

Notes from meeting of MET's Land Committee
Wednesday 5-26-2021
1:00 pm

Attending Committee Members: A. Jones, C.Wells, M. Benjamin, J. Jitkoff
Attending MET Staff: J. Chapman, A. G. Carlson, J. Turgeon, J Markline
Attending OAG: T. Kovacs

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 1, at 1 pm

Agenda Item 1:

- a) Easement Program Update: AG Carlson provided the following update:
- The Natural Conservancy approached MET about collaborating on its coastal resilience easement program. TNC cited MET's leadership in this realm. MET will meet with TNC about this opportunity next week.
 - AG Carlson, J Turgeon and T. Kovacs had several conversations with MARBIDCO regarding the Small Acreage Next Generation Farm program. MARBIDCO is interested in MET holding agricultural easements as a part of this program. Through discussions about the program's process, timing, site visits and easement template review it became clear that MALPF may be a better fit for some of these easements. MET will continue to work with MARBIDCO to find ways to collaborate on potential easements where our priorities, processes and timing fit.
 - AG Carlson and J Markline are organizing files and filing recent easement acquisitions. This process has changed as most of the documents are digital since the telework order has been in place.
 - AG Carlson continues work on a Conservation Easement Program Manual.
 - J. Turgeon reported that the hiring Freeze Exemption for the Easement Program Planner position is being processed by DNR at this time.
- b) Easement Pipeline Report: AG Carlson presented the pipeline:
- FY 2021 will end with MET reaching its acreage goal of protecting at least 1000 acres. FY 2022 also looks to be a year where we will meet our goals. With one staff processing easement and managing the program this is an accomplishment for MET.
 - MET continues to receive interest from landowners wanting to protect their land. The extensive project list makes clear that MET has more work than we have staff. Our local land trust partners are contributing by doing their share of the work on co-held projects.
 - Of the 40 projects on our list A G Carlson has touched 21 in the last 4 weeks, moving each along in the process. Three projects are ready to be recorded in the very near future (Aspen Point Fields, Aspen Angus, and Izaak Walton League of Harford County).

Agenda Item 2: Conservation Easement Projects

- a) **Conceptual Review - 22.5 +/- acres in Montgomery County with Sugarloaf Countryside Conservancy** J. Turgeon presented the proposed project for the Committee's conceptual review of MET continuing to process the project. The Committee did not object to proceeding with the project.

Agenda Item 3: Stewardship Program

J. Chapman provided the following update:

Monitoring efforts are beginning to ramp up again as COVID restrictions are being relaxed. Total of 657 monitoring visits or aerial image reviews conducted so far. Majority (273; 77%) of ground visits have been conducted and reported by Coholders, followed by MET staff (16%), Volunteers (7%)

MET has completed 303 aerial reviews, 169 on Eastern Shore in Fall pilot, and 134 so far on Western Shore project; Ground visit assignments have been distributed to those volunteers who have asked for them (~30)

Staff continuing to coordinate w/Lower Shore Land Trust (LSLT) to determine additional data collection requirements to meet objectives for the LTA/TNC remote monitoring grant; New requirements relate to Return on Investment: what savings in labor, fuel, mileage in remote monitoring vs on the ground, and what activities may benefit for additional time savings. MET still working to achieve annual monitoring on its entire portfolio in order to achieve full implementation of LTA Standards and Practices.

To review, LSLT will be updating its solely held easement GIS, uploading to LENS system, and conducting solely and co-held monitoring for as much of its portfolio as satellite imagery is available or can be tasked at reasonable cost. Conversation with Lens and LSLT earlier Wednesday clarified that there is good coverage, but not necessarily at high resolution (<=1 m).

MET will be taking additional measures in order to maintain landowner relations when conducting aerial reviews vs. ground visits. Normally, volunteers and staff conduct phone or onsite interviews with landowners prior to visits (about recent activities, concerns, future plans), but remote monitoring doesn't provide this opportunity. We may be able to address the need with a phone-a-thon by staff and board volunteers. We will ask for interested volunteers at the June Board meeting.

Jon continuing training of new Stewardship Planner Josette Markline. She spent several days training with Ann Carlson to review basics of easements and easement processing as Josette will be doing most amendment processing.

We've together been reviewing selected stewardship procedures, and Josette has been doing self paced study of the new Stewardship Manual completed in the fall. She is the first employee to test drive it, and will be making additions where she sees the need to clarify and expand. Together we are conducting field visits for stewardship issues and new owner visits that were put off during COVID travel restrictions.

We are addressing several backloged issue response visits to properties: dumping concern in Howard Co, unapproved new access in Balt Co, report of commercial activity in Montgomery County. We're also conducting reviews of 2 new/replacement home sites and 2 harvest festivals on easement properties in Western MD, all falling under delegation of authority to Director on basis of de minimis impact to conservation values.

JC continuing to discuss with DoIT the potential costs and timeline for developing a replacement field data collection tool and report processing system for monitoring and baseline/current conditions reporting. Projected cost between 20 and \$25K for tool and report processing functions; will require the full FY2022 to develop tool (6 mo) and system. Remains unknown if DNR will assist in underwriting cost, is dependent on interest by other units that await a demonstration of what tool can do.

Meeting adjourned at 2:02 pm.

<i>2021 LANDS COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE</i>
January 20
April 21
May 26
September 1
October 20