



May 31, 2024

Upcoming Events

[2024 Virginia Interagency Wildland Fire Academy](#) – May 28 - June 1

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

[Virginia Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Course](#) — Sept. 23 - October 4

Have an upcoming agency calendar event to share?

Email **Mary Weaver** at Mary.Weaver@DOF.Virginia.gov

Policy Updates

Workplace Safety: Accident Reporting, Investigation and Prevention

Updates have been made to [Policy and Procedure 8-11—Workplace Safety: Accident Reporting, Investigation and Prevention](#). All employees should review the policy, as several items have been updated. More updates will be made in the coming months to our safety policies and procedures, announced in the Branch. For more information, contact Safety, Training, and Compliance Officer **Chad Briggs** at Chad.Briggs@DOF.Virginia.gov.

Agency Updates

Classified State Employee Raises

The General Assembly has approved a 3% salary increase that will take effect on June 10. Employees who were hired on or before March 10 will see the increase in their July 1 pay checks. In the coming weeks, employees who are receiving an increase will receive notification from Human Resources.

Beneficial Ownership Information Reporting Rule

In September 2022, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network issued the Beneficial Ownership Information (BOI) Reporting Rule under the Corporate Transparency Act. This rule requires disclosing the identity of beneficial owners of small business entities beginning on Jan. 1, 2024. If a business (farm, ranch, agricultural operation, woodland) is set up as an LLC, LLP, business trust, corporation, etc., created through the State Corporation Commission, secretary of state, or similar office, it’s likely subject to the new reporting rule. BOI reports must be filed by Jan. 1, 2025 if the entity was created before Jan. 1, 2024 or within 90 days if formed after. Failure to file required reports may result in fines or imprisonment. DOF is working with the Virginia Cooperative Extension to raise awareness within the forestry community.

Annual Virginia Hurricane Exercise

Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer joined state and federal agencies for a Hurricane Exercise at the Virginia Emergency Operations Center in Richmond on Friday, May 24. Participating agencies included the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, Virginia State Police, Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Department of Social Services and Federal Emergency Management Agency Region 3. Afterwards, Governor Glenn Youngkin received a briefing ahead of the NOAA-forecasted “above-normal” hurricane season.



Southside Richmond Urban Forestry Collaboration

State Forester **Rob Farrell** joined Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager **Lara Johnson**, Urban and Community Forestry Partnership Coordinator **Molly O’Liddy** and Community Forestry Specialist **Alanna Ostrowski** to meet with Southside Richmond community groups to discuss increasing urban tree canopy and project collaboration within the City of Richmond. The meeting included Sheri Shannon and Amy Wentz, founders of Southside Releaf, Rob Jones, executive director of Groundwork RVA and Faith Walker, executive director of RVA Rapid Transit.

Forest Legacy Grants Awarded

Virginia awarded three Forest Legacy Grants for conservation projects. The Forest Legacy Program, working through the states along with local communities, identifies private forestlands to develop proposals to conserve lands as forests for recreation, wildlife habitat, and as sustainable sources of wood and other forest products. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) selects the top proposals for funding through a voluntary competitive process and provides grant funding. Some of this land will stay in private ownership, permanently protected and conserved as forests, while states purchase other parcels to be managed as public land. This year, through DOF and partners, USFS awarded a total of \$9,500,00 in Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) dollars and an additional \$4,570,000 in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for a total impact of 5,878 acres. The three projects are:

Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve Expansion, Floyd and Carroll counties (\$9.5 million from LWCF)

– The project will conserve 3,311 acres of Southern Appalachian Rich Cove Forest and productive white pine, as well as nearly 14 miles of mountain streams at the headwaters of the New River. This acquisition will secure public access near a community in need of outdoor recreation alternatives, alleviate pressure on existing preserve resources, and support the tourism economy of surrounding communities.

Assamoosic Pinelands State Forest, Southampton County (\$3.2 million from IRA)

– DOF was awarded this funding to acquire land for a state forest in Southampton County. The funds come from the FL-IRA tribal category and was the only funded tribal project in the country. This project was submitted by The Nature Conservancy with DOF approval but the funding, and the acquisition, is dependent upon DOF developing a co-stewardship agreement for the property with the Nottoway Indian Tribe.

Cedar Mountain Shenandoah, Albemarle County (\$1.3 million IRA)

– This conservation easement will protect 767 acres of family-owned forestland and complement prior Forest Legacy Program investments, connecting over 5,000 acres of working forestland. The project helps ensure the Appalachian Corridor’s protection and enhances critical habitat connectivity and climate resiliency in the region. The project’s location in the watershed, upstream of Sugar Hollow Reservoir, elevates its importance for both habitat and water resource protection.

Community Woods Grants Awarded

Two Virginia companies have been selected as recipients for FY24 Community Woods Grants for a combined total of nearly \$1.2 million. The Community Woods Grant Program provides funding to install thermally led community wood energy systems or to build innovative wood product manufacturing facilities. USFS expects renewable wood energy systems installed under this program to use the most stringent control technologies. The program places emphasis on assisting sawmills in economically challenged areas to retool or add advanced technology. Ballie Lumber Company and The Turman Group were the awarded recipients. Additionally, one Wood Innovations Grant has been awarded to Unaka Forest Products, Inc., located in Tennessee, with implications for two sites Duffield and Abingdon.

DOF and Virginia Loggers Meeting

On May 12, DOF and the Virginia Loggers Association co-sponsored a training and networking opportunity at the Mangohick Volunteer Fire Department in King William County. State Forester **Rob Farrell**, Deputy State Forester **Ed Zimmer**, Water Quality Program Manager **Rodney Newlin** and approximately 20 DOF field staff from the Eastern Region joined 25 members of the local harvesting community to discuss updates on agency water quality programs and the Hardwood Initiative. Also in attendance were local State Delegate Buddy Fowler and a representative from Representative Bob Good's staff. These trainings allow newer team members to become familiar with the local harvesting community and help foster collaborative relationships to protect the waters of the Commonwealth.

Virginia United Land Trust Annual Conference

DOF's Conservation Team attended the Virginia United Land Trust (VaULT) annual conference at Mary Washington University in Fredericksburg. VaULT supports Virginia's diverse conservation community to amplify land conservation efforts and achieve widespread protection of natural, cultural and scenic resources, ensuring long-term benefits for all Virginians. Keynote presentations were given by Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matt Lohr, Deputy Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Stephanie Tailon, and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources team regarding wildlife conservation efforts and a 25-year history of the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation. DOF provides 15 scholarships for conference attendees and input on several topics and panels.

Hardwood Training for DOF and Private Consulting Foresters

Forest Management Director **Dean Cumbia**, Hardwood Coordinator **Joe Rossetti**, Research Program Manager **Zoe Bergman** and Area Forester **Kevin Keith** held a hardwood training at the Holiday Lake 4-H Center and Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest May 14 - 15. Field staff from every region attended to learn about hardwood management, the Hardwood Initiative and using the Hardwood Assessment Tool (HAT). HAT was developed by DOF in 2021 to assist foresters in making management recommendations to improve hardwood forests and quantify resulting improvements. Participants can now plan projects and assist landowners with the Hardwood Initiative Cost Share. Dean and Joe also held a second training May 16 - 17 for nine private consulting foresters from across Virginia to learn about HAT and assisting landowners with applying for cost share. State Forester **Rob Farrell** participated the first day to lend advice and support for these consultants going above and beyond to provide service to their clients. To learn more about HAT, contact Joe at Joe.Rossetti@DOF.Virginia.gov.



Annual VESTEX Exercise

DOF participated in the 2024 Virginia Emergency Support Team Exercise (VESTEX), a two-day exercise focused on state-level hurricane response efforts coordinated through the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Richmond. Led by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, the exercise was designed to work through normal state response efforts and coordination resulting from a significant hurricane impacting the Commonwealth. DOF staffed the state EOC for both days of VESTEX and collaborated with the Virginia Department of Transportation to provide chainsaw crews to open roads following the storm, as well as talked through how DOF's incident management teams can assist with the restoration of critical infrastructure in areas with the greatest impacts.

DOF and Sentinel Landscapes Featured in Chesapeake Bay Journal

Last summer, Governor Youngkin announced the federal designation of two additional sentinel landscapes in Virginia that together encompass nearly three million acres of the Potomac, Rappahannock, York and James River watersheds. In mid-May five new sentinel landscapes were announced nationally, including one in the Chesapeake Bay watershed of Pennsylvania. Assistant State Forester **Terry Lasher**, Military Liaison for the Commonwealth of Virginia Tom Crabbs and U.S. Conservation Officer with the Pew Charitable Trusts Zack Greenberg were interviewed for *The Chesapeake Bay Journal* article. Read more here:

https://www.bayjournal.com/news/growth_conservation/sentinel-landscapes-help-buffer-military-bases-with-multiple-benefits/article_c4f24110-0696-11ef-8862-a3330e300cd8.html



Beech Leaf Disease Confirmed in New Kent County

Beech leaf disease causes the darkening of leaf tissue between veins, giving leaves a banded appearance. Other symptoms include leaf curling, leaf discoloration, and canopy thinning. The disease is thought to be caused by a foliar nematode, but research is ongoing. The disease has been confirmed in Prince William, Fairfax, Stafford, Loudoun, and now New Kent ([national distribution map online](#)). If you see symptoms in other counties, send photos to Forest Health Program Manager **Lori Chamberlin** at Lori.Chamberlin@DOF.Virginia.gov. More information can be found in 2021 Forest Health Review: https://dof.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/FHR-2021-12_pub.pdf.

Monitoring Forest Health on Virginia's Eastern Shore

Forest Health Program Manager **Lori Chamberlin** and Forest Health Specialist **Katlin DeWitt** met with Area Forester **Robbie Lewis** on the Eastern Shore for three site visits on May 15. Two of the locations were experiencing oak decline and mortality; the oaks have been stressed by several factors including mature age, prolonged saturated soil, defoliating insects, secondary pathogens, and lack of management over time. The third site was a suspected pine bark beetle spot. Ips bark beetles and black turpentine beetles were found in a few of the trees, but the initial cause of damage was determined to be lightning. The visits emphasize the importance of continual monitoring and being attuned to forest conditions and proactive management to address forest health.

Mountain Valley “Dozer Dayz”

Mountain Valley District held their annual Dozer Dayz event May 16 – 17 in the Blue Ridge area of Bedford County. During the event, 15 full-time and part-time firefighters received valuable seat time operating on various difficulties of steep and rocky terrain. Newer operators also used this opportunity to accomplish many of the tasks in their DOF Basic Tractor Plow Operators Task Book.



Red Spruce Germination Study at Nurseries

There is high demand for red spruce seedlings for restoration plantings throughout Virginia. Seedlings are currently being shipped in from the Pacific Northwest, which increases costs and unnecessary transit operations. DOF proudly grows most of our state’s native tree seedlings, though previous attempts at growing red spruce were unsuccessful. Another effort is underway to grow this diminished species; Research Program Manager **Zoe Bergman** worked with Augusta Nursery Manager **Josh McLaughlin**, Assistant Nursery Manager **Jake Good** and Nursery Technician **Nate Chewing** to plant 600 red spruce seeds at Augusta Nursery. A second study installment will be sown in plugs at Sussex Nursery. The seeds will be monitored and measured over the coming months to determine success rates.

Tree Supply Steering Committee meeting

Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager **Lara Johnson** attended a virtual Tree Supply Steering Committee meeting for the Chesapeake Bay last week discussing supply needs for caliper tree supply issues across the Bay watershed with representatives from all Bay states, USDA Forest Service, private nurseries and NGO partners.

Virginia Tech Students Learn About Working with DOF

On May 15, the southeast chapter of the Society of American Foresters hosted a panel discussion for Virginia Tech students at the Airfield 4-H center. Foresters **Caroline Norris** and **Zach Dowling** sat on the panel to share practical forestry and personal experiences they’ve had with DOF. Other participants included Madison West, consulting forester with American Forest Management and Neil Clark with the Virginia Cooperative Extension.



James Madison University Industrial Design Semester Projects

James Madison University’s Industrial Design class recently held their end of semester project showcase. Professor Kevin Phaup’s students showcased amazing pieces created from Harrisonburg urban wood. Professor Phaup is one of three cooperating faculty members at JMU that regularly promotes the use and value of urban wood resources. DOF’s Urban Wood Project provides technical assistance and support for the JMU Urban Wood Program.

DOF Staff and Smokey Bear Visit Local Tazewell Event

On May 11, Forest Technicians **Emily Wotton** and **Collin Sapp** brought TAZ50 to the Tazewell County Fairgrounds to participate in a "Down on the Farm" event. Assisted by Smokey Bear, Collin and Emily interacted with over 250 families, spreading the message of fire prevention.

