



VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

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



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Planning for Success

By Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech

If you own woodlands and read this newsletter, you have already taken the first step towards becoming a responsible steward by educating yourself about woodland management. But have you taken the next step and obtained a written forest management plan? If not, are you ready to? In case you are not aware of the benefits of a written management plan, here is a short list. A well-written forest management plan:

- Provides a road map to help you achieve your ownership goals using sustainable forestry practices.
- Meets a requirement for having your land certified as a Tree Farm.
- Meets a requirement for enrolling in Land Use Taxation.
- Potentially increases your ranking for certain cost share programs.
- Meets a requirement for the riparian forest buffer tax credit.
- Meets a requirement for placing the land under a conservation easement.
- Potentially meets requirements for participating in ecosystem services markets, such as forest carbon programs.

Before you contact a professional to write a plan, take time to sit down with your family and discuss your ownership goals. A goal is the big picture or a general statement about how you and your family want your land to look in the future. Examples of goals include:

- Provide quality habitat for game and non-game wildlife species.
- Provide firewood for home heating and outdoor exercise.
- Gain the skills necessary to better manage the property.

Most family woodland owners have multiple goals.

Once your goals are written, a forester can help determine if they are realistic. Your property's location, size, soils, topography, elevation, and land use history will all play into this determination.



A forester can walk your woods with you to help determine what management activities (objectives) you'll need to take to work towards your goals. These will form the foundation of your forest management plan.

The next step is to walk the woods with the forester to determine your objectives. Objectives are specific management actions you can take to work towards your goals and they often have a timeline associated with them. Examples of objectives include:

- Create early-successional habitat by cutting small patch clearcuts every 10 years.
- Harvest undesirable and unhealthy trees for firewood.
- Attend classes offered by the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program.

You may be able to implement some objectives on your own. Others may require the services of a forester or other natural resource professionals.

Events Calendar

For the most complete listing of natural resource education events, visit the online events calendar at <https://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu>.

SCHEDULED EVENTS - JANUARY - MARCH 2026			
DATE	LOCATION / DETAILS	EVENT DESCRIPTION	CONTACT
Jan. 6 & 7 or Feb. 11 & 12 or March 24 & 25	Virtual 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM \$250 Students and Educators \$350 Non educators	Remote Pilot (Drone) Certification Test Prep This workshop provides extensive preparation for the FAA's Remote Pilot Certification test (aka Part 107). This certification is essential to operating a drone legally. This is an introductory workshop. No previous experience or knowledge is necessary.	John McGee jmcg@vt.edu 540-231-2428
Jan. 16	Courtland 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM Free	Forestry Basics Owning forestland is a dream come true for many. And it is a lot of work. Learn how to keep your forest healthy and productive.	Neil Clark neclark@vt.edu 757-653-2572
Jan. 27	Wakefield	Conservation Easements 101 Donating an easement can keep your woodlands intact. And it is a long-term commitment that can impact your heirs. Learn the basics to see if this conservation tool is for you.	Elizabeth Cooper elizp16@vt.edu 757-294-5303
Feb. 12 & 13	Virtual or Blacksburg 2/12 8:00 AM to 5:15 PM 2/13 8:00 AM to 12:15 PM \$25 (virtual) \$125* to \$180* (in-person)	Virginia Association of Forest Health Professionals Annual Conference Learn about new, emerging, and ongoing forest health concerns. Continuing education credits available for in-person attendees.	https://www.vafhp.org/
Feb. 19	Courtland 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM Free	Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) Information Session SPB can cause significant damage to our pine resource. This session will provide information about these beetles and how to protect your pines.	Neil Clark neclark@vt.edu 757-653-2572
Feb. 21	Blacksburg 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM	Woods & Wildlife Conferences These conferences provide information, tools, and personal contacts to help private woodland owners keep their woods, and the wildlife that live in them, healthy and productive. A variety of topics are offered to appeal to owners of both small and large tracts, and both new and experienced owners. Register for the Blacksburg event before 5:00 PM January 16 and save \$5 per person (\$50*per person; \$90*per couple).	Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540-231-6391
Feb. 28	Culpeper 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM \$55*per person; \$100*per couple		Adam Downing adowning@vt.edu 540-948-6881
March 18	Petersburg 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM	Silvopasture Workshop Contact Kendra Esparza-Harris kendra.esparza-harris@dof.virginia.gov 434-326-2599 for more information.	Kendra Esparza-Harris
March 13-14	Appomattox 3/22 7:15 to 6:00 3/23 7:15 to 1:00 \$65*per person; \$110*per couple	Beyond the Basics Woodland Owner Retreat: Managing Your Forest for Timber Income We will take a deep dive into sustainably managing hardwood and pine timber for income. Program includes classroom, field trip, and hands-on activities, including a mock timber sale. On-site lodging available for an additional \$40 per person per night.	Jason Fisher 434-476-2147 jasonf@vt.edu
March 28	Montpelier Station 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM \$ to be determined	Spring Ephemeral Walk at James Madison's Montpelier Explore the woods around historic Montpelier to learn about early and important flowering plants.	https://www.montpelier.org/events/

Camp Woods & Wildlife

Applications are open February 2 through April 17. This camp provides hands-on learning in the outdoors for students aged 13 to 16 with an interest in natural resource careers. Camp will be held June 15 through 19, 2026 at Holiday Lake 4-H Center, near Appomattox. For more information, see <https://dof.virginia.gov/education-and-recreation/youth-education/camp-woods-wildlife/> or contact Ellen Powell, ellen.powell@dof.virginia.gov.

*Meal(s) included

Planning, *continued from page 1*

Your goals and objectives can then be incorporated into a management plan. Forest management plans have several key components, including:

- A list of your goals.
- Maps of the property. These should show all important features, such as boundary lines, water bodies, forest types and ages, acreages, cemeteries, buildings, etc. They should also show soils.
- A list of management objectives and associated timelines.

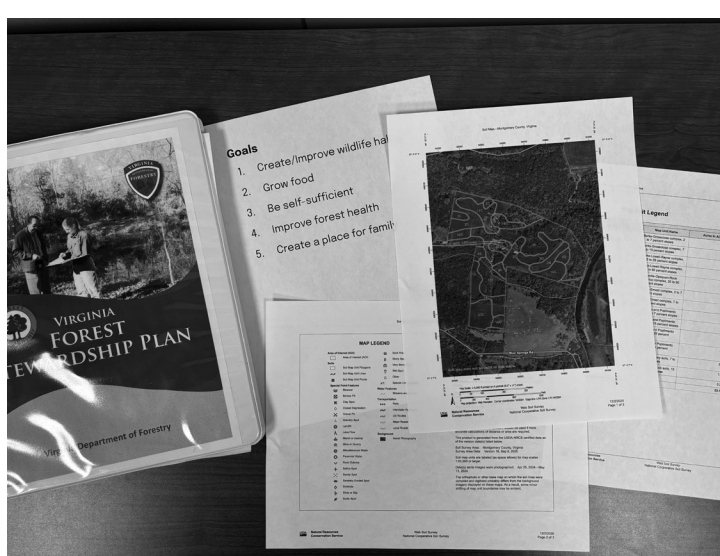
Management plans may include other elements as well. The length and detail in a plan should reflect the size of your property and the intensity of your management. For small and/or less intensively managed land, a management plan can simply be a collection of the documents listed above. For large and/or more intensively managed land, a more detailed plan may be appropriate.

As your resources and circumstances change, your goals may also change, so treat your management plan like a living document. It's a good idea to review your plan every few years and update it as necessary. Ideally, you will involve your family members in this process. Including your family members helps them understand the importance of managing the resource and gives them opportunities to invest their time in this family asset. This is important for another type of planning, legacy planning.

Legacy planning involves determining what will become of your land after you are gone. Legacy planning is important and easy to put off because it can be difficult for families to discuss. It entails answering questions such as: Will your children keep the land? Do they want it? If so, do they have the capacity to continue its care? Will they be able to afford inheritance taxes and other expenses? Proper legacy planning can answer these questions ahead of time. A forest management plan is an important part of a legacy plan.

Management plans come in all shapes and sizes. If you want a comprehensive document, one that will qualify you for cost-share and certification programs, three types of plans are suggested. These are:

- Forest Stewardship Plans. These are written by a Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) forester or consulting forester. The VDOF charges \$1.50 per acre (with a minimum cost of \$200 per plan). Consulting forester fees vary.



Key components of all forest management plans include a list of ownership goals and maps.

- Conservation Planning Activity Plans (CPA 106 Plans). A consulting or industry forester registered as a Technical Service Provider can write a CPA 106 Plan for your property. Although the cost will vary by forester, there is cost share available that can help offset the expense.
- Tree Farm Plans. Written by either a consulting or an industry forester. The cost will vary depending on whom you hire.

If you have never worked with a forester, start the planning process by contacting your area VDOF forester. If your management goals are heavily focused on managing for wildlife, you may also want to include a wildlife biologist in your planning.

Resources

Family Resources Inventory Worksheet
<https://tinyurl.com/FamilyResourceInventory>

Legacy Planning: A Guide for Virginia Landowners
<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/CNRE/CNRE-121/CNRE-121.html>

Natural Resources Conservation Service
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/equip-environmental-quality-incentives/equip-cpas-dias-and-cemas>

Virginia Department of Forestry Forester and Virginia Private Forestry Consultant Directory
www.dof.virginia.gov or call the Central Office at 434-977-6555.

Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
<https://dwr.virginia.gov/quail/get-involved/private-land-biologist/>

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You Ain't From Around Here! If You Can't Beat 'em, Eat 'em

by Dr. Jacob Barney, Virginia Tech

I have been researching and teaching about invasive species for more than 25 years. Sometimes it can feel a little like the Saturday Night Live character “Debbie Downer,” only ever delivering bad news. To be sure, the narrative surrounding invasive species is dire; just look at the first-ever global assessment published in 2023 by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (<https://www.ipbes.net/ias/learning>). Here is a short list of some of the newly collated impacts of invasive species:

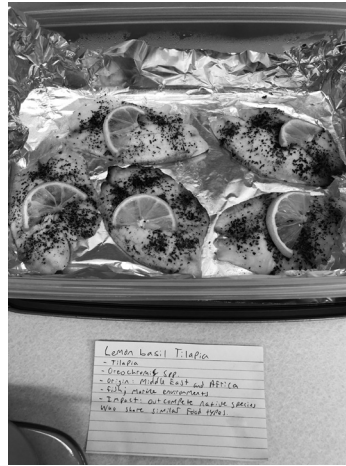
- Cost as much as natural disasters.
- Exacerbate wildfires and droughts.
- Contribute to food insecurity.
- Cost an estimated \$423 billion.
- Are responsible for about 60% of extinctions
- About 200 new species are introduced annually.

These impacts say nothing of those of you battling Japanese stiltgrass, multiflora rose, autumn olive, or feral hogs on your properties. These species are damaging and really challenging to get rid of. Once these invaders become established they are nearly impossible to completely eradicate; thus, we are largely left with trying to minimize their impacts.

To that end, did you know that many invasives are edible? Some are even tasty! Every fall as I wind down my class, Biological Invasions, we spend our last class sharing an invasive species potluck. Everyone brings a dish that contains at least one invasive species ingredient. I find this a suitable way to end the semester, eating what we have been studying for months. The students have made some incredibly creative dishes over the years, and I bet you have some of these tasty invasives on your property.

Here is an abbreviated list of some invasive species I have eaten over the years: feral hog, blue catfish, snow goose, autumn olive (prepared 10 different ways), multiflora rose, garlic mustard, Palmer amaranth, tilapia, water chestnuts, bamboo, kudzu, dandelion, chickweed, beebalm, goat, Asian carp, fennel, mint, white mulberry, and honeys and teas from invasive plants.

Some of the species listed above taste amazing, while others I would say are just edible. Once you've had a Dorito, nature has a hard time competing on the flavor profile!



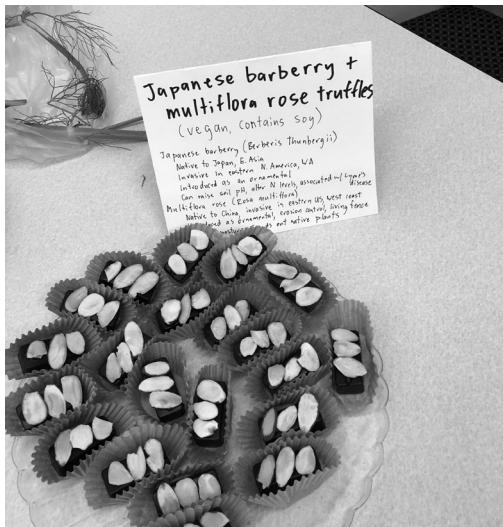
Edible invasive species can be used in both main dishes (tilapia, left) and desserts (wine raspberry, right). Photos by Jacob Barney, Virginia Tech.

The first rule for eating anything in the wild is identification! If you aren't 100% certain what it is, don't eat it! It just isn't worth the risk. Luckily for us, there are loads of great tools available to assist with identification, most notably the Seek app. This is a great tool. Simply open your phone camera and it usually gets darn close to a correct identification. I wouldn't rely on just the Seek app, but a confirmation with another source should suffice.

Now that you know what to look for, some quick searches on the web will provide some inspiration for how to use these unwanted guests for your next menu. I asked ChatGPT for some recipes on some common invasive species in our region and it provided lots of inspiration. In the winter months the pickins are a little slimmer, but you could probably find some autumn olive fruits hanging around, and once the seeds are removed you can turn them into jellies, jams, sauces, and fruit leather. Maybe you can find a source for feral hogs, blue catfish, or maybe even snakehead fish. Once spring arrives your options will be much larger: garlic mustard in your pesto, wineberries fresh or processed, and now there is spotted lanternfly honey!

There is a growing movement of eating invasive species as a way to contribute to their management, which is noble, but is probably not very realistic. I think eating invasive species serves more as an educational tool than real management. Harvest some invasive species, make some tasty treats, invite your neighbors, and make plans to collectively work to limit the spread and impacts of invasive species.

—Eat 'em, continued on page 5.



This delicious recipe uses two species of invasive plants, Japanese barberry and multiflora rose. Photo by Jacob Barney, Virginia Tech.

Did you know that Virginia Tech has one of the largest groups working on invasive species in the world? The Invasive Species Collaborative (ISC) has more than 70 scientists working on this issue including on pretty much every kind of invader (plants, animals, microbes) all over the world! The ISC is working to develop tools and solutions to the invasive species problem, reduce their impacts, and prevent the introduction of the next harmful species.



Students in the Biological Invasions class celebrate the end of the semester with a potluck comprised of dishes made with invasive species. Photo by Jacob Barney, Virginia Tech.

Jacob Barney is a Professor in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, and Director of the Invasive Species Collaborative at Virginia Tech, jnbarney@vt.edu, 540-231-6323.

Japanese Knotweed & Ginger Jam

Ingredients

- 4 cups chopped Japanese knotweed
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp grated fresh ginger
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1/2 cup water

Instructions

Combine the chopped Japanese knotweed, sugar, grated ginger, lemon juice, and water in a large saucepan over medium heat.

Stir the mixture constantly until the sugar dissolves completely, about 5 minutes. Once the sugar has dissolved, reduce the heat to low and let the mixture simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking.

After 20 minutes, increase the heat to medium-high and bring the mixture to a boil for 1 minute to ensure the jam sets properly.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and let the jam cool slightly before transferring it to clean jars.

Seal the jars tightly and store them in the refrigerator. The jam will thicken as it cools.

Light and refreshing with a vibrant pink hue, this jam pairs wonderfully with creamy cheeses or as a glaze for grilled meats. Its unique flavor profile is sure to impress at your next brunch or picnic.

Recipe from: SimplyFamilyRecipes.com

ONGOING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Fifteen Minutes in the Forest

Online video series. Every 4th Friday at 12:15 pm.

Join Virginia Cooperative Extension's Forestry Team for videos about natural resource-related topics.

Find past videos:

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

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 for a chapter near you.

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forest-stewardship](http://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/forest-stewardship)



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Virginia Sustainable Forestry Initiative SIC
804-278-8733
<http://virginiasfi.org/>



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

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