

Mount Rogers Area Christmas Tree Growers Association

PO Box 127
Whitetop, Virginia 24292

Minutes – Board of Directors Meeting, June 27, 2010, Whitetop Fire Hall, Whitetop, VA

The meeting was called to order by President John Rosser at 1:30 PM. The following board members and guest were present: President John, Charlie Conner, Earl Deal, Joe Freeman Jackie Davis, Wythe Morris, Danny Neal and Ronnie Richardson, Della Deal and Buddy Deal.

Rouging of Cull Trees in Original Park Orchard

A general discussion of the rouging of cull and dying trees in the original orchard was conducted while the group waited for all members of the board to get to the meeting. This included a talk on the possibility of sawing lumber from some of the larger logs generated in the cutting operation.

Budget and Financial Report

Earl Deal reported on our expenditures and receipts since September 1, 2009. Attached to these minutes is a spread sheet showing the comparison of expenditures with those budget items approved by the Board of Directors at the last meeting. The budget comparison includes all receipts and expenditures by type since the fiscal year began.

Our income has been slightly higher than expected due to sales of Transplants to various members and individuals. We are also ahead on the sale of seed. Most expenses have been in the range expected at this time in our budget year.

Grants

Jackie Davis suggested that the time is good for submitting a Marketing Grant Request with the Virginia Tobacco Commission. It was suggested that we needed to involve Mike Maynard and other politicians in helping make this a successful effort. There is an individual within the county administration that may be able to help us in developing a proposal. Jackie indicated that he would make a few contacts over the next few weeks and get back with board members in initiating a grant proposal.

National Christmas Tree Association Tours

President John presented the Preconvention tour that he has put together that will come from Winston-Salem to the Mountain Music Center, Mabry Mill and Morrisette Winery on August 11th. All of the arrangements have been made and he is leading this tour in conjunction with the Virginia Christmas Tree Association.

Della Deal discussed the Seed Orchard Tour that will be one of the alternatives for the August 14th tour day. She discussed the highlights of the tour and the planned schedule. A more complete discussion of this tour is included in the membership meeting minutes.

National Meeting Exhibit Booth and other Convention expenses

President John asked the board's permission to propose a motion to the membership for \$1000 funding for the tour expenses and \$500 for having an exhibit booth at the National convention. The booth would be used to promote seed sales and would also have a list of our members developed from the Webb site. The board unanimously approved his request. Della Deal also volunteered to head up setting up the booth with the help of Earl and Buddy Deal.

Old Flats Orchard

Charlie Conner discussed the work done on the Old Flats Orchard establishment as of this date. Between Charlie, Ronnie Richardson, Buddy Deal and the Smokey Holler Crew the site was laid out and root stock trees planted in April. Weed control was initialized in early May and more work on the site has been done in June.

More work is planned to ensure that the planted trees survive. Charlie indicated that he was going to contact the Grayson Highlands folks about obtaining some red spruce wildlings that could be planted as a wind break around the orchard. The orchard committee felt that the White pine Blister rust may be too prevalent in the area for the use of White pine.

Della Deal then quickly went through her ideas on the next phase of finding and selecting outstanding Mount Rogers Fraser fir trees in member's plantations that could supply scion material for grafting on to the root stock. She passed around copies of a preliminary brochure that she had developed to explain the selection process. She and John Frampton have also developed a sheet that contains grading criteria to be used in the selection process. This would be just the beginning with the actual scion material not cut until the spring of 2012. A total of approximately 100 different trees would be selected for the process.

Jackie Davis reported that the Parks Department issued a temporary permit that allows us to plant and manage the new orchard until the land transfer to the Virginia Forestry Department can be completed. This has allowed us to go ahead and get the orchard established.

Earl Deal and Danny Neal reported that they had contacted the Department of Agriculture auditors and they indicated that we could pay for the surveying of the property with our "Development" Grant.

Original Park Orchard

Bryan Davis, Charlie and Joe Freeman marked those trees that needed to be eliminated or rogued out of the orchard. The objective was to eliminate the dead and dying trees that we have been attempting to save through spraying. Joe and his crew cut these down June 22nd and 23rd. A Smokey Holler crew is in the process chipping up the tree laps in order to meet the expectations of the Grayson Highlands Administration.

Jill Sidebottom (NCSU) has established a demonstration of two new materials for control of the Balsam Woolly Adelgid. She used a soil "drench technique" using Merit and Safari, two new pesticides available for "Wooly" control. She is also attempting to determine the optimum "window of control" for these two materials. The general consensus of the Board was that we were lucky to have Jill helping us in our attempt to protect the Orchard.

The Board meeting was adjourned at 3 PM in time for the General Membership meeting.

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Minutes – Membership Meeting, June 27, 2010, Whitetop Fire Hall, Whitetop, VA

President John called the general membership meeting to order at 3 PM.

Matt Rumfield, The Bank Store

Matt Rumfield, The Life Store Insurance representative from West Jefferson was introduced and thanked for sponsoring refreshments for the members.

Minutes and Financial Report

The minutes of the last meeting and the financial report were passed around to those members present. A motion was made and passed to approve the two reports as written.

A motion was also made to pay \$1865 for the insurance on the Warehouse. The motion was approved unanimously by the membership.

Seed Orchard Reports

Charlie Conner led a discussion about what was being done with the Original and the new Flats seed orchards. He discussed the problem with the decline of the original trees and the need to establish a replacement orchard. He also reported on the work that has been done at both orchards.

The potential availability of sawn lumber from the Rogued trees was also discussed by Joe Freeman and Charlie. Joe was unable to estimate the cost of hauling and sawing the logs. A few people did express an interest in purchasing some of the lumber if the cost can be held to a reasonable level. The members present indicated that the Association would need to mail an announcement to the general membership concerning the availability and seek commitments from them.

Jackie Davis reported on the “operating permit” that was issued that allowed us to begin work on the Flats Orchard. He noted that the transfer of the property from the Virginia Parks Department to the Virginia Forestry Department was close to completion. Jackie then reported that The Chestnut Foundation is very interested in establishing a high elevation plantation of improved American Chestnut at the Flats site.

Wythe Morris discussed his work with the 4-H and other youth groups that have shown an interest in outdoor education and environmental projects at the Flats site.

Della Deal then led a discussion on getting our membership excited about identifying outstanding trees on their farm that came from Mount Rogers seed. Dr. John Frampton (NCSU) has suggested that we need to find at least 100 outstanding trees. Scion material from these trees would be used to graft onto the root stock now planted at the Flats site. Della reported that Dr. Frampton would like to perform a needle holding test on each tree and also track the Spring bud breaking time for each.

A brochure that is to be mailed to each member along with a "Grading" sheet to be used in the selection process is attached to these minutes. The first step is to have each grower identify trees in their fields that may be considered worthy to be placed in the orchard. Those trees selected to contribute scion material would be named for the farm and forever remain associated with the member's farm – a branding of seed with their name on it. The seed orchard committee will oversee these activities and help lend support to the next phase of the project.

Marketing

A significant amount of discussion concerning marketing of our trees occurred at the meeting. The general consensus of the group was that Demand was down and Supply was up. Several ideas about what to do about it were presented. Supporting the National Check Off program for marketing, improved genetics to make it possible to lower management cost, obtaining a grant for marketing activities of Mount Rogers trees were just some of the ideas discussed.

Danny Neal led a discussion of some other ideas on marketing for individual growers. His main point was that you cannot sit back and wait for the buyers to find you. You must get your name in front of them through direct mailing, innovative Webb sites, Trade shows, etc. Searching the Webb sites of government agencies like the Department of Agriculture, Associations of Retailers, Civic organizations, etc could yield a lot of names for your mailing list.

National Christmas Tree Association Tour

President John discussed the pre-convention tour (August 11th) to the Blue Ridge Parkway, Mountain Music Center, Mabry Mill and Morrisette Winery. All arrangements have been made and an excellent announcement of the tour is given on the National Association's Website. The announcement even has a video clip done by NBC on the Parkway.

Della and Earl Deal presented the agenda for the Seed Orchard tour that will be one of the tour options on August 14th. A complete agenda with times and the names of volunteers for the various activities are attached to these minutes.

President John asked and received a motion that our Association set aside \$1000 to support the tours and \$500 to purchase a booth at the Convention site in Winston-Salem to promote the sale of member's trees and our Mount Rogers seed. The motion was passed by a unanimous vote of the members.

Virginia Christmas Tree Association

Charlie Conners and Danny Neal announced that the Virginia Christmas Tree Meeting would be in Waynesboro, VA on August 26, 27 and 28th.

Mount Rogers Association Web Site

Betty Vornbrock led a discussion concerning the Association's web site and the addition of a PDF file listing those growers in a "Sell Directory." Betty reported that the site is up and running. However, more historical information, links to other sites, articles on environment and fire safety and general marketing such as making a Family Tradition with a Mt. Rogers tree are still needed.

The general consensus of the members present was that we do not need a printed "Buyer's Guide" for the Association. The majority felt that a list that could be read and/or printed from the Association's Web site would be better. A motion was made to do this and approved. Earl Deal and Betty agreed to develop a "Buyers Guide" PDF file based on the information sheets supplied from growers this year.

A question was asked concerning the number of people that have visited the site. Betty indicated that she should be able to get this information from the Hosting company. She also plans to add a counter to the site and begin the count with the historical information from the Hosting firm.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6 PM.

Submitted by:
Earl L Deal, Jr.
Secretary/Treasurer