

VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

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

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Jennifer L. Gagnon, Editor

Address all correspondence to:
Virginia Forest Landowner Update
228 Cheatham Hall (0324)
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-6391
jgagnon@vt.edu
<https://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu>

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Unpacking the Importance of Wetlands in Forested Ecosystems: What is a Wetland and Why Should You Care?

by Elizabeth Sicking, Virginia Tech

Do you have a wetland on your property? How would you know? It can be tricky to determine, as wetlands are neither fully terrestrial nor fully aquatic and may be flooded for a short term, an entire season, multiple seasons, or permanently. However, they can be concretely defined by their hydrology and the presence of two additional features: (a) Soils that are often saturated with water (called hydric soils) and have unique characteristics, and (b) water-loving vegetation (called hydrophytic vegetation) that is adapted to live in saturated soils (Odum 1988).

There are many types of wetlands in Virginia and the nation (see Box 1). Wetlands provide a variety of ecosystem services including carbon storage, nutrient cycling, water quality improvement, and biodiversity (see Box 2 on page 3).

Wetland History and Declines in the US

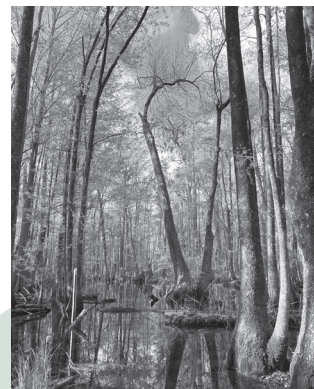
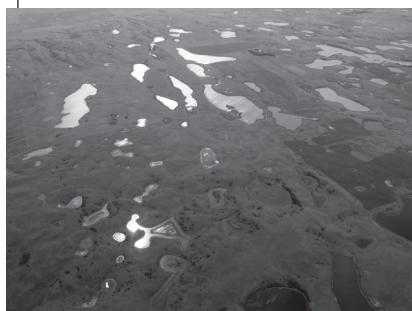
In the early 1700s, there were about 221 million acres of wetlands in the contiguous US, and between 1780 and 1980, more than 50% of this wetland area was lost (Dahl 1990). Virginia lost 42% of its wetlands in this time (Dahl 1990), a loss of about 800,000 acres.

—Wetlands, continued on page 3.

Box 1: Wetland Types

Wetlands are categorized by their permanency, water source(s), and vegetation. Wetland permanency is related to water source; seasonal and intermittent wetlands are fed by precipitation, while permanent wetlands are typically connected to the flow of groundwater and/or surface water, in addition to precipitation (Winter et al. 2001).

Common wetland categories include marshes (grass and sedge dominated), scrub-shrub wetlands (scrub-shrub dominated), and swamps (water-tolerant tree dominated) (Odum 1988). Delmarva bays, vernal pools, pocosins, and swamps are notable wetland types in Virginia. Vernal pools and pocosins are types of isolated wetlands. Isolated wetlands have no continuous surface water connections and make up around 16% of US freshwater wetland area (Lane and D'Amico 2016). Almost 30% of some vegetated freshwater wetlands are isolated (Lane and D'Amico 2016), making them vulnerable to conversion and gaps in federal protection. Several regions across the country are dense with isolated wetlands, including the midwest (prairie potholes), Texas (Texas playas), the southeast Carolina bays, cypress dome swamps, and the west coast (vernal pools).



Photos (l to r): Prairie pothole region (usgs.gov), California vernal pool (epa.gov), Georgia cypress swamp, (author).

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/onlineregistration.html>

SCHEDULED EVENTS - JULY THROUGH OCTOBER 2024

DATE	LOCATION / DETAILS	EVENT DESCRIPTION	CONTACT
July 1 – Sept. 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online • \$55/family 	Online Woodland Options for Landowners This 10-week, self-paced, not-for-credit course is for landowners of any acreage who want to gain an introductory level of understanding of basic woodland management and become better stewards of their land.	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391
July 12 July 26 August 23 August 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sussex County • Highland County • Shenandoah County • Bland County • \$20*/person; \$35*/couple 	Virginia Tree Farm Foundation Tour Series Join the VTFF for lunch and a tour of an active Tree Farm. Topics (depending on location) include management of loblolly pine, longleaf pine, and Appalachian hardwoods.	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391
August 9 & 10 October 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staunton, \$90*/2 people; \$10* each additional family member • Lynchburg \$80*/2 people; \$40* each additional family member 	Generation NEXT Workshops Learn how to pass your land, and your legacy, on to the next generation while keeping it intact, in forest, and in family ownership.	Karen Snape ksnape@vt.edu 540-231-6494
August 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raphine • 10:30 – 4:00 • \$45* 	Timber Cruising for Woodland Owners Hiring a professional forester is the best way to ensure an accurate accounting of your timber volume and value. And it's important for you to understand where these numbers come from. This hands-on class will teach you how a timber cruise is conducted.	Adam Downing adowning@vt.edu 540-948-6881
September 20-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Kent • 9/20 7:15 – 6:00 • 9/21 7:15 – 1:00 • \$65*/person • \$130*/couple • Onsite lodging available for \$65 	Southeast Virginia Beginning Woodland Owner Retreat The Beginning Woodland Owner Retreats were developed for those new to active woodland management. A combination of classroom, field trip, and hands-on activities will be used to teach concepts of sustainable woodland management. Onsite lodging is available and highly recommended.	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391
September 23 – October 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online • Free 	Virginia Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Course This course was developed to promote the use of prescribed fire in Virginia. Online self-paced delivery, approximately 12 hours.	Jason Braunstein jason.braunstein@dof.virginia.gov 434-962-1318
October 3 October 11 October 24 October 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wise • Rockingham • Bedford • Dinwiddie 	Fall Forestry & Wildlife Field Tours Join landowners, natural resource professionals, and outdoor lovers for day-long tours that explore sustainable forestry and wildlife management practices. Tours visit private, public, and industry-owned lands. Registration opens in August.	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391

*fee 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

Wetlands, continued from page 1.

Until the late 1970s, wetland drainage and alteration for conversion to other land use was directly and indirectly incentivized by federal policies and programs enacted to support agricultural growth (Dahl and Allord 1996). One such policy, The Federal Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (1953), directed several federal agencies to build canals and ditches for the drainage of wetland areas in agricultural regions (Heimlich et al. 1998). In contrast, several federal policies have supported wetland conservation.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act was established in 1918, and protects waterways important for migrating birds. The Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act (1934) requires hunters to purchase duck stamps to hunt waterfowl, with proceeds supporting wetland conservation. The Food Security Act of 1985 contains passages, sometimes called the “Swampbuster” provisions, that de-incentivize the conversion of wetlands for agriculture (Dahl and Allord 1996). Wetlands on agricultural land are valuable, providing water filtration, nutrient retention, and flood mitigation,

protecting downstream waters. However, wetland losses continued to exceed gains from 2009–2019, with vegetated wetlands declining 0.6%, equating to a loss of about 670,000 acres (Lang et al. 2024).

Wetland conservation

Ecosystem services are valuable to everyone and wetlands provide direct benefits to society through their services. Wetlands are often small and numerous, rather than large and few (Martin et al. 2012). This means that any wetland, no matter how small, contributes to net ecosystem services gained across a local or broad scale landscape. Federal policies surrounding wetland management and protection frequently change, making state legislation and programs important for the conservation of these valuable ecosystems.

If you want to find a wetland on your property or elsewhere, look for low, wet areas where the vegetation looks different than the surrounding forest. Wetland vegetation and dark, organic soil are great wetland indicators even if no water is present, but going out after heavy precipitation is an ideal time to see if a suspected wetland has been inundated.

–Wetlands, continued on page 5.

Box 2: Wetland Services in Forest Ecosystems Water Storage and Connection to Groundwater

- Wetlands store water and can be areas of groundwater recharge and/or discharge in forested systems, based on water source and connectivity (Winter et al. 2001).
- Wetlands collect flood water during heavy rainfall events (Zedler and Kercher 2005).
- Wetlands lower nutrients and contaminants in water before it flows downstream or as it enters the groundwater (Deemy and Rassmussen 2017).

Nutrient Cycling and Carbon Storage

- Wetland soils are anaerobic (have low oxygen), resulting in decreased microbial activity and slowed decomposition.
- Slow decomposition leads to the accumulation of organic matter (e.g. carbon) and the cycling and retention of nutrients like nitrogen, sulfur, iron, and phosphorus.
- Nutrient removal is related to wetland size; small wetlands are good removers of phosphorus, while larger wetlands are better removers of nitrogen (Marton et al. 2015).

Biodiversity

- Wetlands increase diversity in forest ecosystems by providing unique habitat.
- Isolated wetland habitat is especially important for rare and vulnerable species, like amphibians who need fish or predator-free places to lay their eggs (Liner et al. 2008).
- Endemic species (species found in only a small geographic area) distribution is positively correlated with wetland cover in the US (Dertien et al. 2020).



Spotted Salamander
(*Ambystoma maculatum*)



Golden Club
(*Orontium aquaticum*)



Spring Peeper
(*Pseudacris crucifer*)



American
Rubyspot
(*Hetaerina americana*)

Photos by Sydney Haney, Virginia Tech.

Woodland Owners: The Beneficial Ownership Information Reporting Rule May Apply to YOU!

In September 2022, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) issued the Beneficial Ownership Information Reporting Rule under the Corporate Transparency Act. This rule requires disclosing the identity of beneficial owners of small business entities beginning on January 1, 2024.

The need to make these reports will depend upon the nature, size, and form of your business. If your business (farm, ranch, agricultural operation, woodland) is set up as a legal business entity (such as an LLC, LLP, business trust, corporation, etc.) created through the State Corporation Commission (SCC), secretary of state, or other similar office, the operation is likely subject to the new Reporting Rule.

Beneficial Ownership Information reports must be filed by 1/1/2025 if the entity was created before 1/1/2024 or within 90 days if the entity was formed after 1/1/2024. The fact sheet linked below titled Beneficial Ownership Reporting – Key Questions answers frequently asked questions such as who qualifies as a beneficial owner, what information must be reported, and when to file.

Please note that while there is no charge to file, failure to file required BOI reports may result in fines of \$500.00 a day and/or five years in prison.

The following resources will assist you with understanding this rule and raising awareness among your farm and forest landowners regarding their potential responsibilities.

Overview

- The New Small Business Reporting Rule and Your Farm. By Jennifer Friedel: <https://tinyurl.com/JFriedel>

FinCen Fact Sheets

- An Introduction to Beneficial Ownership Information Reporting: https://www.fincen.gov/sites/default/files/shared/BOI_FinCEN_Brochure_508C.pdf

- Beneficial Ownership Reporting – Key Questions: https://www.fincen.gov/sites/default/files/shared/BOI_Reporting_Key_Questions_Published_508C.pdf

- The FinCEN Beneficial Ownership Information Website: <https://www.fincen.gov/boi>.

Special thanks to Tim Williams for bringing this to our attention. Thanks to Jennifer Friedel, Dan Goerlich, Travis Mountain, Kristine Tidgren, and Charles Brown for providing the information.

Please send all questions about BOI reporting to Jennifer Friedel, jfriedel@vt.edu

Prescribed Fire Assistance for Woodland Owners



The Virginia Prescribed Fire Council is pleased to announce the creation of Virginia's first Prescribed Burn Association (PBA). PBAs are a very simple concept: neighbors help neighbors conduct prescribed fire on private lands. PBAs help meet the demand for labor and equipment on burn days, establish firebreaks, and make connections to education and resources, as momentum for more fire on the ground across the southeast grows.

Two landowners in southeast Virginia experienced the same issue most landowners have, a lack of support for using prescribed fire. So, they decided to form the Southeast Virginia PBA (SEVAPBA). With guidance and mentorship from the Virginia Prescribed Fire Council, Lee Jones and Kyle Mallas founded the SEVAPBA in April 2024. The SEVAPBA will operate primarily south of the James River and east of I-95 but, as membership and resources grow, they hope to expand their footprint.

Landowners are still responsible for obtaining a burn exemption during the 4 PM Burn Law period and are ultimately liable for any damages. However, with the help of their neighbors, more landowners are apt to use fire as a tool to manage their woodlands.

Contact the SEVAPBA coordinators:
Lee Jones: 804-731-7758; Kyle Mallas: 757-620-5429
email: SEVAPBA@gmail.com
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61559925997309&mibextid=LQQJ4d>
To learn more about prescribed fire: <https://www.vafirecouncil.com/>

Wetlands, continued from page 3.

Resources and more information

If you're interested in learning more about a wetland on your property, consider setting up a trail camera to capture wildlife that visit, or monitor the flooded period. Apps like iNaturalist and Seek (photo ID of plants and animals), and Merlin (sound ID for birds) can be useful for learning more about flora and fauna you may see or hear in a wetland. Online resources to learn about wetland protections and incentivized restoration programs in your state, as well as changes in federal protection of wetlands, can be found by scanning the QR code using any smartphone camera!



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Elizabeth Sicking is a graduate student in the Department of Entomology, esicking23@vt.edu.

Find more of Sydney Haney's photos at: <https://sydneyhaneyphotography.godaddysites.com/>

Blue Ridge PRISM Invasive Plant Survey

Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management) is surveying a broad group of participants to better understand what invasive plant species have been, or are becoming, a problem for Virginia homeowners, farmers, commercial property owners, and natural area stewards. We need your help to identify which invasive plants you are seeing locally and are most concerned about.

To access the survey, please use this link:
<https://tinyurl.com/InvasivePlantsofVirginia>

or scan this QR code:



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Department of Forest Resources &
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**Virginia Tech Department of Forest
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228 Cheatham Hall 0324
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-6391
<https://frec.vt.edu>



**USDA Forest Service
Forest Stewardship Program**
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250
212-205-0929
www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/forest-stewardship



Virginia Forestry Association
3808 Augusta Ave.
Richmond, VA 23230
804-278-8733
www.vaforestry.org



Virginia Sustainable Forestry Initiative SIC
3808 Augusta Ave.
Richmond, VA 23230
804-278-8733
virginiasfi.org



Virginia Tree Farm Foundation
757-354-6721
www.vtff.org

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