



March 17, 2023

Upcoming Events

[VDOF Biochar 101 Webinar](#) – March 20 @ 10:00 am

[2023 Virginia Interagency Wildland Fire Academy](#) – May 24 - 28

- ◆ Visit <https://dof.virginia.gov/events/> for public events and <https://dof.virginia.gov/events/category/employee-only/> for employee only events.

Tragedy Strikes VDOF

- ◆ On Monday, March 13, funeral services were held for seven-year VDOF employee Rocky Wood in Dickenson. Rocky was tragically killed Thursday night in an ATV accident while battling a 15-acre wildfire along Lester's Fork Road near the Roseann community in Buchanan County. Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matthew Lohr, State Forester Rob Farrell, Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer, Western Regional Forester Brad Carico, the VDOF Honor Guard and many other agency staff were in attendance. The Virginia Department of Fire Programs supported the services. The State Forester joined Secretary Lohr to present a flag to Rocky's wife. On Monday, Governor Youngkin ordered all state flags lowered to half-mast in Rocky's honor.

This marks the first fatality of a full-time VDOF employee in the line of duty. The Anthem Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a work-based intervention program designed to assist employees in resolving personal problems and coordinate assistance as needed. All employees can contact the EAP behavioral health number at 1-855-223-9277. Contact Chief Human Resources Officer John Habel for additional information. An EAP overview is available here: [EAP Overview Presentation 2022](#).

Employee News

Transfer

- ◆ We're pleased to announce that Garrett Evans has been selected for an area forester position in the James River District, primarily serving Amherst County. Garrett has served as an area forester for the VDOF in the Tidewater District for the past 7 months. He has a B.S. in Forest Ecosystem Management from The Pennsylvania State University and a M.S. in Forest Management and Silviculture from the State University of New York at Syracuse. Prior to coming to work for the VDOF, Garrett performed research work for the American Chestnut Foundation and Penn State's

Forest Ecology Lab. He began his role in the James River District on March 13. Please provide Garrett with a warm welcome to the Central Region when you get a chance.

Assistance Needed

Counselors, Instructors and Leaders for Camp Woods & Wildlife

- ◆ Camp Woods & Wildlife owes much of its success to its awesome counselors, instructors, and leaders. In fact, camp cannot happen without them! We are in critical need of more counselors this year. VDOF employees who enjoy working with teens are encouraged to join our camp staff. This year's camp will be held June 19-23 at Holiday Lake 4-H Center near Appomattox. The staff application (Form 13.06) can be found on the VDOF employee site: <https://dof.virginia.gov/employee-access/employee-forms/>. If interested, please clear attendance with your supervisor and return your completed form to ellen.powell@dof.virginia.gov as soon as possible. Contact Ellen with any questions.

State Wildlife Action Plan -- Opportunity

- ◆ The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) has requested assistance from VDOF in updating the State Wildlife Action Plan (WAP). VDOF is seeking a representative from the field to serve on the WAP Committee and provide forestry input to the process. Duties would include attending in-person and virtual meetings, interacting with other committee members, and reviewing and providing input to draft documents. The field representative would serve with another HQ VDOF member. The time commitment expected may be variable but is estimated at one half to one day every two weeks. This opportunity will enable the person to develop a greater understanding of wildlife and forest management on a broad level, interact with a variety of other professionals from across the state, and to develop skills in reviewing, writing, and editing. If you are interested, please contact Dean Cumbia Dean.Cumbia@DOF.Virginia.gov by March 31.

Last Week

Board of Forestry Meeting

- ◆ On March 14, the Board of Forestry held its regular meeting at the VDOF headquarters. The Board discussed several items including Reforestation of Timberlands 2023 Practice and Rates, the election of the next Board Chair and Vice-Chair, the Hardwood Initiative, sustainability of Virginia's forest resource and workforce development. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for June.

Interim Voluntary Guidance Released for the Northern Long-Eared Bat

- ◆ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released guidance on the Northern long-eared bat, whose populations have declined dramatically due to a disease known as white-nose syndrome. As a result, the species will be listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, effective March 31. Preliminary review indicates related guidance may not be as impactful on the forest industry as once projected. VDOF continues to review the guidance and develop approved messaging to share with staff and partners.

Wildfire Activity

- ◆ Over the last seven days, VDOF has suppressed 37 wildfires that have burned 379 acres across the state. The largest was an 86-acre fire in Isle of Wight County. These fires damaged one home and four outbuildings. VDOF response efforts over this same period protected four homes and nine other structures with an estimated value safeguarded of just under \$1 million.

Hardwood Initiative Demonstration Project

- ◆ VDOF's Hardwood Initiative has completed the first demonstration project on a Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) management area, a crop tree release on Little North Mountain in Augusta County. The 15-acre project was completed in one day by a contractor. With DWR staff's support and assistance, the project resulted in an improved stand and the release of many desirable trees, underscoring the fact that the woods offer several potential "crops," not just future saw timber. VDOF plans to complete more projects on DWR properties (including one in progress) to showcase hardwood management practices and subsequent benefits to wildlife.

Dubai Wood Show

- ◆ VDOF Utilization and Marketing staff recently attended the Dubai Wood show in the United Arab Emirates. The largest wood and woodworking machinery tradeshow in the Middle East and North Africa, the show provides a platform for suppliers, manufacturers and machinery and tool companies to showcase products, innovative technologies, product scenarios and large-scale machinery to key international players in the wood and woodworking machinery industry. Two Virginia organizations participated in the event, the Virginia Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services (VDACS) and the American Hardwood Export Council. There were nearly 100 visitors to the VDACS booth during the three-day event. Buyers were interested in white and red oak, ash, and yellow and white pine products. There were 400 exhibitors and 10,900 attendees, representing 50 countries, at the event.

Trees Virginia Annual Retreat

- ◆ VDOF Urban and Community Forestry staff attended an annual retreat hosted by Trees Virginia. The two-day event featured a tour of Harrisonburg's Urban Forestry program, annual budget review and strategic planning for the organization. Trees Virginia welcomed three new board members this year, including Celia Raney of the City of Lexington, Lemuel Hancock of Shenandoah County and Corey Connors with the Virginia Forestry Association.

Legislation/Regulations

- ◆ The public comment period for periodic regulation review closed on Virginia Regulatory Town Hall March 6. VDOF is currently preparing the Periodic Review Report of Findings and the ORM Economic Impact.

William & Mary Harvest

- ◆ The latest round of harvest operations has begun on the College of William & Mary's Ash Lawn Foundation property. The harvest consists of pine thinning on approximately 12 acres, completing the project that started last year.

Forest Carbon Markets Workshop

- ◆ On March 3, VDOF assisted Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) with a Forest Carbon Markets workshop in Chester. The workshop was targeted to natural resource professionals and forest landowners. Designed to provide a full overview of forest carbon markets, the workshop opened with an overview from Melissa Kreye (Penn State and the Forest Owner Carbon and Climate Education program), followed by information about carbon registries and presentations from individual carbon programs. The event was capped off with a landowner and forester panel discussing perspectives from participants in carbon programs. In addition, VCE and Virginia Tech shared a framework for each carbon program that provides an overview with minimum requirements for participation, length of programs, plan requirements, and more. More than 100 people attended the workshop with another 100 joining virtually.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Meeting

- ◆ Central Regional Forester Robbie Talbert and staff attended a cooperators' meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regarding the management of property on the John W. Kerr Reservoir located in Mecklenburg and Halifax counties, and portions of North Carolina. The meeting covered law enforcement, fire suppression, prescribed burning and resource management on lands adjacent to those managed by USACE. Joining VDOF were representatives from numerous partner agencies including Virginia State Parks, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, North Carolina Wildlife Commission, and North Carolina State Parks.

Bio-Char Demo

- ◆ A biochar demonstration is scheduled to occur on the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Catawba Hospital property during the week of March 21. This past week VDOF Utilization and Marketing staff partnered with forestry education staff at Mountain Gateway Community College on the first in a series of CharBoss biochar machine demonstrations. The CharBoss is designed to create biochar from parts of a tree too small for sawtimber products. The machines are used widely in the western U.S. on forest fuel reduction projects. VDOF has scheduled five additional demonstrations across the Commonwealth in the weeks to come.

Cumberland State Forest Hosts Trail Race

- ◆ The Cumberland State Forest and Bear Creek Lake State Park will be hosting a 10-mile trail race held by the Richmond Road Runners. Nearly 300 runners and 10 volunteers (course marshals and water stops) will use the State Forest and State Park property trails for this event.

Sustainable Forest Initiative and American Tree Farm System Recertification Audits

- ◆ The Sustainable Forest Initiative and American Tree Farm System audits for the Virginia State Forest system will occur the last week in April. Site visits will include Cumberland, Niday, Mathews, Hawks, Old Flat, and Channels state forests.

Forest Resource Management

- ◆ Forest health staff met with the State Forest managers to discuss future projects in our state forests, including southern pine beetle trapping, invasive plant treatment, hemlock and ash treatment, and biological control release.
- ◆ Forest health staff attended parts of the 2023 Spotted Lanternfly Virtual (SLF) Summit. University, federal, and state partners shared current information about SLF distribution and control methods. Consensus from everyone is still that SLF is not entering the interior of forests, but it can be found on forest edges, and certainly in urban landscapes.
- ◆ Todd Groh (forest resource management program manager) and Joe Rossetti (hardwood initiative coordinator) attended a joint Southern Group of State Foresters, Forest Management Committee/Stewardship Coordinators meeting in Starkville, MS on Feb 28-March 1, along with Forest Management and Stewardship leaders from all of the southern states. The meeting provided a time to hear and learn from projects in other states, updates from the U.S. Forest Service, and regional and national issues. Joe Rossetti made a presentation on Virginia's Hardwood Initiative.
- ◆ Lori Chamberlin (forest health program manager) and Mike Downey (assistant director of wildfire prevention and mitigation) examined a bark beetle spot in Louisa County. While southern pine beetle was suspected, only evidence of ips and black turpentine beetles were found.
- ◆ Katlin DeWitt (forest health specialist), Amanda Conrad (forest health technician), and Dave Slack (area forester) met with Devin Bily (plant pathologist with Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) in King William County on March 7 to look at a 24-year-old pine stand that had thinning crowns, some chlorotic needles, and heavy cone crops. After walking parts of the stand, it appeared that heterobasidium root disease was the causal agent based on visual symptoms observed in the field. Root samples were collected and taken to the VDACS pathology lab for confirmation. Heterobasidium root disease is an important disease of conifer species and is heavily impacted by site conditions such as soil type.
- ◆ Katlin DeWitt, Lindsay Caplan (invasive species specialist), and Lori Chamberlin met with Kevin Heffernan (Department of Conservation and Recreation) to discuss upcoming invasive species work. They agreed that one strategy would be to focus groundwork on wavyleaf grass control. VDOF and DCR will work to identify sites and engage and coordinate with other partners in this work.
- ◆ A hardwood Timber Stand Improvement practice was completed recently at VDOF's Hockley Research Forest in King and Queen County by Virginia based contractor, Rx Fire Effects. The hardwood stand had pine harvested several years ago, and now follow-up work is being done to control unwanted species from the overstory and understory to improve oak regeneration. In coming years, the area will receive multiple prescribed fires to encourage development of oak regeneration and suppress sweetgum, yellow-poplar, and American holly regeneration.

Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)

- ◆ The final draft proposal has been written for Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) Mitigation Funding to be used on the Green Hill Vegetation Management project, to occur on U.S Forest Service property and Moore's Creek State Forest. The draft is in review by both Forest Service and State Forest staff. The proposal is seeking approximately \$300,000 of MVP funds to carry out various projects on interconnected lands that also may involve expanding into another GNA Project. The Forest Service has already completed their National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and approval of the project for moving it forward.
- ◆ Staff met with USFS staff from the Warm Springs Ranger District and the USFS Forest Supervisor's office to review the Potts Creek GNA Project, which is in Allegheny County just outside of Covington. The entire project covers over 1,000 acres of forested areas in over 30 various stands to be treated.

Agency Lands

- ◆ The Sussex Nursery has graded 18,185,000 seedlings this season, or 81% of our projected sales.

State Forest

- ◆ Two prescribed burns were carried out on the Matthews State Forest last week: one was a pollinator plot and the second was a pitch-lob stand. Western Regional staff assisted with the prescribed burns and State Forest staff assisted on another regional burn on private lands.

State-Owned Lands

- ◆ Approximately 2,000 loblolly pines were planted on the Piedmont Geriatric Hospital property in Nottoway County by hospital building & grounds staff, supervised by Kirby Woolfolk. The area planted was part of a failed shortleaf pine planting in December 2021.

Central Region

- ◆ Derek Keiser (water quality specialist) served as an instructor for the FI-310 Wildland Fire Investigation: Case Development course organized by the Southeast Arson Task Force in Little Rock, Arkansas. This course provides an introduction to the law enforcement case development of major wildland arson, including serial arson. Students learn strategies and tactics to combat serial wildland arson and work in groups to develop a case plan and presentation based on an actual wildland arson case.
- ◆ David Powell (district forester) attended an Albemarle County Public School "Business Development Forum." The goal of the forum is to reconnect the schools, especially the high schools and trade schools, with professionals in the area to help develop real world experience in the curriculum.
- ◆ Zoë Bergman (area forester) hosted a workshop on local foraging through the Fauquier Education Farm at the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) office in Warrenton. A large portion of the talk involved multiple ways to eat invasive species like garlic mustard, autumn olive, dandelion, and field garlic. The workshop was free and open to the general public. (pictured)



Eastern Region

- ◆ Andrew Murray and Eli Podyma (community forestry specialists), taught the Forest Ecology and Urban Systems units of the Virginia Master Naturalist training for the Riverine Chapter

in Henrico County. There were approximately 25 students in attendance who were interested in learning more about forest management and invasive species control.

- ◆ On Saturday, February 11, VDOF wildland firefighters responded to what would eventually become a 70-acre wildfire in eastern Henrico County off Deep Bottom Road. The wildfire, which was initially sparked by a mowing operation, quickly spread into a young pine stand with grass understory. This fuel type represents one of the most dangerous cover types that firefighters face in Eastern Virginia, as the grass and pines support fast-moving, intense fires. As VDOF firefighters worked to control the wildfire with specially equipped bulldozers, they were assisted along the southern flank of the fire by a previous fireline and open land that was seemingly impervious to the fire. That's because VDOF had conducted a prescribed burn on the property in December of 2022. Prescribed burns provide many benefits to forest and grasslands, including improving wildlife habitat, improving ecological health, promoting native plant growth, and a benefit that is seldom realized in Virginia - reducing wildfire hazards. Had this area not been burned, the wildfire would have likely been significantly larger and may have threatened homes and infrastructure in the area. This is just one example of how a natural process like fire can be a beneficial tool in managing Virginia's landscape while also reducing hazards to Virginia's citizens. (Pictured)



- ◆ On March 8, Kendall Topping (area forester) and Heather Tuck (regional fire specialist) hosted a table at the second annual Work Like a Girl event at the Chesapeake Central Library. The event hosted female experts in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) businesses and agencies to show young girls that these careers can be their path as well. Kendall and Heather taught dozens of families the importance of conservation work and wildland firefighting and why the career is a great choice for all genders.
- ◆ On March 8, Kendall Topping attended the Chesapeake Environmental Awards Luncheon at the Chesapeake Convention Center. The luncheon celebrated the pioneers of conservation and environmental outreach in the city. The mayor presented awards to various organizations such as Friends of Indian River, Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, and more. Kendall hosted a table during the event to highlight opportunities via grants and outreach with the Virginia Department of Forestry, creating more partnerships and contacts.
- ◆ On March 10, Kendall Topping joined Western Branch Primary School for their Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics (STEAM) Day. During this event, professionals in STEAM industries spoke to classes about the science behind their careers and the importance of their work. Kendall presented on the importance of trees in Virginia. She taught over 200 students how trees improve our lives and how to protect them. At the end of the presentation, several students said they wanted to be a forester like her when they grew up.