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VDOF & VCE MAKE LAND LEGACY PLANNING MORE ACCESSIBLE

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) and the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) encourage landowners to make plans for passing on their land to the next generation – right now. The Generation NEXT program is a collaboration between VDOF and VCE that helps Virginia landowners keep forests intact, in forest, and in family.

Generation NEXT is hosting two low-cost virtual legacy planning series this year – in April and September – to help landowners take the first steps and clarify some of the misconceptions about the legacy planning process that might prevent people from getting started.

Many landowners are overwhelmed by the legacy planning process and assume that it primarily involves complicated work with attorneys and accountants. This assumption might cause landowners to delay thinking about what they want to happen to their land when they're no longer around to manage it. The Generation NEXT program demonstrates how estate planning (working with lawyers and accountants) is just one part of the legacy planning process.

“One of the most important steps in legacy planning includes conversations between you and the people who will steward your land after you're gone. Do they understand your stewardship goals for the property? Do they feel a connection to the land? Are there key pieces of information you need to share about the property? Having these conversations is critical,” **says Adam Downing, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent.**

If a landowner passes away without clearly established plans for their estate (including their land), things can quickly become complicated for the surviving family members. The Generation NEXT program provides families with resources and tools that make the process more manageable and accessible.

With the Generation NEXT workshops, families pay a single fee to participate, even if they are geographically separated. The workshops serve as designated opportunities for family members to ask difficult questions, receive useful information, and get on the same page about plans for the future. Typically, these sessions are in-person, so dispersed families are taking advantage of the virtual offerings.

As a companion to the workshop series, the Generation NEXT team created a publication, *Legacy Planning: A Guide for Virginia Landowners* that provides an overview of the nine major steps involved in developing a robust land legacy plan. It includes case studies from landowners throughout Virginia and guides landowners to tools and resources. The free publication is available online or in-print (by request). https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/CNRE/cnre-121/CNRE-121.pdf

Landowners should approach legacy planning as an on-going process. “Much like a forest changes over time, your legacy plans will evolve. As priorities change or family dynamics shift, so should plans for your land,” says **Andrew Fotinos, Conservation Specialist with VDOF**. “Having the *Legacy Planning* publication on-hand will help landowners as they periodically revisit the nine steps over time.”

With spring and summer just around the corner, it’s the perfect time to engage with Step Eight: “Provide opportunities for your family to learn about and enjoy your woodlands.” Explore your property with future generations to instill in them the importance of good land stewardship.

Spring dates for the Generation NEXT workshops are April 7, 8, 14 & 15. Those interested in attending the spring workshop should register by March 31 to guarantee their spot and receive a print copy of the *Legacy Planning* publication before courses begin. Fall workshops will take place on September 8, 9, 15 & 16. Families or individuals can register for either the spring or fall dates, or they may elect to attend both series for a comprehensive experience. Content may overlap in the two series, but they are not identical.

Registration can be completed online: <https://ext.vt.edu/natural-resources/legacy-planning/training.html>

About the Virginia Department of Forestry

The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 108,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide an overall economic output of more than \$21 Billion annually.

Headquartered in Charlottesville, the Agency has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide citizen service and public safety protection across the Commonwealth, which it’s been doing now for more than 100 years. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.

About the Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Cooperative Extension brings the resources of Virginia's land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the commonwealth. We are a dynamic organization that stimulates positive personal and societal change, leading to more productive lives, families, farms, and forests as well as a better environment.

Understanding that knowledge is power, we place that power in the hands of Virginians and help them learn how to use it to improve the quality of their lives. Our Extension agents and specialists form a network of educators whose classrooms are the communities, homes, and businesses of Virginia, where they bring research-based solutions to the problems facing Virginians today. Extension programs are delivered through a network of faculty at two universities, 108 county and city offices, 11 agricultural research and Extension centers, and six 4-H educational centers.

VCE and VDOF programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.