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Employee Spotlight

Congratulations – Justin Barnes

- ◆ Justin Barnes (deputy regional forester) has been selected as the VMN Chapter Advisor of the Year. <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/home/recognizing-our-vmn-2021-statewide-award-winners>
- The Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) program is a statewide corps of volunteers providing education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. Interested Virginians become Master Naturalists through training and volunteer service. Each chapter has an advisor, a local representative from one of the program’s seven sponsoring state agencies. The Virginia Master Naturalist Program is jointly sponsored by, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Conservation and

Recreation, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, the Virginia Museum of Natural History and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's Center for Coastal Resources Management. The program is based in the [Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation](#) within the [College of Natural Resources and Environment](#) at [Virginia Tech](#).

- The VDOF provides advisors to seven VMN chapters; Justin Barnes, Central Blue Ridge Chapter; Bill Perry, Central Virginia Chapter; Jim McGlone, Fairfax Chapter; Jack Kauffman, Old Rag Chapter; Meghan Mulroy-Goldman, Peninsula Chapter; Ellen Powell, Rivanna Chapter; and Kathleen Ogilvy, Riverine Chapter.

Employee News

Continued Operations in a COVID-19 Environment

- ◆ As we enter our second month of 2022, we still find ourselves combating the impact of COVID-19 in our daily lives. In our professional setting (state employment), with the issuance of the new administration's [Executive Directive #2](#) (1.15.22), we are no longer required to disclose our vaccination status or submit to weekly testing. This newest directive builds on the previous administration's directive's amendments (5.28.21), which ended the statewide mask mandate for the vaccinated and highly encouraged mask wearing for the unvaccinated, per CDC situational guidance. Moreover, another program implemented during the height of the pandemic allowed for state employees to use Public Health Emergency Leave or PHEL under generous guidelines. In this context, we wanted to highlight our employees' responsibilities moving forward, to protect each other in alignment with updated CDC guidelines and eligibility for PHEL use under new/more restrictive guidelines.

VDOF Moving Forward

Face coverings (masks) are not required in the workplace -- EXCEPT --

- ◆ When their strict use is required in order to abide by VDOF ["New! CDC Isolation and Quarantine Guidance"](#) (published 1.10.220 via our weekly Branch); **OR**
- ◆ When Agency/Regional Leadership determines that their use is warranted for the protection of employees attending meetings, activities or events, in which lack of social distancing and volume of personnel in an enclosed setting increases the propensity of infection/virus spread (*ALL VDOF in attendance may be required to wear face coverings regardless of vaccination status*).

All employees are free to wear a mask as their personal choice to increase their level of protection for themselves and others.

PHEL Approval and Use

- ◆ 40 Hours maximum for full-time staff for the Jan 10, 2022 - Jan 9, 2023 leave year).
 - Part-time staff may be authorized at 50% prorating based on worked hours per week: e.g., an employee who works a 32-hour week is authorized 16 hours of PHEL per week, with an overall allotment that cannot exceed 20 hours per year.
- ◆ **VDOF Office of Human Resources is the only approving authority for PHEL use.**
 - Email all requests to hro@dof.virginia.gov (with CC to your supervisor), and **attach proof** of a positive COVID-19 test result.
 - If the test is a PCR or from a medical provider, submit a copy of results depicting the employee's name as the patient.

- If the test is a Rapid Test or at-home test, place driver's license/VDOF ID next to results and take a picture attesting the test belongs to you.
- ◆ Supervisors may provide input on telework capability.
- ◆ Once the 40 hour allotment of PHEL is used, employees will need to use appropriate and available personal leave balances for any prolonged effects and/or new infection, as traditionally done for another illness.

Safe Practices

- ◆ Maximize use of hand sanitation stations and regular hand washing;
 - Facilities' teams - please keep our sanitation stations operational and filled up!
- ◆ Leaders should ensure communal/meeting spaces are constantly monitored and sanitized.
- ◆ Stay vigilant and don't be afraid to use any or all available mitigation techniques to protect yourself and others.

Coming Up

Hardwood Diseases Webinar – February 23

- ◆ A webinar on hardwood diseases, presented by Dr. Ellen Crocker and hosted by Southern Regional Extension Forestry's Forest Health Program, will be offered February 23 at 1pm. Register and join here: <https://forestrywebinars.net/webinars/hardwood-diseases>

4PM Signs

- ◆ It will soon be time to switch our roadside signs to display the 4 PM message. Everyone is encouraged to replace any signs of poor quality, and to give all signs a good cleaning. At the current time, the only replacement signs available are at the regional or some county offices. If a replacement Fire Danger sign is needed, fire staff does have a limited supply of the older style sign, available by reaching out to [Fred Turck](#) for any needs.
 - Anyone needing the new style of 4pm road signs should pass your needs to your Regional Fire Specialist, who can consolidate a regional need, then share with Fred.
 - Contact Fred with any questions or other 4pm sign needs.

Project Updates

Policy and Procedures

- ◆ [Policy and Procedure 1-5 Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems](#) has been updated to add the IGNIS drone and the pilot list.

Commonwealth of Virginia 457 Plan

- ◆ VRS has recently launched a communication campaign to increase the awareness of and promote savings through the Commonwealth of Virginia 457 Deferred Compensation Plan, a valuable benefit available to employees. As part of the campaign, postcards were mailed to employees who are eligible for, but not participating in, the 457 Plan. (Postcards were not sent to employees in the Hybrid Retirement Plan.) The postcard also highlights some of the other resources available through VRS, like [myVRS Financial Wellness](#) and [Certified Financial Planning services](#).
- Should you have any questions, please email DCPlans@varetire.org.

Last Week

State Forester

- ◆ Rob Farrell, Ed Zimmer (deputy state forester), Terry Lasher (assistant state forester), and John Colligan (chief of administration) participated in the Legislative Day on the Hill sponsored by Virginia Forestry Association, Virginia Forest Products Association, and the Virginia Loggers Association. The forestry community very much appreciated hearing from Secretary Lohr, Secretary Wheeler, and multiple legislators.

Fire and Emergency Response


- ◆ On January 25, all four of the VDOF's Incident Management Teams (IMTs) participated in a wildfire-based training exercise. The exercise was designed to allow each team to manage the response and suppression of a simulated large wildfire event impacting the area around the Wintergreen resort. The simulation included suppression of a large wildfire during extreme weather, evacuation operations, working with other response cooperators, and a simulated small plane crash incident within an incident. The exercise allowed the four teams to practice their incident management skills, including the preparation of an incident accident plan, logistical support of large agency incidents, and the ability to test agency dispatch and communication systems. The success of the exercise highlighted the VDOF's strength in emergency incident management and helped to increase the readiness of VDOF's incident management personnel ahead of Virginia's spring 2022 wildfire season.

Forestland Conservation

- ◆ The Utilization and Marketing Team (UMT) continued planning the details for the mass timber event. The team has secured a space at Omni Hotel in Charlottesville to host the event at the end of July 2022. Speakers are all confirmed and the new CLT Apex building tour is confirmed as well. The team continues to work on developing learning objectives for the mass timber seminar to get American Architect Institute continued education units for attendees, which is important to promote the event among the target audience.
- ◆ The UMT is working to host a Carbon Forest Seminar in Staunton on June 1, 2022. The team is in the process of confirming speakers for the event, the venue has been tentatively picked, and the agenda is under development. More information will follow as details are finalized.
- ◆ The VA Firewood Business Development Workshop is set for Thursday, May 5 at Taylor Recreation Park in Ashland.
- ◆ Jack Kauffman (forest management specialist) and Sarah Parmelee (forestland conservation coordinator) represented VDOF and the Conway Robinson State Forest at the Prince William County Community Open House and public meeting, concerning a proposed zoning change that would open

up the Rural Crescent adjacent to the Conway Robinson and the Manassas National Battlefield Park for potential development for data centers.

Forest Resource Management

- ◆ The “Hardwood Class of ‘22” with fifteen VDOF foresters began training on January 25 with a one-day session on hardwood regeneration, wildlife management, and degraded stand management. The Forest Resource Management Branch provided the training using a unique format - foresters gathered at their regional offices in groups of five and connected virtually for discussion after each session. Two of the topics utilized recorded webinars from the U. S. Forest Service’s Bent Creek, NC Experimental Station training. The presentations are available for anyone to view at <https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/uplandhardwood/courses-and-webinars/virtual-workshop/#course>
 - The final session on degraded stand management was presented live by Dr. Jeffrey Stringer from the University of Kentucky, who is also a leader of the multi-state White Oak Initiative.
 - A second training session for the Class of ‘22 is planned for May. These 15 foresters will join the existing 21 foresters in delivering the Hardwood Habitat Incentive Program in support of the Hardwood Forest Habitat Initiative.
- ◆ On January 26, Jerre Creighton (research program manager), Mike Womack (state forests forester), Ian Morris (state forests technician), and Joe Rossetti (hardwood forest habitat initiative coordinator) reviewed existing projects on the Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest. Of particular note was a Crop Tree Release demonstration installed in 2005 by State Forest staff in a young hardwood stand. One question of concern was whether released trees of stump sprout origin would exhibit stem decay as a result of the rotting stump or cut stems adjacent to the crop tree. No evidence of decay was found at the height where a harvester would normally cut the tree. Pictured is a yellow-poplar for which a double stem was removed using crop tree release in 2005. The remaining stem was cut in 2022 to check for stem rot, and none was found at the height of the cut.
- ◆ On January 27, Matt Wolanski (senior area forester), Cain Harbison (area forester), Jack Kauffman and Joe Rossetti visited stands on First Mountain State Forest and Paul State Forest in Rockingham County to assess them for Crop Tree Release demonstration sites. A 10-acre stand on First Mountain had been severely high-graded before VDOF acquired the land, but has regenerated well with desirable trees. However, the remnant residual overstory trees pose a challenge by stunting the regeneration. A 28-acre stand on the Paul State Forest received a crop tree release some years ago, and while now older, would benefit from another treatment.
- ◆ Todd Groh (forest resource management program manager) met with the Dabney Lancaster Community College's Forestry Capstone class to discuss the VDOF and landowner assistance. These students are in their final year of a Forest Management Technology Associates of Applied Science degree and will soon be looking for employment. Todd also informed the students of the opportunities for working with the Virginia Department of Forestry. Associate Professor Billy Newman indicated that Dabney Lancaster graduates usually have many private and public sector employment opportunities, from the US Forest Service and VDOF to private tree care companies across Virginia.

- ◆ Katlin DeWitt (forest health specialist) virtually attended a Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) Working Group meeting hosted by Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). This group shares SLF updates and management strategies, and consists of VCE agents, Master Naturalists, and staff from Virginia Tech, local government, and state agencies. Katlin presented and discussed the SLF efforts at VDOF.
- ◆ Lori Chamberlin (forest health manager) attended the Southern Group of State Foresters Forest Health Committee meeting in Lexington, KY. State and federal forest health program staff shared information about emerging pests, new grant requirements, technology for monitoring forest disturbances, and funding opportunities.

Agency Lands

- ◆ The Sussex nursery has graded a total of 5,074,000 seedlings, which is 22% of this year's crop. There have been some delays in lifting due to weather.
- ◆ Ones Bitoki (tree improvement forester) visited the Appomattox - Buckingham pine seed orchards and assessed damage from the recent winter storms. There is substantial branch breakage in the older blocks and moderate damage in others.

State Forest

- ◆ Staff attended the Prince William Digital Gateway public comment meeting and responded to public inquiry regarding VDOF comments on the project, which is adjacent to the Conway Robinson State Forest.
- ◆ The State Forest received a \$5,000 donation from Wendy Illick, a citizen and her husband who live in Arvada, CO, to be used on the Conway Robinson State Forest. As they explained in their gift:
 - "My husband and I are interested in making a \$5000 donation to support Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest, which provided respite and comfort for us when we lived in the area several years ago... As much as we love Virginia and all its natural resources, we'd love a way to contribute directly to maintenance, upkeep, or educational materials specifically at this forest... We used to live and work around Manassas and in Fauquier County, but are now living outside of Denver, Colorado. For me, as a Colorado native transplanted outside of DC, I treasured any little oasis available in the Northern Virginia area. I also care that forest management research and education continue in every region."

Central Region

- ◆ Michael Downey, Chuck Wright (area foresters) and Cameron Lipscomb (forest technician) spoke at the Annual Louisa Officers Summit held at the Palmyra Volunteer Fire Department Station 1 on January 25. The discussion of topics focused on strategies and tactics used for Wildland Urban Interface, a great gateway for the upcoming spring fire season.
- ◆ David Powell (senior area forester) and Michael Downey attended the Appalachian Society of American Foresters (APSAF) Centennial Winter Meeting in Asheville, NC.

Eastern Region

- ◆ Lisa Deaton (area forester) shared a presentation on "Coastal Oaks: Live Oak & Cherrybark Oak" with 20 members of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society. The group learned about the characteristics of both species, their potential as a coastal yard tree, and VDOF's efforts to start a "northern seed source" live oak seed orchard at Garland Gray Forestry Center with acorns collected from Mathews County.

- ◆ The Tidewater Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) presented a Forestry Best Management Practice (BMP) Award to John Elkin at their Annual Awards Banquet. Mr. Elkin is a very active forest manager of two properties that border large tidal streams in Gloucester County, and the VDOF has assisted him in many of his efforts. Mr. Elkin requested management plans for these properties as soon as he purchased them. He has conducted numerous timber harvests over the past 17 years, leaving 81 out of his 338 acres to serve as riparian buffers. He has worked hard to establish 16 acres of longleaf pine, a 1-acre sugar maple grove, a 1-acre shagbark hickory stand, and he has conducted numerous loblolly pine management practices over the years. He is also a beekeeper and a Virginia Certified Prescribed Burning Manager.
- ◆ Meghan Mulroy-Goldman (community forester) and Scott Bachman (senior area forester) virtually attended the January Hickory High School environmental club meeting. Mike Andruczyk, Extension Agent for the City of Chesapeake, also participated. The students were interested in the steps to becoming a natural resources professional and the skills to focus on during their high school education to be successful in higher education. The students in the club have also been working with Meghan and Mike to plan future tree planting opportunities on the campus. Meghan presented a short PowerPoint on what to include on their proposal to the school administration to make their planting a reality.

News Clips

- ◆ [Baker: The plight of the American Chestnut tree](#)
- ◆ [This 1882 surveying error saved a patch of forest from logging](#)
- ◆ [Camps help kids explore the great outdoors](#)
- ◆ [Woodgrain reports on work taking place at Marion plant](#)
- ◆ [Dept. of Forestry Provides Guidance When Burning Storm Debris](#)