

Virginia Forests

FALL 2025

A yellow skid steer loader with a large grapple attachment is positioned in a forest clearing. The loader is facing towards the right, with its grapple open. The background shows a line of trees under a clear blue sky. The ground is covered with dry grass and some fallen leaves.

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3808 AUGUSTA AVENUE
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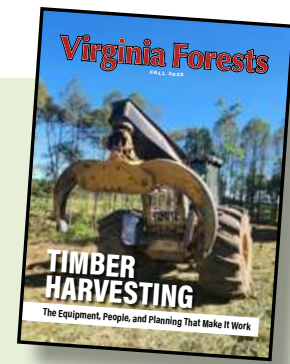
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A rubber-tired grapple skidder is used
during a timber harvesting operation.
(PHOTO BY SCOTT BARRETT)

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We Need You!



Terry Lasher

Fall is the time of year when everyone takes a moment to soak in the beauty of our forests. Don't believe me? Try driving on one of our beautiful scenic back roads or hitting a small mountain town on a Saturday. They are all likely bustling with activity.

Fall is the harbinger that big changes are on the way. The picturesque backdrop of yellows,

oranges, reds, and maroons are the leaves' true colors and are exposed only as their chlorophyll slowly fades and photosynthesis wanes. Gone are the hot humid days of summer and on the horizon are shorter days, colder nights, and for us snow lovers—hopefully, snow!

For those of you that work in our forests it brings a whole new world into view as the leaves begin to crunch under foot, and the sun shines unabated to the forest floor. For me, I miss working in the woods every day, especially in the fall—most notably, the smell of fresh fallen leaves, the crisp, cool mornings, and the warm midday sun. Working outdoors in fall also means additional warm layers for comfort as you go about tackling your daily deeds. While my layers are no longer topped with an outer shell and a stocking cap, my work during this season is still very important. Trading my stocking cap for a tie and my outer shell for a suit coat, I go to the capital to advocate for you, our landowners, and on behalf of the very thing that binds us together—our industry and our forests.

As fall brings about change to our landscape, it also signifies a pending change in the General Assembly with the November elections, where all 100 seats in the house and three statewide offices were on the ballot. This year's election will be a historic one for Virginia as we elect our first female governor. While elections didn't factor much into my mind 20 years ago, they are things that I now watch carefully. Strategy, relationships, and understanding issues are very important for us to successfully support our mission, our industry, and our members. Whatever side of the aisle you are on, please understand the issues. Do your research and vote at every opportunity—it is important, and elections matter.

I want to thank everyone who supports our work in this arena by participating in our advocacy events like Sporting Clays, the Forest Leadership Retreat, and the Virginia

Wood Cup. We are also grateful to those of you that make financial contributions to our VAForestPAC and make purchases during the live and silent auctions at our annual Virginia Forestry Summit. All of our events and donation programs are crucial to our ability to serve.

Our work at VFA requires action. Our members are crucial to our ability to advocate, connect, and educate. Your dues, participation, sponsorship, and volunteerism are extremely important. As we close out 2025, please consider taking an active role in your Association in 2026. Our forests, our industry, and our Association need you. 🍂

Vance Wright Wins VFF's John Deere Gator Raffle

On a bright beautiful fall day, our John Deere Gator raffle winners Vance and Laurie Wright collected their prize! The Virginia Forestry Foundation (VFF) would like to thank James River Equipment for the partnership and support.

Thank you to all that helped support our first-ever raffle in support of the Virginia Forestry Foundation, our recently launched 501(c)(3) non-profit. The VFF was created in 2024 and officially launched in 2025 to protect and grow our forests so they and their ecosystem services continue to benefit every Virginian—now and for generations to come. With all startups, seed money is critical, and your support was a game changer. Read more about the mission of VFF on page 22.



(l. to r.) Raffle winners Vance and Laurie Wright; Terry Lasher, Virginia Forestry Association; Justin Canada, Director of Large Ag; and Brandon Boiling, Lacrosse General Manager, James River Equipment.



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3808 Augusta Avenue
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The Virginia Forestry Association, chartered in 1943, is a not-for-profit, non-governmental, privately-supported association of forest landowners, wood product industries and businesses, loggers, foresters, forest use groups, and conservation-minded citizens. New board members are elected annually by mail ballot to all VFA members. Any VFA member may be a candidate for the board.

Reflections on Season of Change



Jay Phaup

Tournament in conjunction with the Virginia Forest Products Association to benefit our Political Action Committee (VAForestPAC), and the John Deere Gator Raffle to support the Virginia Forestry Foundation (VFF). I'm deeply grateful for the generous contributions, time, and energy from all who participated. These efforts are vital to advancing VFA's mission. Thank you!

In late summer, our segment councils reconvened to refine objectives for our four stakeholder groups: 1) Forest Land Ownership; 2) Harvesting & Transportation; 3) Management & Consulting; and 4) Forest Products & Wood Manufacturing. Many of us wear multiple hats across these sectors, but our shared priorities remain clear—markets, education and outreach, and advocacy and communications.

September brought more highlights, including the Forest Leadership Retreat at Wintergreen for those in leadership roles (You can read more about this event on page 20.) In addition, Governor Youngkin and his administration hosted a reception at the Executive Mansion to recognize the forest products community's contributions to Virginia. As the third-largest economic sector in the Commonwealth, forestry generates \$23.5 billion in benefits and plays a critical role in energy production, water, air, and soil conservation. The Governor praised our tenacity and resilience in the face of challenges—a sentiment that truly reflects the spirit of our industry and is inspirational to him.

VFA leadership also had the opportunity to meet privately with Speaker of the House Don Scott to discuss the importance of existing and alternative markets as well as energy initiatives. His thoughtful questions and engagement, informed by his background in life sciences, laid the foundation for a good

My favorite season has arrived. The humidity has dropped, the leaves are changing, the opportunity to shoot (and miss) upland birds is open, and the growing season for 2025 is drawing to a close.

It's also a fitting time to reflect on the year we've seen within the Virginia Forestry Association (VFA). Following our annual Virginia Forestry Summit in Roanoke in May, we hosted several successful fund-raising events: the Sporting Clays Tournament to support advocacy efforts, the Virginia Wood Cup Golf



Jay Phaup led Virginia officials on a tour of Packaging Corporation of America's Riverville mill location in Amherst County as part of Forest Products Week. Pictured (l. to r.) State Forester Rob Farrell, Jay Phaup, Deputy State Forester Ed Zimmer, and Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matt Lohr. (PHOTO COURTESY OF VIRGINIA DEPT. OF FORESTRY)

—continued on page 28



Forest Harvesting Operations in Virginia

By Scott Barrett, Ph.D. and Temitope Ogana

Virginia has about 600 logging businesses. These are family-owned businesses that collectively serve as a critical link in the supply chain to harvest wood grown by forest landowners and deliver it to mills across Virginia.

For most forest landowners, a timber harvest on their property is something that doesn't happen very often. It can be an exciting event to finally see the rewards from the time and effort put into managing and growing a stand of timber or to see the results of a carefully planned harvest to meet other objectives.

For many forest management activities, a timber harvest is where the transaction occurs. It is where ideas are turned into action, and where trees are turned into products and revenue. However, if you are not familiar with what occurs on a timber harvest, it might seem a bit chaotic with big machines moving around everywhere and trees being cut down. Understanding the processes can help you know what to expect during a timber harvest on your property.

Virginia has about 600 logging businesses. These are their family-owned businesses that collectively serve as a critical link in the supply chain to harvest wood grown by forest landowners and deliver it to mills across Virginia. Logging operations in Virginia vary widely by region due

to differences in topography, forest types, forest product markets, and the preferences of individual logging business owners. Despite the wide variety in logging businesses and operations, all operations have common functions, and certain types of systems are more prevalent in different regions. Virginia Tech Forestry Extension has conducted long-term surveys of Virginia loggers to gather data on their operations. We have included data from the most recent 2024 survey to highlight the most common equipment used on logging operations across the state.

Preparing For A Timber Harvest

If you plan to harvest timber, expect some changes on the landscape. Regardless of the type of harvest, whether it is thinning or regeneration harvest, things will look different compared to when they started. Be prepared for loggers to have equipment on site, and they must also have a way to access the property with trucks.

■ Roads and Road Entrances

An important consideration is how trucks will access the site to haul wood to mills. Unless the logger can set up directly on the side of an existing road, constructing logging roads will be required. Typically, loggers plan on building temporary access roads that are closed after the timber harvest. If the landowner wants a permanent access road, it will require higher construction standard which is more expensive to build. This should be discussed with the logger ahead of time and be part of the negotiation for the harvest.

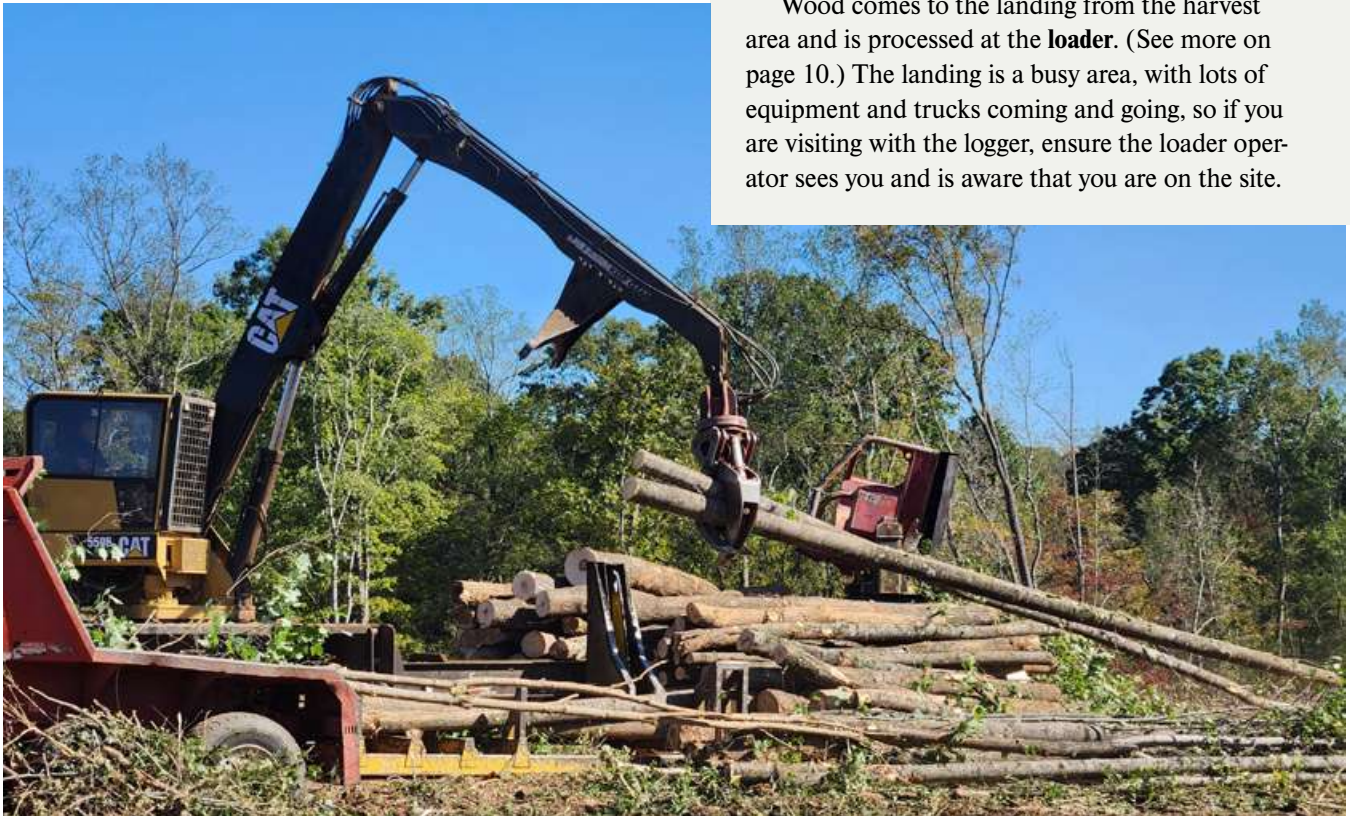
The following includes terminology and equipment used to perform harvesting functions and can help landowners better understand what occurs on logging operations.



The log landing or log deck.

■ Landing/Deck

A **log landing**, also called a deck, is a central location accessible by trucks where harvested wood is accumulated, processed, and loaded onto trucks. It serves as a focal point of the operation, with numerous activities and frequent truck and equipment movement.



Knuckle-boom loader.

Wood comes to the landing from the harvest area and is processed at the **loader**. (See more on page 10.) The landing is a busy area, with lots of equipment and trucks coming and going, so if you are visiting with the logger, ensure the loader operator sees you and is aware that you are on the site.

Harvesting Functions Performed on Logging Operations

Every harvest is unique. In Virginia, they can range from steep mountain slopes with large hardwood sawtimber in the mountains to flat sites with pine pulpwood harvests in eastern Virginia with many combinations in between. These harvests can be carried out with a diversity of equipment and harvesting businesses; however, there are still common functions performed on all logging operations.

■ Felling

Felling is the first step and involves severing the standing tree from the stump to begin the process of turning it into a product. Many people probably think about using a chainsaw for felling a tree. Although chainsaws are still used

in the logging industry, their use is decreasing, and most timber is felled with mechanized equipment.

Rubber tired feller bunchers are used as the primary felling method on over 60 percent of logging operations across the state and account for over 87 percent of all production. As their name implies, feller bunchers fell the tree and can also accumulate multiple trees and lay them down in a bunch.

The most common mechanized felling equipment used in Virginia includes is a **rubber-tired feller buncher** with a rotating disc saw head that cuts the tree off as the equipment drives up to it.



Rubber-tired feller buncher.

On steeper and more rough terrain, some loggers will use **tracked feller bunchers** with a felling head on a boom that can swing and extend out to reach trees for felling. Tracked feller bunchers are used as the primary felling method on nine percent of operations and account for about nine percent of the overall production in Virginia. While the majority of the total volume of timber is harvested by mechanized equipment, it is still common for loggers in the mountains to predominantly fell with chainsaws. Just over half of logging businesses in the mountains primarily fell with chainsaws; however this accounts for less than 20 percent of production in this region. Across Virginia as a whole, operations primarily felling with only chainsaws account for less than five percent of total production.



Tracked feller buncher.



Rubber-tired grapple skidder.

■ Skidding

After trees are felled, they must be extracted from the harvest site to the landing. In Virginia, this is predominantly done with a **rubber-tired grapple skidder**. The grapple allows the operator to pick up bunches of wood from the ground without leaving the machine cab. Rubber tired grapple skidders account for over 95 percent of all wood production in Virginia.

On some steeper sites, cable skidders are used. These are also rubber-tired skidders but do not have a grapple. The skidder operator attaches a choker by hand to hook onto the log which is then winched back to the skidder. This allows access to steep areas but requires leaving the equipment to hook the cable onto logs.

A cable skidder should not be confused with cable yarding, which is a logging system in which cables are suspended in the air to transport logs to a landing. Although you might have seen it on TV shows, cable yarding is rare in Virginia, and none were reported in our most recent logger survey.



Pull through delimeter.

■ Delimbing

This is the process of removing limbs from the tree stem so that the log does not have branches sticking out. There are several common methods for delimbing. In the mountains, the majority of operations report using a chainsaw for delimbing. However, across the state, most operations (65%) report using a **pull through delimeter**, which uses a set of knives to strip the limbs off as the tree stem is pulled through. Operations primarily using a pull though delimeter account for almost 90 percent of all production in Virginia.



Slasher saw.

■ Loading

Once the tree has been processed and is ready to go to the mill, it must be loaded onto a truck. The most common equipment for this is a trailer mounted **knuckle-boom loader**, which remains relatively stationary on the landing. Over 80 percent of operations use a trailer mounted knuckle boom loader. The next most common type of loader is a mobile knuckle boom loader, mounted on either a truck or on tracks. The mobile loader allows the loader to move to different spots on the landing. Some loggers also use self-loading trucks with the loader attached to the truck, but these are not very common in Virginia.

■ Bucking

Bucking is the process of cutting a tree into log lengths. This can also be accomplished with a chainsaw, but over 95 percent of all production in Virginia is from operations that primarily use a hydraulically powered buck saw also referred to as a **slasher saw**, that is attached to the loader. These resemble a large, powerful chainsaw blade that can be safely operated from inside the loader cab.

■ Trucking

Tractor-trailers are by far the most common trucking configuration in Virginia. For some smaller operations or in areas with roads that have short turning radius, some operations use other trucking configurations, such as straight trucks with one, two, or three rear axles, sometimes with an additional trailer behind the straight truck.

■ Chipping

An increasing number of logging operations across Virginia have chippers to process logging residues (such as limbs, tops, and small or low quality trees) to use for biomass energy. These operations typically market the roundwood as sawtimber or pulpwood, and chip the residues with a **whole-tree chipper** into fuel chips that are burned for energy. Overall, about a third of Virginia loggers have whole tree chippers to produce fuel chips. Some logging businesses have “clean” chippers which include a debarker and produce higher quality chips for making paper, as opposed to fuel chips which are a lower quality chip with bark and leaves included.



Whole-tree chipper.

Future of Logging Operations

Our logger survey data shows that logging businesses are becoming larger and more productive, and we expect that trend to continue. Similar to consolidation in other industries, there are generally fewer logging businesses now, but those that remain are producing more than they were in the past. In the mountains, tracked felling machines are becoming more common than in the past, and their use will likely continue to increase in future. In many cases tracked felling machines are replacing manual felling with chainsaws on steep slopes. While there will likely still be a need for manual felling, the amount of timber felled with chainsaws will likely continue to decrease in the future.

Though not yet used in Virginia, tethered or winch-assist logging systems are increasingly common in steep slopes areas elsewhere. These involve standard ground-based equipment with the addition of a cable or “tether” which is attached to a winch at the top of the slope and is used to help the equipment travel up and down slope. Tethered logging systems could potentially become more common in steep slope areas of western Virginia.

Enjoy the Benefits of a Timber Harvest

Regardless of the type of system used for your harvest, hopefully it is well planned, and you know what to expect. You can enjoy the satisfaction of seeing your management plans get implemented, generating revenue from your land, and you can implement a harvest that meets your land management goals. You can also enjoy the fact that your forest land and timber harvest play a role as a key part of Virginia’s forest supply chain that provides the raw material for Virginia’s third largest industry. Forest harvesting produces renewable wood products, supports family-owned logging businesses, and enables management of forest lands across Virginia. 🟩

Scott Barrett, Ph.D., is Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Virginia Tech Department of Forest and Resources and Environmental Conservation.

Temitope Ogana is a Graduate Research Assistant, Virginia Tech Department of Forest and Resources and Environmental Conservation.

Photos provided by the authors.

Tips for a Successful Timber Harvest

By Jennifer Gagnon

Research on family woodland owners shows that although harvesting timber is likely low on your list of motivations for owning land (Butler, 2020), many of you will do it at some point. Most family woodland owners don't have much, if any, experience with the timber harvest process since it is typically a once or twice in a lifetime occurrence. This lack of experience can result in unintended consequences, including being paid less than what the timber is worth, not getting paid in a timely manner, not having adequate regeneration in place to grow the next forest, or having roads left in poor condition. This article provides tips on understanding the people and the processes involved in harvesting your timber to help ensure you get the timber sale you want—and the new, healthy forest you deserve.

Why Sell Timber?

It's your land, so you can sell timber for any reason, but you are more likely to be happy with the results if you have your timber harvested with specific objectives in mind.

Income generation is a common objective for harvesting; however, harvesting can also be an effective forest management tool. A well-designed and managed timber harvest can improve the health of the woods



Working with a forestry professional is the best way to ensure your timber harvest meets your objectives.

by removing unhealthy trees and undesirable species, such as invasives. Well-planned roads and skid trails can provide access to the woods long after a timber harvest is complete. Timber harvests following a catastrophic event, such as high winds or severe insect or disease damage, can improve forest health. Finally, timber harvests increase biodiversity at the local level and diversify habitat at the landscape level.

The People

There are different types of forestry professionals who may be involved in

your timber sale. It's helpful to know who these people are and how they can help you.

1. **Foresters:** graduates of a four-year forestry program trained in managing forest ecosystems. They may conduct surveys to evaluate the health and composition of forests and identify potential risks or issues such as disease outbreaks or nonnative invasive species. They use this information to develop comprehensive management plans that promote biodiversity, maintain

soil quality, and schedule timber harvesting. *(The Types of Foresters inset provides more information on who provides specific services.)*

2. **Timber Buyers:** professionals who purchase standing trees from landowners and have them harvested and delivered to a mill. This could be a mill employee, a logger who buys the trees and harvests them, or a timber broker.
3. **Loggers:** professionals who cut down trees and process them into logs or chips to be transported to mills. Sometimes loggers also buy timber.

Is it Time to Harvest?

After determining your objectives for harvesting timber, you should contact a forestry professional to make sure this is a good management decision and that your timber is ready to be cut. While there are different types of forestry professionals, a great place to start for most people is with your local Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) forester or natural resource specialist, who serves each Virginia county. They can walk through the woods with you and make an initial evaluation of the marketability of your timber. Some factors that determine marketability include species, size, quality, access, tract size, and distance to markets.

If a DOF professional thinks your timber may be marketable and that a harvest would be a good tool to help meet your objectives, you will want to find a professional forester who can help you manage the sale. A forester's involvement helps ensure that the harvest is conducted in a way that is best for the woods in the long term and that will benefit you financially.

Your local DOF office can provide a list of professional foresters who can assist with the timber sale process. Just like finding an accountant, builder, or lawyer, you will be more satisfied with the results of your timber harvest if you take time to find the right forester to work with. *(See Tips for Selecting a Forester on page 15 for more details.)*

The Process

One of the first steps a forester will take is to mark the boundaries of the timber sale. Well-marked boundary lines will show exactly where timber harvesting is to occur. This helps minimize legal problems such as accidentally cutting someone else's trees.

TYPES OF FORESTERS

VDOF area foresters/natural resource specialists

are employed by the Virginia Department of Forestry and are located throughout Virginia. They are typically the first point of contact for landowners. They can walk your property with you, discuss opportunities and concerns, advise you on available cost share programs that can help you meet your management objectives, and make an initial evaluation on the marketability of your timber. These services are free. Because these professionals are public employees, they cannot estimate timber values or be involved in timber sales on private property.

Consulting foresters are independent foresters you can hire for a variety of services. They can assess your property as well as write a management plan. They can determine the value of your timber and assist you with timber sales. Consulting foresters work for you and should incorporate your interests and goals in their management recommendations. Consulting foresters charge a fee for their services.

Industry or procurement foresters work for businesses in the forest products industry, like sawmills and paper companies. They work with you to purchase timber for their mills. Industry foresters can provide many of the same services as consulting foresters.

Extension foresters are employed by Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. Their main role is to provide private landowners with woodland education and resources based on sound science. If you have a question about managing your woodlands or are wondering how to get started, these are the folks to contact.

Your forester will then determine how much timber you have and its approximate value (called a timber cruise), and what harvesting methods are most feasible. The harvest method will depend on the size and type of forest you have, where it is located, local markets, and your objectives. Choosing which trees to cut is complex, as it must balance science, forest health, and economics with the desired future condition of the forest. A good forester will combine science and experience to help you meet your objectives and ensure good growth and regeneration in your future forest.

Your forester will also develop a plan to ensure that your timber is accessible. This may involve determining what types of stream crossings are necessary, the location of roads and landings, and obtaining permission for logging equipment to use neighboring roads or driveways.

At this stage, you are ready to proceed with finding a buyer. Some sales may be attractive enough to warrant multiple offers, while others may be more difficult to sell. The three main ways timber is sold in Virginia include:

1. **Lump Sum:** Sale of standing timber for a fixed dollar amount agreed upon in advance. This approach generally transfers the risk of market changes and damage from natural disasters to the timber buyer.
2. **Pay as Cut:** An agreed upon amount is paid for each unit of production (i.e., weight or volume). You will be paid periodically throughout the harvest, as stated in your contract. You retain ownership of the timber until it is cut.
3. **Shares:** Proceeds from the sale are split between you and the logger at an agreed upon percentage or share of the amount received



Timber harvests will change how your woods look. These changes, however, are temporary. Quickly following a harvest, early successional habitat develops, providing valuable cover and food for wildlife.



The open canopy of young forests allows ample sunlight to reach the ground, which results in diverse understory vegetation that supports a wide-array of insects, birds, reptiles, and mammals.

TIPS FOR SELECTING A FORESTER

when the logs are delivered to a mill. The logger cuts the timber and sells the logs, then the landowner receives their share of the revenue from the sale of those logs.

After reviewing the offers and selecting the best one (keep in mind, the best offer may not be the highest payment), it's time to close the sale. This involves signing a contract with the buyer that outlines the details of the sale, including pricing, payment terms, and liability issues. Have a lawyer review the contract before signing it to ensure that your interests are protected.

Prepare Yourself

One thing that many woodland owners are not prepared for is the visual impact of a timber harvest. The change is often dramatic. While disturbance from a harvest is visually jarring to human eyes, the woody debris left behind provides cover for wildlife, breaks down and returns nutrients to the soil, prevents soil from eroding, and protects regenerating trees from deer browse. Within a couple of years, the new forest will be well-established and provide early successional habitat for wildlife. Just brace yourself for the initial change and remember that forests are dynamic and proper timber harvesting practices mimic natural forest ecology processes. 🍂

Jennifer Gagnon is Senior Extension Specialist, Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation and Coordinator of the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program at Virginia Tech.

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1

Ask about their experience and credentials.

- a) Do they have a forestry degree?
- b) Are they members of a professional organization such as the Association of Consulting Foresters or The Society of American Foresters?
- c) Can they provide references?

2

What services do they provide? Examples include timber sales, resource inventory, nonnative invasive control, wildlife habitat improvement, and legacy planning.

3

Ask about their fee structure. Do they charge by the acre, per-hour, or a percentage of timber sale revenue?

4

Do they understand your objectives and offer options on how to achieve them?

5

Ask how they determine which trees to harvest, especially which ones should be left behind and why.

- a) Listen for indications that the harvest they propose includes trees of all sizes and species. This is important for achieving forest health and diversity objectives.
- b) If they focus on harvesting only the valuable trees or use terms like diameter-limit harvesting, proceed with caution. While valuable trees need to be removed to make commercial timber harvests worthwhile, unless your land is being clearcut, some high-quality trees need to be left behind to grow the next forest. Good foresters are focused on the condition of your future forest.

6

Ask if they work with the logger to implement forestry best management practices. These are mostly voluntary guidelines designed to minimize soil erosion and water quality problems.

7

How often do they check the active harvesting job?

8

If your objective is to maximize revenue from a sale and regenerate a stand, often the best harvesting method may be a clearcut. This is a preferred tool to regenerate tree species that require full sun, such as yellow-poplar and loblolly pine.

9

Before the first tree is cut or road is built, make sure you have a written contract. This ensures that all parties are on the same page and provides some recourse if terms are not followed.

THE LIFE IN A DAY



Into the Woods With Logger Ronnie Moyers

By Fred Schatzki

Deep in the heart of the Commonwealth's high country, a literal stone's throw from the West Virginia state line, lives a man who through hard work, commitment to the logging profession, and tireless advocacy for our forests and the creatures who live there, was nominated for and received one of VFA's 2025 Logger Merit Awards. Follow along as we discover where this man came from, how he operates today, and his forecast for the future.

Ronald “Ronnie” Moyers, proprietor of Moyers Logging, has been working in the woods or on the farm his entire life. He comes from a long line of loggers with a grandfather, father, and brother making a living in the woods.

One of Ronnie’s earliest memories about cutting timber was when, at 8 or 9 years old, he was tasked to reclaim some old fields for sheep pasture. He was handed a chainsaw and went to work. His father, watching from afar, observed some improper saw handling but kept his counsel. As expected by his watchful dad, Ronnie managed to cut his leg. After his father patched him up, he asked, “What did you learn?” Ronnie took that lesson to heart (the learning part, not to mention the safety part!), and to this day he lives by the motto, “Never quit

learning.” Moyers also recalls short-wooding pulpwood: cutting bolts, stacking by hand on a single-axle truck, and getting the load to the mill, all for the princely sum of about \$35 a load. He talks about cutting sawtimber by hand and skidding and loading with horses as part of his earliest experiences in the woods.

Moyers’ father always carried a double-bitted axe (“to have a sharp edge all day”) and would commonly girdle firewood quality trees. This served two purposes: it prepared next season’s firewood for cutting, and as the crown died and provided light to the forest floor, grasses were encouraged, resulting in fine browse for the sheep herd. Observing this natural progression awakened his curiosity and paved the way for a life of living and working in the field.

Regular farming and livestock were also part of his life. In addition to sheep, they also had dairy cattle. Milk jugs, once filled, would be left in the creek to cool until the milk truck arrived for pickup—an unrefrigerated milk truck. The caretaking of land and animals meant there was always something to do: mend fences, feed livestock, cut firewood, repair barns and sheds, and all the other tasks that wake farmers early in the morning and send them to bed late at night.

The daily life of Moyers Logging typically starts by being onsite by 7 a.m., felling and skidding timber in the morning, and processing and loading in the afternoon. “My work day is very regular,” Ronnie says. “I work from 7 in the morning to about 3:30 in the afternoon, except when 3:30 is actually 7 p.m.”

While Moyers Logging historically had up to 10 employees, Ronnie found that being bigger didn’t necessarily mean better, and today he operates with just his daughter and occasionally one other hand. On our visit, we find Ronnie and his daughter Missy Moyers-Jarrells at work on family property selectively harvesting sawtimber.



“I work from 7 in the morning to about 3:30 in the afternoon, except when 3:30 is actually 7 p.m.”

We’re about 1.5 miles off the pavement in the high country. The log deck is at 2,743 feet elevation, and the harvest site is a bit farther up the hill.

Selective harvesting in the mountains is Moyers’ forte. His goal is to improve overall stand quality by removing poorly formed, diseased, or suppressed trees as well as grade logs, to encourage uneven-aged stand development. All felling is done by hand with Stihl saws. Primary limbing and topping is done at the stump to minimize skidding damage. Skidding is done with either a JD 548G skidder or a JD 650J dozer, and they commonly find they have to cable the logs up to a ridge or cut skid trail before dragging back to the deck. Logs and pulpwood are then cut to length on the deck by hand (Ronnie slyly says, “Look at this buck saw!” while glancing down at himself; Missy is usually the one “sticking out” log lengths for Ronnie to cut).

Navigating the mountain haul roads Ronnie established and maintains with the dozer is not a feat for your typical tractor-trailer log truck. Loading and trucking is accomplished via a self-loading International Paystar tri-axle.

Pulpwood is hauled to Smurfit Westrock or sold as firewood to local buyers. Logs are sorted for five different sawmills, depending on species, grade, and prices. Production is about two loads a day.



Safety is paramount. Personal protective equipment (PPE) usage is strictly followed and nobody works by themselves. They use radios to maintain contact during the day. Sometimes safety isn’t a matter of falling trees or



running saws: Missy recounts the time she encountered a rattlesnake in the skid trail. In her zest to escape she twisted her ankle. When Ronnie asked her, “Do you think you can drive yourself to the hospital?” she replied, “Yes!” and did indeed drive herself down the mountain, out to the valley, and into the hospital only to find the ankle wasn’t sprained, it was broken!

Slithery creatures don’t just hang out in the woods, either. In another encounter, Ronnie had exited the skidder for a moment, leaving his hardhat on the controls. Upon his return he noticed the hardhat moving by itself. Turns out a snake had somehow gotten in the machine. When exposed, it disappeared into the workings in the cab, and to this day Ronnie is pretty sure he had a hitch-hiking snake as a helper for the rest of the afternoon.



Ronnie regularly finds himself acting in the role of a manager and consultant as well as a logger. He explains to his harvest clients the benefits of his style of logging. As a self-taught conservationist, his years of experience in the woods observing the effects of his work combined with educational seminars allow him to describe (and show!) what the landowner can expect. He commonly revisits old jobsites to examine the forest progression, and he uses that knowledge to improve his operations.

He recalls one landowner saying to him, years ago, “I want you to treat it as if you own it.” That trust and responsibility was daunting at first, but with experience comes the wisdom and confidence that benefits everyone and results in well managed timberlands. He recalls a few other comments from clients: “The education you have given us on our property we could never have received without you,” and “We had no idea that it was possible for this to be explained to us!”

Ronnie’s work with the woods doesn’t always stay in the woods. One example is his maple sugaring business, Laurel Fork Sapsuckers. He taps sugar maple trees on Tree Farm family property, processes the syrup in his sugar house, and sells the sweet final product to local buyers. He is also involved with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) EQIP program, working to create habitat for the threatened



golden-winged warbler. Another NRCS project involves creation of pollinator habitat in one of his high-country meadows. Moyers also has participated in several projects with Trout Unlimited to improve stream quality.

Ronnie takes his love of education seriously. He hosts students from Mountain Gateway Community College for field tours and hands-on experience, and he exhibited proper chainsaw use for a local Farm Safety Day. A bit further from the woods has been his work with the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, where he travelled to Washington, D.C. to visit Senators' offices to encourage support for funding the Farm Bill.

Ronnie is optimistic about the future but has concerns about who might be interested in doing the kind of work he does today. He's not seeing a lot of new logging startups: "Cost of entry in the business is significant." And finding help will, he thinks, be a challenge.

"We need to create a new generation of loggers," Ronnie says. He thinks we can accomplish this through education, stewardship, and being an ambassador for the industry. He also believes that the demand for wood will only increase. Aside from private lands that are becoming more fragmented and increasingly moving away from traditional forestry use, he sees this vast

He recalls one landowner saying to him, years ago, "I want you to treat [the land] as if you own it."

Federal ownership of forestland and thinks, "Why don't we use this renewable resource?"

Educating the landowner and the public about the wise use of forestland for timber, wildlife, clean air, and clean water is a responsibility of everyone involved in woods work. As a logger for 50 years, the 2019 Virginia Tree Farmer of the Year, now recipient of the Logger Merit Award, Ronnie is uniquely positioned to spread the message of how a life in the woods can lead to a new day. 🍷

Fred Schatzki is a Consulting Forester with American Forest Management and a member of the Virginia Forestry Association Magazine Committee.

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By Luke Shenk



Dave Donaldson



Carey Lasher

The 3rd Annual Forest Leadership Retreat at Wintergreen Resort brought together forward-thinking forestry leaders to navigate industry challenges, strengthen resilience, and build lasting success. Amid shifting economic pressures, participants engaged in strategic discussions, shared insights, and expanded their networks to drive the future of forestry.

In the opening keynote session, speaker Dave Donaldson, Executive Vice President and General Manager of Forest Resources at The Westervelt Company, gave an inspiring account of how Westervelt's legacy embodies over a century of resilient, innovative, and principled leadership as one of the nation's most respected privately owned land stewardship organizations. Established in 1884, The Westervelt Company has been continually adapting and evolving through economic, environmental, and political change. Though uncertain or difficult times are inevitable for any industry, Donaldson outlined strategies revolving around forward thinking coupled with risk assessment and how having a plan in place can help persevere or weather the "storms."

Forest management involves thinking ahead. In many cases, foresters are making management decisions and recommendations based not only on current conditions

but also on a multitude of future considerations, including risk assessment. These recommended management activities typically include 15- to 20- or 25-year time frames. Recognizing that forest management demands long-range thinking, The Westervelt Company has embraced a quarter-century mindset moving beyond short-term planning to adopt strategies that support resilience and sustainability through uncertainty. For every problem or hardship, there is always an option. It just might not be how it has historically been done.

The sessions and speakers following the keynote address articulated specific topics and skillsets to help expand, sustain, protect, and lead existing businesses into the future. As explained by speaker Liz Baker, Founder and Executive Advisor of Nimbology, artificial intelligence is no longer a foreign technological concept. AI can transform business organization by taking over the mundane, repetitive work, increasing efficiency, and providing time to focus on the critical areas of business. A real time demonstration of AI during her presentation showcased its capabilities providing insight to the endless possibilities of business-related AI.

Steven R. Peter delivered an inspiring motivational talk focused on the power of passion; specifically, fourth quarter passion. Just like in the final minutes of a close football

game, where both teams are giving everything they've got, the intensity, determination, and love for the game reach their peak. That same level of drive applies beyond the field. Whether you're a leader, an entrepreneur, or navigating everyday life, it's passion that fuels our response to challenges, propels us through risks, and opens the door to new opportunities. Fourth quarter passion is the ultimate key to a winning strategy.

The evening reception on the beautiful Blue Ridge Terrace offered a relaxed and inviting atmosphere, perfect for winding down. Attendees mingled over a bourbon tasting, enjoyed friendly rounds of cornhole, and savored a variety of



Meals served on the outdoor terrace overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains.

delicious food. With the backdrop of mountain views and the soulful live music of the talented John Shenk, colleagues and friends came together for a memorable evening of camaraderie, great flavors, and mountain views.

The annual Forest Leadership Retreat, hosted by the Virginia Forestry Association, provided a meaningful and engaging space for professional growth, strategic insight, and networking connections within the forest industry. Designed as a smaller, more focused event, the two-day retreat allowed participants to dive deep into key topics, gaining a clearer understanding of the complex components involved in running a successful forestry-related business. Attendees walked away with fresh insights, actionable takeaways, and valuable relationships that could shape their next big move.

With economic pressures reshaping the industry landscape, the event was intentionally crafted as a strategic reset for forestry leaders aiming to stay competitive and forward-thinking. The event was a tremendous success, and the Virginia Forestry Association looks forward to hosting the Forest Leadership Retreat again in 2026. 🍷



Steven Peter.



Live music by John Shenk at the evening reception.

Virginia Forestry Foundation: One Virginia. One Industry. Leading Forward.

By Michael Harold, VFF Chair



It has been an exciting start to the Virginia Forestry Foundation (VFF), founded in 2024, as the foundation continues to make strides in its mission to promote the sustainable use and conservation of forest resources for the long-term social, economic, and ecological prosperity of all Virginians. With a vision to shape the future of forestry in Virginia through innovation, workforce development, and responsible stewardship, VFF aims to become a unifying force for the state's forestry industry.

The VFA Board and Executive Director Terry Lasher have been actively pursuing programs in which VFF can be a leading voice for the industry. As such, VFF has been busy laying the groundwork for impactful programs that advocate, educate, and conserve. One such program is Forestry Works, which VFF is proud to champion on behalf of our forest industry and aims to educate a workforce to meet the needs of our forest industry. We are grateful

for our supporters who have stepped up to get VFF started in the right direction, allowing it to amplify its voice across the Commonwealth.

Looking ahead, VFF plans to deepen its investment in workforce development, sustainability initiatives, and forestry education. These efforts will ensure that Virginia's forests remain vibrant, productive, and resilient in the face of economic and environmental challenges. To accomplish these goals, the Foundation aims to strengthen partnerships with industry leaders, landowners, educators, and all others associated with Virginia's forests to promote sustainable practices and foster innovation.

As VFF continues to grow, we extend heartfelt thanks to VFA staff, our dedicated board members, the forestry industry, and the broader forestry community. Your support fuels our mission and inspires our vision. Together, we're building a legacy of stewardship and sustainability for Virginia's forests. 🌲

TO LEARN MORE

or become a supporter, visit the Virginia Forestry Foundation website at <https://www.vforestry.org/virginia-forestry-foundation>.



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Consultants: Recipe for Success

The time has finally come—you have decided to sell your timber. What is your next step? This can be a complex question if you have never done it before or aren't using professional help. A timber sale has many moving parts, and failure at any junction can lead to long-term issues. When you retain an Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF) member, we are the professional “chef” cooking your timber sale “meal.”

Once the sale decision is made, the consulting forester will lay out the sale area, marking the sale boundaries to define timber to be sold. Next is a timber inventory to determine the types and amounts of timber to be sold along with a market value estimate. A sale prospectus (describing the timber as well as general terms of sale) is created, inviting buyers to submit bids for the timber. Once a suitable bid is received, a timber cutting contract is executed.

So, your timber is sold; your paperwork is in place. Next is the actual timber harvest operation. Your consulting forester will oversee the operation, ensuring contract terms are followed. They will make regular inspections, ensuring BMPs are followed, roads are maintained, site impact is minimized, and any other special terms are followed. Your consultant's knowledge and experience, combined with professional relationships with buyers and loggers, is of great benefit here; we know how operations should be conducted, and how to solve issues that may arise.

Once the harvest is complete, the consultant will work with you to determine next steps. This could be site preparation and tree planting, natural regeneration, or even conversion to agricultural or other use. Your consultant can also assist with cost share applications to capture federal and state incentives related to forestland management activities.

Timber sales can be a daunting task for the uninitiated landowner. Done properly, a timber sale can provide income while preserving conservation of precious natural resources and ensuring sustainable management of your lands. Done improperly, damage from timber harvesting operations can have lasting effects on the land that may take years to mitigate. When thinking about a timber sale, you can consider retaining an ACF forester to ensure that your goals are met and the operation is a success. 🍷

—The Executive Committee of the Virginia Chapter ACF

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The VFA Voice includes up-to-date info about events and activities that support the association, our initiatives, and our members along with forestry-related stories geared to the interests of Virginia's diverse forestry community.

Passing Your Land to The Next Generation?



By John Carroll, Virginia Tree Farm Foundation Board of Directors

As we grow older and look to the future of our forest and farm land, many of us find ourselves facing many decisions. Some decisions are lifestyle related: where to live, what activities will we pursue to remain active, where and how much will we travel, and what will we do with all of the personal items we have accumulated during our lives. Being proactive with all these many decisions is important, but none moreso than considering the future of your real property ownership. My wife Virginia and I are certainly no experts in making these decisions and can procrastinate with the best!

There are a wide variety of tools available that will provide you with resources and knowledge about passing your property to the next generation. Here, I'd like to focus on mentally preparing yourselves and your children or heirs for that next step in ownership. In the end, the passing of ownership will only be successful if there has been adequate preparation, communication, and well-established relationships. There are lots of seminars and workshops that are available to help you understand which options you may want to consider for your particular situation. I strongly recommend you attend one or more of these along with your children when the time is right. But don't wait too long! Of course, there are many legal and tax-related plans that you'll need to consider and discuss with your attorney and financial advisor along the way, too. This is critical and will make the difference for the arrangement to be both legal and financially sound.

I would like to walk you through some of the relationship strategies you can take to see if passing your property is

the best decision for you, the property, and most of all your children. After all, there are other things you can do with the property.

You could opt to sell or donate the property; sometimes, that is the best option. There are so many markets out there for your land today that are too numerous to mention, and you can explore these on your own. You might be surprised at the value.

Of course, it is easier to pass cash, stocks, bonds, etc., and sometimes this is preferred. Don't discount the idea that your children might want to sell the land outright after your passing. This is often the case when there is an undivided interest in the property. Also, you may want to provide the opportunity for your children to receive a stepped-up basis in the value of the property and the current favorable federal estate tax treatment.

It would be great if your children have expressed interest in the future of your property and already have a connection to the land. This might be from a recreational aspect, involvement in a family business, or any number of activities that have maintained that interest. Properties that have a history of residential use are the easiest to hold that interest, but plenty of investment properties also have created that special connection for families over time.

The future of your property is certainly more viable if that property has some type of ability to generate income. I don't know of many things that will better maintain the interest your children have in the property. And it only makes sense that there must be a way of paying the ever-increasing taxes, take care of improvements that need to be

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made over time, and as an investment return during their lifetime.

It is helpful to involve your children in the decisions regarding the property, and there are many ways to make that happen. Management plans, timber sales, leases, building/improving roads, conservation easements, Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs, carbon, and some or all of the income and expenses related to the property are all opportunities. It also makes sense to share some portion of the income generated by the property or business depending on how you are organized. It not only shows them the potential of the property but also gives you the responsibility of instilling the stewardship philosophy for the land. It shows how, if properly managed, your property will produce an income stream over time.

Involving them in the work goes hand in hand with the decisions. This could be anything from making arrangements for reforestation, marking boundary lines, or securing the services of resource professionals. Hands on work is pretty easy when your children are young and they can't wait to help out on tasks like spreading seed and straw or planting trees, but this gets more difficult and complicated as children get older. Life gets busy!

It would be a good idea to set up future ownership of the property for success. A portion of the funds from

PDRs, easements, and leases could pass with the property if possible. These funds would help offset expenses in transition and improve the viability of ownership.

The great thing about land is that it continues to increase in value while providing a number of benefits over time. I cannot think of a better reason to make sure future generations are able and adequately equipped to enjoy the same benefits that we have enjoyed. Finally, you are leaving your children with a great gift. Other than your unending love for your family, leaving an asset like your farm and forest land to your children is one of the greatest gifts to be given! 🌲

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Virginia Forestry Educational Foundation Update

Mentorship Employment Program Opens Doors to Forest Industry

Palmer Dugger, owner of L.P. Dugger Logging in Southside, Virginia, recently partnered with the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) to mentor and employ one of their students. The student, whose primary training was in welding, gained valuable experience through exposure to the forestry industry while continuing his studies.

During the semester, the student worked 20 hours a week with L.P. Dugger Logging, where Dugger provided him with a salary and consistently reported back to his professors at SVHEC to ensure that his progress was monitored. Dugger reflected positively on the partnership, noting that the student was hardworking, dependable, and quickly became an asset to the company. "The return was worth the investment," Dugger said, pointing to the dual benefit for both the student and the company.

At the end of the semester, the student decided to follow his dream of pursuing a welding career at a different company since L.P. Dugger Logging did not require a full-time welder at that time. However, Dugger firmly believes that the skills and knowledge the student gained from his time in the forestry industry will serve him well in his career. Exposure to a different field not only broadened the student's experience but also gave him a new appreciation for forestry. Dugger added that the experience could influ-

ence the student's career decisions in the future or inspire him to encourage others to consider forestry-related careers.

Reflecting on the program, Dugger explained: "He was an asset to our company during the time he was here, and even though he did not stay as a permanent employee, I feel he will help our workforce with the experience he received here." His words highlight the ripple effect of student placements—benefits that extend beyond just one student or one semester.

After this positive collaboration with SVHEC, Dugger says he "would not hesitate to work with another student in the future." Programs like these offer companies the opportunity to shape the future workforce while giving students hands-on, paid experience in industries they may not have otherwise considered. For Virginia's forestry sector, such partnerships are crucial. They not only help meet workforce needs today but also inspire a new generation to keep forestry alive and thriving in the Commonwealth.

By linking education with industry, the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center is creating pathways where students can gain meaningful employment experiences, and companies like L.P. Dugger Logging can connect with emerging talent. These types of collaborations should be encouraged and expanded statewide—for the good of both students and the industries that need them. ◀



John C. Magruder
Consulting Forester

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Thanks to the strength of our endowments, investments, and generous donor support, VFEF will award over \$375,000 to over 20 organizations in 2025 to advance forestry education across the Commonwealth.

Scan the QR code to make a donation and help grow the future of Virginia's forest industry. Every gift makes a lasting impact! Thank you for being part of our mission!



Established in 1958, The Virginia Forestry Educational Foundation, is a IRS 501(c)(3). All contributions are 100% tax deductible.

STRONG FUTURE.

The Virginia Forestry Educational Foundation (VFEF) is proud to share an updated mission statement that honors our deep roots while looking ahead to a strong future.

OUR NEW MISSION

To support forestry education promoting sustainable forests for the environmental, social, and economic benefit of all Virginians.

OUR REFRESHED VISION

A Virginia where coordinated educational efforts advance a sustainable future for Virginia's forests and forest industry.

This updated mission reflects our long-standing commitment to education, workforce development, and sustainable forestry. We are excited to continue building strong partnerships and investing in programs that make a lasting impact across the Commonwealth.

Thank you for supporting the future of forestry in Virginia.



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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN, *continued from page 5*

working relationship moving forward that is especially important as we approach the start of the 2026 General Assembly session.

VFA continues to work through Team Ag and Forestry, a coalition of like-minded forestry and agricultural associations focused on strengthening our legislative impact. This group met separately with policy directors from both gubernatorial campaigns to help shape their natural resource platforms. It was gratifying to hear our message echoed by both candidates during the Young Farmers gubernatorial candidate forum at Ferrum College—proof that our advocacy is making an impact.

In this issue, I encourage you to read about one of the most vital links in our supply chain: the forest harvesting and transportation sector. Our Logger Merit award recognizes the essential, often underappreciated, work of our loggers. Their efforts connect forests to markets and deserve our thanks.

Finally, remember to share forestry's successes with those you meet—especially with children, who represent the future of our industry.

Thank you for all you do. 




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