

Agriculture & Forestry Advisory Panel Meeting

Meeting Teleconference - WebEx

January 14, 2021

Start time 1:00 pm

At a Glance

- Each subgroup provided a brief overview of their recent discussions and developments, highlighting enabling factors and next steps in drafting recommendations.
- Staff shared that the Climate Action Council (CAC) will provide a standard template for final recommendations soon.
- Panel members discussed the meeting process to date, highlighting the good work done to date and identifying opportunities for enhanced discussion and engagement moving forward.
- The panel will host a public engagement session as a part of the next panel meeting on February 4th 2:30-4:00 pm.

Present:

WebEx: (85 total attendees including panelists and agency staff)

Advisory Panel:

Commissioner Richard Ball, Chair AGM; Rafael Aponte, Rocky Acres Community Farm; Amanda Barber, Cortland SWCD; John Bartow, Empire State Forest Products Assoc.; Michelle Brown, TNC; Tom Gerow, Wagner Lumber Co.; Suzanne Hunt, HuntGreen LLC/Hunt Country Vineyards; Peter Innes, DEC; Samantha Levy, AFT; Robert Malsheimer, SUNY ESF; John Noble, Noblehurst Farms; Julie Suarez, Cornell University; Ned Sullivan, Scenic Hudson; Donna Wadsworth, International Paper; Elizabeth Wolters, NYFB; Peter Woodbury, Cornell University

Absent: Peter Lehner, Earth Justice; Stephanie Morningstar, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust; Nelson Villarrubia, Trees NY

Agency Staff:

David Valesky, Brian Steinmuller, Jennifer Clifford (meeting host), Kevin King, Lindsey McMahon, Greg Albrecht, Bethany Bzduch, Scott Fickbohm, AGM; Jeffrey Mapes, Jason Drobnack, Suzanne Hagell, Mark Lowery, Maureen Leddy, Ian Crisman, Willow Eyres, Eden Zickler, DEC; Giovanni Holmquist, ESD; Stephanie Wojtowicz, Anurupa Roy, Christopher Eastman, DOS; Lewis Payne, NYPA; Kara Allen, Stephen Hoyt, Kathleen O'Connor, Ziggy Majumdar, NYSERDA.

Welcome

Commissioner Ball, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

Panel Member Rollcall

Absences noted above

Public Participation

To submit feedback to Panel Members and agency staff during the meeting, members of the public can use the WebEx Chat function. Questions and comments issued by the general public during the meeting

will be collected but not directly responded to during the meeting. Feedback can also be submitted at any time by emailing agriculture.forestry@agriculture.ny.gov.

A public meeting to engage directly with interested members of the public on Advisory Panel recommendations is tentatively scheduled for the next panel meeting. For more information visit <https://climate.ny.gov>.

Subgroup Reports & Discussion

Each subgroup provided a brief overview of their recent work, focusing on key conversations to date and highlighting enabling factors that may support forthcoming recommendations.

AGROFORESTRY SUBGROUP

Brian Steinmuller, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

The Agroforestry subgroup has met twice, with recent discussion focusing on silvopasturing, alleycropping and riparian buffers. During these discussions, subgroup members have placed an emphasis on measurement and monitoring practices, as well as on enabling initiatives to facilitate developments. See the presentation materials for more details.

Overview:

- The subgroup is working to better understand silvopasturing, alleycropping, and riparian forest buffers and relevant enablers.
- The subgroup anticipates that rewarding agroforestry activities and practices for their carbon benefits will be necessary for implementation.
- For agroforestry to be effective, the subgroup anticipates it needs to be directly promoted through existing programs, such as the Climate Resilient Farming program.
- The subgroup continues to discuss what is needed to sustain riparian forest buffers after they are planted.

Comments & Questions:

- While many practices, such as forested buffers, have been in practice in New York state for many years, it is important to consider practices and opportunities that are not yet common in the state.

SOIL HEALTH & NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT SUBGROUP

Jennifer Clifford, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

The Soil Health & Nutrient Management subgroup is focused on carbon sequestration through soil health and nitrous oxide reductions. Recommendations center around increasing the adoption of soil health practices and helping farmers understand the benefits of nutrient management. The group has spent significant time discussing the collection of on-farm data and enabling initiatives, including payments for ecosystem services and soil health standards.

Overview:

- The subgroup is working to better understand the benefits of nutrient management for greenhouse gas mitigation and other effects.
- Subgroup discussions have focused on measuring and monitoring soil health at the farm level.
- The subgroup continues to discuss the implementation of ecosystem services payment and the various mechanisms for implementation

Comments & Questions:

- The panel discussed the details of payments for ecosystem services at length after it was raised in the subgroup's presentation.
 - Payments for ecosystem services can take many forms. The subgroup remains open to considering a variety of methods for ecosystem service compensation.
 - Payment for ecosystem services can provide payments for net new carbon benefits and potentially for current baselines. The subgroup will need to consider how to reward for practices implemented to date as well as activities that increase the carbon-related benefits of ecosystems.
 - Many best management practices need to be sustained for many years to realize the benefits making permanence hard to track and achieve with soil health practices. Payments for Ecosystem Services can effectively reward landowners for engaging in beneficial practices and increase adoption to realize the changes needed to achieve the goals.
 - The term "ecosystem services" is used to capture the range of benefits these best management practices provide, while the emphasis remains on the carbon sequestration potential.
 - Ecosystem services will also be discussed further at the next Agroforestry Subgroup meeting.
- With the new incoming federal administration, members recommended the panel and the subgroups tack developments at USDA and align recommendations and activities to enable New York to continue leading in this area.

LIVESTOCK & DAIRY MANAGEMENT SUBGROUP

Greg Albrecht, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

The subgroup is focused on achieving methane emissions reductions through manure and feed management. The panel has discussed approaches to measuring and monitoring efforts at a farm level and a state level as well as benchmark development. Among the enabling initiatives discussed, the subgroup highlighted the need to look for tools that are most applicable to the state context, working through public-private partnerships and the potential for developing new farm product markets. See the meeting materials for details.

Overview:

- There is ongoing discussion around how to more efficiently use existing farm resources for livestock and feed management.

- There has been significant discussion of whole-farm nutrient work and farm business efforts, such as the dairy program through Cornell, as mechanisms to implement the recommendations of the subgroup.
- The subgroup is emphasizing the role of ongoing education and technical support in enabling emissions reductions in the sector.
- The subgroup anticipates there are significant private-public partnership opportunities, including with The Nature Conservancy and Fertilizer Institute's 4R Nutrient Stewardship program.

BIOECONOMY SUBGROUP

Maureen Leddy, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

The Bioeconomy subgroup is focused on the substitution of fossil-fuel products with bio-based products, the use of bioenergy, and the opportunities for biorefining. The discussions to date have highlighted the limited opportunity for in-state biofuels, as well as the tradeoff between energy crops and other land uses. Mass timber presents a notable opportunity in the state. The subgroup meets again on January 26th to focus on bioenergy end uses.

Overview:

- The opportunity for in-state biofuel is limited; for example, working estimates provided by panel members on biogas potential only equates to a single-digit percentage of the natural gas currently used in state.
- The subgroup sees a need for greater understanding of the biofuel energy content to determine the processes and end uses to which different biofuels have highest and best use.
- The group will meet next to discuss prioritization of bioenergy end uses to maximize potential emission reductions

Mass Timber:

Lindsey McMahon, Department of Agriculture & Markets

Provided a summary of recent developments specific to the discussion around mass timber, a potential replacement for steel building products, as part of the Bioeconomy subgroup. This highlighted:

- A recent inter-agency discussion on the potential for mass timber illustrated broad interest in the technology.
- SUNY Maritime is piloting a mass timber dormitory with the Dormitory Authority.
- Building codes offer a potential barrier to implementation and there is ongoing evaluation as to whether codes can be updated to better accommodate mass timber in the near term.
- There is ongoing emphasis on using New York-based timber products in other elements of construction beyond and furnishings.

Comments & Questions:

- One opportunity for significant implementation of mass timber is through public housing projects.

FOREST & FORESTRY MANAGEMENT SUBGROUP

Jason Drobneck, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

The subgroup has focused on motivating private landowners to adopt improved forestry practices through tax incentives. They are also considering the need to mitigate potential burdens on municipalities as well as looking for opportunities to improve forest stewardship. The subgroup meets again on January 26th

Overview:

- The subgroup is looking to recommend statutory changes to tax abatement program 480a.
 - The subgroup will likely recommend a separate track of carbon sequestration as one of the key changes to 480a.
- Current programs have motivated a little over 1 million acres of protected lands for sequestration but will need to facilitate the conservation of 5-7 million acres to achieve sequestration goals.
- The subgroup is currently considering if longer-term sign-ups should receive higher tax benefits.
- The subgroup believes there is significant need for further workforce development in forestry practice, to be discussed at future meetings.

Comments & Questions:

- With the need for further workforce development, DEC may need to take the lead on such a program, requiring additional support and funding.
- Commissioner Ball noted that recommendations consider the carbon and societal benefits of each opportunity, while leaving assessments of cost to a later time.
- The societal cost of carbon will also play significantly into balancing the cost-benefit analysis of action versus inaction on many recommendations.

LAND CONVERSION SUBGROUP

Jeffrey Mapes, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

Recent discussions have centered around forest land and agricultural land conversions. The subgroup emphasized the role of current and forthcoming state programs in helping achieve the emissions reduction goals and helping “keep forests, forests.” Their discussion has also touched on outreach and connection with landowners and the equity implications of land transfer.

Overview:

- To meet land conservation goals, the State Legislatures is considering a proposal to conserve 30% of the state’s land area by 2030.
- The subgroup is considering tax policies as mechanisms for driving conservation, such as the forest tax law and agricultural districts law.
- The subgroup expressed that an aging small landowner population poses a significant challenge. While land acquisition and tax policy can help, ongoing creative outreach will be necessary to meet statewide goals.

- Funding for land conversion programs could come from local or state tax revenue, depending on the program.
- Land access, intergenerational transfer, and the inclusion of new and BIPOC farmers is of significant concern to the subgroup and the focus of ongoing discussion.

Comments & Questions:

- While land use planning and decisions happen locally, the state offers technical assistance to local governments and can set an example.
- The [State Forest Action Plan](#) and [Open Space Plan](#) are examples of statewide plans that provide local guidance and set an example. The Open Space Plan is also slated to be updated in 2021/2022.

Recommendations Template

Maureen Leddy, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

Two guiding documents will be used to finalize recommendations to the CAC: a PowerPoint template and Word document of instructions. As much as possible, recommendations should be designed by consensus. Each recommendation should also be evaluated for its emissions reduction potential through 2030 and 2050. The PowerPoint template will be provided to panel leads during the upcoming CAC meeting.

Comments & Questions:

- Each recommendation will need to be put into the PowerPoint template.
- The Word guidance document details various questions and considerations to detail in creating the final version of each recommendation. This document will be circulated after the meeting.
- The guidance document identifies considerations and questions related to the impacts to disadvantaged communities, health, the environment at large, businesses and the workforce as well as general, “other” impacts.
- Emissions reductions, avoided emissions, or sequestration and cost are to be the primary evaluation criteria for recommendations. In some cases, this requires projections of what emissions would have been were recommended measures not taken.
- The panel suggested that each recommendation should include a discussion of its potential to push businesses or industries to move emissions out of state (leakage).
- The guidance documents and template include space to discuss cross-over issues, and the panel noted the need for increased cross-panel engagement to identify these areas.
- The CAC does not expect the panel to identify highly granular cost data for their recommendations, but rather a ballpark range should be provided to enable rough comparisons.
- Subsequent panel discussions will likely include further details and discussions on this topic as the deadline for submitting recommendations to the CAC approaches.

Open Panel Discussion on State of Progress

David Valesky, Department of Environmental Conservation

The panel leadership sought to gather members' thoughts on the status and process of the panel. The goal of the discussion was to capture member's sentiments and identify what areas might be improved as we enter the last few months of the process.

Comments & Questions:

- Several members highlighted their appreciation for Commissioner Ball's leadership and the work of the Agriculture & Markets and Department of Environmental Conservation staff in orchestrating and organizing the panel.
- Members noted that the virtual format and compressed timeline limited the ability to debate and discuss bigger, less concrete options and ideas. It was noted that the structured nature of the discussion is in large part due to the framework and timeline for reaching the requirements of the CLCPA.
 - Samantha Levy offered to compile an initial list of ideas that have been tabled to date and circulate to the panel members. This will be used to collect additional inputs and will be shared with the subgroups for further discussion.
- It was suggested that while actions to achieve the state's 2030 targets should rely on "off-the-shelf" approaches and solutions, the panel should consider more abstract or as-of-yet untested but more ambitious approaches to the 2050 goals.
- Members also discussed the use of the forthcoming recommendations PowerPoint template. They suggested that filling out this template could serve as the basis for productive discussion at the subgroups going forward, and that draft recommendations be provided to the panel at large as early as possible to enable time for consideration and comments.
- Additional discussion around measurement, monitoring and research highlighted a desire to ensure that each panel was committing to similar levels of measurement and monitoring.
- Some members did note that additional transparency and elevation of lesser-heard voices should be a priority for the panel. Members stressed the need to capture greater input from folks who have not always been brought into the policymaking process and a greater emphasis on equity.
- It was suggested that in crafting recommendations, members should look across agencies and determine if new staff or budget is needed to support implementation.
- Members noted that recent discussions have not focused on urban agriculture and forestry and that these topics should be further discussed before final recommendations are drafted.
- To better enable members to share their perspectives moving forward, the panel will be using the hand raising function in WebEx. This should help to facilitate orderly, open discussion and invite those less likely to jump in over audio to share their thoughts.

Next Steps

February 4th 1-2:30pm: Next Advisory Panel meeting focused on equity considerations

February 4th 2:30-4pm: Public engagement meeting

Meeting concluded at 3:16 pm

Please contact Peter Innes, NYSDEC; Deputy Commissioner David Valesky (AGM) or Brian Steinmuller, Assistant Director of the Division of Land and Water Resources (AGM), if you have questions.

Peter Innes: peter.innes@dec.ny.gov

David Valesky: david.valesky@agriculture.ny.gov

Brian Steinmuller: brian.steinmuller@agriculture.ny.gov