

Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

December 17, 2009

Present at the meeting: Dennis Daniel, John Gregory, Steve Henson, Joe McGuiness, Katherine Medlock, Steve Novak, Danny Osborne, Terry Porter, Mark Shelley, Parker Street, Alex Wyss.

Present for the first portion of the meeting: Susan Shaw, Tom Speaks

Katherine opened the meeting and Joe covered housekeeping items. The group introduced themselves.

Tom Speaks described the purpose and need for this process and expressed his hopes for a successful outcome. He thanked everyone for participating and offered his assistance, or that of the Forest Service Staff when/if we needed it. Tom explained that the current condition of the Forest was largely a result of the past activities of the lands acquired to create the Cherokee National Forest early in the 1900's. He expressed concerns over invasive exotics and other threats to the health of the Cherokee. The focus of this process will be landscapes, habitat and the age and structure of vegetation on the North end of the Cherokee National Forest because those are the areas where the most controversy is encountered. Tom encouraged the group to think about the desired future condition of the landscape, then to develop agreement and establish a way to implement that goal and monitor the success of implementation. He also expressed a need to overcome some budget/fiscal limitations and a willingness to help us do that.

The group talked with Susan Shaw about choosing a facilitator. The facilitator will be selected from those that are certified by the Environmental Conflict Resolution (ECR) center. The Committee recommended that preference be given to individuals who had worked in the Southern Appalachians and also to those that had experience with National Forest issues. Steve Henson said he had worked with both MaryLou Addor and Steve Smutko and that both would be fine with him. There is an additional facilitator, Dave Halley, who might be considered if they become members of ECR.

Action Item:

Katherine will keep the Steering Committee informed of the progress on choosing a facilitator.

Ground Rules Discussion

The Committee began the process of conducting a Self-Assessment by reviewing the example ground rules that Katherine had sent out previous to the meeting.

The Committee decided to add language to clarify that "maintain privacy" referred to personal privacy, not the privacy of the actions or decisions of the committee.

The Committee decided to add language that states members of the Committee will make every effort to attend all of the meetings of the Steering Committee.

The Committee decided to add a third broad category to the ground rules that stated that members of the committee would honor these rules and also be flexible about the possibility of adding to them as needed in the future.

Action Items:

Katherine will make the suggested changes to the ground rules and send it to the entire group for review.

The Committee will review the revised documents and make any further suggestions via e-mail to the entire group.

Protocol Discussion

The Committee reviewed the Draft Protocol document.

The definition of consensus was determined as an item that everyone “can live with”. This was explained as a decision that everyone in the group would be willing to accept and still continue to participate in the process.

Next, the Committee discussed the possibility of using proxies and/or alternates. Mark Shelley made a case for the use of alternates stating that during a long process it was inevitable that members would have to miss meetings. Pre-designation of an alternate would cut down on the amount of time a replacement would have to take to get up to speed with the group. The counterpoints to the use of alternates were to keep the group small and develop a level of trust among the members. Also, having alternates attend meetings in addition to the primary members would be cost prohibitive for several members. Joe McGuinness made the point that everyone in the group probably had at least one other member that they would be willing to trust with a proxy vote.

The final decision from this discussion was that there would not be alternates and was made by consensus, with at least one member expressing reservations but willing to proceed.

The Committee agreed that proxies should be announced prior to the meeting (preferably by e-mail to the whole group).

There was discussion about the purpose of the group and the type of decisions that would be made by the Steering Committee versus decisions that would be made at public meetings. There was discussion about compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), and ensuring that our process was in compliance with that law. Decisions about the final recommendations that will be made to the Forest Service will be made at the public meetings with public involvement. The Steering Committee will lead that process by striving for common ground, and determining a process that is based on science and moves the group toward meaningful decisions.

The Committee decided that in order to ensure that the entire process was transparent, that future Steering Committee meetings would be open to the public. There will be times on each agenda that will allow the public a chance to raise questions or make comments.

The Committee decided to hold future Steering Committee meetings outside of Forest Service buildings.

The Committee agreed that agenda items should be sent to the coordinator at least one week and a day before the meeting. Items can also be added to the agenda at the start of every meeting.

The Committee decided to add a section to the protocols that describes a process for how to replace Steering Committee members in the event of withdrawal. It was agreed that the Steering Committee will work to replace that member in consultation with the withdrawing member, when possible.

The Committee decided to add a section to the protocols that describes external communications with the media. The Committee agreed that there will be a time to develop a media strategy that will outline more details about how members should communicate to the press. Until that time, press inquiries should be directed to Katherine.

The Committee decided to add a section to the protocols that describes the responsibilities of each Steering Committee member to do outreach to their represented constituency.

Action Items:

Katherine will contact Susan Shaw and ask about FACA to ensure that our procedure is within the bounds of that law. Arrangements will be made to have a FACA expert speak to the group if there is any uncertainty.

Katherine will make the recommended changes to the protocol document and send it out to the Steering Committee.

The Committee will review the revised document and make any further suggestions via e-mail to the entire group.

Next Meetings and Wrap-up items

The committee will have a conference call at 3:30 on January 7th.

The next face-to-face meetings will be at 3:30 on February 8th and at 3:30 on February 23rd.

Committee members requested that a section about the participation of the agency be added to the case statement. There may be additional changes to that document. The Committee will review the case statement and make suggested changes via e-mail to the whole group.

Katherine made a request for participants to track the time that they spend on this project so that it can be used as in-kind match.

Action Items:

Katherine will send out the details of for the Conference call.

Katherine will contact Heidi Ehle from the Jonesborough visitor's center to set up future meetings.

Katherine will add language to the case statement regarding agency participation and send it out to the Committee.

The Committee will review the revised document and make any further suggestions via e-mail to the entire group.

Katherine will explore electronic tools to help the group make changes to documents (such as Sharepoint and Google docs).

Katherine will make corrections to the contact information sheet and send it out to the Committee.

Katherine will send out an electronic version of the Volunteer Log-in sheet.