

Final Notes
NAFSR Board of Directors
Conference Call
May 7, 2020

On the Call

Jim Caswell, Larry Payne, Bill Timko, Jim Golden, Rich Stem, Rich Guldin, Tom Thompson, Jack Troyer, Ranotta McNair, Mac Gramley, Jane Kollmeyer, Becki Lockett Heath, Sandra Holsten, Dale Robertson, Al West, Johnny Hodges, Doug Crandall (Director of Legislative Affairs, Department of Agriculture)

Membership and Finances – Johnny Hodges

Our current membership is 695 members which includes 141 Lifetime and 189 Golden members. We have gained 15 Lifetime Members in 2020 so far. We currently have 20 members that have not paid their 2020 dues.

Financial summary – our current balance is \$29,882 with \$10,356 in our long-term investment and \$19,526 in cash and CD's.

Update and Discussion on Key Issues/Projects

Legislation Updates – Doug Crandall

- There is potential for a stimulus package, but it will be hard.
- With unemployment rising to 20%, the need to get people back to work will become overwhelming.
- A \$7 billion package was put together for Secretary Perdue which includes FS management work over the next 2 to 5 years. Jim Hubbard does not want to take it to the Secretary yet. The Secretary is currently only working on Covid-19 issues.
- Senators Gardner and Daines have put together the "Save Our Parks" bill. This is a stand-alone bill. We pushed to get the FS included at \$280 million per year for 5 years to work on infrastructure. Both senators are in tough re-election contests, so they feel they need to come up with something.
- Highway Bill – we are still pushing to get the FS their fair share.
- The 2018 Farm Bill addressed the issue of substance abuse which had prevented people from being hired to drive heavy equipment, etc.

Reforestation, Legislation, Job Corps – Bill Timko

Reforestation -

- Bill's handout on reforestation is included at the end of these notes.
- Under the current budget, there is little opportunity for the FS to increase reforestation funding without hurting other programs.

- There is a bill proposed that would increase the reforestation trust fund from \$30 million to \$60 million per year.
- One of the questions is how to allocate the additional \$30 million – should it be spread across all regions or focused on specific events such as large fire rehab? What do we (NAFSR) think they should do?

Legislation –

- Still working on the reforestation bill.
- The FS has \$7 billion in infrastructure in the stimulus package.

Job Corps –

- All Job Corps centers are closed.
- To help graduates, there is a proposal to provide a “graduation coach” (FS retiree) and a “graduation mentor” (current FS employee).
- Most centers have poor internet connections so the coaching would likely be face to face.
- Jim C. talked to the Chief a few days ago about this issue. He told her we could probably get volunteers to serve as coaches, but we could not manage the program.
- Becki suggested that maybe we could use the ACES program to get a coordinator. Funding would come from the FS.

NACO (National Association of Counties) Update – Rich Stem

- Attended the national NACO conference in DC in March.
- Prepared a guide for commissioners on how to work with the FS.
- Spoke to the NACO resources council (150 members) about FS capacity and budget.
- Used the Capacity Report that we wrote. Other groups are also supporting our report.

FCWG (Forest Climate Working Group) Update – Rich Guldin

- The group met the first week in March.
- They reached consensus on reforestation, science needs and private lands issues.
- The major reforestation issues are climate, carbon sequestration, and trillion trees initiative.

CEQ and NEPA – Ranotta McNair

- We sent in our 15-page paper regarding the CEQ proposed regulations with our comments on March 4 (paper is posted on our website). It was signed jointly along with PLF (Public Lands Foundation).
- We expect the CEQ rules to be issued by June 1.
- OMB allows organizations and individuals to call in with final comments to the Forest Service regulations that are supposed to come out in June. Recently Jim C., Larry, Rich S. Jack, and Ranotta participated in a 30-minute call with OMB. They basically repeated our issues from the paper we submitted. Call Rich S. if you want to discuss further.

Fire Committee – Al West

Fire and COVID-19 -

- A group of retirees under the title "National Wildfire Institute" have written a letter to the Secretary and several members of Congress. We do not agree that this should have been done at this time. It's focus is more money for initial attack using small aircraft on escaped fires and less concern with issues related to COVID-19.
- Fire Committee is working on a conference call with the WO. Fire Director setting it up and hopes to include Jim Hubbard and John Phipps.
- Nationally and Regionally, units are working on guidance for conducting fire operations safely with COVID-19. Similar work is being done and coordinated with other agencies and IC Teams.

FS Letter on NEPA/Public Engagement/Covid-19 – Jim C.

- Jim has a copy of a letter from the Deputy Chief of NFS on how to handle public input on NEPA.
- There is strong direction on how to handle public input.
- It is in stark contrast compared to DOI directions.
- The letter was distributed to the Board. We will post it on our website.

Post Virus Actions and NAFSR Priorities – Jim C.

- Things have been pretty much shut down.
- We will have to re-start the car.
- Partners are reaching out on upcoming issues.
- There is interest in our Capacity Report as related to stimulus bills.
- We were disappointed in the letter from Secretary Perdue in response to our March 9 letter (both letters are posted on our website).
- It has been 7 months since we finished the Capacity Report.
- We asked for a meeting with Secretary Perdue in October.
- We were focused on administrative issues.
- Jim Hubbard promised a meeting which never happened. We were totally ignored.
- Doug Crandall said there is a different Chief of Staff now and he doesn't see these issues as important. The Secretary probably never read our report.
- We are not getting through; we need help from Hubbard; there is little engagement on the issues.
- Larry – we need to de-emphasize our interaction with the department to zero; we spent a lot of time working with them, but with no results. We should focus on our partners and Congress.
- The Secretary listens more to the governors than anyone else. They would be effective on stimulus bills relating to the need for jobs.
- Rich S. – has a PowerPoint regarding the capacity report he used with NACO that he would share with anyone interested.
- Jim C. – we need to push our agenda harder on the Hill and with other organizations. We need a strategy to do that.

- Dale R. – recommends working with the FS on the hiring situation; put a plan together and put it on the Secretary's desk; we need the FS to push from their end with common goals; provide specifics on what the government can do.
- Rich G. – a few FCWG members are already talking to some of Biden's people; they expect Biden to have secretary/under secretary positions lined up by September; other organizations are providing input; Ronald Klain is a former chief of staff for Biden and is very influential – watch for op-eds from him.
- The Board feels our plan of work is still good.
- Jim C. and Larry will work on a one-pager on how to proceed.

END OF NOTES

Bill Timko's Handout on Reforestation

Reforestation under Forest Service Control

- There is very little the agency can change to increase the amount of reforestation without harming other important programs under current budgets.
- Congress has shown bipartisan support for doubling the Reforestation Trust Fund. If this were to happen, then the agency would have two basic approaches to increase reforestation activities.
 1. Maintain the current regional allocation process and include the extra \$30 million in the region's constrained budget.
 2. Establish a national fund and allocate needed reforestation funds to specific events.
- Does NAFSR need to consider or promote a position on reforestation funding if Congress increases the Reforestation Trust Fund?

Longer Version

The NAFSR Board of Directors agreed to the following guidelines concerning the Forest Service reforestation program. These will focus NAFSR efforts and are not Guidelines to the Forest Service.

1. Limit *NAFSR exploration of the* reforestation issue to National Forest System lands (*italic is added text*).
2. Define reforestation as all activities necessary to ensure tree survival *and a healthy future forest*.
3. Work with Forest Service to validate concerns *identified by NAFSR listed above* that are under FS control.
4. Support Congressional efforts to increase reforestation on all lands.
5. Outreach and collaborate with other organizations to promote reforestation and engage on climate change.

This paper is focused on Guideline 3.

There are three components to Guideline 3, which are:

1. Intense competition for appropriated funds in the Vegetation and Watershed Budget Line Item (NFVW) among reforestation, timber stand improvement, noxious weeds, rangeland improvements, watershed assessments and soil and water improvements.
2. Allocation of the Reforestation Trust Fund (RTF) to the regions in the constrained budget.
3. Identification and reporting of areas requiring reforestation activities.

The agency has limited opportunities to increase current accomplishments in reforestation without increases in funding.

Opportunities:

- Component 1. Forest Service leadership can direct resources to accomplish increased reforestation within the Vegetation and Watershed Budget Line Item.
- Component 2. Leadership can annually allocate Reforestation Trust Fund dollars to specific locations requiring reforestation activities. For example, leadership can direct millions of dollars to a specific unit or fire event across multiple units.
- Component 3. Increased emphasis and redirecting funding will create an incentive to adequately report reforestation needs.

Obstacles:

- Component 1. Redirecting funding and emphasis among the numerous equally important programs in the Vegetation and Watershed Budget Line Item will be difficult. Shifting funds to reforestation will have a commensurate decrease in other programs. However, this has been done in the past to increase fuels treatments, watershed assessments and noxious weed treatments.
- Component 2. The Reforestation Trust Fund has been incorporated into the region's constrained budget for years and is a key component of field units' annual program of work. Creating a national funding pool will require withdrawing funding from field units.
- Component 3. Collecting and reporting reforestation needs will not universally occur without a viable incentive. Units will not invest funds and resources in collecting reforestation data if there is no likelihood of implementing future reforestation projects. Even though existing agency policy requires collecting reforestation needs, funding is not available to conduct the assessment.

Increases in funding will address these obstacles. Any increase in discretionary appropriations, Vegetation and Watershed Budget Line Item, is highly unlikely in the current federal budget environment. However, both the Senate and the House of Representatives have members who are proposing a doubling of the Reforestation Trust Fund. The agency could hold the \$30 million increase at the national level to fund large-

scale reforestation projects. Field units could receive funding for specific multi-million-dollar reforestation projects as supplements to their annual budgets. This would provide units the incentive to assess the reforestation needs following a catastrophic event (Component 3).