

# Forestry News



Memorial Edition April 2010

"We Protect and Develop Healthy, Sustainable Forest Resources for Virginians."

Carl Garrison, State Forester

Janet Muncy, Editor

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## In Memory of Alex Williamson September 21, 1950 - March 13, 2010



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and other Virginia  
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publications at  
[www.dof.virginia.gov](http://www.dof.virginia.gov)*

## A Greater Love Hath No Man...

*Jim Bowling, technician, Nottoway County, Central Region*

The Gospel of St. John Chapter 15, Verse 13 starts out – A greater love hath no man than...

Alex Williamson had many great loves in his life. A greater love hath no man than Alex Williamson for his family as a husband, father and brother. As we chased the fire dragon around the state of Florida during the summer of 1998, I had a chance to talk with Alex about many things. One of those subjects was his family. When Alex talked about his family, you could see it in his eyes, hear it his voice and feel the devotion and love he had for his family.

A greater love hath no man than Alex Williamson for God. Again in 1998, we were in Florida; at every meal, Alex would bow his head and give thanks, be it at a table or on the tailgate of a truck eating an MRE. As we talked, I came to realize how deep his faith was.

A greater love hath no man than Alex Williamson for his country. As we continued our travels in Florida; I asked Alex about his service in southeast Asia. He wouldn't talk about the action he saw but I did learn why he served. Alex felt a duty to his country for the freedoms he and all of us enjoy. Alex was a patriot.

A greater love hath no man than Alex Williamson for his community. His service to and for Halifax County speaks for itself.

A greater love hath no man than Alex Williamson for the Virginia Department of Forestry. His three decades of service was centered on the oath he took as a chief forest warden. He was a brother wildland firefighter, forest warden (law enforcement officer), instructor and leader.

A greater love hath no man than the shy old country boy Alex Williamson for all these things, and he was a fierce defender of his great loves. He himself was greatly loved, and he will be sorely missed.

I have lost my captain, brother firefighter, my mentor, leader and, most of all, I lost my dear, dear friend Alex. Oh Captain, my Captain. Godspeed my friend!



## VDOF Mourns

*Janet Muncy, graphic specialist, Public Information Division*

Virginia Department of Forestry will never be the same. March 13 will be remembered as the day we loss our colleague, our mentor, our friend.

Words really can't do justice to the legacy left by Alex Williamson. The impact of his life on others is clear by the outpouring of sympathies and grief shown. He's touched so many lives and will live in our hearts forever.

Alex served the citizens as the technician in Halifax County for more than 35 years. He won several prestigious awards, including employee of the year and conservationist of the year. He was recognized nationwide in his fire prevention efforts by achieving distinguished service awards in Florida and Oklahoma and recognized for his outstanding efforts in the area of Forest Fire Prevention in Region 8. He was a lifetime member of the Turbeville Volunteer Fire Department and an honorary member of the South Boston Fire Company, as well as other fire departments. He was a member of the Farm Bureau Board of Directors, an honorary member of the FFA, a member and captain of the Department of Forestry Honor Guard, a lifetime member of Calvary United Methodist Church, and member of American Legion Post #8 and VFW Post #8243, having served in the US Air Force during the Vietnam War.

While the list of achievements and service could go on and on, the most important legacy I believe that Alex leaves us with is the drive to do good – to be a good person, family member, citizen, coworker and friend. As any of Alex's friends would know, he was always there when you needed him, whether for help, to lend an ear or to cheer you when you were down. Alex was the epitome of what it means to be a friend and good person.

I will never forget that crooked smile, smiling eyes and low friendly voice always giving words of encouragement. There are so many stories to tell and memories to share, I encourage you to hold those memories in your heart and let them be your guide as you live your own life.



*Of the thousands of photos I've taken of Alex over the years at many different events, I believe this is my favorite – taken at sunset while we were at the Eastern Shore traveling with the Capitol Christmas Tree.*

## The Right Choice

*Dave Snyder, assistant regional forester, Central Region*

The Department of Forestry made the right choice in hiring Alex Williamson for the chief forest warden position in Halifax County. The Department of Forestry wanted an individual who would become a well-respected representative of the Department in the community. Over his 35 year career with the Department, Alex Williamson could not have done any better a job of achieving this expectation. An effort was made to leave a positive impression of the Department of Forestry with every individual with whom he came in contact within the course of the day's work. Everyone received the same level of first class service, no matter how small a landowner you were or how insignificant the request for assistance was. Relationships were built on a cooperative spirit of working together, and respect was earned by standing up for what was right and fair to all involved. Alex took the time to take care of those small details that may seem insignificant but were very important in maintaining good relationships. Landowners would receive phone calls keeping them up to date on every step that was being done to ensure that their forestry projects were being completed to their satisfaction. Alex would check in with coworkers' families when they were out of town on assignment.

The Department of Forestry also needed an individual who had a level of dedication that it could depend upon to get the work done with little supervision or direction. I do not know a time when Alex was not available to answer an emergency call for assistance from the Department of Forestry or the



volunteer fire departments in the county. His leadership skills were recognized and utilized by local and state firefighters. He had the organizational and people skills to direct an incident efficiently and safely. These skills were valued on local incidents, as well as on state and national incidents. He continued to conduct the Smokey Bear elementary school programs after others had stopped because he saw the value of these programs and the enjoyment that the children got from them. Several years ago, Alex fell 20 feet off a ladder and crushed several discs in his back. Since then, he worked with this pain but did not use it as a way to drop the level of commitment that he had to his job with the Department of Forestry. Those long road trips on out-of-state assignments came with some sacrifice. The Department of Forestry was well represented in Halifax County, the state and beyond through the dedicated efforts of Alex Williamson.

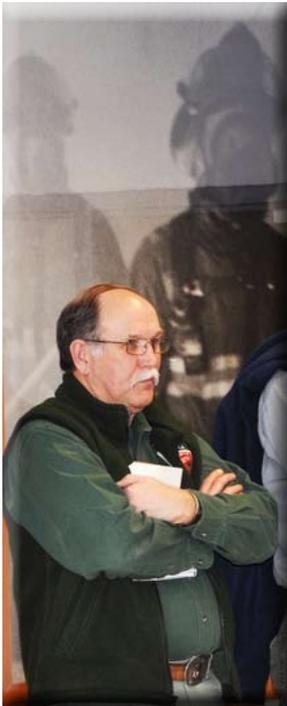
## Santa Williamson

*Neal Oberholtzer, forester, Mecklenburg County, Central Region*

Several years ago, we received a phone call on Christmas day. My daughter, Emily, who was only 5 or 6 years old at the time, answered the phone. I could hear her say, "Yes,

I received everything I wanted, thanks and yes, we had a big dinner, thanks." Then she said, "Dad, the phone." I asked her who it was and she exclaimed, "It's SANTA!" As soon as I got on the phone, I knew it was Alex by his big laugh. It was Emily's best Christmas ever because she talked to "Santa." Over the years, Alex and I have had a good laugh about this. He touched many lives in different ways. Our family will miss him dearly.

## Firefighters Respond... to SNOW?



*Fred Turck, assistant director,  
Resource Protection Division*

Feb. 8<sup>th</sup> started off no different than any other day in Waverly the day after a snow, and in anticipation of another round. I expected a call from John Miller informing me that I would be deployed to the state EOC ESF 4 desk. The call came, but not to go to Richmond. I was being asked to lead a group to the City of Alexandria. We were asked to provide a short overhead team to help with planning. I asked who was going, the reply was Janet Muncy, Chris Sullivan, Brad Wright, Neal Oberholtzer, Jim Bowling and Alex Williamson. Not knowing exactly what to expect, I knew

the folks lined up to go would be ready for anything from planning to operational assignments.

Upon arriving at the Alexandria EOC, I quickly realized that they were primarily in need of planning assistance. There was a main city operations unit working in one location; a fire operations center working at a different location, and yet a third, the snow operations, working out of a separate location. All three operations were connected only via "technology." We were being asked to help provide some overall organizational structure to the situation. The city had a tremendous amount of people and equipment on the ground, or I should say in the snow. For example, it had more than 100 people going around to hydrants clearing them so they could be accessible to fire trucks.

After an initial meeting with the Alexandria Plans Section Chief, this was going to be an office job from start to finish. In true VDOF fashion, everyone changed gears and did what was needed to assist the folks who were in desperate need of help. Alex, as so many times in the past, became one of the folks looked to for guidance and leadership. Chris and I were



assigned to the city's main EOC working with the planning section chiefs; Janet, Alex and Brad were assigned to Snow Ops, and Neal and Jim were assigned to Fire Ops.

An email I received from Alex on Feb. 22, 2010 summed up not only our assignment, but Alex's dedication to doing whatever it took to "get the job done." He was thanking us and doubting his contribution in true Alex fashion, when in fact, it is us who should have been thanking him and learning from his experience, leadership and positive attitude.

*Fred,*

*First of all, I want to thank you and John for allowing me to go with you to Alexandria. As always, I learn something every time I go out on a tour. I am not sure how much I really contributed to this trip. Mostly at Snow Ops. I did little gopher things for Janet who was very good at writing the IAPs and helping the city on getting the information they needed to comply with FEMA. I was able to talk with some of the supervisors and answer some of their questions on making sure they put down all necessary expenses. I spent most of one day with Neal at Fire Ops where I understood the lingo somewhat better. I think it was good we were there, but I feel we probably could have been used to give some crew bosses a break if they so desired. I am a good people person but not one to write IAPs. Even though we might not have done a lot of work that you could see on the surface, I think us just being there and willing, showed good cooperation from our state agency to a large city. Thanks again, and always willing to go. – Alex*

I was so honored to be part of this assignment, not only because VDOF once again responded to a locality in need, but also that I was able to work alongside of one of the best... Alex Williamson.

## Always An Honest Opinion

*Jim Garner, retired State Forester*

One of my favorite memories of Alex was in 1989, shortly after we changed from green to white trucks. After looking at them, I thought they were too plain and needed a distinguishing touch. We picked two pickups and put a 6" wide dark green stripe all the way down each side. Alex was due a new truck and agreed to take one for testing – no comments, just a questionable look. At the 1989 personnel camp in Lynchburg, both trucks were displayed and I asked for feedback. The white pickup with a green stripe was soundly rejected by almost everyone!

Shortly afterward, I was with Alex and asked if he would like to see if we could remove the stripe or would he like another truck. His reply was quick "No. You asked me to take the truck and I will. Besides, you have hidden the other one on the State Forest, so I am the only one who can legitimately advertise your dumb idea." As I recall, that is close to a direct quote. That was Alex – not disrespectful, sarcastic or negative – just offered his straightforward opinion and ideas. Actually, I think he thought it was kind of funny.

I always knew I could depend on Alex for this straightforward response in an honest, unbiased and usual thoughtful logic. I also knew after all discussion was over and a decision was made, he would move forward with his unique dedication and loyalty to the VDOF. Alex was a fiercely loyal person.



He was loyal to his family, to the civic organizations, the church and to his community. This loyalty earned him a deep respect from all who knew and worked with him. This respect was made obvious by the people and organizations paying final tribute to one of their own.

As we passed through the town of Halifax on the way home, we noticed all the flags on the courthouse lawn were at half-staff. I guess that said it all – the community had lost one of its most respected heroes.

## Other Duties As Assigned

*Ken Mohler, technician, Rockbridge County, Western Region*

I remember hosting a National Association of State Foresters annual conference in Williamsburg. Among those chosen to assist with hosting this event were Janet Muncy, Alex Williamson and myself.

Being the hospitable people that we are, Jim Garner asked me to serve as bartender for the event. Of course, I said yes, as long as I could choose my assistant. My choice, Alex Williamson. When I called Alex to ask him to

help, he said he had no idea how to. However, in no time at all, he was on the front line serving everyone with a smile. We even had to get Blair (Blair Dalton) to help out a few nights. What a great time we had working together, some nights until 3:30 a.m.

As the week came to an end, I asked Janet Muncy to make a certificate for me to give to Alex... a "Certificate of Completion for Bartender School" and I presented it to him on that last night. What a big Alex smile he had!

Even when it was something Alex knew nothing about, he stepped right up and took care of business... and we always had fun, no matter what the task!

## An Inspiration for Future Firefighters

By Fred Turck, assistant director, Resource Protection Division

The Virginia Department of Forestry will initiate a program at the 2010 Virginia Interagency Wildland Fire Academy that will honor the memory of Alex Williamson. Each year, we will offer two honorariums that will cover the cost to attend the academy for two individuals from fire departments. One will be specifically for an individual from a Halifax County fire department, the other honorarium will be given to an "at large" individual selected from the remainder of the academy attendees from fire departments. If there is no individual from Halifax County attending the academy, both recipients will be selected "at large."

Below is the text of a letter that will be sent to those receiving the honorariums.

"You have been selected to receive an honorarium to attend the 2010 Virginia Interagency Wildland Fire Academy in memory of Alex Williamson. Alex worked for more than 35 years with the Virginia Department of Forestry in Halifax County. He was a familiar sight whenever a brush fire or fire in any wooded area broke out in Halifax. Williamson also

traveled across the country in an emergency response role whenever Virginia was asked to assist other states.

Alex was a lifetime member of the Turbeville Volunteer Fire Department and was an honorary member of the South Boston Fire Company, as well as other fire departments.

Williamson was a member of American Legion Post #8 and VFW Post #8243, having served in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War from 1968 to 1972.

Alex was passionate about working with children. All across Halifax County, he educated the young and old about the importance of wildfire safety and prevention. He would speak to them at the county's schools, fire departments, fairs, events, just about anywhere; and he was usually accompanied by Smokey Bear.

In addition to his love of Smokey and dedication to children, Alex took very seriously his role as a teacher and mentor. He had a very important role in several training programs, including the Wildland Fire Academy.

We hope you accept this honorarium and, in doing so, strive, like Alex, to be your very best.

Alex will be missed by all of us, and we can be assured that his dedication and efforts on and off the job will serve us, the citizens of Halifax County and the entire Commonwealth for generations to come."



## Top Choice!

*Janet Muncy, graphic specialist, Public Information Division*

As I went through my many photos finding pictures of Alex to share, I came across many photos of our trip around the state with the Capitol Christmas Tree. Alex and I often talked about that trip and how lucky we were to be involved in such an event. I'd feel remiss not to include something about it.

I remember the day Jim Garner asked me to come up to his office. That usually meant he needed computer help, but that day, it was to ask me to work with the USFS on the Capitol Christmas Tree project - the Capitol's tree would come from Virginia! I love projects like these, so I was excited to work on such a event. I attended the first meeting with Jim Garner and the USFS folks, including Bill Damon, George Washington and Jefferson National Forests forest supervisor at the time.

After determining our role in the event, Garner asked me who I would choose for a team to travel with the tree. I can promise you, there was no hesitation on my part... Alex Williamson, Alan Craft and Ken Mohler. Garner immediately agreed with these choices. Who best to represent the VDOF as we traveled all over the state visiting many communities. Alex and Alan immediately said yes; Ken said yes with a little hesitation when he realized he would miss three weeks of hunting season but, after a short pause and finding out Alex was going, he agreed.

We spent almost three weeks on the road together -

memories I will never forget. Alex took pride in everything he did and this was no exception. He made every person, young and old alike, feel so special and important as he and Alan received each community's tree ornament at each stop. As we packed up to move onto the next town, Alex packed the ornaments with tender care for their trip to Washington, DC. He greeted the public, rode in parades, thanked the generous folks who prepared meals for us in some communities. He was the gracious guest of each town we visited.

I'll never forget when Alex met a previous chief of the USFS, Max Peterson, at the Leesburg celebration. Alex immediately recognized him and grabbed me to get a picture of them. He was a celebrity to Alex.

Have you ever seen pride overflowing... that was Alex as we pulled into South Boston. One of the largest events along the way, South Boston welcomed us, and you could see the respect that folks there had for Alex. He was practically a celebrity to them, though Alex would never admit that.

We worked really long days, very little sleep, often to the point of exhaustion, but you'd never hear any complaint from Alex. He was just so thankful to be involved. We were like family on a "working" vacation together.

I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in such an event, but even more so to spend so much time with such great people... especially Alex. He made a tremendous impression on everyone with whom he came in contact.



*Alex greets his fellow citizens in South Boston.*



*Alex brought smiles to everyone he met.*



*Alex meets Max Peterson, former chief of the USFS.*

## Nothing Like OJT

*Michael Salyer, technician, Wise, Russell and Dickenson counties, Western Region*

OJT - yes, I am referring to on-the-job training. No other is the best at helping one get OJT than Alex, as I soon learned. I started in Campbell County in 2004, Alex was one of the many people that helped me as a new employee.

I went to Halifax to help him do a prescribed burn not far from the office. I tried to get him to operate the dozer and



let me drop fire with the other guys but Alex, being the kind person he was, would not go for that. Alex had gone over the plan and wanted me to take the dozer to the far side of the tract. Looking back now, I feel that he was trying my skills in operating the dozer. Before I left with the dozer, he informed me that there were some tree stumps just on the other side of the ditch and they weren't visible from where we were standing. As I came out of the ditch onto the tract, sure enough, I high centered on the stump, and there I was sitting with the tracks off of the ground. I called Alex on the radio, and he knew what I had done before I even told him. Unlike most, he did not get upset. He gave me the chance to get out of the situation after I told him that I thought that I could get the dozer off the stump. I was able to get it off, and we got the burn completed. Whether you call it giving the new guy a hard time or just good practical training, you always learned something from Alex.

I worked in the old Region 4 for two years, and every time I called Alex with a question about something, he was always glad to help. Like all who worked with Alex, I have many stories and memories of Alex, but this is one that sticks with me. Those of us who knew him, know we have lost a great friend, and those who had not met him will never know what a great person he was first hand. Rest in Peace, brother, and I will see you again some day.

## A Man of Conviction

*Angela Conary, administrative services specialist, Eastern Region*

I can truly say I've never heard anyone ever say anything bad about Alex or the way he handled himself. I feel honored to have had the chance to meet Alex as a person and to be a co-worker in the same agency as Alex.

I'm so glad that I had had the chance to talk with Alex the week that he was tragically taken from us. He and I had chatted via e-mail, as well as talked on the phone a couple of times that Tuesday and Thursday. We had talked about work-related things, as well as personal topics. One of our conversations was about what he treasured the most, his family. He told me that he never regretted taking care of his parents in their later years.

He also told me his family was a very supportive family and that had made so many things easier for him.

Alex knew where his priorities laid. He also knew how to have fun and enjoy life, too. I learned that about him as I served on the Quality Work Group with him. I represented Region 1 while Alex represented Region 4. He always said it was a lot of work but take the time to have fun while working. He always thought that the Quality Work Group was one of the best voices that the Department of Forestry offered its personnel. He worked hard for his region and spoke strongly and proudly as their voice.

Alex will surely be missed. I only hope that we all carry with us some of what he taught us. If we do, then each of us will have a part in continuing what he so strongly believed in.

## Even the Mundane is Fun

Larry Mikkelson, conservation specialist, Forestland Conservation Division

In the spring of 1978, after a few months of being a training forester in District 4 (Farmville) under the tutelage of Bill Haag in Lunenburg County and Larry Layman in Halifax County, Larry indicated that I should get out and work with the chief forest warden in Halifax, Alex Williamson. That sounded like a nice change from the norm for my training, and I was looking forward to it. At least I wouldn't have to be working on a TEX (timberland exam) and trying to meet the rigorous review standards of my boss, assistant district forester Jim Bowen.

On a warm spring day, Alex and I headed out to paint forest warden toolboxes. I don't recall how many boxes we painted, or where exactly, but I do recall a good long day together, and learning that Alex was particular about his work and was very involved in the community, his church and the fire department.

There is one particular toolbox that I do recall, along the road to Staunton River State Park, because at that location, Alex and I ate lunch, and laughed until we couldn't laugh any more about a recent fund raiser for the fire department – a womanless wedding. He described how he and several other fire department members (all men at the time) dressed up



and played the parts of the bride, groom, preacher and a variety of bridesmaids, etc. I recall stories of low-cut dresses and chest hair hanging out, and other equally humorous situations during the "wedding." As he told the story, there were several times when we were laughing so hard that he could hardly continue. All for a good cause...

I remember working with Alex at other times over the years responding to fires and doing fire department training, but that painting day is the one that sticks in my mind when I think of Alex.

Alex, you are greatly missed, and I know you are with your Lord in a better place. Thanks for your friendship.

## Always Find Fun in Your Work

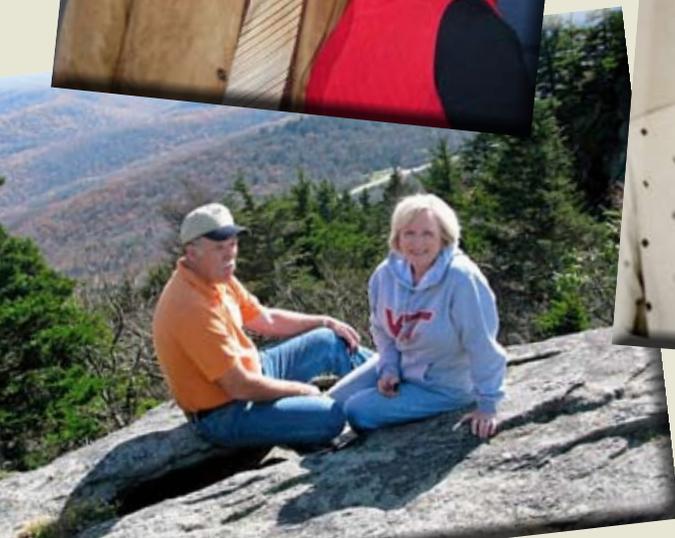


(Right) Hurricane response in Texas  
(Left) Capitol Christmas Tree parade in Amherst

# Forestry News

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It's All About Family



# Forestry News

Memorial Edition April 2010

## VDOF Family



## From Our Family to Yours

Alex is going to be missed by all of his friends at the Department of Forestry, as he felt they were like family. He had high respect for the Department and its values. He had said that once you are a member of the Department of Forestry, you will always be one. My heartfelt thanks are given to each and every one of you for all that you have done for my family and me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. May God bless each and every one of you.

*Betty, Amanda and John Williamson*



## Web Sites:

South Boston Fire [<http://sbfc.pure.net/alex.htm>]

Facebook [<http://zh-hk.facebook.com/pages/Contribute-to-Alex-Williamson-A-Great-husbandfatherbrotherand-friend/370252122189>]

## Special Edition of Forestry News in Memory of Alex Williamson

Submit articles to:

Janet Muncy, editor  
[janet.muncy@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:janet.muncy@dof.virginia.gov)



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