

Syllabus

2026 Online Woodland Options for Landowners

Monday June 1 – Friday August 7

Please read this entire syllabus. If you have any questions, contact the course instructor

Overview:

Woodland Options for Landowners is designed to familiarize and connect landowners with their forests, and to help them develop specific management plans for their properties. Our mission is for you to develop goals and objectives for your land, to gain practical knowledge of basic forest management principles, and to learn how to apply that information to reach your goals. During this course, you will be introduced to the concepts of defining goals, land stewardship and sustainability, property deeds and boundary lines, maps, photos, and soil surveys, forest ecology and management, tree identification, management options, sources of assistance, and planning.

Registration:

Online registration for the 2026 semester of Woodland Options for Landowners begins April 1, 2026. The course registration web page is located on the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program website at: <https://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu>. To register for Woodland Options, simply visit the above website and find “Online Registration” on the pull-down menu. Pre-course materials will be available starting Monday, May 18. You will also receive a registration confirmation, welcome email, and detailed instructions from the course instructor as the class date approaches. Class officially begins Monday, June 1.

Background Required:

None. Woodland Options for Landowners is an introductory level overview of basic forest management principles and techniques. This course is designed for private forest landowners of any acreage and is not intended for landowners who have substantial experience in working alone or with natural resource professionals in the management of their forests. Nevertheless, veteran landowners are welcome to enroll and may take the course as a refresher on basic forest management. If you do not feel this course is right for you, but have specific forest management questions, please direct them to the course instructor.

Educational Objectives:

By completing this course, you will:

1. Develop a clear vision of your goals for managing your property.
2. Understand the social, economic, and biologic limits to your management goals.
3. Know the location of your property boundary lines.
4. Know how to read a topographic map, aerial photograph, and soil survey and understand their applications to forest management on your property.
5. Visualize the effects of different silvicultural systems (and know what silvicultural systems are).
6. Know the common tree species and basic forest cover types on your property.
7. Identify specific management units on your property.
8. Develop a plan of action for each management unit on your property.
9. Know and contact your local and regional natural resource management assistance agencies.

Required Text and Materials:

No additional text, materials, or costs are required to complete the basic assignments. The basic assignments can be completed entirely online and do not require a visit to your forest property. Basic assignments consist of an online reading assignment and a review quiz. However, most modules have an associated advanced assignment that you are strongly encouraged to complete if possible. All worksheets and field sheets needed to complete the advanced assignments are located on the course website. However, to complete the advanced assignments, you will also need some additional materials and equipment. The following additional materials and recent average costs are listed by course module in which the equipment is needed (note: some equipment is needed for more than one advanced assignment but is only listed for the first assignment needed).

Module 1: dendrology (tree identification) field guide (Free-\$25); A basic dendrology guide is included in your registration packet; however, we strongly suggest that you obtain a comprehensive guide for all eastern tree species. Suggested dendrology guidebooks include:

- A Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs: Northeastern and North-central United States and Southeastern and South-central Canada (Peterson Field Guides) by George A. Petrides and Roger Tory Peterson (1973).

- A Field Guide to Eastern Trees (Peterson Field Guides) by George A. Petrides, Janet Wehr, and Roger Tory Peterson (1998).

New copies of all of these are available for purchase online; in many cases, low-priced, used copies are also available. In addition to printed guides, there are numerous online tree identification apps. Virginia Tech Dendrology has a free mobile tree id app, VTree, available for both Android and IOS devices.

Module 2: A digital camera (\$80 - ?). Your smart phone or tablet camera are fine as well.

Module 3: compass with **adjustable declination setting** (\$30-100) – **look for adjustable declination setting in the description** of the product; one hundred' or longer fiberglass measuring tape (\$25-40).

Module 4: topographic quadrangle map (free to \$7); aerial photograph (free to \$60 depending on size); soil survey (available online for free). For the purposes of this class, the imagery you can find on Google Earth is sufficient (and free). However, if you want larger, high quality print images, ordering information is provided with the pre-course materials. You will need to order these resources no later than the first week of class.

Module 5: (no additional materials required)

Module 6: (no additional materials required)

Many of the above items can be located at a local hunting outfitter, camping supply store, or discount retailer. The following are suggested mail/internet sources for natural resource management supplies:

- **Bailey's:** phone: 1-800-322-4539; <https://www.baileysonline.com/>
- **Construction Safety Products:** 1-800-592-6940; <http://www.cspforestry.com/>
- **Forestry Suppliers, Inc.:** 1-800-647-5368; <https://www.forestry-suppliers.com/>

In addition, incidental funds will be needed for costs such as writing instruments, clipboard and paper, photocopies, and travel to and from your property.

Instructor:

Your instructor for Woodland Options is Extension Associate Jennifer Gagnon. Jennifer is employed by the Virginia Tech Department of Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation and coordinates the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program. She received her B.S. in

Forest Resource Conservation and Management and her M.S. in Silviculture from the University of Florida. You may contact Jennifer at:

228 Cheatham Hall (0324)
310 West Campus Drive
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540-231-6391; jgagnon@vt.edu

Grades:

This course is not for college credit or for a grade. The quizzes at the end of each Module are there for you to assess your understanding of the materials. There is a gradebook where the results of the quizzes will be recorded, for your own information.

Office Hours:

By phone, normal office hours (8am-5pm), most weekdays. E-mail anytime.

Course Announcements:

Each time you enter the course website, you will first see the course announcement page. All announcements will be posted to this page and you should be sure to check for new ones at least once a week. Announcements will include reminders about course assignments and details for ordering materials and will address frequently asked questions from participants.

Mentors:

The purpose of the mentors is to provide participants with a virtual face-to-face support network while completing course content and activities. Participants will interact at least once per module (a minimum of six times total through the course) to discuss questions and issues pertinent to the module subject matter. Questions will be posted on the course website's discussion board by the instructor. However, you are also encouraged to ask your own questions, post comments, and share experiences. Based on feedback from previous semesters, actively participating on the discussion board will improve your online learning experience. Your fellow students and mentors can be wonderful sources of information.

General Outline:

Module 1: Vision, Goals, and Family Resources

- Understanding the limits to management
- Developing a vision and goals for your property
- Family resource inventory
- Dendrology 1

Module 2: Stewardship and Sustainability

- Brief history of forestry and land use in the southeastern United States
- Impacts of decisions on past, current, and future land use
- Understanding land use history on your property
- Dendrology 2

Module 3: Property Deeds and Boundary Lines

- Locating a legal property description for your property
- Your property in the landscape
- Basic compass use and orienteering
- Boundary line identification
- Dendrology 3

Module 4: Maps, Photos, and Soil Surveys

- Tools used to assess forest resources
- Locating and reading a topographic map
- Locating and using an aerial photograph
- Locating and using a soil survey
- Application of maps, photos, and soil surveys to your property
- Dendrology 4

Module 5: Forest Ecology and Management

- Understanding forest soils and sites
- Basic forest ecology

- Introduction to silviculture
- Dendrology 5

Module 6: Assistance, Planning, and Options

- Sources of professional management assistance
- Components of the forest management plan
- Assembling your management plan

Weekly Schedule:

Please note, pre-course content will be available on May 18, 2026. Module 1 material will be available June 1, 2026, Module 2 through Module 6 content will be released sequentially according to the following schedule.

Pre-course – May 18

Registration, syllabus, pre-course questionnaire

Familiarize yourself with Google Earth Pro and the Web Soil Survey

Collect optional course materials

Week 1: June 1

Module 1: Vision, Goals, and Family Resources

Basic Online Assignment

Discussion Board Participation

Review Quiz

Advanced Assignment: Family Resource Inventory

Module 1 Assessment

Week 2: June 8

Module 2: Stewardship and Sustainability

Basic Online Assignment

Discussion Board Participation

Review Quiz

Advanced Assignment: Land Use History

Module 2 Assessment

Week 3: June 15

Module 3: Property Deeds and Boundary Lines

Basic Online Assignment

Discussion Board Participation

Review Quiz

Advanced Assignment: Courthouse Visit, Boundary Line

ID, and Orienteering Exercise

Module 3 Assessment

Week 4: June 22

Module 3 (continued)

Week 5: June 29

Module 4: Maps, Photos, and Soil Surveys

Basic Online Assignment

Discussion Board Participation

Review Quiz

Advanced Assignment: Map, Photo, and Soil Survey

Reading

Module 4 Assessment

Week 6: July 6

Module 4 (continued)

Week 7: July 13

Module 5: Forest Ecology and Management

Basic Online Assignment

Discussion Board Participation

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Review Quiz

Advanced Assignment: Stand Identification and Soils

Assessment

Module 5 Assessment

Week 8: July 20

Module 5 (continued)

Week 9: July 27

Module 6: Assistance, Planning, and Options

Basic Online Assessment

Discussion Board Participation

Review Quiz

Advanced Assignment: Resource Agency Contact

Module 6 Assessment

Week 10: August 3

Wrap-up

Post-Course Assessment

Optional Hands-on Field Trip

Holiday Lake 4H Educational Center, Appomattox

Summer 2026