



December 7, 2020

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News from the Governor’s Desk

Premium Holiday

- ◆ Message from Governor Ralph S. Northam:

I am pleased to announce that all eligible state employees will pay no health benefits premium for the month of December! This was part of the state budget passed this fall that I signed into law on November 18. For most employees, these premium holidays will occur on December 16 and December 31, 2020, which means there will be no employee premium contribution deducted from your pay on those dates.

Participants at all membership levels in the COVA Care, COVA HDHP, COVA HealthAware, Kaiser Permanente HMO and Optima Vantage HMO plans are eligible. Because of the requirement in the Code of Virginia that TRICARE supplement participants pay the full cost of their coverage, the premium

holiday will not apply to those members.

If you have any questions, please contact your agency Benefits Administrator.

Thank you for all that you are doing during these difficult times. More than ever, Virginia State Employees are working hard on behalf of Virginians.

Happy Premium Holiday!

Sincerely,
Governor Ralph S. Northam

Employee News

Congratulations – Dave Houttekier!

- ◆ Dave Houttekier has been selected as the new Assistant Director of Operations on Fire Staff, effective November 25, 2020. Dave has an Associate's Degree in Business Administration with a minor in Accounting from Northern Virginia Community College and a Bachelor's Degree in Forest Resource Management from Virginia Tech. Dave brings 20 years of wildfire management and incident command experience to the position, having previously served in numerous agency roles in research, county and work area levels.

Transferring Work Areas

- ◆ After three years of service in southeast Virginia, Manij Upadhyay is transferring to the Mattaponi work area to fill one of the open area forester roles. Manij was previously an area forester in the Blackwater work area. Prior to his work with VDOF, Manij worked for more than 10 years as a forester in Nepal. Manij holds a Masters in Forestry from Tribhuvan University in Nepal and a four-year degree in forestry from the Institute of Forestry, Hetauda Campus, Nepal. Manij will begin his new role December 10.

Welcome to VDOF

- ◆ VDOF would like to welcome Zach Arnold, who was recently selected as an area forester in the Shenandoah work area (Central Region). Zach has a Bachelor of Science degree in Forest Resource Management from the State University of New York - Syracuse, plus 14 months of forestry-related experience in the private and federal sectors. He will begin work for the agency on December 10.
- ◆ VDOF would like to welcome Rachel Harris to our Utilization & Marketing Team as our grant-funded U&M specialist. Rachel has a B.S in Wildlife Science from Virginia Tech and a Masters of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design from West Virginia University (WVU). Rachel brings to us previous experience with WVU's Appalachian Hardwood Center and WVU Extension, as well as marketing work with the Augusta Cooperative Farm Bureau. She will begin work for the agency on December 10.
- ◆ VDOF would like to welcome Thomas (Wayne) Shinault, who has been selected as a nursery technician/seedling delivery driver for the Garland Gray Forestry Center. Thomas has 20-plus years in the trucking industry. He will begin working with the agency Dec. 10th.

Leaving VDOF

- ◆ Amy Ricotta (procurement officer) is retiring from VDOF on January 1, 2021 after 36 years of service. Congratulations, Amy – enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

- ◆ Steve Counts (emergency operations program manager) is retiring from VDOF on January 1, 2021 after 28 years of service. Congratulations, Steve – enjoy your well-deserved retirement.
- ◆ Debbie Zimniewicz (program support technician) is retiring from VDOF on January 1, 2021 after 12 years of service. Congratulations, Debbie – enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

Project Updates

Urban Wood Project Update

- ◆ Recently the Virginia Urban Wood Project participated in the National Arbor Day Foundation's Partnership in Community Forestry virtual meeting. Partnering with the Urban Wood Network (<https://urbanwoodnetwork.org/>) the Virginia Urban Wood Project helped to plan, host and also present at the National Urban Wood Academy. This five-hour event was attended by 190 participants from across the United States, Canada and Central America.

Since the webinar, the Virginia Urban Wood Project has supplied Urban Wood program development information to municipalities in Florida and Nova Scotia.

Last Week

State Forester

- ◆ The VDOF values and promotes our staff pursuing advanced college degrees and additional education while working at the agency. Besides personal development, folks who pursue degrees are more valuable employees and leaders within the agency. Often, their course work itself provides direct benefits to the agency, even while they are still pursuing the degree.
 - One significant example of this is a recent project Regional Forester Robbie Talbert completed for his Organizational Management class. Robbie is completing this course as part of the Masters in Business Administration program at Radford University. His project consisted of analyzing the agency and determining at least one significant opportunity for positive change within the organization. With his deep and broad familiarity with the agency, Robbie was able to discern there was an opportunity to better equip leadership at all levels to be more capable and more willing to lead positive change within the agency. His project developed a case for why this improvement was needed, articulated a vision that would accomplish the needed change, and laid out a plan, timeline, and cost structure that would allow us to engage everyone within the agency.
 - The agency Executive Team is considering how best to move forward with the proposal. And to answer the question you surely have in your mind – he received a grade of 100 percent on the project.
- ◆ VDOF updated a number of potential exporters of southern yellow pine (SYP) logs about the effort to end the Chinese ban on imports of SYP logs from Virginia and South Carolina, and to gauge the exporters' potential interest in shipping SYP logs to China as part of a pilot program. The exporters were asked to respond if they are interested in exporting logs following the treatment and testing protocols that have been established between Virginia, South Carolina and USDA.
- ◆ Rob Farrell participated in the initial meeting of the Sustainable Aviation Biomass Fuel Advisory Council. This group aims to provide a coordinated, collaborative effort to help drive more sustainable biomass fuel opportunities for the aviation industry utilizing forest products from the Central Appalachia region. Aviation fuel made from woody biomass could provide a tremendous opportunity for Virginia to be a leader in sustainable, carbon neutral fuels. More importantly this use of woody biomass would provide an important market for low-quality hardwood trees that need to be thinned from the forest to support Virginia's Hardwood Habitat Initiative.

- ◆ Rob Farrell participated in the Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF) fall meeting virtually. Rob currently serves as vice chair on the SGSF executive committee.

Forestland Conservation

- ◆ Lara Johnson (urban & community forestry [U&CF] program manager) and Molly O'Liddy (U&CF partnership coordinator) attended the annual state and federal U&CF program meetings virtually. Lara presented a status update on the Urban and Community Forestry economic impact analysis study throughout the southern states (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas).
- ◆ Lara Johnson and Molly O'Liddy attended the annual Arbor Day Foundation's Partners in Community Forest Conference virtually. The theme of this conference was 'Moving Forward'. Presentation topics included Urban FIA, 1 Trillion Trees Campaign, Environmental Equity, and Natural Area Management, among many others.
- ◆ Joe Lehnen (urban wood utilization forester) and Molly O'Liddy virtually attended the Urban Wood Network's National Urban Wood Academy. Joe started off the academy with shared experiences and successes from Virginia. Leaders in urban wood utilization presented on their programs, challenges and successes. Attendees included more than 200 participants from all 50 states.
- ◆ Terry Lasher (assistant state forester) hosted a State Level Coordinating Committee for Virginia's Security Corridor Sentinel Landscape application. The meeting was held in a virtual format and consisted of members and partners from across Virginia, the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry office, the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, the Secretary of Natural Resources, and our Armed Forces. The purpose of the meeting was to begin the process of identifying critical partners and goals for completing the draft application in December.
- ◆ Terry Lasher made a presentation to the Virginia Military Advisory Council regarding Virginia's efforts surrounding the Sentinel Landscape application. The meeting was attended by installation and military branch commanders from across Virginia, members of the Secretary of Natural Resources staff and Government Contractors. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the Commanders of our progress and outline future expectations and timelines.

Forest Resource Management

- ◆ In the Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA) Quarterly report to the Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF), VDOF was one of only three of the 13 southern states to meet FIA plot production and grant management targets for the quarter ending September 30, 2020. Congratulations and thank you to the entire FIA team for their good work!
- ◆ VDOF FIA crews have completed 9.3 percent of the current panel of plots, and these have been transmitted to the U.S. Forest Service for processing.
- ◆ The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) recently announced that the Virginia NRCS is accepting landowner applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) until December 18, 2020 for their 2021 program year. The EQIP is very popular among landowners and there may not be another signup for 2021. Currently, the forestry EQIP offerings are for longleaf and shortleaf pine establishment and hardwood management. VDOF foresters work closely with the NRCS field staff to manage the forestry-related projects, from preparing plans to certifying final practice completion. VDOF has a contribution agreement with the NRCS to provide technical assistance on Farm Bill Programs, so VDOF will be reimbursed for our time assisting with these projects. Therefore, it is very important for VDOF staff to record their time accurately in IFRIS. If you have questions, contact Todd Groh (forest resource management program coordinator and NRCS/VDOF forestry liaison).

Agency Lands

- ◆ Slate River reservoir reached a record-high water mark with rains received over a week ago. Mike Womack (forest management specialist) performed a survey of the dam and associated infrastructure for damage. Mike found that water went over the emergency spillway causing erosion to the backside of the emergency spillway. The dam and outlet appears to be in normal condition. The riser was still under water and not visible at time of inspection. Mike took pictures to document damage, notified Peter Francisco Soil and Water Conservation District (PFSWCD), and sent them pictures. (Note: the PFSWCD is responsible for maintenance of the dam and associated infrastructure) This is the first time that water went over the emergency spillway since the reservoir was built 25 to 30 years ago.
- ◆ Mike Womack had to cut and move multiple trees blocking roads on Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest and made repairs to the fords on Rinehart and Glover forest roads to make them passable. Mike completed surveying damage to roads with one bridge damaged that will need repair. All creek fords will need work to remove piled-up sand and grade approaches, one concrete low-water crossing needs repair, and several forest roads need repair by grading and gravel application.
- ◆ A group from Pennsylvania came with Corey Green Forest Modeling Research Cooperative (FMRC) Research Associate from Virginia Tech (VT). The group is going to conduct below-the-canopy Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) flights on eight of the VT Intensively Managed Plantation (IMP) thinning study plots at Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest and Prince Edward State Forest to collect stem profile data. Mike Womack, Rodney Newlin and Jim Pugh met them to observe and discuss their program.
- ◆ Mike Womack facilitated the National Wildfire Coordinating Group Ground Ignition Subcommittee virtual meeting last week. Mike currently serves as chair of that subcommittee.
- ◆ Jerre Creighton (research program manager) and Ellen Powell (conservation education coordinator) met with Walter Hussey of Fluvanna Parks and Recreation to discuss a chestnut planting for demonstration/education purposes at Pleasant Grove Park near Palmyra. Mr. Hussey is on the advisory board for Fluvanna Parks and Recreation and is also a Master Naturalist and Master Gardener who has been working on the meadow management program at Pleasant Grove. The plan will be to establish 25 to 30 hybrid chestnuts from VDOF's Lesesne State Forest breeding orchards beginning next spring.
- ◆ Jerre Creighton and Katlin Dewitt (forest health specialist) met with consulting forester Paul Haney and management staff and board members from the Morven property to review and discuss the pine decline symptoms experienced in several post-thin 40-year-old loblolly pine stands.
- ◆ Jerre Creighton spent Monday and Tuesday at Prince Edward State Forest working with Corey Green of the FMRC to install the first location of the new study to gather data for projecting growth and yield of thinned loblolly pine stands that receive either fertilizer or competition control (or both) after thinning. We located, monumented, tagged and stem mapped four plots in a stand that was thinned last February. This was a pilot effort to test the study protocol and provide information for discussions at FMRC's upcoming annual meeting on December 3.

State-Owned Lands

- ◆ Ed Stoots (state lands coordinator), Jerre Creighton, Dean Cumbia (director of forest resource management), Denny McCarthy (area forester) and Todd Groh assessed two hardwood stands at Catawba Hospital for potential harvest demonstration plots. An approach involving adjacent small (two-acre) areas demonstrating five silvicultural strategies will be proposed to the facility administrators.

Central Region

- ◆ Derek Keiser (water quality specialist) coordinated and led a virtual training session for half of the Central Region regarding Virginia's Timber Theft regulations, agency procedures, and responsibilities of VDOF employees related to timber theft. Thirty-seven employees attended. Another session was held on November 24 for the remaining employees in the region.
- ◆ Chuck Wright (area forester) along with Master Naturalist Walter Hussey made a presentation to the Fluvanna Board of Supervisors (BOS) regarding the benefits of beginning an early successional management program at Pleasant Grove, the county's largest park. At the conclusion of the presentation the BOS adopted the recommendations to begin a prescribed burning program in the park and agreed to enlist VDOF services to plan and execute the prescribed burns. The first burn is planned for early 2021.
- ◆ Drew Arnn (senior area forester) participated in a Virtual Career Day at Brosville Elementary School in Pittsylvania County. A copy of the video compilation regarding his presentation can be found via the following link: <https://flipgrid.com/+glass8432/5fec7a3d>
- ◆ Jordan Herring (senior area forester) led an online workshop on winter tree issues and maintenance for residents of Purcellville. The workshop touched on common winter tree injuries and ways to prevent them from occurring.
- ◆ Kinner Ingram (urban & community forester) led the annual hunt meeting for the Conway Robinson and Whitney State Forests with the assistance of Jordan Herring, Joe Rossetti (senior area foresters), and Jim McGlone (urban forest conservationist). The meeting educated the chosen hunters on why we hold annual hunts on our state forests, hunting safety guidelines and protocols, and general day-of-the-hunt logistics. Two biologists from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources spoke at the meeting about chronic wasting disease and the regulations regarding the transportation of deer carcasses.
- ◆ Jim McGlone worked with the Fairfax County Forest Pest Branch and Fairfax County Extension to present a virtual workshop on oak decline syndrome. Despite a few technical glitches, the program was well received. About 250 people participated, and the question and answer period lasted for almost an hour.

Western Region

- ◆ Many thanks to our firefighters in the Western Region who have spent many long hours recently safeguarding the lives and property of our citizenry. It only goes to prove that in this part of the State vertical topography and high winds supersede rainfall. A special "shout-out" and thanks to the six members of the Eastern Region Fire Crew (Warren Coburn, Lisa Deaton, Clint Phegley [area foresters], Jack Colyer, Kevin Dodson [forest technicians] and Steve Coleman [water quality specialist]) who spent five days away from home assisting regional crews with multiple large fires in Buchanan County. Local media coverage of these fires can be found at: [Weather conditions fueling multiple wildfires across Southwest Virginia.](#)

Public Information

- ◆ Raina DeFonza (public information coordinator) has been supporting the SGSF Communications Committee and Healthy Trees Healthy Lives (HTHL) by writing content for the HTHL website. This recent article was written by Raina: <https://healthytreeshealthylives.org/stories/visualizing-trees-as-a-public-health-solution>

News Clips

- ◆ [Weather conditions fueling multiple wildfires across Southwest Virginia](#)
- ◆ [Evergreen Packaging Wins AF&PA's 2020 Leadership In Sustainability Award](#)
- ◆ [OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS REENERGIZE KIDS DURING THE PANDEMIC](#)
- ◆ [EXPLORING THE MATTAPONI RIVER](#)
- ◆ [Virginia Dept. of Forestry: 2 wildfires active in Buchanan County](#)
- ◆ [What's Happening on America's Lands, Soils, and Waters?](#)
- ◆ [The Vast Impact of the Forest Landowner](#)
- ◆ [Virginia's Fact Sheet](#)
- ◆ [Trees and plants could become new additives in 'light' food products](#)
- ◆ [The futuristic cargo ship made of wood](#)
- ◆ ["Forests and livelihoods: sustaining people and planet" announced as theme of World Wildlife Day 2021](#)
- ◆ [Dublin Volunteer Fire Department acquires MHCV](#)
- ◆ [The Algernonne Oak, Fort Monroe's nearly 500-year-old tree, gets a little TLC](#)
- ◆ [The World's largest smiley is in the forest](#)
- ◆ [Documentary 'Mr Besley's Forest' centers on conservation pioneer](#)
- ◆ [Conservation Corner: Forest Health and Pine Beetles](#)
- ◆ [Family of late Jay Reese honored with top award](#)
- ◆ [As solar farms multiply across Virginia, officials reckon with land use challenges](#)