



July 18, 2023

Upcoming Events

[Fall Fire Academy](#) – September 25 – 29 ***Registration Now Open!**

[2023 Virginia Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Course](#) – October 2 – 15

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

Employee News

Welcome to DOF!

- ◆ DOF welcomes **Dylan Grubb** as the new Scott/Wise County Technician. Dylan is a resident of Wise County and holds an associate degree in forest science from Mountain Empire Community College. He is currently working on a second degree in environmental science. Before coming to us, he served as a Ranger for Spearhead Trails. In his spare time, he enjoys fishing, hunting and playing golf. Dylan's first day with DOF was July 10.



With Great Sadness

- ◆ Senior Firefighter and Assistant Fire Engine Operator on Engine 632 on the Central Zone of the national forest **Joe Wirt** passed away on July 4. Prior to joining the Forest Service, Joe served with Botetourt County Fire and EMS and as a part-time firefighter with DOF. He also served his community for many years as a volunteer firefighter. A Celebration of Life [service will be held at Melrose Baptist Church on July 22, at 11 a.m.](#) Please keep Joe's family in your thoughts.

News You Can Use

VRS Visits

- ◆ VRS representatives will be onsite at all three regions for one-on-one presentations. To schedule a meeting with the VRS representative to discuss retirement Benefits, options and applying for Retirement, contact Human Resources Chief Human Resources Officer **John Habel** to schedule.
 - **July 20:** Eastern Regional Office, New Kent, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
 - **July 27:** HQ/Central Region, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

- **August 15:** Western Regional Office, 9 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Boot Allowance

- ◆ Good News...a boot allowance is once again available to support the wildfire PPE needs of our agency. The boot allowance will be available for current full-time employees who support wildfire response in the agency.
- ◆ Eligible positions include agency responders (as defined under the agency Readiness and Mobilization Plan), State Forest and Nursery personnel (excluding PSTs), Buildings and Grounds personnel and agency mechanics.

Details:

- Reimbursement of 100% of the cost of one pair of boots, up to \$400 maximum, will be provided for newly purchased boots that meet current wildfire standards.
- Boots purchased under the program must be of all leather construction, with a minimum of an 8" top and slip-resistant soles.
- Boot purchased by mechanics should include a steel toe, per agency policy.
- Reimbursement will be handled by way of a travel voucher.
- Paid invoices must be marked by the employee to indicate that it is for the "Boot Reimbursement" as well as including a statement "the purchased boot meets the agency minimum standards for wildland boot PPE."

Please note:

- In-store purchases: Only original itemized "paid" receipts for purchases can be accepted with the travel voucher for reimbursement. Credit card receipts and receipts that do not show payment will not be accepted.
- Online purchases: Fiscal will need to have something printed out that shows the payment made (not just an order confirmation) as well as a packing slip showing that the boots have been received before a reimbursement can be processed.
- Boots must be purchased and travel vouchers submitted for payment prior to Nov. 30 to qualify for reimbursement.
- For those who have recently purchased boots, itemized receipts for boots meeting our minimum standards will be accepted for reimbursement as long as the receipt is no older than Jan. 1, 2023.
- Reimbursements of up to \$400 will be allowed for anyone who wishes to have an existing pair of boots overhauled or resoled (an original itemized paid receipt must be generated prior to the Nov. 30, 2023, deadline).
- Submitted travel vouchers should be coded to Cost Code 506 to ensure payment.

Questions about boot allowances?

Contact Director of Fire and Emergency Response [John Miller](#).

For procurement questions, contact Procurement Officer [Thomas Baumann](#).

Thank you, Field staff, in the Middle James River Watershed!

- ◆ Through DOF's collaborative efforts, and in a relatively short amount of time, more than 400 acres of riparian buffers have been established over the last four and half years through the James River Buffer Program. In keeping with the flexible nature of the program, projects spanned from .01 to 58 acres in size and were carried out on urban, public and rural properties in every county and city in the

watershed. In addition, 97 acres are planned for establishment, either through planting or facilitated natural regeneration, by the end of this year. DOF will be exiting its partnership in the James River Buffer Program at the end of this year. The James River Association in the Middle James and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in the Upper James will continue the program, serving landowners for at least the next three years. Middle James River Forest Watershed Project Coordinator **Deya Ramsden** will continue to take on projects until Oct. 15.

Projects should meet the following criteria:

- not highly invaded nor require extensive site preparation
- composed of pine for the rural setting (we can support hardwood with shelter plantings on urban sites)
- suitable for facilitated natural regeneration with minimal site preparation
- as always, sites should be open (not cut-over) and within 100 feet of a water feature
- rural landowners who prefer hardwood with shelter plantings will be referred to the James River Association

Later this year, Deya will be reaching out about providing technical support and coordinating follow-up maintenance on buffers that remain in the three-year maintenance window. Stay tuned for more information about the exciting, new Statewide Flexible Buffer Program from the DOF Watershed Team.

Last Week

Eastern Region Veterans' Group

- ◆ On June 11, the Eastern Region DOF Veterans group held their first meeting in New Kent. The group was joined by representatives from the Virginia Department of Veterans Services who provided information on benefits, claims and additional programs for veterans, families and survivors. The information enabled veterans to understand of the assistance that they will receive to include policies on specific issues. Additionally, the open forum discussion during this engagement provided guidance and direction while answering specific questions on a wide range of issues that Veterans may be dealing with. Also in attendance were Ian Morris (State Forest Technician) and Bill Sweeney (Watershed Specialist) from the agency's Central and Western Regions. They will be leading the agency's effort to create similar affinity groups in their parts of the state. The Eastern Region recently initiated this group for Veterans to provide support and guidance while building cohesion within our Veterans ranks. Group activities are coordinated by Tidewater Technician **Paul Taylor** and supported by Deputy State Forester **Ed Zimmer**.

Virginia Association of Assessing Officers Annual Education Seminar

- ◆ Forest Management Programs Manager **Todd Groh** made a presentation to the Virginia Association of Assessing Officers (VAAO) annual education seminar on July 12 at Brightpoint Community College in Chester. The VAAO is a professional organization of assessors and appraisers from state and local governments, many of whom administer local forest land use taxation programs. Forest land use taxation is an option for localities and lowers property taxes for landowners, helping them to keep their land as forests. Todd's presentation highlighted the Forest Sustainability Fund, established by the General Assembly in 2022. The Fund helps localities offset lower (forgone) revenue by having the forest land use tax option. The successes achieved for the program's inaugural year and the part that

DOF played in making it happen. Ninety percent of the eligible localities (68) submitted applications and received a proportional share of the one million dollars that was available in the fund this year.

Southern Rivers District

- ◆ **Todd Groh** also recently visited the Southern Rivers District in the Central Region to complete Forest Stewardship monitoring stops in Pittsylvania and Halifax counties. The U.S. Forest Service randomly selects Forest Stewardship properties each year and requests each state's forestry staff visit the properties to determine the effectiveness and impact of the program by gauging the implementation of the plan's recommended practices. The Forest Service uses these results, collectively with national data, to evaluate the investment in private forestlands.

Ash Tree Treatment at HQ

- ◆ Forest Health Technician **Amanda Conrad** and Forest Health Specialist **Katlin DeWitt** treated five ash trees around HQ on July 13. By using injections of emamectin benzoate the trees are now protected for another two years from attack from the emerald ash borer (EAB). Maintaining trees around the HQ campus allows a seed source for future ash trees and allows for education and outreach opportunities around ash, EAB and the importance of treatments.

Forest Health Monitoring Business meeting

- ◆ Forest Health Specialist **Katlin DeWitt** attended (and served as the southern region representative) a national Forest Health Monitoring (FHM) Business meeting virtually on July 10-11. This meeting includes each regional forest health program manager from the U.S. Forest Service as well as a state representative from each region. Topics included how to better optimize engagement using forest health data, forest health indicators nationwide and planning the next FHM meeting.

Wavyleaf Treatment and Management

- ◆ Invasive Species Specialist **Lindsay Caplan** met with Sky Meadows State Park (Fauquier County) and Potomac Appalachian Trail Club staff on July 10 to discuss treatment of the invasive wavyleaf grass along the Appalachian Trail and surrounding areas (pictured). DOF plans to provide significant assistance to their ongoing treatment efforts. Wavyleaf is a relatively new invasive species to Virginia that has been found in some areas. It's aggressive and crowds out native plants, and DOF and partners are seeking to limit its spread and impact.

In addition, Lindsay and Western Region Area Forester Justin Funk met with multiple private landowners on July 12 in the Galax area to discuss invasive wavyleaf grass management on their properties. This infestation area is significant due to its distinction as the only known population of wavygrass in southwest Virginia, size and proximity to the New River Trail. DOF plans to assist these landowners with treatment efforts.



Eastern Shore Conservation Alliance

- ◆ Area Forester with Blackwater District **Robbie Lewis** recently met with the Eastern Shore Conservation Alliance at Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Doe Creek Complex on the Eastern Shore. The group, which included representatives from DOF, DWR, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, The Nature Conservancy, Eastern Shore Land Trust, and Coastal Zone Management, discussed wildlife habitat and coastal resiliency projects for the Wildlife Management Area.



New DOF Video: Hemlock Treatment Tutorial

- ◆ Did you know hemlock trees can live for 800 years or more? (You probably did.) Sadly, due to the invasive hemlock woolly adelgid, less and less hemlocks are reaching maturity. The good news: DOF is helping landowners and organizations protect hemlocks with easy and effective treatments. DOF recently produced an easy-to-follow tutorial video on the soil drench method featuring our own **Katlin DeWitt** and **Amanda Conrad**. Watch it on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Zke-QQ3Des>

