accomplished by the June 30th deadline.
 - Dave G., - getting the projects completed is highly possible; and, getting the demo areas across the state constructed is a main objective. Therefore, incentive to complete in a timely manner to qualify this project for IFDC funding allocation is high. Dave indicates that he reviewed the other two proposals sent in late, and they are also ready to go.
- Jay H. – Does not see a grave reason why the Council should not approve the late project requests. However, the IFDC needs to be as transparent as possible.
 - When project proposals are received late, as these were, we need to make sure that submitters know how we grade proposals for approval/disapproval in the future.
 - The Council has made concession here and there in the past but we need to be very firm on the closing date by which proposals need to be submitted for fair consideration. This needs to be at the forefront moving forward.
- Elliot L., - The Council has talked about preparing a guideline booklet; would this help.
- Eric H., - The guidelines are set-up in the Request for Proposals (RFP).
 - We may need to re-enforce and hold to the date guidelines.
- Lydia – The Council has funded good projects in the past that have not gone through the RFP. Should we be thinking of other things that the Council needs to fund with this money?
 - Eric H. that is a good thing to consider. Does anyone know if there are other expenses that need to be covered with IFDC dollars? Council members consider this.
- Dave G., - adds, he does not think that there is a better use of IFDC budget money than working together with our partners through funding of these small Forestry projects in Illinois.
- Eric H., - notes, that if all four of these submitted projects are funded, there will still be about \$4,000 available in the budget for other things.
- Steve G., - questions: If IFDC budget allocations are not spent and do go back to the IDNR, does it get used for Forestry and not go back into the State's general fund?
 - Paul D., - when money goes back it does stay in Forestry but it varies year to year on what that money is spent on. They are fighting for staff salaries at DNR so there are always items that need to be funded.
- Steve G., - Is there a fear that the funds to the IFDC could be reduced if year after year we do not use our allocated budget. There has been discussion to reduce funding in the past when the IFDC was not an active organization.
 - Mike B., as long as the Council is active and working it is going to be funded. If the budget funds were returned to IDNR Forestry, it would not be wasted.
- Question, could the Council grant money to the IDNR to buy computers. That is an interesting question; however, you have to be very careful taking money out of one pocket in the state and putting it into another.
 - Eric H., - The Council has allocated funds to the DNR in the past for projects, however, the person requesting funding was required to submit a proposal and follow RFP guidelines like everyone else.

Jay H. asks if there is any additional questions or discussion about the project proposals or is the Council ready to move forward with a Motion

MOTION: Casey Calvert makes a Motion the IFDC grant funding for the two proposals that were delivered for Council consideration last night. Dave Gillespie seconds the motion. Jay H. asks for any further discussion.

- Lydia S., - notes that yes there needs to be time for follow-up and further discussion.
- Dale S., - does not have a problem with any of the proposals; but, last year the Council noted that they were going to draw a line in the sand and make sure that we are funding credible / viable projects. At some point, we need to say no more; we must have time to carefully consider these projects. Council members discuss.
 - Council members agree with Dale.

- Dave G – regarding the \$5,000 cap on project proposals; it may stretch the money out for more projects, but are we limiting those projects.
 - Jay H. – the Council set that limit. It was the easiest way to get the small projects approved and through the system.
- Eric H. – sometimes there is a fluid structure to the IFDC budget, which leaves more, funding for the small grant program. E.g., SIU may be under-budget and that money can go back to the Council to be used for other things. By Jan, Feb or March that excess amount is known.
 - Mike B., - it does make sense for the Council to keep the two opportunity system. The main funding program and there is value to keeping the second tier option.
 - This is not just to spend up the money, but to give other opportunities for projects to be funded that come up later in the year.
 - Dale S., - it makes sense to plan a secondary period of funding for proposals; that are decided on at the January meeting each year.
- Lydia S. – If we can allocate some of those funds back to IDNR Forestry, if needed through a proposal that should be open for consideration.
- Paul D. – to the Council – Regarding future RFP’s sent forward by the Council. The IDNR must abide by a strict policy and the law when purchasing/ granting monies/ etc. The IFDC is different because we are an unbiased, scientific council of members we have more leeway. However, if the Council did not hold this status, our cap would be \$2,000.
 - When writing the RFP the Council does not want to be subject to the State grants process – so we cannot use the term “grants” for the funds that we allocate to the proposals. This should be “project funding.” The Council has discussed this before, but the terminology small grants program is still being still being used; this needs to change the Council does not want monies to be forced through the DNR procurement process.

Jay asks if there is any further discussion or if the Council is ready to vote on Motion on the floor.

- Patti asks for clarification on the Motion for the record; is this approval only for the new proposals or for the previous proposals that were before the board for consideration as well.
- Casey Calvert acknowledges the Motion should have been for all four proposals and withdraws his previous Motion.

MOTION: Dale Schumaker makes a Motion that the IFDC approve funding for the four proposals that have been presented to the Council. Wade Conn seconds the Motion. Jay H. asks for any further discussion, none noted. Motion carries. The four (4) project proposals are approved for funding.

- Eric Holzmueller, IFDC Director, will contact all.

Jay asks if there is any other New/Old Business.

- Elliot L. proposes that a letter be sent to the DNR asking for clarification on how IFDC budgeted money should be allocated.
- Mike notes that he and Paul will look into this.
 - Council need to know what they can and cannot do.
- Mike reminds Council that this was looked into last year, and it seems like the Council is doing fine. We just need to watch the use of terminology; avoiding using the term grants in our RFP.

Jay H. calls for any other discussion.

- Lisa Helmig gives brief F.S. Shawnee National Forest updates.
 - The Great American Outdoor Act has great public benefit. This is part of a regional effort (in part building toilets) on the Shawnee.
 - Beneficial changes made to the Policy Act. Forest Service updates to timber management directives giving us stewardship authorities, forest health and restoration.
 - We are looking at updating handbooks and manuals.
 - A 60-day public comment forum on Shawnee projects opened on December 18th.
 - FS / Shawnee updates are posted regularly to the website. If you have any trouble navigating the

website, please let Lisa know.

Jay thanks Lisa for these updates.

Eric Holzmueller closes the January 13, 2021 meeting of the Illinois Forestry Development Council.

- Next meeting of the IFDC is scheduled for March 10th, 2021. This will be a Zoom Meeting.
- With no further comments or discussion, the January 13th meeting of the Illinois Forest Development Council is adjourned at 11:00 a.m.