



January 29, 2024

Upcoming Events

[Eastern Region – Regional Meeting & Fire Training](#) – Feb. 7

[Landowner Woods & Wildlife Conference – Southwest Virginia](#) – Feb. 10

[Landowner Woods & Wildlife Conference – Northern Virginia](#) – Feb. 24

[Virginia Association of Forest Health Professionals Conference](#) – Feb. 12-13

[2024 Forest Management Academy at Sweet Briar College](#) – Sept. 9-13

Have an agency-relevant event to share? Email **Mary Weaver** at Mary.Weaver@DOF.Virginia.gov

Policy and Form Updates

[Form 7.8, Cost Share Plan Template](#) has been updated on the DOF Intranet. This form provides staff with a concise planning template for use cases with multiple federal or state cost share programs. Updates include replacing the form's multiple text lines with text boxes that will automatically "wrap" entered text. Staff are encouraged to attach a plan addendum to the template if additional space is still needed for practice descriptions or prescriptions. For more info, contact Forest Management Program Coordinator **Todd Groh** at Todd.Groh@DOF.Virginia.gov.

[Policy and Procedure 6-1](#) for DOF's Pine Bark Beetle Prevention Cost-Share Program has been revised and is now in effect (Jan. 1). The maximum cost-share payments for thinning projects have been increased. The new cost-share rates will be honored for any work accomplished this year.

- Incentive payments for pre-commercial thinning project are now 60% of direct project costs, not to exceed \$150/acre (max of \$10,000 per federal fiscal year). This was increased from the previous \$115/acre maximum.
- Changes were also made to the logger incentive program, which provides financial assistance to loggers who perform first commercial thinning projects on small tracts. This cost-share is available for parcels that are 5 to 30 acres and will reimburse loggers 100% of logging costs (not to exceed \$4,000). A logger or logging company may not receive more than \$12,000 per federal fiscal year.

Employee Updates

The Western Region welcomes **Sheila Cook** to DOF. Sheila will be serving as a program support technician based out of the Galax office at the Matthews State Forest. She comes to us from Radford University where she served for seven years as an executive administrative assistant. Prior to that she served as an administrative assistant with the Virginia Department of Corrections.



Joseph McKeown has accepted the area forester position in the Rappahannock District, primarily serving Fauquier County. Joseph, who is a native of Prince William County, has a B.S. in Forest Resource Management from West Virginia University plus 18 months of forestry experience. He has also completed S-130/190 and has seasonal fire experience in the Western U.S. Please welcome him when you get a chance.

The Capital District is excited to welcome **Daniel Brooks** as a Community Forestry Specialist primarily covering the Virginia (Lower) Peninsula. Daniel brings a wealth of arboricultural knowledge and experience to DOF through nearly eight years of field experience including starting his own arborist company. He is an ISA certified arborist with TRAQ certification. Additionally, Daniel served in the United States Marine Corps Security Forces as an Infantryman. Please welcome Daniel to DOF.



Kathleen Copeland-Fish has been selected as the New Bay Watershed Specialist for the Shenandoah District, primarily serving the northern Shenandoah Valley. Kathleen has a B.S. in Environmental Science from George Mason University and a M.S. in Environmental Studies from Prescott College in Arizona. She has the equivalent of 10 years of natural resources experience, most recently as the science program lead for the Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. Please welcome her when you get a chance.

Joshua Just has accepted his old job back as a forest technician in the Tidewater District, mainly covering the Northern Neck counties. Josh previously worked with DOF for three and a half years and also served in the U.S. Marine Corps. He originally hails from Indiana.



Please welcome to the DOF **Michael "Shane" Sturgill**. Shane started with DOF as a forest technician out of our Abingdon Office on Jan. 10. Shane previously worked for the National Park Service from 1992 to 2020 and then with the USDA Forest Service from 2020 to 2023. In his free time, Shane enjoys the outdoors, especially hunting and fishing.

Agency Updates

Inclement Weather Alerts and Telework Policy

The agency will continue to use DOF Alert to notify staff of delayed office openings and closures during inclement weather and other



DOF Alert System

emergencies. Please take a moment to verify your notification information in the [DOF Alert System Member Portal](#). Here you will also be able to select the specific notification groups you need. For assistance accessing the portal, contact **Mary Weaver** at Mary.Weaver@DOF.Virginia.gov. Also, as a reminder, per [Policy and Procedure 08-001](#), employees eligible to telework are expected to telework when inclement weather forces the closure of their office. If an employee chooses not to telework, they will need to use personal leave time.

Virginia Retirement System Visit

A representative from the Virginia Retirement System will be visiting the Salem office Feb. 12 and Charlottesville headquarters Feb. 16 to discuss plans, benefits and programs. If you would like to schedule an appointment with the rep., please contact **John Habel** at John.Habel@DOF.Virginia.gov

2023 State of the Forest Report

DOF has completed and published the 2023 State of the Forest Report, which serves as our official annual report. It's an important resource and vehicle to share DOF's work with legislators, industry partners, NGOs, the public and you, the people who make these accomplishments possible. DOF submits this report of agency actions to the General Assembly each year.

[Check out this year's report](#) on the DOF website for a message from the State Forester and updates on forest sustainability, , fire and emergency response, water quality, forest management, conservation, forest health, state forests and lands, nurseries, urban and community forestry, and forest product markets.



The First New Employee Training Academy

Six technicians and foresters attended the first ever New Employee Training Academy at New Kent on Jan. 8-11. Day one consisted of basic silviculture and an overview of DOF's forest health program. Day two consisted of water quality, harvesting operations and First Aid/CPR. Day three covered fire basics and radios, followed by a S-130 "Field Day." Day four consisted of information technology and vehicle operations. Attendees enjoyed the instruction and teambuilding activities.



Upcoming Generation NEXT Workshops and Webinars

The Generation NEXT program educates landowners on the importance of estate planning and helps them start the process. Two mini workshops will be held March 1 in Warsaw and Saluda offering free legal information and estate planning strategies. Speakers include legal and financial experts experienced in estate planning as well as natural resource professionals and rural landowners. There will also be a virtual webinar on March 17 targeted to landowners with some estate planning experience.



DOF employees are encouraged to share upcoming Generation NEXT workshops to landowners. Registration info is available here:

<https://sites.google.com/vt.edu/generationnext/home/workshops>

Virtual Hardwood Initiative Training

Hardwood Coordinator **Joe Rossetti** led approximately 12 DOF foresters in the first step of DOF Hardwood Initiative training with an online discussion on Jan. 17. In preparation, the participants viewed four videos from the USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station Virtual Upland Hardwood Workshop. The videos are presented by leading researchers and cover regeneration ecology, prescribed fire, intermediate silvicultural treatments and wildlife and forest management. They are available on the [USDA Forest Service's website](#). Thanks to those who participated by discussing how we can use this info while working with landowners.

Training Collaboration with New Kent Fire and Rescue

Staff from DOF's Capital District, Eastern Region, and research program supported a logistical request from New Kent Fire and Rescue (NKFR) for a specialized training. One of the cold storage units at New Kent was identified as an ideal location to simulate a big-box store setting for mayday drills. Thanks to this collaborative effort, NKFR was able to train 34 staff members to be better prepared as large stores continue to move into the area.

Applications Now Open for the 76th Camp Woods & Wildlife

This field-based residential camp introduces teens to natural resource careers, through hands-on classes on the Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest. We count lots of forestry and wildlife professionals among our camp alumni. This year's camp will be held June 17-21 at Holiday Lake 4-H Center and is open to Virginia residents (13-16 years of age) who haven't attended before. The application includes a nomination section to be completed and submitted by a teacher, natural resource professional, or other non-family adult. All attendees receive a substantial scholarship, reducing the camper fee to only \$95.



The application deadline is April 15. We'll be recruiting camp staff (counselors and instructors) soon, so watch for that in a future Branch. For more info contact Conservation Education Coordinator and Camp Coordinator **Ellen Powell** at Ellen.Powell@DOF.Virginia.gov, or see the [Camp Woods & Wildlife web page](#).

Forestry Employee Survey

The Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF) is asking state forestry employees to participate in a survey to provide insights into recruitment and retention challenges in our industry. Please consider taking this (optional) survey on the SGSF website: <https://southernforests.org/state-forestry-employee-survey>. Eligible participants who complete the survey can enter to win a Carhartt backpack (pictured).

