



FORESTLAND CONSERVATION REVIEW

November 2021

– NEW EASEMENT SPOTLIGHT –

JOSEPH PINES, SUSSEX COUNTY

In February, the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) and the Meadowview Biological Research Station (MBRS) acquired land that expands an existing conservation easement on the Joseph Pines Preserve in Sussex County. The 196-acre purchase by MBRS increases the preserve property to nearly 428 acres. The easement, donated to VDOF by MBRS, includes the entire preserve.

The property is managed to restore the native longleaf pine ecosystem that was historically present in Sussex County. “Five centuries ago, longleaf pine was arguably the most common tree species in upland southeast Virginia,” said Virginia State Forester Rob Farrell. “VDOF and many of our partners have long recognized the importance of longleaf restoration to environmental and economic health, and we are excited to strengthen our efforts through the expansion of this easement.”

Longleaf pine forests are fire-dependent and host a number of other rare species in Virginia, including red-cockaded woodpeckers and two species of pitcher plants – a primary conservation focus for MBRS. Preserve managers have reintroduced fire to the landscape and will continue work to restore the native ecosystem through the reintroduction of at least 18 rare plant species and three rare animal species. “Preserving this habitat means we’re preventing extinction and conserving biodiversity,” says Dr. Sheridan.



Native yellow pitcher plant at Joseph Pines Preserve (Photo credit: Meadowview Biological Research Station)

Restoring longleaf pine to the landscape is important for many reasons. In addition to supporting critical habitat and sources of freshwater, longleaf can be a commercially-valuable tree. Their potential resistance to forest pests means they contribute to the overall health of Virginia’s forests. “Identifying forestland with significant conservation value is an essential part of VDOF’s land conservation programs,” said VDOF Forestland Conservation Specialist Amanda Scheps. “The Joseph Pines Preserve is an outstanding example of land that contains important habitat and supports important research to restore a diminished species.”

VDOF has held an easement on the preserve’s original 232 acres since 2012. The recent purchase of the additional acreage was made possible by grant funding from the Virginia Land Conservation Fund, the Cameron Foundation, a third anonymous foundation, a loan guarantee from Atlantic Union Bank, and a loan from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund. MBRS’ goal is to eventually expand the preserve to 2,000 acres in Sussex County, by adding property and amending the easement over time.

THE VDOF FORESTLAND CONSERVATION TEAM

The goal of the VDOF Forestland Conservation Program is to keep Virginia’s 16 million acres of forest “in forest, intact, and in the family”. We do this by 1) helping forest landowners develop, create, and steward conservation easements; 2) helping acquire new state forests; 3) helping landowners access existing programs that incentivize forest conservation; and 4) exploring new and innovative ways to help conserve Virginia’s forests. Over the past year, our team has welcomed two new team members: Karl Didier as the forestland conservation program manager and Sarah Parmelee as the forestland conservation coordinator.

KARL DIDIER

Karl joined the Forestland Conservation Program in January. Prior to VDOF, he worked in the non-profit sector overseeing conservation programs on a global and international scale, especially those focused on forests and forest biodiversity. Karl helped conserve some unique landscapes in many parts of the world, such as the tropical forests of the Amazon and the grasslands of Mongolia. Karl has a B.S. in biological sciences from the University of Southern California, a master’s and a Ph.D. in environmental and forest biology from the State University of New York’s Environmental Science and Forestry Program, and is an adjunct professor at the University of Florida.



Karl Didier, forestland conservation program manager

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Sarah Parmelee, forestland conservation coordinator

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SARAH PARMELEE

Sarah joined the Forestland Conservation Program after five years serving as the area forester for Fauquier and Rappahannock counties. Sarah is excited to join the conservation team and bring a forester’s perspective to easement stewardship. As forestland conservation coordinator, Sarah is in charge of stewarding VDOF’s conservation easements including coordinating monitoring, approving plans and structures, and documenting relevant changes to easements. Documenting and monitoring easements is essential in allowing VDOF to retain its status as an accredited easement holder and allows easement holders to maintain the tax benefits associated with owning or donating an easement. She has a B.S. in forestry from Sewanee University of the South.

FORESTLAND CONSERVATION 2021 IN NUMBERS

- ◆ 2 easements of **2,297** acres added
- ◆ **196** total easements held (**126** within the Chesapeake Bay watershed)
- ◆ **87,565** acres protected by easement (**32,522** acres within the Chesapeake Bay watershed)
- ◆ **60** counties have easements
- ◆ **52** properties totaling **16,879** acres have received Century Forest designation
- ◆ View an interactive map of VDOF easements [<https://dof.virginia.gov/forest-management-health/forestland-conservation/conservation-easements/>].

EASEMENT MONITORING

Thank you to all the easement owners who completed and returned their landowner questionnaire! This is part of the annual monitoring that we conduct on every single easement. Next year (2022), VDOF Forestland Conservation staff and field staff will conduct in-person field monitoring. We will contact easement owners to schedule a time to visit. Landowners do not need to be present for monitoring, but we let you know before we come on your property. If your contact information has changed, please email us at conservation@dof.virginia.gov to make sure we have your current information in our system.

While you need not be present, our field monitoring visits can be a great time to discuss forest management opportunities or upcoming plans for your property.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Would you like to share the story of your property or easement and encourage your fellow landowners to conserve their forests? Contact us at conservation@dof.virginia.gov and we might include you in a future newsletter.

EASEMENT SALES

If you are planning to sell your easement property, please email us at conservation@dof.virginia.gov. VDOF tracks the sale of properties under easement so that we can contact the new landowners as soon as the sale is final. If the current landowner allows, we can also answer questions about easement restrictions for potential buyers.

Standard easement language requires that VDOF be notified in writing 30 days before the sale is complete. If the sale will exercise any of the easement's allowed divisions, we strongly recommend allowing VDOF to review the deed of sale prior to the actual sale so we can verify that the retained rights (such as houses, minimum forest acreage, etc.) have been correctly allotted to each division. This will help prevent future confusion or unintentional violation of easements.



(Photo credit: Alex Hawkinson, Clarke County)

LIFE ON CONSERVED LAND

VDOF easement landowner Alex Hawkinson is creating an environment where both people and wildlife can experience the natural beauty of the Shenandoah River and Valley. In addition to more than 200 acres of mature forest, the property includes a mile of Shenandoah River frontage, two native wildflower meadows, and numerous ridges and valleys. It will also include a conservation center and astronomy observatory for hosting gatherings and community events advocating for conservation of both our land and our nighttime skies. Pictured is an orphaned raccoon that was released as part of Alex's conservation projects.

GENERATION NEXT

By Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program Coordinator

Family-owned woodlands are most vulnerable to being sold out of the family, parceled into smaller pieces, and/or converted to other uses when they are passed from one generation to the next. Even if you have a conservation easement on your land, legacy planning is a way to determine the destiny of your woodlands and can help ensure they are passed on intact, in forest, and in the family. Legacy planning involves sharing with your heirs all that you treasure about your land and, ideally, including them in management and planning activities. Starting this process now, early in your land tenure, gives your heirs emotional ownership and helps create strong ties to the land.



To help landowners with the legacy planning process, the Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Cooperative Extension partnered to form the Generation NEXT Program. The program recently published a book: *Legacy Planning: A Guide for Virginia Landowners*. The Generation NEXT Program has other legacy planning resources available to landowners as well. It offers webinars and in-person workshops that delve into each of the nine steps, a website, and a YouTube playlist with videos of landowners sharing their legacy planning stories. You can find the Generation NEXT resources here:

- ◆ Webinar/Workshop Schedule: <https://ext.vt.edu/natural-resources/legacy-planning/training.html>
- ◆ Legacy Planning: A Guide for Virginia Landowners: <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=1109>
- ◆ Legacy Planning for Forest Landowners: <https://ext.vt.edu/natural-resources/legacy-planning.html>
- ◆ Generation NEXT Video Playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIfecRH17LbOvQQ6lgWupA57JR9Luiju>

For more information on the Generation NEXT Program or to receive a printed copy of the Legacy Planning Guide, please contact Karen Snape, program coordinator, ksnape@vt.edu, (540) 231-6494. Learn more about the programs offered from Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Virginia Landowner Education Program, visit <https://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu>, or contact VFLEP at (540) 231-6391.

INFORMATION FOR YOUR EASEMENT

PLANNING A TIMBER HARVEST

Sustainable timber harvesting is an important component of forest management in Virginia. Harvesting can be a way for landowners to earn income and is also crucial for some habitat restoration projects. Without knowledge of sustainable timber harvesting principles, the appearance of a timber harvest can be aesthetically jarring to adjacent landowners and other individuals and may raise questions about easement compliance and timber harvesting.

An important part of VDOF's job as an accredited easement holding entity is documenting forest management activities, including timber harvesting, as they occur on conservation easement properties held by the Department. By maintaining standardized documentation of all approved harvests, VDOF can respond to claims that the conservation values of a given easement have been harmed by a timber harvest should the harvest come under scrutiny.



As an easement landowner, it is your responsibility to make sure that you do your part to keep your property in compliance with the restrictions of the easement. VDOF uses a standard set of requirements for conservation easements when it comes to timber harvesting:

- ◆ All forest management activities conducted on the easement, including timber harvesting, shall be in accordance with an approved Forest Stewardship or multiple-resource forest management plan. This plan shall only be prepared or updated by a forester meeting the qualifications specified in Section 10.1-1181.9 of the Code of Virginia (1950) and must be reviewed and approved by VDOF's forestland conservation coordinator.
- ◆ All timber harvesting activities, including salvage harvests, conducted on the property shall be in accordance with an approved Pre-Harvest Plan which must be consistent with the Forest Stewardship Plan. Pre-Harvest Plans must also be approved by the forestland conservation coordinator.

- ◆ All Virginia Best Management Practices (BMPs) including Streamside Management Zones (SMZs) are mandatory.
- ◆ VDOF must be notified at least 30 days before any timber harvest starts.
- ◆ VDOF must be notified eight days before the logger completes the job and moves off-site so our staff can inspect the BMPs. In the event that the BMPs are not satisfactory, they can be corrected at less cost to the logger and landowner than if the logger had to move back on site to complete them.

Some easements may have expanded SMZs or no-cut buffers adjacent to streams or special features. Some properties may also have Habitat Protection Areas with special restrictions put in place to protect a rare plant, animal, or habitat. These will be mentioned in the Deed of Easement, but you can also contact the forestland conservation coordinator to verify if there are any special considerations to take into account when planning a timber harvest.

Even though easements are common in Virginia, not every forestry professional will know about the standard restrictions, such as the mandatory use of BMPs. Therefore, it is very important to talk to your forester and logger about the presence of a conservation easement on your land. We strongly encourage noting the presence of the conservation easement in the sale or contract.

If your logger or consulting forester has questions about the conservation easement, contact the forestland conservation coordinator. Consulting foresters writing plans for a conservation easement can also reach out to forestland conservation staff at conservation@dof.virginia.gov for information about restrictions that may affect their recommendations. VDOF Water Quality staff can write Pre-Harvest Plans at no cost to the landowner and advise loggers on matters such as placement of crossings, brush-matting, and road closing. They can also share BMP cost-share opportunities with loggers.

Find your local VDOF forester. [<https://dof.virginia.gov/>]

Because VDOF easements require (1) a Forest Stewardship Plan, (2) a Pre-Harvest Plan, and (3) Standard 50 ft. SMZs, timber harvests within 300 feet from a stream are excellent candidates for the Riparian Buffer Tax Credit, which reimburses landowners for a percentage of the value of the timber retained in the SMZ.

Find more information about the Riparian Forest Buffer Tax Credit Program. [<https://dof.virginia.gov/water-quality-protection/water-quality-protection-landowner-assistance/riparian-forest-buffer-tax-credit/>]



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