



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet Virginia 2024



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2023 Estimate
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$1,600,444
Forest Legacy	\$7,227,000
Forest Stewardship	\$374,273
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$735,664
State Fire Assistance	\$4,771,956
Urban and Community Forestry	\$1,118,187
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$255,762
Total	\$16,083,286

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 15,904 harvest inspections on 3,624 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. VDOF 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 a number of forest pests. Wavy-leaf grass has joined tree-of-heaven, kudzu, and a long list of other non-native invasive plants that are crowding out or impeding establishment and growth of native tree species. Additionally, invasive insects and tree diseases are negatively impacting hundreds of thousands of trees. DOF monitors the landscape for these forest pests and provides treatment recommendations to land managers.
- The Virginia Department of Forestry (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 2023 Accomplishments	Value
Population	8,631,393	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	8,960
Acres of Forest Land	16,004,258	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	32,394
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	11,455,730	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	7,076
Number of NIPF Landowners	162,582	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	170
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	2,217,900	State Fire Communities Assisted	650
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	13,195,300	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	56,522
Number of Rural Fire Departments	597	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	2,301
Cities and Towns	228	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	115
Forest Based Employment	108,451	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	7,023,271
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	15,067
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	37,115,564		

Program Highlights

Community Forestry and Open Space

The Va. Dept. of Forestry partnered with North Carolina Forest Service, North Carolina State Forestry Extension and the US Forester Service Wood Education Resource Center by presenting a Firewood Business Development Workshop in Ashland, VA. The day-long workshop featured speakers from NC State Forestry Extension, Virginia Tech's Dept. of Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation, VA Dept. of Forestry, and the VA Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The twenty-five participants learned about best business practices, marketing strategies, consumer trends, resources from Virginia's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) program, pest detection, pest management, and wood drying kiln operations. In addition, the VA Dept. of Forestry partnered with the City of Harrisonburg's Dept. of Public Works and the James Madison University Sustainability Group to present a Tree Care-Urban Wood Workshop at James Madison University in Harrisonburg. The fifty-three (53) attendees learned about JMU Urban Forestry projects, using trees as a stormwater BMP practice, urban wood programs at other Virginia universities, the City of Harrisonburg's Urban Wood Program, and participated in outside demonstrations which included proper young tree care and sawmilling urban trees.

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-publication, Field Notes, to highlight forestry and conservation topics. DOF is currently training its field staff and other forestry sector professionals in how to conduct effective educational programs to improve forest literacy. In the past year, more than 100 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

DOF organized and hosted "Wood in Construction and Beyond – Highlights on Mass Timber Products" on July 27, 2022. Approximately 50 people attended the educational seminar event including architects, engineers, foresters and researchers. Architects and engineers were primarily targeted for this seminar due to their role in planning, designing, reviewing building construction projects and using building materials (e.g., wooden building materials including both traditional and emerging mass timber products). Attendees got the opportunity to learn and gain perspectives from local, regional and national experts on many topics. In addition, DOF participated in Virginia Forest Products Association's 38th East Coast Sawmill and Logging Equipment Exposition at the Richmond Raceway which is the largest forest products trade show in the country, held every other year. DOF highlighted water quality, forest health, utilization and marketing programs, and our urban wood utilization efforts. Several thousand attendees interacted with staff to promote a wide variety of agency priorities and initiatives, including cross-laminated timber, harvesting best management practices, and spotted lanternfly interdiction. DOF hosted the Virginia's Forest Carbon Symposium which included large and small landowners, DOF and consulting foresters, and other private and public landowners and managers. The expert panel of speakers from around the country delivered informative sessions on various topics related to forest carbon markets and how to take advantage of them. The overwhelmingly positive feedback (as well as the long waiting list for the event) confirms interest in this topic in Virginia is high...and growing.

Forest Health Protection

DOF monitors Virginia's forests for forest health disturbances. Historically, the southern pine beetle has been the most devastating native pest to the pine resource 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, 73,000 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 of biotic and abiotic factors, such as old age, site conditions, drought, and defoliation. Spongy moth is a common defoliating pest in western Virginia that can lead to oak decline/death. Spongy moth populations increased in 2023; approximately 37,000 acres of defoliation were mapped near the Shenandoah Valley. The emerald ash borer which is a major threat to the ash resource, and the hemlock wooly adelgid continues to threaten hemlock trees. DOF Forest Health program staff treat ash and hemlock trees on State Lands to protect these endangered tree species (119 ash and 173 hemlocks were treated in 2023). DOF also participates in the release of biological control agents for emerald ash borer and the hemlock wooly adelgid, to provide long-term protection to host trees. Emerging pests that were recently detected in Virginia include the spotted lanternfly, laurel wilt disease, and beech leaf disease. In addition, wavyleaf grass has joined the long list of non-native invasive plant species that are negatively impacting forest health. VDOF monitors all emerging forest pests in an effort to stop/slow their spread and minimize their impact.

Forest Legacy

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) in Virginia completed its 22nd year in 2023. DOF engaged conservation partner groups statewide to develop two new project proposals and complete the acquisition of four tracts: two fee simple expansions of existing state forests and two new conservation easements supported by approximately 3 million FLP dollars. The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund played key roles on the state forest expansions, helping with costs and due diligence work. With the addition of 2,474 acres, a parking area, and signage, the Charlotte State Forest (CSF) was nearly doubled in size and was opened for public recreational use. DOF is preparing a new forest management plan for the CSF, has added the land to its portfolio of Sustainable Forestry Initiative certified tracts, and will carry on the long legacy of sustainable timber management practiced by the prior owners. DOF completed a large conservation easement in Highland County, permanently conserving several unique forested and rocky habitat types on upper mountain slopes as high as 4,000 feet elevation. Rare forest stands include native red spruce and paper birch, near the southernmost extent of the species' ranges.

This new FLP tract is noteworthy for its forest species diversity and high climate resiliency. A new FLP easement completed in Sussex County helps both DOF and The Nature Conservancy advance Longleaf Alliance goals for Virginia's primary longleaf pine restoration area and red-cockaded woodpecker habitat expansion.

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 landowner 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 over 80% 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 meets 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 have been identified as most needed to improve hardwood forests. DOF established the Hardwood Initiative Cost-share to assist private landowners with the costs of implementing improvements to hardwood stands. DOF has trained field staff and private foresters to use the Hardwood Assessment Tool to aid in making prescriptions by working systematically through a decision-making process. A Hardwood Initiative Tax Credit was recently established to offset landowner 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 the forest management practices. Crop tree release was the focus this year, but understory treatments, invasive species control, and expanding gap harvests are being implemented as well.

Landscape Scale Restoration

DOF participated in the Upland Oak, I and II, Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) grants, which are closely allied with the Hardwood Initiative in which DOF focuses efforts on training and establishing demonstration areas. A 2021 LSR Grant, "Putting Plans into Action, Hardwood Management in Virginia" will enable 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 easements. 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 FY23, DOF's program assisted 132 communities including 61 with the Tree City USA designation. Using federal Forest Service funds, we provided 26 subawards totaling more than \$470,000 including planning assistance for several underserved 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 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 in Oklahoma and Alabama. We also supported trainings in Tennessee and Arkansas. 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, 58 communities and/or non-profits across the Commonwealth have received over \$850,000 in grant funds for tree planting and maintenance. DOF partnered with three Virginia nurseries to launch a pilot program featuring discounts on native trees and shrubs. "Throwing Shade VA" offered customer discounts of \$25 on eligible trees values at \$50 or more. This successful and expanding discount program incentivizes customers to purchase native species, which are adapted to their natural environment and thus more likely to thrive.

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