

Forest Certification: A Primer

By: Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech

*This article is an excerpt from the full-length publication: **To Certify or Not? An Important Question for Virginia's Family Forest Owners, which can be found here: http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/ANR/ANR-50/ANR-50_PDF.pdf.***

Family woodland owners ask themselves many questions about their properties, such as if and when to cut timber, what types of wildlife to manage for, how to control exotic invasive species, and how to protect water quality. An increasingly common question that forest owners ask is whether they should certify their forests.

Forest certification programs inform consumers about the management of a forest. They recognize forests grown and harvested in a sustainable manner. In addition, they may provide marketplace recognition of wood products made, at least in part, from trees grown in certified forests and processed in a sustainable manner. Programs are voluntary and allow forest management to be evaluated and validated against a set of standards. Standards provide general guidance for holistic forest management practices and product sourcing.

Benefits of forest certification may include:

1. Increased access to markets
2. Acknowledgement of good forest management
3. Potential for better forest management

Costs associated with forest certification may include:

1. Acquiring a written management plan
2. Adopting current forest management practices
3. Auditing/monitoring fees
4. Continual improvement of forest management practices

There are three main certification systems in Virginia. Each system has its own standards, but they all address timber and non-timber forest values; maintenance of forest productivity and biodiversity; protection of soil and water; and aesthetic, recreational, cultural, and wildlife benefits.

The three major certification systems in Virginia are the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). While similar in many aspects, there are some key differences among the systems. An individual landowner's management goals and land base will help determine which system, if any, is best for their land.

How to Certify

Landowners should research the available programs or talk with a forestry professional to help decide whether certification makes sense and which system might be the best fit for their property. More information on each of the certification programs can be found on the program web sites:

- American Tree Farm System: <http://www.treefarmssystem.org>
- Forest Stewardship Council: <http://fscus.org> or <http://www.fsc.org/smallholders>
- Sustainable Forestry Initiative: <http://www.sfiprogram.org/>

Additional, non-biased information on certification can be obtained from Dovetail Partners, Inc., the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, and the Sustainable Forests Partnership.

An early step in any certification program is to obtain a written forest management plan. In Virginia, landowners can contact the Virginia Department of Forestry to get started with this process. The forester writing the plan should be made aware of intentions to certify, to ensure the proper components are addressed in the plan.

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VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

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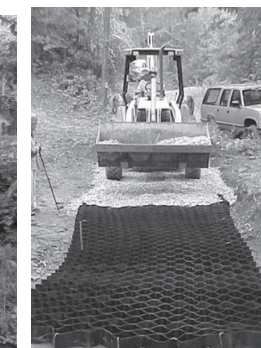
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Forestry Operations and Water Quality in Virginia By: Bill Lakel, Virginia Department of Forestry

Editor's note: In my March e-newsletter I wrote about the new Farm Bill and its provisions which would affect forest owners. I made the comment "Perhaps the biggest win for forestry in the Farm Bill is the provision preserving the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) nearly four-decade-old approach to treating forest roads and other forest management activities as nonpoint sources under the Clean Water Act". This comment elicited questions and concerns as to why this is a positive thing for forest owners and water quality. Bill Lakel, Water Quality Program Supervisor for the Virginia Department of Forestry, addresses these questions and concerns in this article. A list of peer-reviewed papers which demonstrate the science on which his comments are based can be found on the Forest Update website: <http://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu/newsletter/current/index.html>.

The Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) and Amendments generally consider water quality pollutants (e.g., sediment, temperature, chemicals) from normal forestry and agricultural operations as non-point source pollutants (NPSP) under Section 319. This means that agricultural and forestry operations are not easy to define, locate, and evaluate, unlike many industrial operations. For example, a large factory that discharges pollutants through a ditch, pipe, or channel, is relatively easy to locate and evaluate, because the source is in a fixed location and operates in a predictable fashion. These identifiable and fixed location types of polluters are considered point source pollution (PSP) and are regulated through permits from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Although regulation and permitting processes do not totally stop pollution, they do attempt to evaluate and minimize the problems. Additionally, the costs of satisfying the permitting requirements can be substantial. As a result, in many cases applicants will find an alternative mechanism to reduce pollution to avoid the permitting cost, so permitting can have a secondary positive impact on water quality.

Forestry operations, however, are transient, ephemeral, and widespread, and as such do not lend themselves to an intensive and costly permitting program administered by EPA. This is why section 319 of the CWA administers these activities with a much broader approach in cooperation with state and local governments, which are better suited to address NPSP sources across the landscape. It is also important to note that, under most circumstances, normal ongoing forestry and agricultural operations which follow Best Management Practices (BMPs) are also exempt from CWA wetlands permitting under section 404 for the same reasons.



In Virginia, Best Management Practices can help minimize sedimentation resulting from forestry operations. Practices include the use of temporary bridges (left) and geowebbing (right) for stream crossings during logging operations. Photos by: Mike Aust, Virginia Tech.

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Useful Resources

- A new report, Fading Forests III, released by the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture and The Nature Conservancy, compiles the latest data and analyses on the introduction, spread, and costs of non-native invasive tree pests and diseases. Find out what pests are in your county, and find the full report here: <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/habitats/forests/fading-forests-3-report-on-invasive-species.xml>.
- Honey bees are amazing creatures. Watch them up close on the USDA's Bee Cam: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=usdabees>.
- Soils are the foundation of our woodlands - they provide stability, water, air and nutrients to trees. Learn more about Virginia soils by Liking the Virginia Cooperative Extension Soils page: <https://www.facebook.com/IheartVAsoil>.
- **Like the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program on Facebook.** We have started a monthly trivia contest - on the first of each month, be the first to answer a forestry-related trivia question, and win a free VFLEP logo hat! See the Facebook page for complete rules: www.facebook.com/VFLEP.

CONTACT OUR SPONSORS AND STATE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AGENCIES:



Virginia Department of Forestry	Virginia Tech Department of Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation & Virginia Cooperative Extension	USDA Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program	Virginia Forestry Association	Virginia Sustainable Forestry Initiative SIC/Virginia Tree Farm Committee
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EVENTS CALENDAR			For the most complete listing of natural resource education events, visit the on-line events calendar at http://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu		
Contact	Date	Location	Event	Time	Fee
DCR	July, Aug., & Sept.	Virginia's State Parks	A variety of events and activities For a complete list, visit: www.dcr.virginia.gov/parks .	Varies	Varies
AC	Year-round	State-wide	Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer Basic Training www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/chapters.html	Varies	Varies
AD/JF	July 29 & Aug. 5	Farmville	Preparing for Generation NEXT Are you prepared to pass the environmental and heirloom values rooted in your forest to the next generation? If so, join us for a workshop with legal guidance from professionals in inter-generational land transfer.	12:30 - 7	\$50* for 1 - 2 people; \$25* for each additional
SA	Aug. 12	Boyce	Reading Trees: An Introduction to Identification Learn to identify trees using simple keys, books and memory tools from the Virginia Native Plant Society's Carrie Blair.	9 - 11:30	\$12 (Please pre-register)
SA	Aug. 20	Boyce	Ticks & Tick-Borne Diseases National Capitol Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Association members will share the latest on prevention, treatment, research, and other relevant topics.	7 - 8:30	\$12
JG	Sept. 5-7	Wakefield	Landowner Weekend Retreat Spend the weekend with fellow forest owners and natural resource professionals. A combination of classroom and field classes will teach new landowners about important aspects of forest management. Hands-on activities will teach tree identification and use of forestry equipment.	All weekend	Varies - please see the website for details
JF	Sept. 20	Lovingston	Venture Outdoors Program Looking for a crash course on current forestry topics? Attend this program and in just one day learn about management options for your hardwoods, invasive species and more.	9 - 3:30	Free* (Please pre-register)
JG	3 dates in October	3 locations across Virginia	Fall Forestry & Wildlife Field Tours Join VCE, natural resource professionals, and fellow forest owners to learn about forest and wildlife management on private, public, and industry-owned lands. This year's tours will visit the Chesapeake Bay, Grayson-Carroll Counties, and Halifax County.	Varies	Varies
If you are a real estate professional or Commissioner of the Revenue, please visit the Landowner Update website for a schedule of our continuing education classes, Real Forestry for Real Estate (www.forestupdate.frec.vt.edu).					
*meals included; **meals & lodging included					

EVENT CONTACTS			
Contact	Name/Affiliation	Phone	e-mail/website
DCR	Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation	804/786-1712	www.dcr.virginia.gov
AC	Alycia Crall	434/872-4580	www.virginiamasternaturalist.org
AD	Adam Downing	540/948-6881	adowning@vt.edu
JF	Jason Fisher	434/476-2147	jasonf@vt.edu
SA	Bland State Arboretum	540/837-1758 x 224	www.bland.virginia.edu/our-foundation/online_payments
JG	Jennifer Gagnon	540/231-6391	jgagnon@vt.edu

Return of the Wapati – An Update

Back in the summer of 2010, the Virginia Forest Landowner Update (V. 24 No. 3) featured a story about the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries' (VDGIF) plan to reintroduce elk to Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise Counties in SW Virginia. Elk were returned to the area over three years, with the final 45 animals being released this April. There are approximately 85 elk in the current herd; only 3 have died since the initial reintroduction in 2012. For now, concerns expressed over bringing elk back to the area (collisions with cars, damage to agricultural fields, and introduction of disease) have not come to fruition. The VDGIF hopes to grow the herd to 400 animals.

You Ain't From Around Here! A Better Approach to Invasives? By: Rod Walker, Middle Mountain Farm, LLC

Landowners, both large and small, are combating invasives of various kinds all across the US and, indeed, across the world. Most of us take small steps to deal with those that most directly impact us - weeds in the garden, stink bugs in the house, garlic mustard around the lawn. Other forest owners deal with various invasives on a larger scale, including trees like Ailanthus, vines like kudzu and bittersweet, stilt grass, and dozens more. We all struggle with the realization that, at best, we beat them back to some edge, beyond which they thrive and continuously send seeds, runners, and roots back across the edge into our space. We also struggle with the need to fight the battle seemingly forever, as each of the invasives has deposited a seed bank that will take years to deplete even if we pull or kill every single sprout.

Furthermore, each of us tends to conduct our own experiments with various methods to determine what treatment is most effective. We could learn a lot from each other as well as through various public and private agencies and resources on the internet.

One approach that is largely unknown in Virginia, but common elsewhere in the US, is to create regional organizations that target selected species across a wide area. These organizations also serve as a means for sharing best practices and, indeed, raising funds from other sources to allow for broader, more aggressive initiatives. These regional organizations have many names, but most often are called Cooperative Weed Management Areas or CWMAs. A typical CWMA covers 5 to 10 counties, but some cover whole states and some cover one county or less. These are stand-alone non-profit organizations whose steering committees consist of representatives from various non-profits like The Nature Conservancy, federal agencies and landowners like the Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Forest Service and National Park Service, state agencies like the Virginia Department of Forestry, and private landowners. Collectively they create and operate initiatives across their target geography, conduct public awareness activities, share best practices, and apply for grants from various public and private sources. And while the common thread is dealing with invasives, the mission is often broader - such as overall improvement of forest health. This might include how to reestablish native species where invasives have been killed or removed. Ultimately, each CWMA sets its own agenda, creates its own annual plans, and conducts its own programs. Many CWMAs have grown to the point they have part time and/or full time employees to drive their activities.

Dealing with invasives on a regional, collaborative basis is a much better answer than each of us only working separately. And as the effects of invasives become more severe and the public becomes more aware, this approach should become more and more appealing and popular.

In Virginia the only CWMA in existence today is the Potomac Highlands Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area that covers several counties in West Virginia and two counties in northwest Virginia.

The author, a landowner in the Charlottesville area, is working with various organizations to create a CWMA in central Virginia. For more information on CWMAs, start with the CWMA Cookbook at www.MIPN.org. For more information on forming a CWMA in central Virginia, contact Rod Walker at rwalker@alum.mit.edu.



Tree being overwhelmed by oriental bittersweet. Photo by: Midwest Invasive Plant Network.

Water Quality cont. from page 1

The current CWA approach to NPSP under section 319 includes the development of BMPs in cooperation with state governments that will help operators minimize pollution to Virginia's waterways. The CWA also established a system that allows state and local governments to apply for federal grants in order to fund positions and projects that directly address NPSP locally. Both the BMP and local water quality programs are very active in Virginia through both the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Department of Forestry (VDOF).

It is important to understand that forestry operations are particularly well-monitored in Virginia by the VDOF; this is especially true for active harvesting operations. All forest harvesting operations must, by law, be reported to the VDOF within 3 days of the start of harvest operations. Virginia also has a Silvicultural Water Quality Law which provides the State Forester of Virginia broad authority to monitor timber harvesting in the commonwealth and take decisive action against any owners and operators who allow forestry operations to contribute sediment pollution to the waters of Virginia. This includes the ability to issue remedial recommendations, hold administrative hearings, issue stop work orders, and assess and levy financial penalties up to \$5,000 per day of violation. This law enforcement program is carried out by as many as 90 VDOF inspectors. A much smaller and specially trained group of water quality inspectors also audits 240 completed harvests per year to monitor BMP implementation and water quality controls.

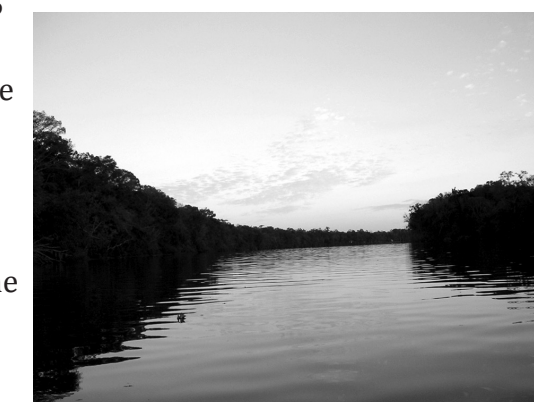
It is also important to recognize that forestry operations in general do not apply chemicals or concentrated fertilizers and that the rates of such applications, when they do occur, are much lower than those used in agricultural or urban activities. Furthermore, forest operations generally do not expose large areas of bare soils. Typically, ongoing normal forestry operations almost always include replanting, reseeding, or natural regrowth strategies to reforest stands of timber that have been harvested; these reduce NPSP potential. The revegetation of the site also causes hydrologic impacts resulting from forestry operations to be minor and short-lived compared to other more intensive and less vegetated land uses such as agriculture and urban development. The scientific research and literature is clear and well-established on these points. Severe impacts to streams, such as has often been measured downstream of agriculture and urban development, is simply not the norm for forestry operations.

The general consensus of the research regarding protection of water quality is that forest operations are compatible with good water quality. This does not mean forestry operations never cause environmental degradation, because in some cases they clearly do. However, evaluations of the current Virginia BMP program indicate that almost 90% of forest operations comply with water quality BMPs and the state program is very effective. The relatively low occurrence and severity of major problems does not warrant a federally administered expensive point source permitting approach. With all that being said, it is important that the federal government continue to vigorously pursue reductions in NPSP through cooperative efforts with the commonwealth and other states and localities by encouraging sound best management practices on the ground for both forestry and agricultural operations.

In short, forestry BMPs work!

To review the research on forestry practices and water quality, visit the Virginia Forest Update website for a list of peer-reviewed publications:
<http://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu/newsletter/current/index.html>

Dr. Bill Lakel is the Water Quality Program Supervisor for the Virginia Department of Forestry; william.lakel@dof.virginia.gov.



Almost ninety percent of forestry operators in Virginia comply with Virginia's Best Management Practices. Photo by: Mike Aust, Virginia Tech.