



# Southwest Virginia Landowner Woods & Wildlife Conference

February 22, 2025 Squires Student Center, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg

Location	Time	Title	Presenter
General Session <b>Ballroom B</b>	9:30	Registration & coffee	
	10:00	Introductory remarks	Jennifer Gagnon
	10:15 - 11:00	<b>Program Kick-off</b> If a Tree Falls and There is no Bat Around to Hear it, does it Make a Sound? The Reality of Where We are Post White-nose Syndrome	Mark Ford
Concurrent Session 1 <b>TBA</b>	11:15-12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Getting Started in Beekeeping</li> <li>c. Revolutionizing Forestry and Land Reclamation with Drone Technology</li> <li>d. Storm Effects on Trees: It Depends</li> <li>d. Natural Resources Professionals Panel</li> </ul>	James Wilson Brandon Beal  John Seiler
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Forestry</li> <li>• Department of Wildlife Resources</li> <li>• Soil &amp; Water Conservation Districts</li> <li>• Private</li> </ul>	Johnny Vest Andy Rosenberger Christopher Barbour Duane Means
General Session <b>Ballroom B</b>	12:15 - 12:30	Vendor Presentations	
-----LUNCH-----			
General Session <b>Ballroom B</b>	1:30 - 2:00	<b>Plenary Session</b> A Primer on Carbon in Virginia's Privately Owned Forests	Steve Prisley
Concurrent Session 2 <b>TBA</b>	2:15 - 3:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Tick Awareness in Southwest Virginia</li> <li>b. Invasive Plants Recently Added to the DCR List</li> <li>c. Developing Storm-Resilient Streams</li> <li>d. Removing Storm Damaged Wood from Your Forest (Panel)</li> </ul>	Matt Sharpe Rod Walker Tess Thompson
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety Considerations for Removing Storm Damaged Wood from your Forest</li> <li>• Equipment Selection for Low Impact Timber Harvesting</li> </ul>	Karen Snape Ryan Wilcock
	3:00 - 3:30	Break	
Concurrent Session 3 <b>TBA</b>	3:30 - 4:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Protecting Our Communities: Building Resilience in the Wildland-Urban Interface</li> <li>b. Species of Greatest Conservation Need: How the Wildlife Action Plan Informs Conservation Actions</li> <li>c. Using Storm Damaged Wood (Panel)</li> </ul>	Michael Downey Jeff Trollinger
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What I Have Learned as a New Portable Sawmill Owner</li> <li>• Moving from Destruction to Opportunity: Using Storm Damaged Trees</li> </ul>	Kyle Peer Joe Lehnen
General Session <b>Ballroom B</b>	4:30 - 5:15	<b>Capstone</b> Identifying and Managing Common Problems of Landscape Shade Trees	Eric Wiseman
	5:15 - 5:30	Closing remarks, door prizes, evaluations	

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## Session Descriptions

### 10:15 – 11:00 Program Kick-off

#### **If A Tree Falls and There is No Bat Around to Hear it, does it Make a Sound? The Reality of Where we are Post White-nose Syndrome - Dr. Mark Ford**

Mark will discuss the status of bats in Virginia and regionally, how that interacts with forestry and land management, what the implications are for landowners, and what we are, or are not, doing about it.

### 11:15 – 12:00 Concurrent Sessions

#### **Getting Started in Beekeeping - Dr. James Wilson**

Join Dr. James Wilson, Extension Apiculturist at Virginia Tech and learn more about native bees, pollination needs, and getting started in beekeeping. Beekeeping can be a very rewarding effort and can be used to supplement pollination services, produce goods like honey, wax, and bees for sale, and to help us understand more about our local flowering resources. Here we will talk about getting started, costs, benefits, challenges, and more. Come for the free resource links and stay for the fun conversation and honey tasting.

#### **Revolutionizing Forestry and Land Reclamation with Drone Technology - Brandon Beal**

This presentation will explore how drone technology is transforming forestry and reclamation efforts for landowners. He'll dive into practical applications such as reforestation, erosion control, and seeding on challenging terrains.

#### **Storm Effects on Trees: It Depends - Dr. John Seiler**

No one ever likes to see a tree damaged by severe weather events. However, it happens. The impacts of severe wind and rain on our forests depend on many factors. And forests are surprisingly resilient. This presentation will cover when, why, and how trees become vulnerable to storms, but more importantly, how trees and forests recover after storms.

#### **Natural Resource Professionals Panel**

Spend time getting to know local natural resource professions who can help you manage your woods and the wildlife that live in them. The panelists will discuss the services they provide and how you can prepare to make the most of your time when they visit your property. This session will provide ample opportunity for you to ask questions.

### 12:15 – 12:30 Vendor Presentations

### 12:30 – 1:30 Lunch

### 1:30 – 2:00 Plenary

#### **A Primer on Carbon in Virginia's Privately Owned Forests- Dr. Steve Prisley**

The carbon sequestered in Virginia's private forests plays a critical role in our national approach to mitigating climate change. This presentation will review the basics of the forest carbon cycle, using data about Virginia's forests from the U.S. Forest Service. Along the way, we'll clear up some misconceptions about the role of forest management and provide resources for landowners who wish to learn more.

### 2:15 – 3:00 Concurrent Sessions

#### **Tick Awareness in Southwest Virginia - Matt Sharpe**

This presentation will cover some of the species of ticks present in Southwest Virginia. Matt will discuss how to identify them, where they are, what diseases they transmit, and how you can protect yourself.

### **Invasive Plants Recently Added to the Department of Conservation and Recreation's List - Rod Walker**

The Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) list of 90 invasive plants was recently updated to now include 103 plants. This session will provide a brief introduction to the Blue Ridge PRISM, the DCR list, and each of those 13 newly added plants.

### **Developing Storm-Resilient Streams - Dr. Tess Thompson**

Tess will discuss how streams move water, sediment, food, and animals. She'll explain the importance of floodplains and the meaning of phrases like "100-year flood". Finally, she'll provide tips on how to develop resilient streams - not straightening and/or clearing streambeds and crossing streams properly.

### **Removing Storm Damaged Wood from Your Forest (Panel)**

- **Safety Considerations for Removing Storm Damaged Wood from your Forest - Karen Snape**

Removing storm-damaged timber can be dangerous. Learn some basic safety precautions and hazards to watch out for if you decide to undertake this work on your property.

- **Equipment Selection for Low Impact Timber Harvesting - Ryan Wilcock**

Another component to safely removing small volumes of wood from your forest is using the right equipment. Special, small-scale equipment is available to complete this type of work.

**3:00 - 3:30 break**

### **3:30 - 4:15 Concurrent Sessions**

#### **Protecting Our Communities: Building Resilience in the Wildland-Urban Interface - Michael Downey**

The presentation will examine how communities can proactively mitigate wildfire risks through collaborative approaches like the Firewise program, which emphasizes community-level planning, risk assessments, and targeted actions to reduce potential fire damage. The discussion will cover key elements such as defensible space, community preparedness, building with fire-resistant materials, and the importance of landscape management to create more resilient neighborhoods in high-risk fire zones.

#### **Species of Greatest Conservation Need; How the Wildlife Action Plan Informs Conservation Actions - Jeff Trollinger**

State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAP) were mandated by Congress to all states that wanted to receive State Wildlife Grant monies for the management of nongame and other species in critical need of conservation. The object of the SWAPs was to try to prevent species from being listed under the Endangered Species Act and to implement on the ground conservation actions that would help conserve these species before the legal protections of the Act create stricter guidelines for those conservation actions. The Plans have to be updated every 10 years, and this will be Virginia's third SWAP. The 2025 SWAP has expanded to include marine and plant species and also incorporates tribal interests and concerns. Within the SWAP, a comprehensive list of species of greatest conservation need are outlined, the habitats they inhabit, threats to those species and habitats and conservation actions that can be implemented to assist these species. An online tool will accompany the written portion of the Plan and provide information about where these species occur.

### Using Storm Damaged Wood (Panel)

- **What I have Learned as a New Portable Sawmill Owner – Kyle Peer**  
As with any owning any new type of equipment or starting a new venture, there is a steep learning curve. This will be a review of what I have learned, what I did wrong and what I somehow got right.
- **Moving from Destruction to Opportunity: Using Storm Damaged Trees – Joe Lehnen**  
In mere minutes our favorite trees can be transformed from beautiful natural specimens to broken standing stems or twisted piles of wood. Join us to learn how to recover and best utilize your trees from these unpredictable, landscape altering weather events.

### 4:30 – 5:15 Capstone

#### Identifying and Managing Common Problems of Landscape Shade Trees - Dr. Eric Wiseman

Shade trees in our yards and landscapes bring nature to our front door and enrich our day-to-day lives. But there are lots of problems for trees that can come from domesticated living. Weather, pests, pollution, and crummy soil are common culprits. In this presentation, you will learn about these common tree problems, how to prevent them, and who to call on when doctoring your trees goes beyond a do-it-yourself project.

### Speaker Bios

**Christopher Barbour** is from Pittsylvania County, Virginia. He grew up on a flue cured tobacco, beef cattle, and small grain farm and graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry and Wildlife Management in 1991. He managed a large farm after school that farmed commercial cattle and registered Simmental seed stock. He also raised sheep, goats, and horses. Christopher started with the Skyline Soil and Water Conservation in 1995 and is in his 30th year serving the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski, putting conservation on the ground and helping people out with natural resource issues. He also has his own farm and raises cattle for meat.

**Brandon Beal** is the co-owner of Elevation Aerial Application, one of Virginia's largest drone aerial application companies specializing in agricultural drone operations and fleet management. With a passion for innovation and sustainability, Brandon has extensive experience in leveraging drone technology for seeding, spraying, and reclamation projects across diverse terrains.

**Michael Downey** is the Assistant Director for Wildfire Mitigation and Prevention with the Virginia Department of Forestry. His responsibilities include overseeing the Virginia Community Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, promoting Wildfire Prevention and Education, is the state liaison for the NFPA Firewise USA Program, and support of all risk emergency operations for the agency.

Prior to serving the role he was an Area Forester with DOF assisting private landowners to implement sustainable forest management practices and provide professional assistance in land use planning, conservation, forest health and education.

Michael is a native to Upstate New York where he obtained a Bachelor of science degree Forest Resources Management from SUNY Environmental Science and

Forestry. Michael enjoys being a husband to his wife Jessica and a father to his son Harrison. He and his family now reside in Gordonsville, Virginia where they spend their days gardening and exploring the outdoors.

**Dr. Mark Ford** is the Unit Leader of the U.S. Geological Survey Virginia Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and an Associate Professor in Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech. His work focuses on bat distribution and habitat relationships in forested systems, spruce-fir ecology and deer/elk herbivory. Prior to coming to Virginia Tech, he has research and development experience with the Department of Defense, the U.S. Forest Service, and forest industry.

**Joe Lehnen** is a Forest Utilization & Marketing Specialist, coordinating the Urban Wood Program for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Joe led the effort to establish the formation of the Virginia Urban Wood Group in 2017. Joe attained his Bachelor of Science Degree in Forestry/Wildlife Management from Purdue University and has worked for the Va. Dept. of Forestry since 1979, spending most of his career, 33 years, as an Area Forester for the Shenandoah Valley work area. He is an ISA Certified Arborist and also serves as a board member of the Virginia Urban Forest Council. Joe also serves on the Education & Outreach Committee of the Urban Wood Network, and in 2021 served as a special assistant to the Virginia Secretary of Ag & Forestry.

**Duane Means** is an independent professional forester with over thirty years of on-the-ground experience planning and managing forested habitats. He has worked for government agencies, forest industry, and private consulting and is the owner/forester of Arrow Forestry here in southwest Virginia. His goal is to improve forest value and native habitat management in the Appalachian region. Duane is a SAF Certified Forester and inspector for American Tree Farm and National Deer Association/QDMA.

**Kyle Peer** is the Superintendent of the Reynolds Homestead Forest Resources Research Center in Critz, Virginia. The Reynolds Homestead is one of eleven Agricultural Research and Extension centers in Virginia and is housed in the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech. He has also been the Virginia Cooperative Extension Specialist for Christmas trees in the state of Virginia since 2005. His other extension programs include working with forest landowners, master gardeners, master naturalists, sharp loggers, environmental organizations, SAF and youth. When not at the station, Kyle can be found hiking, paddling, tinkering around his property in Floyd, or chilling in front of live band.

**Dr. Steve Prisley** is a Principal Research Scientist at the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI), a research nonprofit. Before joining NCASI, Steve was Professor of forest inventory and GIS at Virginia Tech. He has over 13 years of experience in the forest products industry, and for several decades he has worked closely with scientists from the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis program, using their data in forest carbon assessments and inventory projections. Steve served as a coauthor for two reports for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) dealing with carbon sequestration in forests, and on expert panels for EPA, USGS, and USDA focused on forest carbon. He lives here in Blacksburg, with two sons nearby in Roanoke.

**Andrew Rosenberger** has been a Private Lands Biologist for the past 15 years, helping private landowners decide how to best manage their property for wildlife and agriculture productivity. His work has been funded by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. Andrew helps the landowners in the 22 counties of Southwest Virginia. Prior to becoming a Private Lands Biologist, Andrew was a Research Associate with the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech for 10 years work on projects ranging from technology education, vegetation mapping, to new innovative techniques for monitoring wildlife populations.

**Dr. John Seiler** has been a member of the faculty in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Tech since 1985. He earned his B.S. degrees (Forestry, and Environmental Resource Management) and M.S. degree (Forest Biology) from Penn State University and his Ph.D. (Tree Ecophysiology) from Virginia Tech. Along with his students and colleagues, he has been studying trees for over 40 years. Their research has investigated everything from acid rain to drought as they impact the productivity of forests. This work is summarized in over 115 referred research articles. In 2010, John was named University Alumni Distinguished Professor in recognition of his teaching and research. He has led a team that developed numerous award-winning multimedia tutorials for tree identification, placing the VT Dendro as the number one web site for tree identification. Over his years at Virginia Tech, he has taught a wide variety of classes including undergraduate classes in tree identification, wildland fire, tree biology, plant physiology and forest ecology, and graduate classes in plant water relations, tree physiology and forest ecology. He has taught students ranging from kindergarten to retirees and never passes up an opportunity to speak to a group about trees.

**Matt Sharpe** is a graduate student studying entomology at Virginia Tech. His research involves the Asian longhorned tick and its presence in cattle pastures. Matt grew up in Blacksburg and received a Bachelor of Science Degree from Virginia Tech. He plans to pursue a career in Army entomology after graduation.

**Karen Snape** is a Virginia Cooperative Extension Associate working in the areas of logger education and landowner education. She coordinates the day-to-day operation of the SHARP Logger program, which trains loggers in sustainable forestry, safety, and water quality protection. She also serves as the statewide coordinator for the Generation NEXT legacy planning program. Prior to coming to VCE, Karen served as an Area Forester for the Virginia Department of Forestry in the Fredericksburg area. She holds a Bachelor of Science from Juniata College in Pennsylvania and a Master of Forestry from Duke University.

**Dr. Tess Thompson** is an associate professor and extension specialist in biological systems engineering at Virginia Tech. Prior to pursuing her Ph.D. she worked as an engineer in state government and private consulting. Her research in stream and wetland restoration focuses on the role of vegetation in flow resistance and streambank erosion, mitigating the impacts of urban development on stream systems, and predicting the onset and rate of streambank erosion. Dr. Thompson has over 25 years of experience in water resources engineering, including the design of stormwater controls and stream restoration projects and field monitoring and simulation of Best Management Practices, streams, and wetlands. Dr. Thompson teaches university courses in fluvial geomorphology and stream restoration. She currently serves on the Scientific and Technical Advisory

Committee for the Chesapeake Bay Program and is a fellow of the American Ecological Engineering Society.

**Jeff Trollinger** has worked with or for the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) since 1987. Jeff is originally from Luray, Virginia. He has B.S. in Wildlife Management from VA Tech, a second B.S. Human Resource Management from Bluefield College and a Graduate Certificate from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in Wildlife Recreation and Nature Tourism in 2009. He helped develop DWR's Watchable Wildlife Program, managed the program for 10 years, and led the team that developed the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. He led the development of major portions of the Agency's Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan and DWR's Wildlife Viewing Plan. In addition to managing the Watchable Wildlife Program he served as the Deputy Director for the Agency's Bureau of Wildlife Resources for 8 years, and as the Assistant Chief of the Aquatic Wildlife Resources Division for 6 years and as the Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator for the past two years.

He has co-authored four publications for which he has received several regional and national awards, and he co-edited a publication with the Colorado Division of Wildlife on Wildlife Viewing and Photography Blinds. Jeff is married to a wonderful husband and they have four four-legged children and recently moved to their retirement home in Nelson County!!

**Johnny Vest** graduated from Virginia Tech in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in forest resources and environmental conservation, majoring in natural resource conservation with minors in forestry and urban forestry. He spent the summer after graduation in the western U.S., mostly as a woodland firefighter. He began working full time with the Virginia Department of Forestry in 2016 as an area forester, covering Roanoke and Craig counties. He moved in 2018 and now covers Montgomery, Giles, and Craig Counties.

**Rod Walker** has been a timberland owner for over 45 years. Having owned land in Wisconsin and West Virginia, he and Maggie purchased their land in Albemarle County, Virginia in 1998 and moved there full time in 2012. Prior to retiring, Rod spent 40+ years in IT consulting - totally unrelated to forestry.

Their timberland ownerships were originally for investment and enjoying various outdoors activities. Over time serious forestry activities crept in, starting with planting pine plantations, timber harvests and eventually moving into invasive species management.

While working on invasive plants on their Albemarle property, Jake Hughes from the Shenandoah National Park made them aware of the concept of Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs). Together with Jake, they organized the first CWMA to be formed in Virginia, now known as the Blue Ridge PRISM, to address invasive plants across 12 counties of Virginia, comprising more than 3.5 million acres. Rod is currently the President of Blue Ridge PRISM, Inc. For information on the Blue Ridge PRISM, visit [blueridgeprism.org](http://blueridgeprism.org).

In 2023 Rod was recognized as the Virginia Tree Farmer of the Year by the Virginia Tree Farm Foundation.

**Ryan Wilcock** has been in the logging industry for 25 years. He went into arboriculture work straight out of high school and quickly transitioned into small scall, low impact logging with a farm tractor and winch. He then transitioned to conventional logging due to a lack of demand for low impact work. He had multiple skidders at one point and was moving a lot of wood but did not like what he was doing. In 2009, Ryan sold all his large equipment and went back to logging with a farm tractor and winch, performing low impact work on small tracts as demand



was starting to increase. In 2014, Ryan and his wife moved to northern Idaho where he worked for a high lead logging company felling timber and running equipment. After 4 years, they returned home to southwest Virginia. Ryan has returned to his roots, regenerative farming and low impact logging. He now works for a European equipment manufacturer that is the world leader in low impact logging equipment. He also performs low impact work for landowners.

**Dr. James Wilson** is a Collegiate Assistant Professor, Extension Apiculturist at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg Virginia. James enjoys taking beekeeping Extension on the road throughout Virginia, and teaching Virginia Tech's undergraduate Bees and Beekeeping class and lab, as well as teaching Insects and Human Society courses. Through his continued work in Integrated Pest Management, James leverages an agricultural perspective with a great passion for beekeeping into all his work to protect pollinators and further beekeeping in Virginia. James completed his PhD at Virginia Tech in 2016 working with bees, pumpkin pests, and their associated parasitoid wasps, as well as novel insecticide risk qualification in bees. With this full circle approach to improving pollinator protection and pest management in Virginia pumpkin production, James looks forward to keeping bees safe and working in agriculture systems into the future. Lastly, James is working to reach young bee enthusiasts to help welcome new beekeepers to our greater beekeeping community.

**Eric Wiseman** is associate professor of urban and community forestry in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Tech. He holds B.S. and M.S. degrees from Virginia Tech and received his Ph.D. from Clemson University. Dr. Wiseman started his career working several years as a field arborist and has been on the faculty at Virginia Tech since 2005. His teaching, research, and outreach focus on urban forest ecology and management and professional development of arborists and urban foresters. He is a Certified Arborist by the International Society of Arboriculture and has provided technical assistance on tree management to homeowners, municipalities, and businesses for over twenty years.



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