

Members present: Tom Rosenberg, Arnie Schlei(c)-(via phone), Rick Seefeldt  
Also present: Tom Lovlien-Forest Administrator, Jamie Polley-Director-(via phone), Chad Keranen-DNR Liaison-(via phone)

1. Call Meeting to Order – The meeting was called to order by Chairman Schlei at 2:00pm, Rm. 5, 212 River Dr., Wausau. Official notice and the agenda for the meeting was posted publicly in accordance with State statutes.

2. Public Comment – none brought forward

3. Approve Minutes – **Motion** / second by Schlei / Rosenberg to approve the minutes from the September 29, 2020 regular Forestry/Recreation Committee meeting. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.

4. Operational Functions Required by Statute, Ordinance or Resolution

A. Discussion and Possible Action by Committee

1. Consider Timber Sale Contract Extension Requests – Lovlien discussed five timber sales that are between 2½ to 3 years old and expiring December 30, 2020. The State has given zero percent extensions to all contracts expiring December of 2020. Lovlien’s recommendation is to be consistent with the State and many other counties that have given extensions at zero percent for one year because of the COVID pandemic and the Verso mill closure. **Motion** / second by Rosenberg / Seefeldt to approve extension requests for contracts #668-18, #665-18, #666-18, 671-18, and #660-17 at a zero percent increase. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.

Lovlien explained that there are two five-year old sales that contractors requested a third extension. Lovlien’s recommendation takes into consideration the COVID pandemic and the Verso mill closure. Both of those contracts had previously received a free extension because the weather was not conducive to getting them cut and also a second extension with a twenty-percent increase in stumpage. Both contractors have indicated that they will try to get the sales cut this year. Lovlien believed it was in the best interests of the County to give both contracts one more year at a zero percent increase considering everything that has happened over the last year. The contracts can be re-evaluated for an extension or closed out next year if they don’t get the sales finished. **Motion** / second by Schlei / Rosenberg to approve contract #642-15 and contract #644-15 for a third extension with a zero percent increase. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.

2. Consider Timber Bids and Award Contracts – Lovlien said bids were opened this afternoon on tract #7-20 which didn’t sell last month. Two bids were received and Koerner Forest Products was the high bidder. The bid amount is between the advertised and the appraised value so according to DNR rules the sale can be awarded. Koerner Forest Products doesn’t have any sales with the County currently and has not cut on County forest land before. Lovlien couldn’t get ahold of his references today but has spoken to Keranen who said Koerner Forest Products does a lot of work in this area. Lovlien also mentioned that Koerner is a master logger so assuming his references check out, Lovlien’s recommendation is to award the sale to Koerner Forest Products. **Motion** / second by Rosenberg / Seefeldt to award the sale to Koerner Forest Products as long as Koerner’s references check out positively. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.

Discussion and Possible Action by Committee to Forward to the Environmental Resource Committee for its Consideration - None

5. Policy Issues for Discussion and Committee Determination for Consideration by Environmental Resources Committee – Resolution: Approving the Marathon County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Here is a link to the plan:

<https://www.co.marathon.wi.us/Departments/ParksRecreationForestry/PlanningandDevelopment/FINALDraft/MarathonCountyForestComprehensiveLandUsePlan20212035.aspx>

Lovlien explained that Corporation Counsel has made a few minor changes to the resolution. Lovlien discussed the process that the plan has gone through to get to this point. He discussed some of the themes that came from the survey

and said most of the comments received were trail related. Some people want more trails, some want less trails, but the majority want the trails to be multi-use so that everybody can use them. A policy has been in place since 2004 not to expand any new trail mileage for any groups. Some adjustments have been made over the years for resource or safety reasons. Other themes included sustainable forest management, forest wildlife habitat, the land acquisition process, concerns about exotic invasive species and forest protection, to continue the feasibility study of snowmaking at Nine Mile Forest, and not to exclude the traditional users especially hunting or trapping. He noted that the plan was sent to DNR for their thirty-day legal review and some minor changes involving grammatical errors and missing words were made. No major policies changed in the plan. This is not a static plan and can be amended at any time with County Board and DNR approval. **Motion** / second by Schlei / Seefeldt to approve the final County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan and forward it on to the Environmental Resources Committee and County Board for final approval. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.

6. Educational Presentations/Outcome Monitoring Reports

A. Senator Tammy Baldwin's Letter to Verso Corporation – Lovlien said it appears that the sale of the Verso mill has been paused. The Great Lakes Timber Producers Association and others developed a cooperative and wanted to figure out a way to buy the mill and get it running sooner rather than later. The company is owned by investors who appear to want to turn the biggest profit for their shareholders. Senators Baldwin, Testin and Representative Krug sent letters to Verso asking the owners to reconsider and think about the families of those that have been laid off and the forest industry in Wisconsin and get the sale back in motion. It has been Lovlien's experience that the longer they are closed the less likelihood that they are going to be sold and reopen.

B. Update on Verso Corporation Mill – Lovlien said that the Timber Professionals Association and the Cooperative is still working with the DNR, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and others on a resolution to the mill closure.

C. Fall Timber Bid Summary – Keranen explained that he will be recalculating the bid summary because of the sale sold today. He said the averages would not change a whole lot. The general theme of the bid opening was that due to the slowdown during last summer, the pandemic, the Verso mill closure and all of the sales requiring frozen ground the bid averages now are a little bit lower than they have historically been. He thought the County was fortunate to have sold all five sales.

D. New Chief State Forester Named – Lovlien said Heather Berklund was named the new Chief State Forester. She has been in forestry for more than twenty years, has a good field forestry background and knows a lot about public lands forest management. Lovlien said she has been easy to work with through the Wisconsin County Forests Association, is responsive and informed. Lovlien felt all of her experience will help her in her new position because she can relate to all aspects of forestry.

7. Next Meeting Date, Time, Location: December 1, 2020, 1:30pm, Rm. 5, 212 River Dr., Wausau WI 54403

A. Announcements/Requests/Correspondence – none brought forward

B. Future Agenda Items: Consider Renewing Private Road Access Permits, 2021 County Forest Work Plan, 2021 County Forest Wildlife Work Plan, Application for County Forest Acreage Share Payment, 2021 Forestry/Recreation Committee Tentative Meeting Schedule, McMillan Marsh Lease Amendments, Consider Cash Farm Lease

8. Adjourn – **Motion** / second by Seefeldt / Rosenberg to adjourn the meeting at 2:30pm. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 3-0.