



March 23, 2020

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Agency COVID-19 Updates

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- ◆ The Executive Team is closely monitoring updates from public health officials and guidance from the Governor’s Office daily, and prudently considering how that information affects VDOF’s ability to conduct daily operations while ensuring the health of everyone in the VDOF family.
 - ◆ Communication is vital during times of uncertainty, and we are adding a Thursday Covid-19 email to help keep everyone informed of changes in guidance. In this email we will provide any updates to the current COVID-19 situation as it impacts VDOF, and share additional public health information that may be helpful for each of us to stay safe and able to accomplish our assignments. If there are no changes since the last update in The Branch, we will let you know that as well. We will also address any frequently asked questions, so please forward your concerns or questions to your supervisors so we may provide helpful information to everyone.
 - ◆ This is a stressful time and many of us are anxious about our potential exposures to this virus. In addition to taking steps to stay physically healthy, it is important to tend to our mental and emotional health as well. The Employee Assistance program (EAP) can help work through the anxiety that comes from uncertainty and the stress of feeling disconnected or overwhelmed by change. EAP is available virtually through LiveCONNECT, a live chat service available 24/7 through the Anthem EAP website or contact the EAP service for your health care provider.

- ◆ **Please Remember:**
 - Everyone's best defense is to practice good hand washing, safe distancing (six foot zones), and continuously monitor one's own health.
 - We are not immune to this virus; everyone is at risk!
 - All personal health information is confidential. If anyone tests positive for COVID-19, please inform the supervisor and Human Resources ONLY to ensure all personal health communications are kept confidential.
- ◆ For additional resources about COVID-19 you can go the VDH website and the CDC website.

State Budget Updates

- ◆ The General Assembly (GA) finished their negotiations on the budget fortunately before COVID-19 struck Virginia. Because of the strong economy and all of the economic growth here in Virginia, the budget includes great news for state employees, and for the VDOF. Of course, then COVID-19 struck Virginia and now the economic projections will all have to be revised and the budget will also likely be revised. No one can predict what that will look like a month from now.
- ◆ Regardless of what happens with the budget going forward, the budget that passed the GA is a great story and a great reminder of the importance of advocacy groups like the VA Government Employees Association (VGEA) and all of our industry partners like Virginia Forestry Association (VFA), Virginia Loggers Association (VLA), Virginia Forest Products Association (VFPA), Farm Bureau and the Agribusiness Council. For state classified employees the approved budget includes both a 3 percent bonus on December 1, 2020 and a 3 percent raise in June of 2021. Neither of these were included in the original proposed budget so that is a great accomplishment led by the VGEA lobbyists. Every state employee benefits from VGEA and should support their work.
- ◆ The news was just as good for VDOF. The budget currently includes funding to:
 - establish an Apprenticeship Program
 - IFRIS Analysis – How to move forward with IFRIS or alternative approach
 - continue the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) at \$250,000 in both years
 - pay for a high-level assessment of IFRIS to determine how we should move forward with updating IFRIS
 - add one Watershed Coordinator position and three regional positions to support watershed initiatives and forestland conservation including easement stewardship
 - and add a coordinator position for the Hardwood Forest Habitat Program. The funding for the hardwood landowner incentive program was delayed until the second year of the biennium.
- ◆ So, it was a great year for all of us in the GA and we need to celebrate that. What happens going forward is anybody's guess.

Action Required

Annual SPCC Cardholder Training

- ❑ The 2020 training courses for all SPCC cardholders and supervisors are now through the Commonwealth of Virginia Learning Center (COLVC) <https://covlc.virginia.gov>.
- ❑ To access ALL trainings, please search on keyword SPCC 2020 (exact phrase), in the course catalog.

- ❑ If you have problems and need assistance logging into the COLVC, please contact Kristi Clore at 434-220-2029 or Kristi.clore@dof.virginia.gov.
- ❑ All below trainings and certifications are mandatory and are due no later than May 31, 2020.
 - DOA - Cardholder Supervisor Reviewer Training 2020
 - DOA - SPCC Cardholder Training 2020

{Please Note: Google Chrome is the recommended browser for all trainings. Users who only have Internet Explorer will need to Delete Browsing History/Cookies and Turn OFF Compatibility View in order to view the trainings}.

Last Week

State Forester

- ◆ The Board of Forestry met on March 11 for the annual Spring meeting. The agenda included: reelection of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman; establishing the cost share practices and rates for the Reforestation of Timberlands program for the upcoming year; discussion of potential updates to the Seed Tree Law; discussion of the VDOF conservation easement program with concerns from guests over the role of other state agencies in the VDOF program, and a report on VDOF field surveys of pine seedling survival from last year's reforestation efforts.

Forestland Conservation

- ◆ Charlie Becker (utilization and marketing manager) attended a Forest Economics Contributions Conference and Cross-Laminated Timber (CLT) workshop held in New Orleans, Louisiana.
 - The Economic Contribution Conference brought together state forestry, cooperative education, economic research and economic development representatives from the southern U.S. to discuss ways to improve messaging on the economic importance of forestry in the South. Presentations and discussions covered topics such as the development and dissemination of credible, relevant information and materials to various groups and stakeholders. VDOF will soon have a completed summary of meeting results that the agency can use to implement next steps to update economic numbers and promote the results.
 - The CLT workshop was the first of four scheduled in the South targeting builders, architects and others that are involved with construction of buildings with the goal of increasing wood use. Funding was from the USDA Forest Products Lab. Other workshops are scheduled for Atlanta, Nashville and Raleigh. We also plan to hold at least one in Virginia.
- ◆ Molly O'Liddy (urban and community forestry partnership coordinator) and Eli Podyma (community forester) met with Richmond Tree Stewards at Holton Elementary. Molly wrote an Urban Forest Management plan for the school and the Tree Stewards will help to implement the plan.
- ◆ Lara Johnson (urban and community program manager), Molly O'Liddy, Joe Lehnen (urban wood utilization forester) and Becky Woodson (forest management programs coordinator) hosted the first Trees Virginia board meeting of 2020 in VDOF's headquarters, the Garner Building. Collegiate scholarships and Tree Steward mini-grants were awarded to various recipients throughout the state.
- ◆ Molly O'Liddy assisted the Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards (CATS) with a pruning day on VDOF's headquarters campus. Within the campus arboretum, the group pruned numerous trees for form and structure and will add more trees to the arboretum later this month.
- ◆ Mike Santucci (forestland conservation program manager), Andrew Fotinos (Western region forestland conservation specialist) and Terry Lasher (assistant state forester) worked together to compile "V2.0"

of the ConserveVirginia Forestland conservation layer and submitted to the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

- ◆ The VaULT Conference has been postponed until August 9 - 11.

Forest Resource Management

- ◆ The Board of Forestry oversees administration of the Reforestation of Timberlands (RT) program and provides input on the annual practice prescription rates. On March 11, the Board agreed to increase the rate for herbicide site preparation and release for white pine reforestation. VDOF will change the 2021 RT practice prescription number eight (#8) to “Herbicide Treatment by Air and Ground – White Pine”, and the rate increased to \$75 per acre.
- ◆ Successful reforestation and afforestation are strategically important to the sustainability of Virginia’s forest resource. Each year, VDOF field staff perform seedling survival inspections (“re-inspections”) to quantify success of tree planting projects. Thanks go to the field staff for all of the work involved in obtaining and reporting that information; it represents many miles of walking and sampling, often through difficult terrain, and the information is highly useful. On March 11, Todd Groh (forest resource management program coordinator) and Dean Cumbia (director of forest resource management) presented to the Board a summary of the results to date for the spring 2019 season. More than 60,000 acres of tree planting was reported in IFRIS. VDOF performed re-inspections on 323 tracts for nearly 15,000 acres. There was good survival on the vast majority, with nearly three quarters of the pine tracts having more than 400 surviving seedlings per acre. There was a concentration of failures in the southwestern Piedmont, almost all of which were planted with non-VDOF trees. There is no indication there were widespread failures or even low survival, as there was two years ago.
- ◆ Katlin DeWitt (forest health specialist) has been distributing our 25 southern pine beetle traps to area foresters. The annual spring survey begins when redbuds bloom, so approximately half of the traps have been deployed and the remaining traps will be set in the coming weeks. This survey lasts for four to five weeks and helps us predict southern pine beetle population trends within the state.
- ◆ Lori Chamberlin (forest health manager) visited a site in Albemarle County to assess declining mature loblolly pines. The thinning canopies, needle chlorosis and scattered tree mortality suggest heterobasidion root rot, which is common up to eight years after a thinning. Root samples were collected and sent to the Virginia Tech plant disease clinic for diagnosis. There is an updated publication regarding heterobasidion root rot available here:
<http://southernforesthealth.net/news/new-heterobasidion-root-disease-fidl>

Agency Lands

- ◆ Augusta Forestry Center has processed 903 orders for this year’s sales and 3.3 million seedlings have been graded to date.
- ◆ Garland Gray Forestry Center has packed a total of 25.2 million loblolly pine seedlings to date.
- ◆ Seven volunteers from Microsoft and one from Natural Capital Partners planted 1,000 loblolly pine seedlings on a tract in Mecklenburg County in conjunction with the Arbor Day seedlings that were purchased for planting in the Boydton area. Neal Oberholtzer (area forester) provided the group with information about the tract and proper planting techniques. Harvey Darden (agency lands director) also assisted with the event.
- ◆ Jerre Creighton (research program manager) planted a new loblolly pine study to assess seedling survival regarding storage in bags versus bundles. Four replications of 10-tree plots (a total of 160 seedlings per location) were installed at Garland Gray Forestry Center and Dragon Run State Forest. Two additional locations will be installed in central Virginia.

- ◆ Dennis Gaston (eastern area state forests manager) assisted with a prescribed burn on The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve.
- ◆ K9 Alert conducted search and rescue training at Sandy Point State Forest.
- ◆ Shannon Lewis (Cumberland State Forest manager) taught forest management and ecology to 25 Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN), and Harvey Darden taught the same class to 21 new members of the Historic Southside Chapter of VMN.

Central Region

- ◆ Jim McGlone (urban forest conservationist) participated in a Home Owners Association (HOA) Symposium put on by Plant NOVA Natives that was attended by more than 90 representatives of local HOAs. Jim served as an "expert exhibitor." Using VDOF's new "How to Kill a Tree" banner-up to attract attention, he talked with attendees about services VDOF offers to help HOAs manage their tree resources. Jim spoke with about 15 HOA representatives who were interested in receiving site visits and advice on managing their woodlots. He also answered forest and tree related questions during the Q&A sessions.
- ◆ Matt Hall (area forester) worked with St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary to promote hardwood growth on their property. He helped guide the parishioners to hire a forest consultant to sell some loblolly pine stands to convert to hardwoods. He also has promoted the James River Buffer Program to plant hardwoods along riparian buffers on the property.
- ◆ Rodney Newlin (water quality engineer) assisted with a SHARP Logger Core class in Courtland; approximately 20 were in attendance.

Eastern Region

- ◆ Travis Tindell (area forester) gave a presentation in the city of Hopewell for Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Bees, Trees and Clean Water event last week. He focused on how trees in an urban environment help our native pollinators and keep our water clean and urban streams healthy.
- ◆ The Capital work area team hosted a bulldozer exercise day. During the day, three part-timers assisted the team in installing fire lines at the Zoar State Forest.
- ◆ The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) and the United State Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services (USDA WS) worked together in the search for nutria in the Chickahominy River drainage recently. This was part of ongoing surveillance efforts to protect freshwater marshes north of the James River, where nutria absence is now in question after agencies confirmed a single nutria near Providence Forge, Virginia. Nutria damage wetlands by destroying vegetation, burrowing into riverbanks and dikes and contributing to erosion. These damages can have serious consequences for the health of local wetlands and the Chesapeake Bay. Pictured is the team: Briana Suskie from Virginia Wildlife Services; John Randolph and Todd Engelmeyer (DGIF), and Marnie Pepper with Canine 'Tide' and Carl Dunnock with Canine 'Encore' from the Chesapeake Bay Nutria Eradication Project out of Cambridge Maryland.
- ◆ Meghan Mulroy-Goldman (community forester) was invited to attend a tree planting at Lindenwood Elementary School in Norfolk. The event was organized by Betty Beaucom (Lindenwood Elementary and Norfolk Tree Commission) and Justin Shafer (Norfolk Water Quality and Green Infrastructure).



Steven Traylor (Norfolk City forester) was also there to help. Along with about 30 kids they planted seven fruit trees (persimmon, pear, apricot and fig). For many of the students, it was their first time planting a tree, and they all enjoyed the experience, particularly digging the holes. While they were cleaning up, Meghan asked one of the younger students if she was excited to watch the trees grow and to see the fruit on them one day. Looking at her community forester like she couldn't possibly know what she was talking about, the student replied, "They're fake. There won't be any fruit." It took some convincing, but Meghan thinks she eventually understood that we had in fact planted real trees. Meghan can't wait for the students to see the trees leaf-out this spring.

Public Information

- ◆ Two posts were published to VDOF's Field Notes:
 - [Protecting the Northern Source Longleaf](#)
 - [Teamwork on the Fan Mountain Fire](#)

News Clips

- ◆ [Schroder sponsors bill to break from Virginia law](#)