



August 22, 2022

Upcoming Events

[Generation NEXT – Southside – August 26 - 27](#)

[VDOF/ACF meeting – September 1](#)

[Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat – Southeast Virginia – September 9 - 10](#)

- ◆ VDOF announces the annual [Beginning Woodland Owners' Retreat](#) for Eastern Virginia landowners new to forest land ownership or forest management. The event will be held on September 9-10 at the VDOF New Kent Conference Center near Providence Forge. Sponsored by VDOF, Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program, the retreat will include pine-focused forest management, timber sales, wildlife habitat improvement, tree identification and more. A tour of local properties will showcase forest management in action.

[2022 Fall Virtual Certified Prescribed Burn Managers Course – September 26 - 29](#)

Employee Spotlight

- ◆ Rod Newlin received the following message from a local citizen that VDOF recently visited regarding a potential logging complaint, which was handled by Tyler Hill (forest technician) and Rod Newlin (water quality engineer).
 - "Hello, and update from Fox Mountain Road. Last week, we had a quick 0.5" of rain and the attached photo shows the drainage from the state road, just as you suggested it would be (gushing). So today I cleared the two flow-diversions upslope. Hopefully, it will help. I wanted to reiterate how much I appreciate your prompt and thorough attention to this concern. You went above-and-beyond to help me (and the creek). Thank you for doing your job so very well! It matters!"

Employee News

Leaving VDOF

- ◆ Sarah Ferk, New Kent Conference Center coordinator has left the agency. She was offered a full time teaching position that she couldn't pass up. Until a conference center coordinator can be rehired, NKFC conference center will be managed through the Eastern Regional office.

Fire and Emergency Response Branch Reorganization

- ◆ Recent retirements and the need to incorporate several programmatic changes is resulting in a number of changes to the agency's Fire and Emergency Response Branch (FERB).

- Dave Houttekier will continue in his current role on the FERB as the Assistant Director – Operations. Dave’s primary responsibilities include directing of agency fire suppression and emergency response operations, managing the Dry Hydrant and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant programs, leading VICC coordination and out of state deployments, leading the agency Incident Qualification System (IQS) program, and guiding agency efforts in employee qualifications and credentials.
- Jason Braunstein now serves on the FERB as the Assistant Director – Planning. In this new role, Jason becomes the new agency UAV/Drone Program Coordinator, serves as the FiResponse program manager, serves as the FERB’s lead for overall Incident Management Team development, coordinates the Certified Prescribed Burn Manager program, and continues in his GIS support role for the agency.
- Keith Brown now serves on the FERB as the agency Radio/Communications Specialist. Keith moves to the FERB while continuing his previous job duties of agency radio/communications support, support of office internet/phone/technology, agency lead for the STARs radio system, and communications liaison with the Virginia State Police. Keith’s move to the FERB helps to better highlight the key role he plays in supporting the agency’s emergency response functions.
- Danny Fortune will continue in his current role as the Agency Equipment Manager. In this role, Danny provides program management of agency vehicles and equipment, the voyager gas card program, new equipment purchasing, and management of the Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) and Firefighter Property Program (FEP).
- Carl Belew will continue in his role as the shop manager for the Headquarters maintenance shop.
- Sandy Mills will continue in her role as the Administrative Coordinator for the FERB. In addition to her support of all FERB program areas, Sandy coordinates all of the pass-through grants for the FERB, and now handles the processing of Riparian Buffer Tax Credits and logger Failure to Notify processing at the HQ level.
- *Currently vacant:* FERB Assistant Director – Wildfire Mitigation and Prevention. This position serves as the program manager for the agency’s Wildfire Hazard Mitigation, Firewise, and Wildfire Prevention programs, provides coordination of the new federal infrastructure bill funding, and assists with the coordination of the regional fire specialists. *Note:* This position was advertised on August 17 for internal agency candidates.
- *New position:* Agency Safety/Compliance/Fire Training Officer – Plans are in the works to establish a new agency Safety and Compliance officer. This position will provide a more focused approach to safety in all aspects of agency operations. This position will also provide direction for FERB-related training efforts and will serve as the program manager for agency training and certification related to First-Aid/CPR certification, Commercial Driver’s Licensing, and other certifications and standards required of VDOF personnel. The current plan is to advertise this position for internal and external applicants over the next 30 – 60 days.

Project Updates

Policy and Procedures

- ◆ The Forestland Conservation Program has made minor adjustments to the agency policy regarding [Policy and Procedures 10-2 Open Space Easement Monitoring](#). Most importantly, we’ve indicated that when completing field monitoring reports associated with field visits to easement properties (which we do during even-numbered calendar years), people who participated in the site visit should enter their **full names** in the report in IFRIS (as opposed to, for example, just "watershed stewardship specialist.") We’ve also made a clarification regarding deadlines and procedures for submitting Land Owner Questionnaires, the monitoring tool used in odd-numbered calendar years.

News You Can Use

Waynesboro Tree Care Workshop

- ◆ Registration is open for the Waynesboro Tree Care Workshop being held on September 16, 2022. Agenda and program specifics can be found here: <https://treesvirginia.org/events/paid/142-2022-waynesboro-workshop>. The U&CF Program has funds to cover registration for up to 10 staff to attend the event. Please get approval from your supervisor and email Becky Woodson (becky.woodson@dof.virginia.gov) to get registered.

Last Week

Virginia Firefighter Deployment Update

- ◆ VDOF's third rotation of 16 firefighters finished activities on the Pine Pond fire near Bastrop, Texas last weekend. This week, a new engine crew departed for Fredericksburg to replace personnel currently on the ground assisting with wildfire control. The Texas Forest Service has expressed appreciation for Virginia's work with ongoing drought conditions.

Virginia Loggers Association Annual Meeting

- ◆ State Forester Rob Farrell, Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer and staff attended the Virginia Loggers Association Annual Meeting in Williamsburg last week. The Virginia Loggers Association is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to education, training, and raising awareness about the forest products industry. Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matt Lohr kicked off the meeting and shared several items on the Governor's agenda of interest to the group, including potential alterations to the Virginia Clean Energy Act to allow for biomass and the government-wide effort to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses. The event included informative industry sessions, association awards, and partner networking. Friday evening, Farrell was the keynote speaker and discussed the critical role every segment of the forestry community plays in providing beneficial impacts to the Commonwealth. Matt Poirot (pictured at left with Ed Zimmer) was honored for his four decades of service during the annual meeting of the Virginia Loggers Association in Williamsburg last week.



Virginia Farm Bureau Forestry Committee

- ◆ State Forester Rob Farrell participated in the Virginia Farm Bureau forestry committee policy meeting held in conjunction with a tour of the Speyside Bourbon Cooperage in Atkins.

Chesapeake Bay Commission

- ◆ State Forester Rob Farrell was invited to present to the Virginia Delegation retreat meeting in Onancock, along with Corey Connors of the Virginia Forestry Association. The discussion focused on carbon sequestration potential of Virginia's trees and forests, the significant role that the forest currently plays in carbon sequestration and storage, as well as issues impacting landowners and the forests' potential carbon benefits.

Agency Database Transition

- ◆ VDOF staff and leadership participated in a kickoff meeting with the ESRI project team that will be working on the first phase of transitioning the agency's custom integrated forest resource information system (IFRIS) database. The first phase will include developing an entire IFRIS database structure, as well as completing the transition of the timber harvest inspection element. IFRIS was first developed nearly 20 years ago and has been expanded multiple times. ESRI is a world leader in geographic information systems, and this project is intended to move VDOF to the industry-standard platform.

Statewide Hurricane Response Exercise

- ◆ VDOF participated in a statewide hurricane response exercise hosted by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). Staff covered the emergency support function four (or ESF-4, firefighting) at the state Emergency Operations Center in Richmond and provided agency resources in support of a state-level emergency. VDEM used the exercise to test a new Commonwealth hurricane response plan, a significant portion of which was prepared by VDOF.

Forest Productivity Research Cooperative Annual Meeting

- ◆ VDOF staff attended the annual meeting of the Forest Productivity Research Cooperative in Raleigh, North Carolina. Updates were presented on research being conducted by this international effort. VDOF is a sustaining member of the co-op and several of the research projects have occurred on our state forests. Ongoing studies include fertilization and stand density, precision thinning based on drone imagery, predicting tree growth using LiDAR, and nitrogen fertilizer use by pines and competing vegetation in mid-rotation pine stands. New projects include effects of the soil microbiome on tree productivity and carbon sequestration, and development of a forest carbon budget including roots and final products such as boards, paper, etc.

North American Biochar and Bioenergy Conference

- ◆ VDOF staff attended the North American Biochar and Bioenergy conference in Morgantown, West Virginia. Approximately 200 people attended the event, which included informative sessions on emerging markets for biochar products, presentations covering the industry outlook by speakers from around the world, as well as professional networking with experts from around the U.S. on future Virginia biochar grant objectives. Biochar is a solid material produced by thermal decomposition of organic material (biomass such as wood, manure or leaves) under limited supply of oxygen at relatively low temperatures. Biochar can be used as an amendment to improve soil functions and reduce emissions from biomass that would otherwise naturally degrade to greenhouse gases.

Urban Heat Island Planting Project

- ◆ VDOF staff met with representatives from Marymount University and Arlington County to discuss potential planting locations for an urban heat island focused planting project. Urban heat islands occur when natural land areas are covered with dense concentrations of pavement, buildings or other surfaces that absorb and retain heat. Heat islands often result in higher energy costs, increased air pollution and heat-related illness.

Fire and Emergency Response

- ◆ Jason Braunstein served as the VDOF's representative on the state hazard mitigation steering committee. The committee, which is chaired by Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), has formulated a new state level plan to guide response and recovery efforts for all types of county and state level emergencies.

- ◆ Dave Houttekier and Jason Braunstein served as the agency representatives at the recent Virginia State Firefighters Association convention in Hampton. They provided an agency exhibit in the main exhibit hall and taught one class focused on wildland fire suppression in Virginia's woodland home communities.

Forestland Conservation

- ◆ The VDOF Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) program received plot materials and computer files from the USDA Forest Service (USFS) Southern Research Station for the 2022 Urban FIA field season and began contacting impacted homeowners. These plots are located in northern Virginia counties and utilize the USFS "iTree" program to assess vegetation in non-forest or urban settings. This data will allow researchers to describe the condition of trees within the Washington Metro area, as well as their contribution to air quality, reductions in energy usage, absorption and storage of carbon, contribution to privacy and noise reduction, and added property value. FIA field staff plan to begin field data collection during the week of August 15.
- ◆ Rachel Harris (utilization & marketing (U&M) specialist) is researching and drafting an outreach publication for workforce development for the forest industry that can reach non-standard audiences, as well as considering projects for the final stages of the industry roundtable grant.
- ◆ Rachel Harris has submitted a draft of the final report for the Hardwood SRTS grant to the USDA Forest Service. When the draft is approved the grant will officially be submitted as complete.
- ◆ Sabina Dhungana (U & M program manager) attended the Virginia Loggers Association annual meeting in Williamsburg, where she attended informative industry sessions, networked with partners, and assisted at the VDOF booth display.
- ◆ Sabina Dhungana connected with Chad Shelton (Shelton Logging, Inc.) to assist with a prospect business visit to Virginia to analyze sites, resource availability, and with other manufacturing needs. Sabina and Chad will be providing forest resource availability and logging capacity information to the potential investor.

Forest Resource Management

- ◆ The newly formed Forest Sustainability Fund Steering Committee held its first meeting on August 10 at VDOF HQ in Charlottesville. The committee was formed in response to the establishment of the fund by the 2022 session of the General Assembly and is composed of commissioners of revenue and staff from a sample of counties across the state. The fund was established to help localities with forest land use taxation recover some of the tax revenue forgone due to this type of taxation and thereby encourage counties to maintain this option for landowners. VDOF will administer the fund (\$1 million this year) and the committee will provide assistance to develop guidelines for its use. Dean Cumbia (director forest resource management), Todd Groh (forest resource management program manager), and Becky Woodson (forest management programs coordinator) coordinated and led the meeting.
- ◆ The State Land Use Evaluation Advisory Council (SLEAC) met at VDOF HQ on August 10. SLEAC provides suggested land use values to be used by the approximately 77 localities that have forest use value taxation. Local taxes based upon use of the land rather than fair market value typically result in lower taxes and resulting costs for forest landowners, which assists them in holding and conserving land for the long periods required for forest growth. Dean Cumbia and Todd Groh represented VDOF at the meeting and presented the proposed 2023 forest land use values. The values showed an average of 27% increase over last year, due largely to higher inflation as well as higher prices for hardwood timber. Long-term investments, like forestry, are quite sensitive to interest rates, including inflation.

- ◆ Lori Chamberlin (forest health program manager), Katlin DeWitt (forest health specialist) and Lara Johnson (U&CF program manager) travelled to Hollywood, SC to attend an Asian longhorned beetle workshop hosted by Clemson University Extension. The Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) is an invasive wood-boring beetle that feeds on a wide variety of hosts but has not yet been found in Virginia. Before being discovered in SC in 2020, other infestations were known to be in Ohio, New York, and Massachusetts. The workshop provided in-depth information about this beetle's biology, control and eradication efforts, and field trips to infested locations to see signs of damage. ALB has a high potential to be a serious threat to urban and forest trees, particularly maples, so early detection and eradication efforts are important. (Pictured)



Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)

- ◆ A second timber sale has been posted as a part of the Ewing Mountain GNA located in Grayson County - a part of the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The Brush Creek Units 22 & 29 Timber Sale consists of 31 acres (approximately 275,000 board feet) of mostly white pine. Bid opening is September 7.

State Forests

- ◆ A contracting crew is preparing to start aerial site prep operations on the State Forests. While doing treatment mainly for pine reforestation, two sites (one on Sandy Point and one on Cumberland) will be sprayed with a different mix to see if we can get some hardwood control / release of oaks on the stands.

Eastern Region

- ◆ John Rose (forest technician) and Stephen Jasenak (area forester) hosted around a dozen children at the Rescue Camp for Kids associated with the recently completed First Responders of Virginia Conference in Hampton. The students were shown VDOF trucks and fire gear and the Eastern Brush Truck. The students even got to operate a hose from the brush truck. They competed to use the water to knock over traffic cones in the shortest amount of time. John and Stephen had a great time and even stayed dry!
- ◆ The Blackwater work area staffed a booth at the Southampton County Fair. Kendall Topping (community forestry specialist), Stephen Jasenak (area forester), and Scott Bachman (senior area forester) all took a shift at the four day event after John Rose set up the display and opened the fair. Visitors were able to play the Smokey Plinko game and get information about fire prevention as well as forest management information.

Western Region

- ◆ Headwaters forest technicians Collin Sapp and Emily Wotton introduced Bill Sweeney (watershed stewardship specialist) to the Clinch Valley Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) team, to discuss partnerships that will lead to projects aimed at increasing riparian buffer plantings in southwest Virginia. Bill and Sarah Parmelee (forestland conservation coordinator) met with the entire

Headwaters and Clinch work areas the next morning to monitor VDOF's largest conservation easement. The Highlands easement covers 22,000 acres in beautiful Russell County, and truly requires a team effort to monitor the easement properly.

- ◆ Daniel Cloeter (area forester) and Bill Sweeney participated in the 2022 NWTF Franklin County Longbeards' Jakes Day at Franklin County's Recreation Park. Jakes events are held for children aged 17 and under to help build their connection to outdoor recreation and our abundant natural resources. Dan and Bill's booths focused on forest health and fire prevention, and had ample Smokey Bear giveaways for the children.
- ◆ Andrew Vinson (water quality specialist), Johnny Vest (natural resource specialist), Tristan Vest (forest technician) and Andrew Fotinos (forest conservation specialist) represented the Virginia Department of Forestry with a booth at Blacksburg's 41st Annual Steppin' Out town festival. Despite heavy rains both days, over 600 attendees stopped by the booth to talk forestry and pick up some Smokey Bear handouts. Employees were able to answer many questions on forest management, wildfire prevention, invasive species, water quality, careers in forestry, and the services that VDOF provides to the Commonwealth.
- ◆ David Bryan, Erin Perry (forest technicians) and Kevin Keith (senior area forester) spoke to two classes of High School Students at the Henry County Career Academy. David & Erin talked to the students about the duties of the Forest Technician and Kevin talked about the duties of an Area Forester. Students spend ½ day at their local high school and the other ½ day at the career academy to learn about farming, forestry, veterinary science, and other topics.
- ◆ Recently, Jon Perry (forest technician) was traveling between logging inspections when he was stopped by a USDA Forest Service (USFS) employee who had just left the Little Stoney Falls Recreation Area. A member of the public had called the Forest Service about a tree that had fallen across the road which had him trapped. The USFS employee was driving a truck without a chainsaw and asked if Jon could help get the civilian out. The two worked together to cut and remove the tree blocking the road. They explained to the gentlemen how state and federal agencies cooperate with each other to which the gentleman was very grateful.
- ◆ On August 10 Randy Fleming, (forest technician) met with the Virginia State police to look at a road to access a new STARS tower site in Wise County. The road was impassable with a vehicle so Randy's UTV was utilized to transport VSP communication technicians to the site. While onsite Randy assessed the road for improvements that could possibly be performed with a VDOF Dozer. On August 16 Randy along with Russell Proctor, (regional fire specialist) returned to the site with a dozer. They pushed back brush off the road banks, smoothed ruts and worked around large mud holes to make the road drivable by pickups.