



VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

Events, News, and Information Promoting the Stewardship of Virginia's Forest Resources

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Working with a Consulting Forester

by Karen Snape, Virginia Tech

If you're receiving the Virginia Forest Landowner Update newsletter, then you know you should work with a professional forester when harvesting timber. But what does that mean?

There are three types of professional foresters who work with landowners: agency foresters, industry foresters, and consulting foresters. Most agency foresters in Virginia work for the Department of Forestry (VDOF). They provide free and low-cost services, including writing forest management plans, but cannot be involved in valuing or selling timber. Industry foresters work directly with forest industry or logging contractors, or they manage forestlands owned by investment or real estate groups. They provide many of the same services as consulting foresters. The rest of this article will focus on consulting foresters--individuals that landowners can hire, just as they might hire a realtor, attorney, or financial advisor.

So, how do you hire a consulting forester, and what can they do for you?

Consulting Forester Services Overview

Most consulting foresters offer a variety of services.

They can:

- Write a comprehensive forest management plan, often called a Stewardship Plan, or a more basic plan for just one part of your woodland.
- Estimate the monetary value of your timber, which will depend not only on species and size, but also quality, accessibility, and local markets.
- Mark the boundaries of a timber sale and any streamside or other buffers. If a partial harvest is desired, they can mark individual trees to either be taken or left behind.
- Manage your timber sale, much like a real estate agent might manage a home sale, including drawing up a timber sale contract between you and the timber buyer, putting it out for bids, and selecting a buyer.
- Oversee your harvest and make sure your timber sale contract is being followed.
- Coordinate reforestation of the site after the harvest is complete, if appropriate.

Many will offer other services, like marking property boundaries, conducting prescribed burning, or estimating the value of timber that has been stolen.

Hiring a Consulting Forester

The consulting forester works for you and uses their expertise to advance your goals. You'll pay them either directly for specific services or through a commission on your timber sale revenue. The effects of their work on your property will last years or even decades. So, your consulting forester is important. But don't let indecision hold you back; there are plenty of great consulting foresters in Virginia.

The word "forester" is defined in Virginia law¹. To be called a forester, a person must have at least a bachelor's degree from a program that meets the standards of the Society of American Foresters (<https://www.eforester.org/>), or have an exemption for working as a forester prior to 1992. People who do not meet this formal educational standard might call themselves forestry consultants or something similar, but cannot use the title forester. While a non-forester may do a fine job, depending on your needs, the word "forester" conveys a specific minimum level of qualification.

Another quality you might consider is membership in a professional organization, like the Society of American Foresters or the Association of Consulting Foresters (<https://www.acf-foresters.org/>). Both organizations have ethics codes and provide learning opportunities for members to keep up with the latest information. Both also charge dues, and most foresters are not by nature joiners! So, a perfectly good forester may not be a member of either (or any) organization, but it is something you might consider.

—FORESTER, continued on page 3.



Dr. Camellia Blackwell-Taffel, Ph.D., has successfully worked with agency and consulting foresters to manage her fifth generation, award-winning, family heritage Certified Tree Farm in Fauquier County, VA.
Photo by: Sherman D. Taffel, Photographer/Husband.

Events Calendar

For a complete listing of natural resource education events, visit the online events calendar at <https://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu>. Online registration is available at <https://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu/onlineeregistration.html>

SCHEDULED EVENTS - JULY - NOVEMBER 2023

DATE	LOCATION / DETAILS	EVENT DESCRIPTION	CONTACT
Aug. 5	Appomattox 9:00 - 3:30 Free for Woodland Options Students \$25*/person for others	Online Woodland Options for Landowners Field Trip In this hands-on field trip we will practice tree identification, measure trees, and take a tour to see active forest management practices.	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391
Sept. 8-9	New Kent 9/8 7:15 - 6:00 9/9 7:15 - 1:00 \$65*/person \$110*/couple	Southeast Woodland Owner Retreat Forest Management - Beyond the Basics This program will take a deep dive into woodland and wildlife management topics. Experience is required. Lodging available for an additional \$40/person.	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391
Sept. 9	Winchester Half-day \$20	New Christmas Tree Grower Workshop Learn how to start producing Christmas trees, including selecting seedlings, planting techniques, farm layout, shearing, and applying pesticides safely.	Kyle Peer krpeer@vt.edu 276-694-4135
Sept. 16	Charlottesville All day \$80* for up to 2 people	Generation NEXT Legacy Planning Workshop Learn how to pass your land and your legacy on to the next generation while keeping it intact, in forest, and in family ownership.	Adam Downing adowning@vt.edu 540-948-6881
Sept. 16 Oct. 21	Warrenton 9:00-12:00 Montpelier Station 10:00-12:00 \$TBA	Working Woods Walks Learn about the benefits forests offer us and develop an understanding of the importance of managing them for biodiversity, the environment, and economics.	Adam Downing adowning@vt.edu 540-948-6881
Oct. 6 Oct. 12 Oct. 20 Oct. TBA	Tazewell Mecklenburg Warren Southeast Virginia All day \$TBA*	Fall Forestry & Wildlife Field Tours Join woodland owners and natural resource professionals for a day in the woods. These tours showcase sustainable woodland and wildlife management practices.	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391
Oct. 2-15	Online Self-paced Free	Virginia Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Course Developed to promote the use of prescribed fire in Virginia, as well as raise the knowledge and awareness of Virginia's prescribed burn practitioners.	Jason Braunstein jason.braunstein@dof.virginia.gov 434-962-1318
Oct. 20-21	Chatham Fri. eve & Sat. all day \$TBA*	Generation NEXT Legacy Planning Workshop See description above	Jason Fisher jasonf@vt.edu 434-476-2147
November 9	Richmond 6:00-9:00 \$40/family	Generation NEXT Legacy Planning Workshop See description above	Neil Clark neclark@vt.edu 757-653-2572

*includes meal(s)

ONGOING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer Basic Training

Available statewide. Dates, times, and fees vary.

People who are curious about nature, enjoy the outdoors, and want to be a part of natural resource management and conservation in Virginia are perfect candidates to become Virginia Master Naturalists. Visit www.virginiamasternaturalist.org to find a chapter near you. Michelle Prysby, Statewide Coordinator, 434-872-4580.

Fifteen Minutes in the Forest

Online video series. Every other Friday at 12:15 pm.

Join Virginia Cooperative Extension's Forestry Team for videos about natural-resource related topics. Connect/find past videos:

- **YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/c/VirginiaForestLandownerEducationProgram>
- **Facebook live:** www.facebook.com/VFLEP

FORESTER, *continued from page 1.*

Most consulting foresters are small business owners, and like any small business, they get much of their clientele by word of mouth. You might find your forester the same way you found your mechanic or dentist: by asking people you trust. Your friends, family, coworkers, acquaintances from church or the gym – lots of people may have foresters to recommend (or not recommend!). Government employees, like VDOF foresters, are prohibited from recommending specific individuals or companies. However, they might be willing to tell you who orchestrated that really pretty harvest on the side of your county's main road.

Another consideration may be references. Any forester that you are considering hiring should be able to provide you with a few references – past clients that you can (and should) contact. This will be especially meaningful if their goals and property were similar to yours, but still useful even if they are quite different.

When you find the forester who's right for you, you should sign a contract with them. Just like your timber sale contract, this is a good business practice that will protect both parties.

Things to Discuss

Your consulting forester will recommend harvests and other activities on different parts of your property to help achieve your goals. It's important to communicate your goals clearly to your forester and to feel that they understand and will make recommendations accordingly. Managing a woodland as an economic investment does not make you heartless, and caring a lot about aesthetics does not make you flaky! Those two goals can conflict though, and should result in different recommendations. Likewise, managing for wildlife depends on the species and how much you are willing to invest, versus activities that are revenue-generating or neutral. Finding the right balance means understanding what's most important to you.

You may have other goals or constraints, not strictly related to the forest, that you should discuss with your forester. Do you need to have the harvest completed by a certain date? It is common for a timber sale contract to give the buyer a two-year window in which to harvest the trees. This gives them flexibility to respond to markets and weather, but is a surprise to many landowners. If you need the loggers out, or the timber buyer to pay more up front, you should let your forester know. Another thing to discuss with your forester may be your desired level of involvement. Are you looking for a turnkey service, where they handle everything, or do you want to play an active role in each step of the process? If there are recommendations that do not generate income, do you have the time, interest, and ability to do the work yourself, or will you need to hire contractors? Someone who lives on the property and loves running a chainsaw, someone with a high-paying but long-hours job three states away, and someone on limited disability income might need different recommendations to meet their common goal of reducing invasive species.

Services & Payment

It is important to understand which services your consulting forester is going to provide and how you are going to pay for them. This information should also be in your contract.

The most common service provided by consulting foresters is administration of a timber sale, and this is usually done on a commission basis as a percentage of the sale. Often, the timber buyer will pay the forester their commission directly and pay you

the remainder. Consulting foresters almost always bring in higher bids that more than make up for their fees, but it's important that you understand how payment is being handled so you are not surprised by any bills.

Various related services may or may not be included in their timber sale commission. It is normal for the consulting forester to mark the boundaries of the sale area, not only so that loggers know where to cut, but also so that buyers can see what they're bidding on. This might not be necessary if the sale area already has clearly defined boundaries like driveways, streams, or field edges. If there is a stream within or bordering the sale area, it is a best practice to have a buffer flagged off so trees along the waterway are left to protect water quality.

Your forester may cruise your timber. This entails walking through it, stopping at intervals to measure trees, producing a list of common species, and estimating how much wood of each type is present. They may use the cruise information to estimate how much money your timber sale should bring. A good timber sale is almost always put out for bid to a number of buyers, and that will ultimately decide the actual price, but knowing what to expect can be helpful.

In a clearcut, all merchantable trees are harvested, but a partial harvest can be done several ways. The forester might mark the trees to be harvested, or mark the ones to be left behind, or they might set parameters, like harvesting all pine from a mixed pine-hardwood stand or leaving all oaks within a certain size range.

Once the timber is sold and a contract signed with your timber buyer, some foresters may consider their timber sale service to be successfully completed. Others might remain available to you if there are problems with the harvest. Still others will inspect or monitor the harvest while it's occurring. You should know what level of harvest oversight is included in the timber sale commission, and this should be stated in your contract with your forester. While VDOF does inspect all timber harvests in the state, they only enforce the state's water quality protection laws, and cannot enforce your contract with the timber buyer.

Following the timber harvest, some consulting foresters will also assist with reforestation. This is generally only done if a stand has been clearcut and is going to be planted with pines. The forester can help with planting recommendations, getting signed up with VDOF for cost-share, and finding a planting contractor. This service may or may not be included in the timber sale commission.

When foresters offer services not included in a timber harvest, they may charge a flat fee or an hourly rate. Writing a management plan might fall in this category. Other examples would be cruising and estimating the value of timber to establish tax basis or coordinating tree planting to convert a pasture to woodland (afforestation).

Limitations

There are some things a consulting forester cannot do. They cannot keep your timber harvest from looking (at least temporarily) like a destructive event has occurred. Good harvest planning can minimize damage to the land and any trees that are left behind, but a timber harvest is a major disturbance in your woodland. There will be stumps where trees used to be, trails where machines dragged the logs out of the woods, and most likely a large amount of limbs and branches left behind. This temporarily ugly time is one reason it is important to work from a plan based on your goals. It is easier

–FORESTER, *continued on page 5.*

You Ain't from Around Here!

Nonnative Invasive of the Quarter: Silktree (*Albizia julibrissin*)

by Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech

For the first fourteen years of my life, I lived in Massachusetts, just north of Boston. The long winters were cold and snowy, and the nights were long. The months following Christmas were an exercise in endurance, simply plodding through the dreary days until spring. One bright spot for the females in my family during these dark days was the annual Boston Flower and Garden Show in March. I keenly recall walking into the darkened convention center with mom, Nana, and a gaggle of aunts, and being dazzled by ostentatious displays of flowering plants. Even with two feet of snow outside, the Flower Show assured us that winter would indeed come to an end.

Now, to be honest, I was a kid, and my favorite part of the Flower Show was the retail area. And I loved that area for ONE SINGLE REASON. Each year, I bought a sensitive plant (*Mimosa pudica*). I loved those plants so much; I was filled with anticipation for weeks leading up to the event. If you are not familiar with the sensitive plant, their leaves are lined with tiny hairs that are responsive to touch, temperature, and motion, and fold inward when triggered. This is a natural defense mechanism called a nastic movement.

All plants are capable of movement. Plant movements fall into two general categories, nastic and tropic. Nastic movements occur in response to environmental stimuli; the direction of the response is not dependent on the direction of the stimulus. Tropic movements are directional and occur in response to a directional stimulus. An example of this is photo- (or helio-) tropism in sunflowers. Sunflowers orient their leaves so they will be perpendicular to the sun's rays throughout the day. This video shows sunflower phototropism in action: <https://plantsinmotion.bio.indiana.edu/plantmotion/movements/tropism/tropisms.html>.

Now, you may be thinking, plant movements are cool, but Jennifer, rein it in! This article is about silktree, right? And yes, it is. The connections here is that silktree is also capable of nastic movement, closing its leaves at night (specifically, nyctinastic or sleep movement).

The genus name, *Albizia*, is from Filippo degli Albizzia, an Italian naturalist, who introduced the Silktree to Italy. The species name, *julibrissin*, comes from the Persian word *gul-i brisham* which means silk flower. Silktree is in the Fabaceae, or pea, family, and is a legume, meaning it removes atmospheric nitrogen and converts it to soil nitrogen. Silktree is known by a wide variety of common names, such as Persian (or Chinese) silktree, pink siris, Lankaran acacia, or, as I learned it, mimosa. Its leaves slowly close at night and during periods of rain, thus its modern Persian name *shabkhosb*, which means night sleeper.

Native to southwest and eastern Asia, silktree was introduced to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1745 by famous botanist Andre Michaux. It can now be found from New Jersey to Louisiana, and in California. The flowering tree is aesthetically pleasing and attracts pollinators, like butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds. Silktree is fast-growing and lives for about 30 years. In addition to being planted in yards, it can be found along roadsides, grasslands, vacant lots, clearings, or flood plains. The tree



Circled are silktree seedlings invading an open area in a loblolly pine forest in southeast Virginia. Photo by: Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech.

tolerates summer heat and its flowers prefer full sun. The limbs of the tree are weak and may be damaged by strong winds, snow, and ice. Silktree is said to have medicinal values for treating anxiety, cancer, depression, insomnia, sore throat, improve moods, trauma, insect bites, skin infections, bed sores, fractures, sprains, and other conditions. As always, learn more before attempting to treat your ailment with silktree because, according to WebMD, more evidence is needed to evaluate these uses. In addition, there are potential side effects and interactions with other medications.

Silktree outcompetes native species in disturbed areas, open areas, along roadsides, and along forest edges due to its ability to grow in different soil types, produce soil nitrogen, high seed production, and ability to resprout when cut or damaged. When planted near homes, fallen leaves, blooms, and seed pods require frequent clean up. Silktree can grow in dense stands that shade out native species. Additionally, silktree is susceptible to a number of insects and disease problems. While this species is not a major problem in many parts of Virginia, I have witnessed its ability to invade disturbed areas in southeast Virginia.

How to identify silktree

One basic of tree identification is determining leaf type (simple or compound). A simple leaf is not separated into smaller leaflets; it is completely connected to the petiole as one unit (think oak leaves). Compound leaves are made up of leaflets arranged around a central stalk called a rachis. Here in the southeastern US, we have many trees with simple leaves. On the other hand, we have relatively few with compound leaves. Silktree not only has compound leaves, but they are bi-pinnately compound, which means the leaflets are also made up of leaflets or pinnula. This makes identification relatively easy.

Leaves: Alternately arranged, bi-pinnately compound, feathery, 10-20 inches long; each pinnule is narrow and small, about 3/8 inches long.

-SILKTREE, continued on page 5.

SILKTREE, *continued from page 4*

Flowers: Very showy, rounded, pink, fluffy heads, blooming from May to June. Individual flowers are small with long pink 1.5 inch-long stamens.

Fruit: Flattened 5-6 inch-long gray-brown pods. Each pod contains 5 to 16 hard seeds which can be dispersed by wind, water, and animals. Pods first appear in June and mature from August to September. Seeds can remain viable for at least 5 years. Pods can be toxic to livestock and dogs.

Twigs: Medium textured, zig-zagged, green brown to gray brown, with numerous lenticels; buds have few scales and are small and rounded.

Bark: Smooth and gray brown.

Form: Small tree up to 30 feet tall, with low branches. Crown forms a V-shaped and develops a flat top.

How to control silktree

Prevention: The easiest things you can do are don't plant it in the first place and remove existing trees. Removal of existing plants should be done before seeds mature in mid to late summer. There are many suitable native alternatives to silktree. These include: red buckeye, serviceberry, black birch, fringetree, dogwood, persimmon, winterberry, sweetgum, bristly locust, redbud, and false indigo.

Mechanical: Seedpods should be disposed of and seedlings can be hand-pulled. Removal of the complete root system is needed to prevent sprouting. Larger trees can be cut at ground level. Since this species will sprout from its roots, repeated cutting or herbicide application will be needed for permanent control of large trees.

Chemical control

Foliar: Spray seedlings and small trees with a 2% solution of glyphosate or triclopyr and water, plus a 0.5% non-ionic surfactant to thoroughly wet all leaves. Use triclopyr, a selective herbicide, in areas where desirable vegetation is growing nearby.

Cut stump: Immediately after cutting, apply a 25% glyphosate or triclopyr plus water solution to the outer 20% of the stump. This method can be used anytime the ground is not frozen.

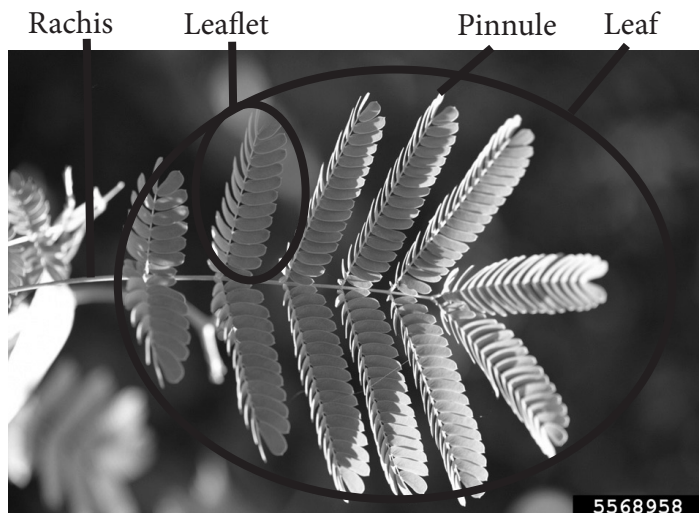
Basal bark: Apply a mixture of 25% triclopyr and 75% horticultural oil to the base of the trunk up to 15 inches from the ground. Wet until runoff is noticeable on the ground. This method can be used any time the ground is not frozen.

I admit, so many years later, that plant-loving kid is still a part of me. The Boston Flower and Garden Show is apparently no more, but the Horticulture Club at Virginia Tech has an annual plant sale. And every single year I excitedly count down the days until I can purchase a Venus fly trap, a carnivorous plant that exhibits thigmonastic movements (exemplified by movements because of contact with an insect).

Alas, we are who we are.

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Silktree's bi-pinnately compound leaves (top) make them easy to identify, as do the showy pink flowers (bottom). Photos by: Karan A. Rawlins, University of Georgia and Lesley Ingram, Bugwood.org.

FORESTER, *continued from page 3*

to tolerate when you know the outcome will be something you want.

Likewise, your consulting forester cannot totally prevent things from going wrong during your harvest. They can ensure you get a fair price for your timber and that your timber buyer is a reputable business. Perhaps most importantly, they can draft a solid timber sale contract between you and the buyer. That way, if a timber harvester who normally does excellent work has a really bad day and seriously misjudges how long it should take your soil to firm up after a rainstorm, you can require the damage be fixed.

Conclusion

Working with a consulting forester can be one of the best things you can do for your woodland, especially if you are considering a timber harvest. It is important to discuss your goals and constraints with them. You should understand what services they will provide and how you will pay for those services, and this should be reflected in a written contract between you. Like so many things in life, honest communication is key.

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'Code of Virginia: Title 10.1, Chapter 11, Article 13. Foresters. <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title10.1/chapter11/article13/>

VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

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