

Coastal Bays Forestry White Paper November 14, 2002

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Structure

To upgrade and enhance actions in the Coastal Bays CCMP, this committee was established to examine ways to both keep the forestry industry viable and give incentives to plant forests in a manner consistent with wildlife and water quality protection in the coastal bays. The group met five times during 2002 and the paper was reviewed by MDA, Worcester Soil Conservation Board and the Forestry Board. The committee reached the following 43 recommendations by consensus.

Background

Forests are a preferred land use for protecting water quality and habitat— basic needs for a healthy environment. The Maryland coastal bays watershed covers more than 117,000 acres in eastern Worcester County and is 38% forested, compared to a statewide average of 41% forest cover. In 1988, 43% of the Coastal Bays was in forest cover. From 2000 to 2020, 11.5% of the forest in the Coastal Bays watershed is expected to be lost, leaving 33% of the watershed forested (Exhibit 1). Development is concentrated in the northern areas near Ocean City, a trend that is expected to continue, while the southern bays remain primarily rural. The forest composition is currently estimated to be 21% pine, 53% mixed pine/hardwood, 20% hardwood, 4% oak/sweetgum/cypress, and 2% elm/ash/red maple, based on 1998 GAP data (Exhibit 2).

There is a contrast between the northern and southern watersheds; hardwoods are more common north of Rt. 50, with 43% hardwood, 15% pine, and 42% mixed, compared to only 23% hardwood, 34% pine, and 43% mixed in the southern Coastal Bays watersheds. That distinction generally remains with Assawoman Bay watershed in the north averaging 45% hardwood, 13% pine, and 42% mixed, and Chincoteague Bay in the south averaging 12% hardwood, 30% pine, and 58% mixed. However, the other major watershed south of Rt. 50, Newport Bay, had a greater proportion of hardwood, with 38% hardwood, 15% pine, and 47% mixed.

The major changes in the region in forest type appeared to be increases in acreage of pine (+6%) and mixed oak/pine (+2%) types, with a decrease in the oak/hickory (-4%) and oak/gum/cypress (-4%) types. Significant 15-year trends show increases in pine stands and decreases in oak, hickory, gum and cypress which are preferred trees for native wildlife.

Challenge

More than half of the pre-settlement forestland in the coastal bays is gone. Forests also have one of the lowest nutrient export rates of any major land use and as such should be viewed as a land use which significantly protects water quality and mitigates flooding. This is in addition to their value in this rural resource-based region. Retaining forestland is the primary challenge the watershed faces. Inventories show a decrease in the extent of pure hardwood forests. There is also growing concern about declining hardwood forest types and the amount of cut hardwood timber being either replaced with loblolly pine, developed or fragmented. This change combined with the loss of forests to development and the fragmentation of contiguous forests requires action to keep significant biodiversity in the coastal bays watershed. An extensive suite of rare, threatened, and endangered bird, reptile and amphibian species living in the coastal bays watershed require mixed hardwood forests for their survival (Exhibit 3). The watershed is a state and Atlantic Flyway hot spot during songbird migration and has hemispheric significance. The combination of the general decrease in hardwoods and the influx of development pressure in the northern watersheds where hardwoods are more prevalent, warrant action.

Goals

The goal of this work will be to develop a strategy for promoting more hardwood planting to improve the habitat for struggling wildlife populations and to protect and create contiguous forest stands. Increasing forestry productivity and profit through incentives and institutionalized forest program changes can further these goals.

Recommendations

A combination of financial incentives, program changes, and education should create the needed changes. Top priority actions are in **bold**.

CREP: Payments for CREP are a combination of USDA, MACS, FLEP, PIP, and POS. Cost share pays 87.5% of the cost. (1) **There should be an up-front incentive for planting hardwoods in the form of a simple payment by state, private or federal sources.** This should equalize current cost disincentives for planting hardwoods (\$425/acre for pine & \$575/acre for hardwoods). Hardwoods generally cost about 3-8 times more than pine plus about \$5 per tree for shelters. At harvest pine also bring \$2,000-6,000/acre versus only up to \$500 for hardwoods. There is no need to raise hardwood minimums which could discourage forest plantings. (2) Promote practices that minimize the use of herbicides that kill beneficial hardwoods.

Forest Management Plans: Farmers who have a combination of forest and crop land are penalized for having forestry management plans because the cost of the tax rate is the price of the plan plus \$150/acre for those without farmland vs \$100/acre for those with farmland. (1) **Woodland associated with farmland should not be taxed at higher rates. The state should delete plan cost and reduce tax rate to \$0.** (2) In any forest plan, wet tolerant species should be planted in wettest areas to insure healthy future forest.

FLEP/WIP: For coastal bays watershed as “special area,” it should target FLEP for 90 percent cost-share for hardwoods and natural regeneration approaches. We need to offset so costs of all trees are the same. It also costs much more to plant hardwoods vs pine.

Seed Tree Law: The law, in its goal of reforestation, is an incentive for planting pine. There have been many interpretations of the law and it appears not to mandate planting loblolly. (1) **Options that allow hardwood and mixed forests must be clarified. The forester is key in explaining this to landowners. Need handout and information packet which clearly states diverse capabilities of seed tree law.** There is an extra level of approval required with alternative management plans and such samples would be helpful to show landowners their options. We need better communication between foresters and landowners regarding options, rights, and responsibilities.

Taxation: Forestland should not be taxed. There should be additional monetary incentives for hardwood, riparian and older growth forests and extensive forested wetlands. Delaware exempts from taxation land with forestry plans.

Harvesting: (1) State should show different harvest techniques in demonstration pine and nonpine forests. We should explore using the coastal bays for pilot projects for different harvest types that achieve landowners’ desire for wildlife and recreation goals in addition to forest products. There may be funding available through US Forest Service. (2) State forester should go over options with landowners. Prescribed burning can be a viable alternative to herbicide spray.

Wetland issues: Implement forestry management practices that retain natural hydrology on forestland. State and federal wetland regulatory agencies may be having trouble interpreting wetlands laws for forestry practices which has led to lax enforcement. Current law says avoidance is necessary but this is not being enforced. Violations are frequent. (1) **Foresters should first practice avoidance, then if not possible, plug ditches with ditch plug when complete.** (2) **A maximum road width is needed to keep ditches smaller.** This should be incorporated into new forestry BMPs with ditch plugging to re-establish hydrology. (3) We should also encourage a watershed pilot area for coastal bays if a statewide BMP change is impossible. Also need education and workshops. (4) **The practice of using forestry ditch management exemptions to drain wetlands for imminent development must be stopped.**

DNR forestry practices: DNR should promote sustainable forest management and mixed forests. All effort should be made to encourage the protection of sensitive resources. Easements could also prescribe specific management types.

State forest land in coastal bays watershed: We need to give input on how to manage during public hearing processes. Should seek forest certification for coastal bays parcels and target non-game wildlife management vs. income.

Afforesting public land: (1) Should review public lands to see what needs planting for wildlife. Should prioritize areas where reforesting would benefit wildlife but continue to temper deer damage to crops. (2) **No county FCA funds should be used for recreational facilities such as**

ballparks. Forest Conservation Act should fund healthy, contiguous forests in the coastal bays watershed, not urban lands plantings.

Conversion of unforested land: MCBP should promote conversion of unforested land to forest in sensitive areas such as those which are sandy, wet, riparian or otherwise inadequate for other productivity.

FCA: (1) **County forester needs forest inventory, ARCVIEW to properly achieve goals of FCA, i.e., keep contiguity within parcels or with adjacent parcels. Forester needs wall map with GAP data.** (2) FCA mitigation should be done adjacent to CREP, other FCA, state forest, etc. to achieve contiguity goals. (3) FCA in Worcester should be administered to insure reforestation is consistent with soil type and parcel site properties. (4) Mitigation banking/off site planting should be supported to encourage holding large forested areas. Such mitigation should be done in same subwatershed. (5) County needs FCA incentive payments to offset hardwood/pine differentials to encourage hardwood planting.

Easement/acquisition areas: There are hundreds of forested sites in the county with rare, threatened or endangered species on them. (1) **Planners should try to match groundwater recharge areas and wellhead protection areas with sensitive areas and FIDS areas to protect maximum quality land. Green infrastructure areas and contiguous areas should be highest priority.** (2) Planners should target forest blocks for recreation in the north county where there is little public land. Easements or acquisitions would be for forest retention or sustainable forestry.

Future market for hardwoods: Within the confines of the forestry group, we could not make a determination as to the future market potential for hardwoods. This global issue needs extensive research. MCBP should hire a consultant or perhaps seek answers from DBED. RC&D may have funding.

Forestry status: **With the surge in population growth and the increase in new developments, forestry is in a state of losing its resource base. Parcelization is a huge threat. Zoning should promote clustering in new developments and upzone away from extensive forestlands.** We need to diversify the products and retain the base to keep a viable industry. Still, long-term timber market is excellent and prices keep rising.

Urban Forestry: (1) Ocean Pines needs methods to retain percent coverage of trees. OPA should modify codes to make this easier in new areas. (2) OPA should also promote native tree diversity and contiguous woods. (3) Ditch management should be done in a way that minimizes impact on natural environment. (4) Worcester needs an urban forester for entire county.

The MD Forestry Task Force: The task force, cited in several CCMP actions has already come out with a paper and strategies. Those that should be incorporated in the coastal bays include (1) Increasing forestry stewardship plans to 75 percent of privately owned forest acreage (2) Upgrading stewardship plans on DNR land that address wildlife needs in addition to wood production (3) Giving financial incentives to private landowners to help them prevent conversion to non-forested use. (4) **Supporting one-time state income tax credit for all of the costs**

associated with developing a forest stewardship plan and doubling it for those in critical areas. Or eliminate cost. (5) Supporting legislation to give sales tax exemptions for all equipment and pollution control devices used in all primary and secondary wood manufacturing processes (6) Giving a 100 percent property tax credit to forest land with a forest management plan. (7) **Helping to direct DNR when undergoing strategic forestland assessment every five years to identify environmentally critical lands.** (8) Directing the state of Maryland to develop cost of community service studies which include the loss of forest resources and the fiscal impact of residential development and its effects on watersheds and forest fragmentation.

Education: Foresters should point out the value of hardwood forests in delivery when working with landowners, especially those interested in wildlife or biodiversity.

Zoning: (1) Golf courses are consuming forest and as such should not be an allowable use on A-1 (agriculturally) zoned land. (2) The amount and nature of A-1 zoning should also be preserved to keep forestry affordable in Worcester.

CCMP: MCBP needs to move forward with some important year 1-3 actions which are not yet started and should move up specific actions (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 1: Projected forest cover in Maryland coastal bays watershed, Maryland Department Of Planning estimates

Watershed	Forest Acres in 2000	Forest Acres Predicted in 2020	% Forest Lost over 20 Yrs	% Watershed forested in 20 years
Assawoman Bay	1683	1093	35.1%	15.9%
Chincoteague Bay	16714	16678	0.2%	39.0%
Isle of Wight Bay	11874	8255	30.5%	24.6%
Newport Bay	11600	11415	1.6%	42.0%
Sinepuxent Bay	2354	1854	21.2%	24.7%
All Coastal Bays	44225	39295	11.1%	33.4%

Exhibit 2: 1998 Forest Types in Maryland Coastal Bays, acres from Mid-Atlantic GAP

Exhibit 3: Species which benefit from mixed, hardwood and older growth forests:

Birds:

Red-shouldered hawk
Broadwinged hawk
Barred owl
Whip-poor-will
Hairy woodpecker
Pileated woodpecker
Acadian Flycatcher
Brown creeper
Veery
Wood thrush
Yellow-throated vireo
Red-eyed vireo
Northern parula
Black-throated green warbler
Cerulean warbler
Black and white warbler
American redstart
Prothonotary warbler
Worm-eating warbler
Swainson's warbler
Ovenbird
Louisiana waterthrush
Kentucky warbler
Hooded warbler
Scarlet tanager

Reptiles and Amphibians:

A. Snakes

Ringneck snake
Scarlet snake
Northern pine snake
Red-bellied snake
Smooth earth snake
Red-bellied watersnake

B. Frogs and Toads

Wood frog
Gray treefrog (Cope's and s.)
Carpenter frog
American toad

C. Salamanders

Red-spotted newt
Marbled salamander
Tiger salamander
Dusky salamander
Two-lined salamander
Mud salamander

D. Turtles

Mud turtle
Stinkpot
Spotted turtle
Eastern box turtle

E. Lizards

Broad-headed skink

Exhibit 4

The Coastal Bays Forestry Group recommends moving up to year 4-5 or emphasizing:

FW 2.1.3 DNR and WC will develop a total forest management strategy that incorporates, where appropriate, habitat requirements of identified species in the WC comprehensive plan and zoning and subdivision code. (Phase 3)

(i) **FW**
2.1.5 DNR
will
investigate
alternative
protection
and
manageme
nt
strategies
for forests
along
streams
and
wetlands.
(Phase 3)

DNR will investigate alternative protection and management strategies for forests along streams and wetlands. (Phase 3)

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