

# Virginia Department of Forestry

## Strategic Plan



2019 - 2022

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## Executive Summary

This five-year strategic plan is the culmination of the efforts of many people; more than 72 percent of VDOF staff and many of our constituents provided input into the plan's development. We thank all who participated in creating a shared vision to move the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) from focusing on the things we do – and do well – to the outcomes we want and need to achieve in the future.

The six goals at the center of the plan serve as enduring priorities that provide a clear focus. The objectives and strategies supporting the goals provide a roadmap to guide the everyday decisions and actions of our entire staff.

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## Virginia Department of Forestry Mission

The VDOF mission is to protect and develop healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians.

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## Virginia Department of Forestry Vision

### OUR VISION

A healthy, abundant, diverse forest resource, providing environmental and economic benefits for all Virginians

A forward-thinking agency, backed by solid technology, strong ethics and science that is a national leader in managing and protecting the forest resource

A professional, creative and adaptive workforce, providing exceptional forestry services to our constituents and customers

VDOF envisions a healthy, abundant forest resource providing economic and environmental benefits to the Commonwealth on a sustained basis. We see a resource whose scenic beauty enhances natural surroundings and whose protected environment supports clean water and wildlife. We further see a diverse forest resource as a part of natural ecosystems.

We envision the economic benefits of forest industry to be in balance with the environmental values of the forest resource.

We envision VDOF as the most effective forestry agency in the nation and as a leader in managing and protecting the forest resource. We see an agency built on solid technology backed by strong ethics, one that is able to stay ahead of change and is quick to respond to citizens' needs and one that is a leader in providing forest resource information. We see VDOF responding to its employees' needs through leadership characterized by open communication.

We envision a focused, well-trained, creative workforce that can adapt to change, equipped with the time and tools to provide exceptional forestry services to landowners, citizens and organizations. We strive to nurture knowledgeable, motivated and proactive employees, equipped to make decisions. Finally, we envision a workforce whose professional, unbiased recommendations positively impact an informed public, and whose efforts result in complete customer satisfaction.

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## Virginia Department of Forestry Values

In working with our customers, we believe in:

- Exceeding customer expectations by delivering quality products and services in a responsive, professional manner.
- Treating customers courteously, honestly and respectfully.
- Actively listening, appreciating, understanding and responding to customer needs.
- Being trustworthy professionals who seek to ensure the integrity of the forest resource.

In working together, we believe in:

- Providing a well-trained, well-equipped, technologically-advanced and responsive workforce.
- Communicating in an open, honest, effective manner.
- Being helpful and supportive to one another; demonstrating the spirit of cooperation, teamwork, and mutual trust and respect for each other.
- Providing a working environment that fosters quality and creativity, rewards team performance, and is challenging and enjoyable.
- Clearly defining, communicating and understanding our vision, goals, objectives, strategies, roles and responsibilities.

## Summary of Strategic Agency Goals

VDOF's strategic goals provide a framework for fulfilling our mission and driving positive changes toward the achievement of our vision.

### Goal 1 - Forest Resource Protection

- Protect the forest resources and the citizens of the Commonwealth from wildfire, and reduce impacts to the forest from other threats.

### Goal 2 - A Strong Forest Economy

- Support a strong forest economy by ensuring a productive and sustainable resource, and promoting diverse markets for Virginia's forest products.

### Goal 3 - Increased Benefits from Trees and Forests

- Increase the social, environmental and economic benefits provided by trees and forests.

### Goal 4 - Human Capital Management

- Attract, develop and sustain the agency workforce to carry out our mission.

### Goal 5 - Continuous Improvement

- Continuously improve agency efficiencies and effectiveness, and ensure that VDOF has the necessary resources to carry out the mission.

### Goal 6 - Outreach and Collaboration

- Broaden outreach and collaboration to increase our influence, and generate support for VDOF and our mission.

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## Goal 1: Forest Resource Protection

### Protect the forest resources and the citizens of the Commonwealth from wildfire, and reduce impacts to the forest from other threats.

*Healthy forests are essential to the economic and environmental health of the Commonwealth and its citizens. Protecting our current healthy forest resource is the most basic duty of VDOF. The range of threats facing the forest will require action by all elements of the agency.*

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#### Objective 1A: Ensure VDOF maintains an appropriate and efficient level of readiness to respond to wildfire and other emergencies, and provide support to cooperating response agencies.

*VDOF is the premier wildfire prevention and wildfire fighting agency in the Commonwealth. It will maintain this role while building partnerships that expand its ability to meet the challenges of emergency response across the state.*

##### Strategies

- S1A-1. Capitalize on the Virginia Interagency Coordination Center to increase VDOF readiness, situational awareness and personnel safety in emergency response situations across the Commonwealth.
- S1A-2. Distribute state and federal grant funding to fire departments across the Commonwealth to increase the wildfire response capacity of Virginia's fire service.

##### Measures

- M1A-1. Percentage of eligible rural volunteer fire departments receiving available state and federal financial assistance.
- M1A-2. Percentage of wildfire responses that are 30 minutes or less.
- M1A-3. Percentage of fires contained during the first 24 hours.

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#### Objective 1B: Ensure functional woodlands remain a part of Virginia's landscape by protecting forestland from fragmentation or conversion to non-forest uses.

*Interconnected and intact forests provide the Commonwealth with the greatest range of economic, environmental and social benefits. By ensuring a sustained flow of natural goods and services for current and future generations, VDOF will reinforce its position as the leading forestland conservation agency in the Commonwealth.*

## Strategies

- S1B-1. Promote retention of high-conservation-value forestland through landowner-focused programs and incentives, and engagement with landowners, partners and localities.
- S1B-2. Protect large blocks of connected forestland with multiple conservation values using a variety of approaches, including working forest conservation easements.
- S1B-3. Emphasize and negotiate the avoidance or mitigation of forest fragmentation and loss as a result of proposed large-scale infrastructure projects.
- S1B-4. Effect intergenerational land transfer planning by landowners that keeps family forestland intact and in forest.
- S1B-5. Integrate forest management planning during the annual easement monitoring process to increase accomplishment of landowner and resource goals.

## Measures

- M1B-1. Number of acres protected from conversion to development.
- M1B-2. Number of families who have taken steps to maintain their forestland intact through intergenerational land transfer planning.

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## Objective 1C: Be proactive in preventing the loss of forest resources and other property due to wildfire and other natural and human-caused events

*VDOF will be the lead agency in protecting forests from wildfire. In addition, we will serve the Commonwealth as a member of the Virginia Emergency Response Team (VERT).*

## Strategies

- S1C-1. Enhance landscape-level emphasis on wildfire prevention and mitigation.
- S1C-2. Implement programs and projects to monitor and protect forests from damage caused by insects, diseases and non-native invasive plants, and work with partners to disseminate forest health risk information.
- S1C-3. Work with the forestry community to support legislation to address timber theft.
- S1C-4. Establish a timber theft response program that includes an internal reporting component, an investigatory process and an educational outreach component targeting landowners, prosecutors and law enforcement agencies.
- S1C-5. Expand efforts to increase acres of key diminished tree species within their historic range.

## Measures

- M1C-1. Number of communities at a reduced level of wildfire hazard through participation in VDOF prevention programs.
- M1C-2. Number of forest health surveys completed.
- M1C-3. Number of landowners who are assisted by VDOF in response to suspected timber theft.
- M1C-4. Number of educational programs delivered that focus on timber theft.

M1C-5. Number of diminished species projects completed (longleaf pine and shortleaf pine).

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## Goal 2: A Strong Forest Economy

### Support a strong forest economy by ensuring a productive and sustainable resource, and promoting diverse markets for Virginia's forest products.

*Our forests and the markets they support are essential to the economic well-being of all Virginians. Given the competing demands placed on our forests and the many factors impacting them, science-based management is the key to ensuring sustainable, healthy forest resources. While landowners have many reasons for owning and maintaining forestland, income from that land is critically important to support reforestation and management work, and to keep forests from being converted to other uses.*

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#### Objective 2A: Provide more proactive forest management planning to increase production and ensure resource sustainability on private and public lands.

*In our ongoing efforts to provide the widest range of options for all forest landowners, it is imperative that VDOF seek to provide forest management guidance well in advance of harvesting and other management activities.*

#### Strategies

- S2A-1. Identify and implement innovative ways to reach a broader group of forest landowners, especially prior to significant management decisions.
- S2A-2. Use forest health and wildlife management information and practices as a means to motivate landowners to plan and implement better forest management practices on their forestlands.
- S2A-3. Continue to increase the availability and productive potential of VDOF pine seedlings.
- S2A-4. Increase collaboration with state and federal agency partners to increase the application of sound forest management on public lands.
- S2A-5. Establish a stakeholder group to guide implementation of the Hardwood Sustainability Strategy.

#### Measures

- M2A-1. Number of management practices implemented by previously unengaged landowners.
- M2A-2. Number of hardwood management projects implemented.
- M2A-3. Weighted productivity rating value of seedlings produced in VDOF nurseries.
- M2A-4. Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) growth/drain ratio for pine sustainability.
- M2A-5. Number of acres of trees successfully regenerated in Virginia.



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**Objective 2B: Enhance the timber harvest inspection program to better help loggers protect water quality.**

*VDOF's exemplary timber harvest inspection program assures the public that timber harvests support the sustainability of the forest industry in Virginia and have minimal impact on water quality. VDOF will look for innovative methods and technologies to make the monitoring of over 5,000 annual harvest sites more efficient and effective.*

**Strategies**

- S2B-1. Develop an ongoing water quality training program that enables the consistent application of and compliance with Virginia's Silvicultural Water Quality Law.
- S2B-2. Incorporate new technologies in the harvest inspection and Best Management Practices (BMP) monitoring process.
- S2B-3. Seek consistent, dedicated funding for the harvest BMP implementation program.

**Measures**

- M2B-1. Percentage of harvested tracts with written pre-harvest plans.
- M2B-2. Statewide BMP implementation percentage.
- M2B-3. Number of loggers trained annually.

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**Objective 2C: Expand VDOF's role in support of Virginia's forest economy to develop new income streams for landowners, and pursue new markets for existing producers and additional manufacturers for underutilized forest products.**

*A strong, diverse forest economy supports healthy forests by providing an incentive for forest landowners to maintain and invest in their forests. The more options landowners have for generating income from forestland, the more likely they are to maintain it. Virginia is part of a competitive global forest products economy. Therefore, we need dedicated, expert resources supporting existing producers and proactively seeking new markets for underutilized forest products.*

**Strategies**

- S2C-1. Provide technical expertise in support of state programs related to exports and increased economic development.
- S2C-2. Develop a forest industry roundtable to identify issues and opportunities and develop plans to grow and diversify Virginia's forest products markets.
- S2C-3. Increase VDOF's capacity to analyze and report on forest resource and market information to support economic development.

**Measures**

- M2C-1. Number of new and/or expanding forest-related businesses or markets.
- M2C-2. Number of economic development project assists involving other state and local agencies.

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## Goal 3: Increased Benefits from Trees and Forests

### Increase the social, environmental and economic benefits provided by trees and forests.

*Trees and forests are natural assets that build a sense of community, character and place, while also providing ecosystem services, such as climate mitigation, water resource protection, wildlife habitat and timber products. The extent of forest and tree cover established and maintained across the landscape directly relates to the level of benefits received from forests.*

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#### Objective 3A: Expand the canopy of healthy tree cover to improve the quality of life in Virginia communities.

*VDOF will encourage and support sustainable community forestry programs that promote green space, tree canopy and the awareness of the benefits trees have to human health and well-being.*

##### Strategies

- S3A-1. Support planning efforts to incorporate green space into communities.
- S3A-2. Support projects that expand urban tree canopies, and improve their long-term maintenance and health.
- S3A-3. Promote the connection between community forests and human health.
- S3A-4. Increase life cycle management of trees to address urban wood utilization/waste.

##### Measures

- M3A-1. Number of communities that have urban wood use plans.
- M3A-2. Number of communities that have green infrastructure and/or urban forest management plans.
- M3A-3. Number of communities that have a new or revised tree inventory and/or urban tree canopy (UTC) analysis.

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#### Objective 3B: Enhance the capacity of forests and trees to provide water quality and quantity.

*We will support low-impact development practices, including tree planting and forestland conservation, to improve water quality and quantity in Virginia's communities.*

##### Strategies

- S3B-1. Improve water quality from selected forested watersheds through collaborative partnerships.
- S3B-2. Develop new strategies and identify additional resources to increase riparian buffer establishment on high-priority sites.
- S3B-3. Continue to collaborate with partners to incorporate working forestland conservation in the Chesapeake Bay restoration strategies.

## Measures

- M3B-1. Number of priority watercourses on which agency-established riparian buffer goals are achieved.

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### Objective 3C: Promote and expand the use of prescribed fire to meet multiple management and training objectives.

*Prescribed fire is an important tool to manage many forest ecosystems in Virginia, as well as a tool to increase the economic potential of many forestlands. In many areas, it has been greatly underutilized, to the general detriment of the forest resource. With the assistance of willing partners, VDOF will expand its use in the appropriate ecosystems and locations.*

## Strategies

- S3C-1. Work with cooperators to increase the number of trained personnel and other resources available to perform prescribed burning.

## Measures

- M3C-1. Acres of prescribed burning conducted in the Commonwealth.

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## Goal 4: Human Capital Management

### Attract, develop and sustain the agency workforce to carry out our mission.

*Successfully carrying out VDOF's mission relies on recruiting and retaining an inclusive, professional workforce that is able to succeed across all levels of governance in an adaptive workplace environment and amid 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.*

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### Objective 4A: Recruit and retain an inclusive workforce that is engaged with the VDOF's mission.

*Our ability to recruit and retain a talented workforce springs from employees' immediate involvement and engagement in all VDOF functions early in their careers. To ensure our employees support and engage with VDOF's mission, we will assure their occupational career paths are clearly intertwined with VDOF operations, and are contingent upon individual performance.*

## Strategies

- S4A-1. Review and revise the New Employee Development Guide and program to effectively standardize onboarding.
- S4A-2. Implement occupational career paths contingent upon increased KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities), performance standards and qualifications that align pay beyond state-driven salary adjustments.
- S4A-3. Implement a VDOF liaison team to support the Commonwealth's Talent Acquisition Strategy to attract a skilled and diverse workforce, with increased outreach efforts to veterans and minorities.

### Measures

M4A-1. Percentage of the workforce classified as veteran.

M4A-2. Percentage of the workforce classified as minority.

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### Objective 4B: Implement relevant, timely training programs and policies that develop technical competence while sustaining safe work environments.

*To increase VDOF's strength, we will deliver educational and training programs that not only allow each individual employee to maximize their technical expertise and professional development, but also instill a culture of safety across all VDOF functions.*

### Strategies

S4B-1. Implement a training and development program that centers on an occupational career path through attainment of competencies.

S4B-2. Implement a formal safety program that empowers all employees to put safety first.

S4B-3. Conduct a comprehensive review of VDOF's law enforcement programs.

### Measures

M4B-1. Number of safety and safety program non-compliance incidents.

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### Objective 4C: Establish an employee succession plan, anchored by a mentorship culture.

*Commonwealth agencies are expected to experience an influx of retirements over the next five years. Currently, nearly 20 percent of the VDOF workforce is eligible for retirement. By 2022, we anticipate this number climb to above 34 percent. VDOF will address this by implementing strategies that ensure institutional knowledge is shared across all levels.*

### Strategies

S4C-1. Pair new employees with mentors to navigate the new employee guide and program.

S4C-2. Establish career and professional development advisory roles at regional headquarters.

S4C-3. Implement a talent management process to foster upward mobility of VDOF employees.

### Measures

M4C-1. Turnover rate for full-time employees with up to five years experience.

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## Goal 5: Continuous Improvement

**Continuously improve agency efficiencies and effectiveness, and ensure that VDOF has the necessary resources to carry out the mission.**

*Developing a system for continuous improvement will enable VDOF to evaluate changing program needs, prioritize actions, assign and manage scarce agency resources, and allow for effective program integration in a manner that supports VDOF's strategic goals.*

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**Objective 5A: Ensure VDOF has adequate equipment, tools, facilities and resources.**

*VDOF's unique mission requires the agency to maintain facilities in geographically dispersed and remote areas, and to procure and maintain specialized equipment. We will support employees with the tools, resources and communication and information systems to enable them to effectively carry out that mission in a safe and professional manner.*

**Strategies**

- S5A-1. Establish an advisory group of knowledgeable vehicle operators and mechanics to help guide the procurement of VDOF vehicles.
- S5A-2. Determine acceptable levels of broadband capacity for satellite offices, survey existing broadband capacity and other connectivity issues at those offices, and prioritize upgrade work accordingly.
- S5A-3. Evaluate IFRIS modules and determine funding needs for modules that require critical upgrades or replacement with Commercial-Off-The-Shelf products where appropriate.
- S5A-4. Contact decision makers in other state and local agencies to secure long-term agreements for the construction of garages for our firefighting equipment.
- S5A-5. Develop a plan to prioritize and obtain funding for the removal of all abandoned VDOF fire towers over a 10-year span.

**Measures**

- M5A-1. Percentage of VDOF facilities with acceptable broadband capacity and connectivity.
- M5A-2. Number of IFRIS modules and IFRIS enhancement activities or technology updates.

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**Objective 5B: Practice continuous process improvement.**

*To increase agency effectiveness and employee involvement, VDOF will employ a standardized method for continuous improvement that incorporates input and feedback from all levels of the agency, and includes routine reviews of decisions.*

**Strategies**

- S5B-1. Promote awareness and implementation of best internal control and procurement practices.
- S5B-2. Ensure internal communications effectively provide for input, feedback and progress reporting.
- S5B-3. Build a knowledge base in a variety of formats to document frequently asked questions (FAQs) for technology and information systems used by the agency.
- S5B-4. Increase efficiencies in the processing of cost-share transactions through the acceptance of digital signatures and the exchange of pertinent documents in electronic form.

## Measures

- M5B-1. SWaM compliance percentage.
- M5B-2. Percentage change in VDOF maintenance costs for pick-up trucks and SUV's.
- M5B-3. Number of educational materials that are developed and distributed through VDOF's technology and information systems knowledge base.

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### Objective 5C: Ensure VDOF adapts to address the changing needs of forest resources and society.

*To help VDOF adapt to ongoing changes, we will develop a protocol enabling agency leadership to evaluate potential new programs and activities that align with the agency's mission, develop strategies to incorporate those programs and activities into the agency's operations based on available resources, and evaluate the success and scale of existing programs.*

## Strategies

- S5C-1. Develop a process to determine the desired scale and scope of all existing VDOF programs to effectively allocate resources.
- S5C-2. Develop a framework and implementation plans for the Forestland Conservation, Community Forestry, and Marketing programs to effectively integrate these programs within regional operations.
- S5C-3. Establish a protocol to evaluate new opportunities, determine their desired scope and scale, and prioritize or develop the necessary resources for those adopted.

## Measures

- M5C-1. Number of projects reviewed through VDOF's change management process.

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## Goal 6: Outreach and Collaboration

### Broaden outreach and collaboration to increase our influence, and generate support for VDOF and our mission.

*To be relevant to our audiences and best serve the forest resource, we must communicate science-supported information that educates, inspires and motivates engagement.*

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### Objective 6A: Increase VDOF's visibility and communications with key audiences.

*To support VDOF's mission and help achieve its goals, we will strengthen and expand our position as a trusted voice of forestry information and as a valued resource for our diverse audiences.*

## Strategies

- S6A-1. Develop strategies (e.g., conservation education, digital marketing) to reach target audiences and sustain engagement through relevant media platforms.
- S6A-2. Develop and implement a business plan for the website redesign.

**Measures**

M6A-1. Number of non-digital outreach activities implemented.

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**Objective 6B: Cultivate partnerships to increase our influence and reach.**

*VDOF will cultivate strong partnerships that enable us to balance the economic, environmental and social benefits of Virginia's forest resources.*

**Strategies**

S6B-1. Identify key partners and corresponding VDOF liaisons.

S6B-2. Develop and implement mutually supportive plans of action.

**Measures**

M6B-1. Number of partnerships with established VDOF liaisons.