

State Vegetation Management Task Force – Group Charter and Ground Rules

In processes where groups of people come together to discuss difficult issues it is easiest to hold productive dialogue and deliberation when the group adopts a set of behavioral and decision making norms at the outset of the discussion. The goal is to create mutually shared expectations and a common understanding and vocabulary for interactions and decisions.

Purpose & Mission of the Task Force

The purpose of the Task Force is to ensure necessary perspectives are represented by members who can commit the time and work effectively together, each bringing to the table the necessary knowledge and resources to inform discussion. The goal is to develop consensus recommendations to DEEP within the stated mission. It is anticipated that Task Force will meet approximately 9-10 times in order to complete its recommendations by August 31, 2012.

The Mission of the Task Force is to develop standards for road side tree care in Connecticut, vegetation management practices and schedules for utility rights of way, right tree/right place standards, standards for tree wardens, municipal tree inventories and pruning schedules.

Ground Rules Governing Behavior of Participants

1. One person speaks at a time, no interruptions.
 - a. Use name tent cards to cue, try to defer to an existing discussion thread.
2. Avoid dominating the discussion so as to provide everyone with an opportunity to contribute.
3. Express your own views and do not speak for others at the table.
4. No personal attacks. Challenge ideas but not people. Listen as an ally, focus on the merits of what is being said and seek to understand. Ask clarifying questions.
5. Make every effort to stay on track and on task to move deliberations forward.
6. Avoid surprises by sharing information and concerns.
7. Take into account information and advice from stakeholders and technical advisors and make recommendations based on the best available information.
8. Seek to identify options or recommendations that represent common ground, without glossing over or minimizing legitimate disagreements. Should a member have a serious disagreement, they will work with the chair or facilitator to develop methods for productively bringing forward and addressing or resolving the disagreement with the Task Force as a whole. Each participant agrees to take into account the interests of the participants, other stakeholders, general public and the governmental organizations.
9. Meetings of the Task Force will be open to the public. Work Group meetings, if necessary, may be held as needed.
10. Each person will speak to the public or others only about their own views. No member will speak on behalf of other participants or the group as a whole.

11. Members of the public and other observers may attend meetings and must abide by these ground rules. At the discretion of the chair and the facilitator, and as time is available, the public may be recognized to make observations.
12. Communicating with the Media: No member of the Task Force will speak for the group to the media without the consensus of the Task Force. During the process, the Chair may respond to inquiries from the media and may speak to the process and its goals but not as to the status of the deliberations. If the Task Force believes that anything from a meeting should be communicated to the media they will do so either by press release or through the selection of a spokesperson on the particular issue.

Ground Rules for Group Decision Making

1. Each person agrees to fully and consistently participate in the process unless that person withdraws. If a person is thinking of withdrawing, they agree to explain their reasons for doing so and provide others with an opportunity to accommodate their concerns.
2. Consensus is reached when the participants agree they can live with and ultimately support the package of recommendations being proposed. Some participants may not agree with every feature of the package as proposed, but the disagreement is not sufficient enough to warrant opposition to the package as a whole.
3. The facilitators will use the following scale to poll the group on whether consensus has been reached. Participants will express their level of comfort and commitment by indicating:
 1. Wholeheartedly agree
 2. Good idea
 3. Supportive
 4. Reservations – would like talk
 5. Serious concerns – must talk
 6. Cannot be part of the decision

If all participants fall between 1 and 3, consensus on the item is assumed. When someone falls between 4 and 6, that person must state their concerns clearly and offer a constructive alternative. The group will attempt to meet the interests of those parties, without diminishing their own interests.

4. If at the conclusion of the process, some members of the Task Force do not agree with the consensus package of recommendations of the larger group, the Task Force will articulate in its recommendation those differences in order to assist the agency in making an informed decision.

Roles of Participants

A. Task Force Members

The role of the Task Force Members is advisory. The Task Force is being asked to advise DEEP on issues identified in the mission.

To do this, Task Force Members are expected to:

- Attend regular meetings of the group;
- Openly communicate Task Force progress with people or groups with whom they are affiliated;
- Present their concerns and issues, and those of people and groups with whom they are affiliated, at Task Force meetings; and
- Work collegially with other Task Force Members, mutually abide by and enforce these ground rules and strive towards consensus agreements.

Meeting Attendance and Removal: The success of the Task Force will depend largely on the consistent attendance and collegial behavior by the Task Force Members. Task Force Members are expected to make a concerted effort to attend all meetings of the Task Force. Members who fail to regularly attend scheduled meetings may be removed from the Task Force by a two-thirds vote of Members present at a scheduled meeting. A Task Force member whose conduct is detrimental to the Task Force or who refuses to render reasonable assistance in carrying out its mission may be considered for removal. Any such member proposed to be removed shall be entitled to at least five days notice in writing of the meeting at which such removal is to be voted upon and shall be entitled to appear before and be heard at such meeting. The member may be removed from the Task Force by a two-thirds vote of Members present.

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

As the sponsor and convener, DEEP determines the goals and objectives of this process and how the outcomes will be used. The agency is also responsible for securing the endorsement of leadership and engaging participants; planning and organizing the process with the facilitator as appropriate, and allocating sufficient resources to see the process through to conclusion. DEEP will be represented on the Task Force in an *ex officio* capacity and will provide technical and other information to the Task Force to assist in its deliberations. DEEP is responsible for final decisions regarding the implementation of any recommendations or coordination with other agencies or organizations concerning implementation of any recommendations.

Representatives of DEEP are committed to working with, and supporting, the Task Force and carefully considering the recommendations of the Task. Senior staff will participate in discussions of the Task Force, openly discussing their knowledge of the issues, legal/regulatory/technical requirements, institutional constraints and budgetary information. To the extent feasible, DEEP will provide technical support to the Task Force with respect to a variety of issues such as state and federal regulatory and legislative requirements, limitations and opportunities in the implementation and financial implications of proposed recommendations.

Facilitator

The facilitator will manage the meetings and assist the Chair and Task Force. He will work with all of the Members and DEEP to ensure that the process runs smoothly. The role of the facilitator usually includes:

- Developing draft agendas,
- Focusing meeting discussions,
- Working to resolve any impasses that may arise,
- Preparing meeting summaries and a draft of consensus work products,

- Assisting in location and circulation of background materials and documents the Task Force requests, and
- Working with DEEP to coordinate technical information to be provided to the Task Force.

The facilitator will be responsible for coordinating with DEEP the posting of meeting summaries and other information on a portion of the DEEP website dedicated to the Task Force Process. Meeting summaries will contain brief overviews of any presentations and summarize the central elements of discussions and articulated issues, interests and recommendations. In general the summaries will not attribute comments to specific individuals in order to focus on the content of the discussion. Given the timeframe for the process, meeting summaries may be posted without review by the Members.

The Public

Task Force meetings will be open to the public to observe; however, due to the time frames and the fact that these will be working meetings, there will be limited opportunity for open public observations and feedback during meetings. Meeting summaries will be made available through postings on the DEEP website pages for the Task Force. Interested stakeholders are encouraged to contact a member of the Task Force whom they believe will understand their comment or concern and address it with that member to request that it be considered in the dialogue of the Task Force.

At several points during the Task Force process, the general public will be provided with opportunities to make suggestions or provide feedback to the Task Force. In the late summer the Task Force is likely to make available *draft* recommendations for informational purposes, the DEEP and/or the Task Force will hold an information session with Question and Answer opportunity, and the public will have a brief 7 day opportunity to submit written feedback before the Task Force finalizes its recommendations and submits them to DEEP. Should any recommendation involve new regulations or statutory changes, there will be the usual and customary formal public process associated with that at some point in the future.

