



May 1, 2023

Upcoming Events

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

[Fall Fire Academy – September 25 – 29](#)

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

Employee Spotlight

- ◆ A Five Forks area landowner handwrote a letter of appreciation after working with Cody Noblitt (Five Forks Natural Resource specialist) for the help he has given. Quoting part of the letter:
- “I worked some with Agent Noblitt....Overall, Agent Noblitt did a thorough job of helping with the prior year spraying, logging done, and excess brush removed/scattered, and all seedlings planted properly at the right counts/space per acre. Agent Noblitt worked well with the planting agent. P.S. I also had a very good prior help from Agent Ogilvy.”

Employee News

Welcome to VDOF

- ◆ We are pleased to announce that Amy Leatherwood has been selected for the Customer Care Specialist position at the HQ building. Amy has experience from Elder, Watkins & Friedman, PC as a receptionist/legal assistant and Piedmont Geriatric Hospital as an Administrative Office Specialist. Amy began work with the VDOF on April 25. Please provide her with a warm welcome when you get a chance.



- ◆ We are pleased to announce that Stuart Baker has been selected for an area forester position in the Rappahannock District, primarily covering Orange and Spotsylvania Counties. Stuart has a B.S. in forest resource management from Virginia Tech plus 4 years of professional experience working for American Hardwood Industries in Waynesboro. Stuart started with VDOF on April 25. Please provide him with a warm welcome to the Central Region and the agency when you get a chance.

- ◆ We are pleased to announce that Thomas (T.C.) Orman has been selected for the forest technician position in the James River District, primarily covering Amherst and Nelson Counties. T.C. was a transportation operator 2 with VDOT and a part-time firefighter for VDOF from 2009-2018. He is a lieutenant in his local volunteer fire department and is very interested in working for the Virginia Department of Forestry. T.C. began work with VDOF on April 25. Please provide him with a warm welcome to the Central Region and the VDOF when you get a chance.



- ◆ Please welcome Charles "Nick" Perkins, our new Water Quality Specialist covering Bland, Wythe, Smyth, Washington, Grayson, and Carroll counties. Nick comes to us from New River Hardwoods where he worked for 4 years as a procurement forester. He has a forestry degree from Virginia Tech and has experience as a wildland firefighter. He lives in Troutdale and his first day was April 25.
- ◆ Please welcome Jonathan Edwards, our new Water Quality Specialist covering Russell, Buchanan, Dickenson, Scott, Wise, and Lee counties. Jonathan comes to us from New River Hardwoods where he worked for 6 years as a procurement forester. He also holds a degree in forestry from Virginia Tech and has experience on the Virginia Tech fire crew. He lives in Lebanon and his first day was April 25th.



News You Can Use

Signs of Change

- ◆ After a long and storied career, the 4 p.m. burn law road signs have earned their retirement. Over the years, the signs have served a valuable public service. DOF now has several other effective tools to share safety messages with Virginia's citizens, without putting extra duties on field staff, and at times, putting them in danger.

This year, instead of flipping the signs, we will be removing them. This change is one small step in our larger campaign to better focus how we use our most valuable resource, our time. We have been using these roadside signs for nearly 75 years and they are a part of our history. While this may be a change in our agency methods, it is NOT a change in our priority or focus on wildfire prevention. We are not pulling back from the 4 p.m. law or our important wildfire prevention work.

The Virginia Department of Forestry (~~VDOF~~) (DOF)

- ◆ Speaking of changes...we have long struggled with our acronym (VDOF or DOF). While VDOF certainly makes sense, we will making a slight change to use DOF as our official agency acronym (to be precise, this is actually an initialism, which is an acronym that is pronounced as individual letters (e.g.; DEQ, DNA).

Why the change?

This helps us standardize our name to align with the way our emails are configured, and how we appear in the Commonwealth directory system. DOF (pronounced DEE-OH-EFF) is already commonly used by both staff, other agencies, our partners and the public. Having two acronyms only causes confusion and weakens our brand. This change simply allows us to move towards

the trend that already exists. Communications will begin instituting this change now. Obviously, a switch like this that appears nearly every time we are mentioned will take some time to get used to, and there are many cases where VDOF is currently the norm (including thousands of instances on the website). These edits will be made over time.

New numbers for Eastern Region

- ◆ Now that we've updated our ER Office lines, VDOF staff should update their contacts to reflect the new direct numbers listed below:
 - Main regional office line (Brenda): 804-966-5092
 - Direct office line: Bryant 804-966-7428
 - Direct office line: John 804-966-3046
 - Direct office line: Dennis Gaston 804-966-2209
 - Direct office line: Conference Center Coordinator Jenny Basile 804-966-2201

Open Enrollment is Here: May 1 - May 15

- ◆ The annual open enrollment period allows you to make your health plan and flexible spending account elections to change your health plan, add or remove family members, or waive state health coverage. Begin making your elections in Cardinal HCM. Elections made during this period, changes to your premiums, health benefits and FSAs will be effective for the plan year of July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. The deadline to make changes is May 15. To Read the "Spotlight On Your Benefits" brochure and to find additional benefits resources go to [spotlight-2023-a10666.pdf \(virginia.gov\)](#). For more information about open enrollment contact Benefits and Talent Acquisition Coordinator Tammi Oliva at Tammi.Oliva@DOF.Virginia.gov (434) 220-9032.

Virginia Public Service Week

Although the U.S. celebrates employee recognition during the first week of May, it's important for us to take time to remember that your hard work deserves to be recognized for what you bring to DOF every day.

In recognition of your service to the Commonwealth of Virginia, there will be several events during Public Service Week (May 7-12) to demonstrate appreciation for your service. You are invited to attend, if you would like – attendance is NOT mandatory. Activities are being planned in each region, along with an event at HQ on May 11. You will receive more communication regarding events.

Last Week

DOF Firefighter Injury

- ◆ Water Quality Specialist from the Tappahannock Office Nelson Hillyer was injured in a bulldozer accident while working on a fire in Essex County last Friday. While plowing a containment line on a very active fire, the front of the dozer dropped into a drainage ditch that was hidden in thick vegetation. The decline of the ditch caused the blade to catch on the ground, which stopped the dozer instantly. The sudden, unexpected stop propelled Nelson forward, sending him into the

dash. Hillyer sustained serious injuries to his neck but is currently recuperating at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical Center in Richmond. Hillyer is expected to be discharged this week and will require a few months to fully recover.

Virginia Forestry Summit

- ◆ The 2023 Virginia Forestry Summit took place in Colonial Williamsburg April 26 to 28. Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matthew Lohr delivered opening session remarks and shared Governor Youngkin's goals related to the forestry and agriculture industries. The Summit featured important topics in Virginia forestry today, including the evolution and future of consulting, the big picture perspective on markets, challenges landowners face, and several workshops and committee meetings. The event also honored individual contributions to Virginia's forestry community.

During the awards dinner on Thursday evening, Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer was recognized with a distinguished service award. Congratulations, Ed.

City of Harrisonburg Green Space Program Work Center

- ◆ The City of Harrisonburg recently dedicated a new Green Space Program Work Center. The center includes new greenhouses for both their urban forestry tree and pollinator programs. The new facility also serves as their urban wood storage yard and processing facility. Those attending included Vice-Mayor Laura Dent, representatives from Shenandoah Valley SWCD, Rockingham County, City of Harrisonburg, James Madison University, VDOF and several members of the public.

Petersburg Planting

- ◆ VDOF staff coordinated with Virginia State University (VSU) staff and students, and Petersburg Public Library staff, to give out 80 potted trees at the library and local farmers' market. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness about combating urban heat islands and to demonstrate effective counter measures through planting native trees. Funding for these trees was provided to VSU through the Heatwatch grant. Species included were sweetbay magnolia, white fringetree, serviceberry and Eastern redbud.

Lynchburg Food Forest

- ◆ VDOF staff assisted in the installation of a food forest project in Lynchburg at a local elementary school. The project was funded through a grant received by the Virginia Foundation of Independent colleges for mapping heat islands throughout the state. The University of Lynchburg and Randolph College used data collected from the heat mapping study to select a project area within the city affected by heat and food insecurity. Students of R.S. Payne Elementary (400 total) assisted in installing fruit trees and shrubs on the school property throughout the day. Partners included the City of Lynchburg Public Works, whose staff have gone above and beyond to ensure that the forest will be taken care of through the hot summer months. The food forest can be accessed by the public and will also have several learning stations for students to engage in outdoor learning.

Arbor Day Events

- ◆ The City of Strasburg partnered with the Shenandoah Valley Electric Coop (SVEC) to celebrate Arbor Day by planting utility-friendly trees along a roadway to replace hazardous trees in the area. The City of Strasburg commemorated this event with a designation by the city council. SVEC is currently a Tree Line USA awardee. The city plans to apply for Tree City USA status in 2023. In

addition to this celebration, the city has made enormous strides in developing a greenway for citizens complete with pollinator patch areas.

Throwing Shade Program Takes Off

- ◆ VDOF staff attended the “Throwing Shade VA” program kick-off event at Woodstock Gardens, one of three participating nurseries, on Saturday. The pilot program will run until the end of June. The goal of the program is to promote the sale of native trees at retail nurseries. Woodstock Gardens has already reported more than 400 trees sold through the program. VDOF will be announcing the program via news release soon.

Ashland Receives Tree City Award

- ◆ VDOF staff presented the Tree City USA award to the Town of Ashland honoring their 32nd year of recognition.

Forest Management

- ◆ Lori Chamberlin (forest health manager) met with the executive director of the Wintergreen Nature Foundation to look at oak stands in Wintergreen in Nelson County. They have noticed increased oak mortality over the last few years. Upon examination of several areas and discussion of different stress factors (spongy moth, dry soil, root disease), it was determined that this is probably another example of oak decline.
- ◆ On April 18, the Hardwood and Stewardship Steering Committee met at the VDOF office in Salem. Joe Rossetti (hardwood coordinator) led the meeting and discussion, which centered around the strategies in the Hardwood Initiative. Topics of note were the hardwood cost share program, training, outreach, and the involvement of private service providers. Additional topics included updates on Forest Stewardship and Forest Legacy. The meeting included an afternoon field trip to the state-owned and heavily forested Catawba Hospital property in Roanoke County, led by Ed Stoots (state lands manager). The site features side-by-side demonstrations of several hardwood forest management practices.

Nursery

- ◆ Sussex nursery continues to prep fields for planting. Last week the nursery fumigated 27.5 acres.
- ◆ Jake Good (nursery technician) and Joshua McLaughlin (assistant nursery manager) represented VDOF at the Fear to Hope Symposium at Christopher Newport University (CNU). This program is in conjunction with CNU and local high schools doing research on salt exposure to conifers that form ghost forests due to climate change. Jake and Joshua staffed a booth and talked with other professionals and over 100 high school students about their research and what VDOF has to offer. VDOF will be growing Eastern redcedar seedlings to support this interesting project. (Pictured)



Communications

- ◆ Ellen Powell (conservation education coordinator) and Lesley Newman (Project Learning Tree [PLT] coordinator) conducted a PLT workshop for 13 educators (mostly Master Naturalists) in Williamsburg, in conjunction with the Forestry Summit.
- ◆ Ellen Powell and two volunteers staffed a forestry activity table at KidVention in Charlottesville, an event attended by over 1200 people.

Central Region

- ◆ Connor Goolsby (natural resource specialist), Matt Wolanski (district forester), and Lauren Charles (forest



technician) coordinated with Shenandoah University staff to conduct a volunteer riparian buffer planting at the Cool Spring River Campus in Clarke County. Twenty-four students from John Handley High School learned about the importance of riparian buffers and spent the day planting a diverse variety of trees and shrubs along the Shenandoah River. The 195-acre property was once the Virginia National Golf Course but now serves as an outdoor classroom for the University, where both students and citizens can learn about ecology and environmental stewardship. Yearly tree plantings are one of many collaborations between VDOF and Shenandoah University staff in the effort to restore and preserve the property. (pictured)

- ◆ Paolo Alvarez and Tom Snoddy (area foresters), along with two volunteers from the local chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists, assisted with the forestry station of the local Envirothon competition in Appomattox. Forty-five students from 9 teams competed in this event. The top 3 teams overall were: first place, Halifax; second place, Buckingham; third place, Cumberland. For the forestry station, first place was Buckingham; second place was Halifax; and third place was Franklin. This event was a good opportunity for the VDOF to connect to high school students and help them learn about forestry, wildlife and the environment.
- ◆ David Powell (district forester) presented a program as part of the spring lecture series at Ivy Creek Natural Area in Albemarle County. The program was about the history and benefits of fire in Virginia, focusing on current prescribed burning efforts in the Commonwealth, using the recent prescribed burn at the Ivy Creek Natural Area as the main exhibition.
- ◆ Zach Arnold (area forester) attended Harrisonburg's Blacks Run Cleanup event along with numerous other environmental organizations. Zach spoke with participants about the impacts of invasive species and the importance of planting the right tree in the right space.
- ◆ A three-day volunteer tree planting project was recently completed at Clermont Farm in Berryville in cooperation with Piedmont Environmental Council. Ashley Mock (bay watershed specialist), Lauren Charles (forest technician), and Connor Goolsby (natural resource specialist) assisted with the plantings and completed planting demonstrations before each session. All of the fields planted are under a CREP contract, which would have expired this September had Clermont and PEC not restored the site to the tree density required for contract renewal.

- ◆ Cole Young (area forester), Zach Arnold (area forester), Chad Stover (fire specialist), and Matt Wolanski (district forester) assisted the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) with a ~250-acre understory burn unit at the Deep Run Ponds Natural Area Preserve in Rockingham County. This burn was a partnership effort between DCR, the Nature Conservancy, the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), VDOF, and a private contractor (RX Fire).
- ◆ Darwin Rhodes (forest technician) and Zach Arnold (area forester) attended the Cub Run Elementary School's Ag Day. They brought the bulldozer out to the event and talked to the students about how VDOF fights forest fires. They showed them the equipment VDOF uses and discussed the importance of being careful with fire. The students were also given loblolly pine seedlings and learned the importance of trees and how to properly plant seedlings. About 300 students in grades 3-5 attended. (pictured)

