



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet Virginia 2025



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2024 Final
Community Forests and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$1,373,611
Forest Legacy	\$9,500,000
Forest Stewardship	\$315,282
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$1,155,458
State Fire Assistance	\$2,641,423
Urban and Community Forestry	\$1,176,393
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$266,911
Total	\$16,429,078

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

Program Goals

- The overarching goal is to maintain and improve the health of community and rural forests and their related economies, as well as to protect the forests and citizens of the commonwealth. These programs maximize cost effectiveness through partnerships in program delivery and increase forestland value and sustainability in a voluntary and non-regulatory manner.
- The cooperative programs are administered and implemented through a partnership among the Commonwealth of Virginia, the USDA Forest Service, and many other entities. They promote and protect the health and productivity of forestlands and rural economies. Emphasis is on timber and other forest products, wildlife, water resources, rural economies, community forests, and conservation practices.

Key Issues

- Virginia's forests are under increasing pressure to provide an array of critical services to citizens and the nation. The most obvious benefits are productive jobs, strong communities, and excellent environmental health—including clean water and air, bioenergy, habitat, and buffers against climate change. Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) strives to equip forest landowners with the information and knowledge to sustainably manage their forests for current and future generations.
- Protecting and maintaining healthy streams and enhancing water quality and quantity are drivers in strategic planning for the agency. DOF supports a unique position among southern states through a statewide logging inspection audit program and is supporting a southeastern regional effort to provide consistent monitoring of best management practices (BMP) on silvicultural sites. DOF conducted 15,799 harvest inspections on 3,535 timber harvests to ensure water quality protection and compliance.
- With the potential listing of aquatic threatened and endangered species by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it is imperative that the forest community be aware of the impact that these potential listings can have on future forest management. DOF has been monitoring these listings and has provided comments in support of Forestry Best Management Practices to protect the aquatic resources. There are many proposed future listings that need to be monitored closely.
- Rapid urbanization in recent years has greatly increased fire danger in the more than 5,315 at-risk wildland-urban interface areas throughout Virginia. Concentrated efforts on improvements in Virginia's highest risk communities, as well as a continued focus on maintaining a high level of agency readiness, is important to limit the potential for wildfire-related damages.
- Swift and efficient initial attack of wildfire is key to the protection of Virginia's assets. Agency response efforts protect an average of 1,100 homes and other structures annually, with an estimated

value of almost \$92 million.

- DOF continues to take steps to develop a long-term pursuit of improved hardwood forest management across the Commonwealth. The Hardwood Initiative refocuses agency efforts to help landowners manage and improve hardwood forests including increasing natural regeneration of desirable young hardwood trees, helping protect water quality, enhancing wildlife habitat, supporting recovery of threatened and endangered species, and bolstering Virginia's outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Despite the economic improvement, DOF still needs to be aware of challenges and issues that affect our forests and forest industries. Timber harvesting continues at high levels, and these increased harvests are very positive to Virginia's private forestland owners and the economy. DOF needs to continue to actively monitor our resource availability and sustainability to ensure that the citizens of Virginia continue to receive all the benefits they depend on from our forests.
- Traditional forest industry jobs continue to transition to new markets with globalization. The carbon sequestration market-driven bioenergy sector, for example, continues to be strong. As the economy and the housing sector improve, some forest markets are growing; however, other under-performing markets are negatively impacting forest landowners and industry. Increasing efforts in exports and value-added manufacturing, such as cross-laminated timber and other emerging markets, will be needed.
- Continuing fragmentation of non-industrial private forestlands (NIPF) presents new challenges as the number of landowners needing services increases and tract size reduces.
- DOF was mandated by the five-state Chesapeake Bay Agreement to achieve the adoption of urban tree canopy (UTC) goals by at least five municipalities by 2010. VDOF has engaged 42 communities in assessing their UTC goals and supports the UTC effort with both technical and limited financial assistance. DOF must maintain interest in UTC in the face of limited budgets at all levels of government.
- Ecosystem services and benefits provided by forests are undervalued. Even with the financial contribution provided by the forest products industry (\$23.6 billion annually), losses to the forestland base are unacceptable. It is imperative that we better develop markets for ecosystem services, such as water quality, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity. It is also imperative that we better account for the conservation of these important services.
- Virginia's forests are threatened by numerous pests, pathogens, and non-native invasive plants. DOF monitors the Commonwealth for forest health disturbance agents to provide appropriate treatment recommendations to forest landowners. DOF's Invasive Species Program provides statewide coordination of invasive species management in Virginia, working with other state agencies and relevant stakeholders, to support the objectives outlined in the Virginia Invasive Species Management Plan.
- DOF has been working with our partners and other stakeholders to address challenging issues such as deforestation resulting from the construction of industrial scale solar facilities. Virginia's transition to solar and wind energy will continue; the goal is to limit the impact on farms and forestlands.
- DOF is concerned about the impact of phasing out woody biomass as an electricity generation feedstock to landowners and forests. Woody biomass has been a critical market for woody debris and low-value trees.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2024 Accomplishments	Value
Population	8,631,393	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	10,055
Acres of Forest Land	16,004,258	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	32,020
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	11,455,730	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	6,481
Number of NIPF Landowners	162,582	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	140
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	2,217,900	State Fire Communities Assisted	163
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	13,195,300	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	93,859
Number of Rural Fire Departments	597	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	228	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	122
Forest Based Employment	108,451	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	7,234,413
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	37,411
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	43,629,458		

Program Highlights

Conservation Education

DOF provides conservation education programs statewide. Outreach ranges from pre-school children to adults via Master Naturalist chapters, landowner education, and Project Learning Tree (PLT) training for educators. DOF hosts Camp Woods and Wildlife each summer for students ages 13 -16. Local DOF work areas actively participate in school programs, career days, youth and civic group presentations, and local festivals and events to provide forestry education to Virginians of all ages. DOF collaborates with partners to host landowner retreats, courses, and workshops. DOF Communications staff collaborate with the Southern Group of State Foresters committees, the NASF and North American Forest Partnership, and other agencies and institutions to establish robust outreach programs and messaging, as well as to maximize educational resources. The Communications Office maintains social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and an e-newsletter to highlight forestry and conservation topics. DOF has now trained 69 field staff and other forestry sector professionals in how to conduct effective educational programs to improve forest literacy. More than 250 educators were trained in Project Learning Tree workshops, and another 119 Virginia teachers have completed a micro credentialing course, "Virginia's Forests," developed by DOF.

Cooperative Fire Protection

State Fire Assistance provides funding to support firefighting resources throughout Virginia. The main focus areas of Cooperative Fire Protection in the Commonwealth include training of 750 firefighters in wildfire suppression and incident command; development of additional volunteer fire department capacity through federal property programs and Volunteer Fire Assistance grant funding; focused efforts on wildfire hazard mitigation in Virginia's highest risk woodland home communities; and wildfire prevention efforts that use both targeted public messaging and law enforcement efforts to reduce unwanted fire starts. Specific program areas include use of the Federal Excess Personal Property Program to assist Virginia in acquiring and placing fire equipment in rural communities throughout the state; the use of Volunteer Fire Assistance funding to provide much needed personal protective equipment, tools, and equipment to rural fire departments across the state; and focused efforts through the State Fire Assistance program to reduce the threat of wildfire damages in Virginia's highest-risk communities.

Economic Action

Forest products and markets for those products support rural economies across the state and are vital to helping landowners keep their land in forest. The Forest Utilization and Marketing group supports the Commonwealth's traditional forest industries while also exploring new sustainable forest products to diversify and expand Virginia's forest economy. New and expanding forest product innovations included biochar, urban wood, mass timber products, and sustainable aviation fuel. Biochar utilization projects included an informational webinar, 6 urban tree plantings, on-going research in ammonia reduction

mitigation in commercial poultry houses and most importantly the launch of a new biochar production facility in Waverly, VA. DOF continued the Virginia Universities Urban Wood Education project which exposes students to using local, urban wood in practical applications such as building construction, furniture creation and wood products research. Skills taught include: sawmilling, wood drying, solar kiln construction, wood identification and design-build applications. Six universities and one community college are participating in the program: UVA, VCU, JMU, William & Mary, VT, and Mountain Gateway CC. DOF provided 11 urban wood outreach programs to these partners and served as the technical advisor for 3 university urban wood projects in their host communities. The U&M group also conducted the annual TPO (Timber Products Output) Survey for Virginia sawmills. This survey information is critical for understanding how Virginia's forest resources are utilized and to highlight the importance of this vital industry sector locally, regionally, and globally. The DOF also provided support to the Virginia Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) & the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) with the expansion and/or recruitment of seven forest product businesses.

Forest Health Protection

DOF monitors the health of Virginia's forests and works to mitigate the negative impact of forest pests and pathogens. The southern pine beetle is the most destructive pine pest in southeastern U.S. Even though southern pine beetle populations are currently low, VDOF's pine bark beetle prevention program (in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service Forest Health Protection Program) remains a top priority. Since the program's inception in 2004, over 75,000 acres have been thinned to reduce the risk of bark beetle infestation in the state's pine belt. In hardwood forests, Virginia continues to experience oak decline - the gradual failure in the health of oak trees that results from the interaction of a variety stress factors. Spongy moth, an invasive species that feeds on oak trees, caused widespread forest damage in 2024; approximately 85,000 acres with defoliation were mapped near the Shenandoah Valley. The emerald ash borer and the hemlock woolly adelgid continue to threaten the ash and hemlock resource respectively. To protect these endangered tree species, DOF Forest Health program staff treat ash and hemlock trees on public land (87 ash and 174 hemlocks were treated in 2024). DOF also participates in the release of biological control agents to provide long-term protection to host trees. A new invasive species initiative focuses on suppression of priority invasive species, creation of demonstration sites in State Forests, landowner assistance, education and outreach, and support for Virginia PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management) organizations. Through this initiative, DOF treated over 1,000 acres of invasive plants in 2024.

Forest Legacy

In 2024 the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) in Virginia completed its 25th year partnering with the USDA Forest Service to identify and protect important private forest lands threatened by conversion and development. The FLP continued efforts to work with our conservation partners and private forest landowners towards closing projects that were awarded federal funding in previous years. A multitude of transactional steps were completed to acquire ten conservation easements, preserving approximately 7,000 acres of forest lands and three fee simple state acquisitions, encompassing approximately 4,200 acres of forest lands for increased public access on an existing state forest and a natural area preserve. This year FLP develop two new project proposals that successfully garnered additional federal funding investments to protect forest lands totaling \$23,875,000. These USDA Forest Service funds will help acquire twelve additional conservation easements encompassing approximately 22,000 acres and four fee simple state acquisitions to increase public access to two state scenic rivers and a wildlife management area. Overall the FLP operates as a high level catalyst for preserving Virginia's working forests to provide a multitude of benefits including facilitating sustainable forest management which supports strong markets for forest products.

Forest Stewardship

The Forest Stewardship program continues to equip and support the DOF field foresters to help private landowners plan and improve management of their lands. This planning process enables foresters to help the landowners see beyond their immediate objectives to a more holistic, multi-resource based management to meet their long-range goals. DOF has concentrated our efforts and funding to the "federal investment areas," but will still develop Forest Stewardship Plans across the state, upon request. The benefits derived from the Forest Stewardship program extend far beyond those enjoyed by the landowners. Every citizen enjoys clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, soil and water conservation, aesthetics, and recreational opportunities afforded to them by healthy, sustainable forests. DOF continues to nurture a strong partnership with Virginia Tech, through Stewardship funding, to provide outreach

information and training events for forest landowners. Significant events have included forest land-owner retreats, outreach to real estate professionals, bus tours, electronic newsletters, various virtual and in-person workshops, and a management video series called "Fifteen Minutes in the Forest". Additionally, it supports development of other stand specific plans that lead directly to implementation of recommendations and on-ground forest management accomplishments, with 79% of the properties being managed following plan recommendations.

Landowner Assistance

DOF continues to provide information, recommendations, and technical assistance to landowners in managing their forest resources. DOF field foresters and technicians develop plans for forestry practices and provide guidance to implement them often in concert with forestry service contractors and consulting foresters. DOF operates two seedling nurseries, with a capacity of more than 30 million seedlings, to support very active reforestation and conservation programs. DOF is working closely with the USDA, state, and private partners to reinvigorate the riparian forest buffer establishment program in the state with DOF foresters guiding landowners to several incentive programs that best meet their individual needs. Virginia's forested buffers play a key role in protecting water quality, improving wildlife habitat and agricultural conservation, and ultimately improving and protecting the nation's largest estuary, the Chesapeake Bay. Virginia's Hardwood Initiative is a multi-faceted approach to improving the quality of Virginia's hardwood forests through intentional, professional management. Twelve forest management practices are being promoted to improve hardwood forests. DOF established the Hardwood Initiative Cost-share to assist private landowners with the costs of implementing improvement practices in hardwood stands. DOF field staff and private foresters are using the agency developed Hardwood Assessment Tool to aid in making prescriptions by working systematically through a decision-making process. A Hardwood Initiative State Income Tax Credit is being utilized by many landowners offset expenses incurred when carrying out hardwood management practices. As an outreach, education, training, and contractor development tool, operational scale demonstration projects are underway to showcase forest management practices. Crop tree release has been featured, but precommercial thinning, invasive species control, and expanding gap harvests are being implemented as well.

Landscape Scale Restoration

A 2021 LSR Grant, "Putting Plans into Action, Hardwood Management in Virginia" has enabled DOF to move the Hardwood Initiative forward by establishing operational-scale hardwood demonstration areas and developing contractors in many parts of the state. Two 2023 LSR grants were awarded in support of the Hardwood Initiative. The first, Long Term Management in Western Virginia, provides a forester for assessment and planning assistance for landowners of conservation easements. It leverages money from a private donation to perform forest management. The second supports businesses. Another 2021 LSR Grant focuses on rebuilding prescribed burning capacity to address multiple production, protection, and forest restoration needs, as well as providing training opportunities. LSR grant funds have been used to design a Virginia Forest Literacy Plan, based on the Texas model and customized to Virginia with the help of stakeholders. The plan outlines critical knowledge and messages about forestry for all ages and provides a blueprint for training agency staff and other forestry sector professionals to effectively share these messages. Trainings in forest literacy, including materials kits for forestry education, began this fall and will continue in early 2024. More than 60 forestry personnel from inside and outside the agency will participate, helping to integrate the ways the agency and partners share forestry messages with Virginia citizens. Another significant invasive plant species is being targeted by the 2021 LSR grant "Restoration of Ailanthus Stands Following Their Removal with a Bio-Herbicide." A native pathogenic fungus will be used to remove invasive Ailanthus trees at demonstration sites, and restoration techniques will encourage native plant growth.

Urban and Community Forestry

DOF, through a partnership with the USDA Forest Service, provides communities with technical, financial, and educational support so they may plant, protect, and maintain community trees and forests. In FY24, DOF's program assisted 122 communities including 65 with the Tree City USA designation. Using federal Forest Service funds, we provided 26 subawards totaling more than \$3.3 million including planning assistance for several rural communities through the Community Design Assistance Center. We also supported workforce development programs and outdoor leaning spaces in multiple locations. DOF and Trees Virginia provided in-person educational opportunities for 720 people focused on tree care, arboriculture, and volunteer engagement. VDOF sponsors the Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute, which takes participants through a process of investigating various environmental issues and

leadership training. DOF continues its leadership with the Urban Forest Strike Team (UFST) by training state personnel in protocols to evaluate tree damage following natural disasters. The UFSTs responded to Damascus after Hurricane Helene. DOF continues to assist the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) to promote the Certified Arborist Program by hosting trainings each year and providing scholarship funding through the local Mid-Atlantic-ISA chapter for certification. Through the Virginia Trees for Clean Water program, 34 communities and/or non-profits across the Commonwealth have received over \$919,000 in grant funds for tree planting and maintenance. DOF partnered with ten Virginia nurseries featuring discounts on native trees and shrubs. "Throwing Shade VA" offered customer discounts of \$25 on eligible trees values at \$50 or more. This program planted over 5,500 trees and provides incentives to Virginia customers to purchase native species, which are adapted to their natural environment and thus more likely to thrive.

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