

DRAFT

Forestland & Urban Tree Canopy Technical Advisory Committee  
Meeting #4 – Minutes

*Attendees:*

Adam Downing	Va Extension
Amanda McGree	Roanoke Valley
Andrew Clark	VA Homebuilders
Ann Jurczyk	CBF
Charlie Paillin	Public
Dave Cantor	Public
Ed Zimmer	DOF
Ember Jenison	DOF
Hannah Schul	DWR
James Brown	Public
James Whipp	DOF
Jennifer Leach	DOF
Jill Sunderland	Hampton Roads Planning District
Jim McGlone	VA SWCD
Joe Lerch	VaCO
Joe Weber	DCR
Jonathan Rak	DEQ
Justin Doyle	JRA
Karen Firehock	GIC
Kaycee Faunce	DOF
Lara Johnson	DOF
Martha Moore	Farm Bureau
Matt Lee	GIC
Matt Wells	VFA
Michael Webb	City of Richmond
Nathan Thomson	DOF
Peter Forrister	GIC
Phil Abraham	Vectre Corp
Rose Freeman	GIC
Sarah Thomas	Vectre Corp
Sheri Shannon	Southside ReLeaf
Terry Lasher	DOF
Vincent Verweig	Arlington County

Date: June 11, 2026

Location: Virginia Department of Forestry Headquarters (Hybrid Meeting)

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

The fourth meeting of the Forestland and Urban Tree Canopy TAC began with introductions from members attending in person and online. The State Forester welcomed attendees and emphasized the considerable progress made since Meeting #3. He highlighted the importance of developing a data-driven Forest Conservation Plan and preparing it for submission to the General Assembly in November 2026.

## 2. Presentation of Final Land Cover and Silviculture Data

The technical team presented finalized statewide land cover datasets for 2018 and 2023 at 60centimeter resolution. These datasets included high-accuracy mapping of canopy, impervious surfaces, vegetation, and water. Silvicultural activity polygons dating back to 2012 were also reviewed to distinguish managed forestry operations from permanent forest loss.

Statewide canopy increased slightly from 16.6 million acres (2018) to 16.8 million acres (2023). Urban corridors including I-95 and Hampton Roads experienced the greatest canopy decline, while western and south-central counties saw modest increases. Silvicultural areas in Virginia's timber basket showed high level of activity during the five year window, but with substantial regeneration expected over longer cycles.

## 3. Forest Fragmentation and Interior Forest Analysis

The group reviewed statewide fragmentation results. Large interior forest blocks were concentrated in western mountain regions and parts of the Dismal Swamp. Highly urbanized regions such as Northern Virginia showed very little intact interior forest. Attendees also discussed challenges with interpreting fragmentation in recently harvested but regenerating silvicultural stands.

## 4. Risk Assessment Overview

The TAC examined several risk layers affecting Virginia's forests: sea-level rise, ghost forests, storm surge, wildfire potential, urban development pressure, solar suitability, and data center expansion. According to the data presented, sea-level rise threatens 36,000 forested acres statewide by 2050, with Virginia Beach having nearly one-fifth of its forests at risk. Ghost forest projections show 21,000 acres at risk.

Urban development models identified 260,000 forested acres statewide with a high likelihood of conversion. Solar suitability maps indicated that forested parcels are twice as likely to be targeted for utility scale solar development compared to other land cover types. Data center development is also disproportionately occurring on forested parcels.

## 5. Discussion: Clarification of Methods and Local Insights

Members raised questions regarding canopy height thresholds, land cover classifications, methods used to delineate ghost forests, and the need for clear definitions in the Forestland and Urban Tree Canopy Conservation Plan. The group emphasized ensuring that statewide datasets include caveats about interpretation and scale, especially when compared to high resolution local studies.

## 6. Strategy Workshop: Expanding and Refining Proposed Actions

Following data presentations, TAC members participated in a strategy building workshop. Strategies were grouped under three overarching goals: strengthening urban tree retention policies, protecting rural forests, and expanding DOF technical assistance capacity.

Key themes included improving local government tools and training, developing statewide model ordinances for solar and data centers, integrating forest planning into hazard mitigation and resilience programs, enhancing coordination among multiple state level TAC and Agencies, and addressing linear infrastructure impacts such as pipelines and transmission corridors.

## 7. Expanded Urban and Rural Strategy Development

Urban priorities included expanding technical assistance for localities lacking arborists, utilizing stormwater BMP credits for canopy retention, increasing urban heat mitigation planting, and establishing clearer statewide definitions for tree canopy requirements. Rural strategies emphasized supporting forest product markets, clarifying silvicultural terminology, addressing wildlife connectivity, and developing invasive species management partnerships with VDOT and other agencies.

## 8. Coordination Across State Agencies and TACs

A major topic was the need for structured cross agency coordination. Members recommended establishing a multiagency summit to align forest conservation, hazard mitigation, resilience planning, and transportation infrastructure policy. The TAC noted that parallel state advisory groups are working on overlapping issues, increasing the need for unified messaging and shared data tools.

## 9. Public Projects, Linear Infrastructure, and Local Capacity

The group discussed impacts from public facilities and private development, along with large linear projects such as natural gas pipelines and electric transmission lines. Members emphasized that these infrastructure types result in substantial forest loss but are not always represented in statewide datasets. A recommendation was made to incorporate strategies addressing avoidance, minimization, and mitigation for these projects.

## 10. Next Steps and Timeline

Plan contractors, the Green Infrastructure Center, will deliver the initial plan rough draft to DOF in mid-June, DOF will review the document for content, clarity, and communications. A graphically formatted draft will be shared later this summer with the TAC and the Board of Forestry for review. The final document is due in September 2026 and will be submitted to the General Assembly by November.