

Easement Spotlight: The Town of Purcellville

On April 22, 2009—Earth Day—the Town of Purcellville recorded a Virginia Outdoors Foundation easement on 1,271 acres of land in the Blue Ridge Mountains adjacent to the Appalachian Trail and west of Hillsboro. The property includes a significant portion of the watershed above the J.T. Hirst Reservoir, three springs and the reservoir itself. The reservoir provides nearly one-half of the drinking water for the town.

The easement is the largest for VOF in Loudoun County, bringing the county's total VOF easement acreage to 24,117 acres, ranking it 6th in the state. It's also the first easement by a municipality in Loudoun.

"I am proud of the council taking action to protect our reservoir and its watershed," said Purcellville Mayor Robert W. Lazaro, Jr. "The town has a proactive environmental record including holding an easement on a ten-acre stream valley property and placing an historic easement on our Fireman's Field property."

"I congratulate the Town of Purcellville for their foresight to protect the watershed for its drinking-water reservoir," said Governor Timothy M. Kaine. "This conservation easement is remarkable, and it demonstrates the significant leadership role



Public partner: The Town of Purcellville became the first municipality in Loudoun County to donate an easement to VOF.

local governments can play in preserving open space. The town's decision will help protect local drinking water and maintain the area's natural beauty for generations to come."

"While the majority of easements donated to VOF are from private landowners, this project is a great example of how municipalities, too, can take advantage of the Commonwealth's unrivaled land conservation programs," added VOF Executive Director Bob Lee.

Timing Mowing to Benefit Wildlife

Property owners mow their fields for different reasons. Some do it simply for aesthetics. Others want to keep trees from taking over fields that may one day be used for crops. Others mow to prevent invasive weeds such as autumn olive from spreading through pastures. Whatever the reason, mowing can have both positive and negative effects on wildlife. By mimicking the natural successional growth that happens after wildfires, you can create habitat that is ideal for many birds and other animals. But if you mow too often or at the wrong time, you can end up hurting these species more than helping them.

We asked Marc Puckett, a certified wildlife biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, for advice on mowing. Here are some basic considerations.

Is Mowing Necessary?

Think about why you are mowing and whether it's needed every year, or even at all. If you are trying to keep your fields

clear of trees, then mowing on a two- or three-year rotation may be all that's needed. It varies based on where in the state you live, as things grow faster in the coastal plain than they do in the mountains.

If you need to mow more regularly but still want to promote good wildlife habitat on your property, learn to differentiate between good wildlife shrubs, thicket-forming cover, and beneficial trees, and other things that you do not want. Leave the good and cut or spot spray the bad. Good things for wildlife include plum, sumac, blackberry, persimmon, greenbrier, grape, blueberry, azalea, dogwood, slower growing oaks, and hickory. Bad things, at least in terms of being invasive and quickly taking over fields, are sweetgum, red maple, poplar, Tree of Heaven, and locust. It takes time to become good at selective management, but most folks can at least learn to identify several good plants to avoid mowing or spraying.

MOWING continued on next page

Finally, if you are mowing simply to have your land be more accessible, consider mowing paths rather than whole fields. Not only will you still be able to walk around and enjoy your land, but you'll also be able to appreciate all of the cover and wildlife that you spared.

Explore Alternatives

If you can find other ways to keep your fields clear, such as controlled burning (only in safe, well-planned situations) or disking (only where erosion is not a concern), then do that instead. These management practices should also be done in rotation, working half or a third of the land each year, usually during late winter or early spring. You can even use spot herbicide treatments to control encroaching trees and further lengthen the time between mowings. Properly applied, non-persistent herbicides can help, not hurt, wildlife.

Timing Mowing

No mowing should occur between early April and early September if possible, as many birds are nesting during this time. Quail will nest well into early fall, for example. Many folks like to bush-hog during fall, as it somehow makes sense to them to “clean” things up before winter. Or, others will say they like to bush-hog during summer before the weeds set their seeds, thinking they are preventing weedy growth. Again, landowners need to understand the value of so-called weeds for wildlife. Unless they are really farming and concerned about weeds, weeds are great.

Ideally, mowing is best done during early to late March because cover quickly regrows during spring. Within two to four weeks, lots of new herbaceous growth will come back and provide nesting and brood-rearing areas for a variety of birds and other animals. When you mow in late fall, the area is essentially barren of cover all winter long, when escape cover is sorely needed. So, ideally, you would mow on a 1/2 to 1/3 annual rotation during March.

Mow From the Inside Out

Many people instinctively start mowing the perimeter of their



Let it grow: The unmowed fields on this VOF easement in Rockbridge County are being managed for quail and other wildlife.

fields and work their way in. This can often send wildlife into the centering of the field, where they will ultimately be killed. To prevent this, start mowing in the middle of the field and work your way out. That gives wildlife a chance to seek refuge in surrounding unmowed fields or tree stands. But remember that this will still destroy any nests or young that can't escape, so it's still important to avoid mowing during the nesting season.

Avoid Mowing to the Water's Edge

Landowners with streams or rivers running through or adjacent to fields should leave an unmowed buffer strip as much as possible. The vegetation helps to filter pollution from runoff and prevent erosion. It also helps to mitigate flooding. For more information about riparian buffers, see the article beginning on page 4.

If your land is protected by a VOF easement and you have questions about mowing, please contact your local stewardship specialist using the contact information on the back of this newsletter or by visiting our Web site, www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org.

Alternatives to Easements for Conserving Land

Almost all of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation's conserved lands are protected through conservation easements that allow land to remain in private hands while preserving its public values. Some landowners, however, have opted to give entire properties to VOF. Their reasons vary: perhaps they don't wish to pass the land on to heirs; perhaps the property is no longer being used; perhaps they are trying to reduce estate tax burdens; or perhaps they just feel the land is so special and has so much public value that it would be safest in public hands. Whatever the reason, land donations are one of the most generous legacies that landowners can leave to future generations.

Here are some ways landowners can donate an entire property to VOF.

Donate the Property Outright

When VOF evaluates a potential land donation, it first examines the property's value as public land. Does it provide

opportunities for public recreation? Does it protect important water resources or endangered species? The higher the public benefit, the more likely VOF will accept ownership of the land.

If the property doesn't meet the criteria for public land but has high conservation value, VOF may place a conservation easement on the property and sell it to another entity or private landowner.

If the property has little conservation value but high market value (for instance, if it's a small urban lot with a building on it), VOF may—with the donor's permission—sell the property and use the proceeds to protect other land with higher conservation value.

Donating Land by Will

Some people wish to donate property to VOF after their death. If they are not concerned about getting a tax deduction on their income taxes, they can leave the property to VOF



A Letter From the Executive Director

The amount of acreage under VOF's protection has more than doubled since 2004, to nearly 550,000 acres. To meet the responsibility that comes with managing these lands, we need to use volunteers to augment our dedicated employees.

Two of many areas where volunteers can help are outreach and landowner relations. VOF will soon have more than 3,000 parcels subject to easement, and the owners of these parcels deserve our attention and help. There are a number of state and federal agencies that give program preference to VOF easements because they know that the properties are permanently protected from development. Working with staff, volunteers can make owners of easement properties aware of government programs that can provide grants and cost-share assistance for conservation practices.

Another way volunteers can help VOF is by researching local land ownership records. Easement properties often change hands, and the sooner VOF is aware of this, the more proactive we can be to explain the terms of the easement to the new landowner. VOF could never have offices in every local jurisdiction in Virginia, but we have easements in over 100 jurisdictions that are served from our seven stewardship regional locations. Having volunteers who could alert VOF staff to easement land ownership changes in their communities would be tremendously helpful.

VOF is developing volunteer position descriptions and training resources to assist citizen volunteers who want to be part of preserving the cultural landscape for which Virginia has so long been revered. We hope to have a wide array of volunteer opportunities that can match the interests, skills, and talents of a diverse volunteer corps. One potential pool of volunteers is the several thousand landowners who cared enough for their open spaces and natural resources to donate conservation easements on their lands. Another target is the growing number of citizens who have completed the Virginia Master Naturalist Program, which requires 40 hours of volunteer service. VOF is a qualified recipient for these 40 hours of service.

Finally, VOF can only maintain our land conservation momentum if we can garner both the private and public funding needed to fully support our programs. Volunteers for resource development can help us by maintaining a dialog with the elected officials who provide state funding as part of a continuing information and education program. State legislators listen to their constituents, and citizens dedicated to VOF's land conservation mission are our best advocates. Additionally, local volunteers can identify folks who live in their communities and have demonstrated the capacity and caring required for tax-deductible support to VOF. The VOF Board of Trustees provides a leadership volunteer example. Trustees volunteer for VOF service by gubernatorial appointment. It is my pleasure to inform our newsletter readers that over the past year 100 percent of our trustees made personal donations to support VOF—and this was in addition to the many uncompensated hours of public service.

If you think you might be interested in volunteer opportunities with VOF, call the office located closest to your residence. The contact information for the VOF regional offices is on the back of this newsletter. You can also find a volunteer application form online at www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/volunteer.

LAND DONATIONS *continued from page 2*

through a will. This will benefit heirs by reducing estate taxes. It's important for donors to notify VOF if they plan to include such a gift in a will, to be sure that VOF will be able to receive it.

Remainder Interest

What about donors who want to continue living on and using a property and donate it to VOF after their death, but wish to receive the tax benefits now? That's when they could consider donating a remainder interest. They could continue to enjoy the land during their lifetimes and may be eligible for an income tax deduction when the gift is made. The value of the deduction is based on the fair market value of the donated property less the expected value of the life estate.

Charitable Remainder Trusts

For those who want to donate land to VOF but receive income during their lifetime, one option is a charitable remainder trust. A donor starts by putting the land under easement and placing it in a trust. Then, the trustee sells the land and invests the net proceeds. One or more beneficiaries will receive payments each year for a fixed term or for life; then, the trustee turns the remaining funds in the trust over to VOF.

If you are considering any of these options to protect your land, please talk to your attorney, tax advisor, and VOF before making any decisions. You may contact VOF development specialist Renee Russell at (804) 225-2756 or rrussell@vofonline.org.

Help us keep our records up to date. Please notify us of any recent changes to your mailing address, e-mail address, or phone number by sending an e-mail to bcabibbo@vofonline.org or by calling (540) 347-7727 x226. If you have questions regarding your easement, please contact your local stewardship specialist.

The Benefits of Riparian Buffers

By Julia C. Klapproth and James E. Johnson

The Commonwealth of Virginia has over 50,000 miles of streams, 248 publicly owned lakes, and almost 2,500 miles of coastal estuary. These waters play an important role in industry, transportation, and agriculture and provide Virginia's citizens with a place to relax and enjoy the outdoors. They are a source of fresh drinking water and home to many of the state's plants and animals.

Unfortunately, human activities within and around the state's waterways have often led to a loss of water quality and the destruction of habitat for fish and wildlife. As a result, 48 percent of Virginia's streams, 6 percent of Virginia's lakes, and 71 percent of Virginia's estuaries are now considered threatened or impaired by some form of pollution.

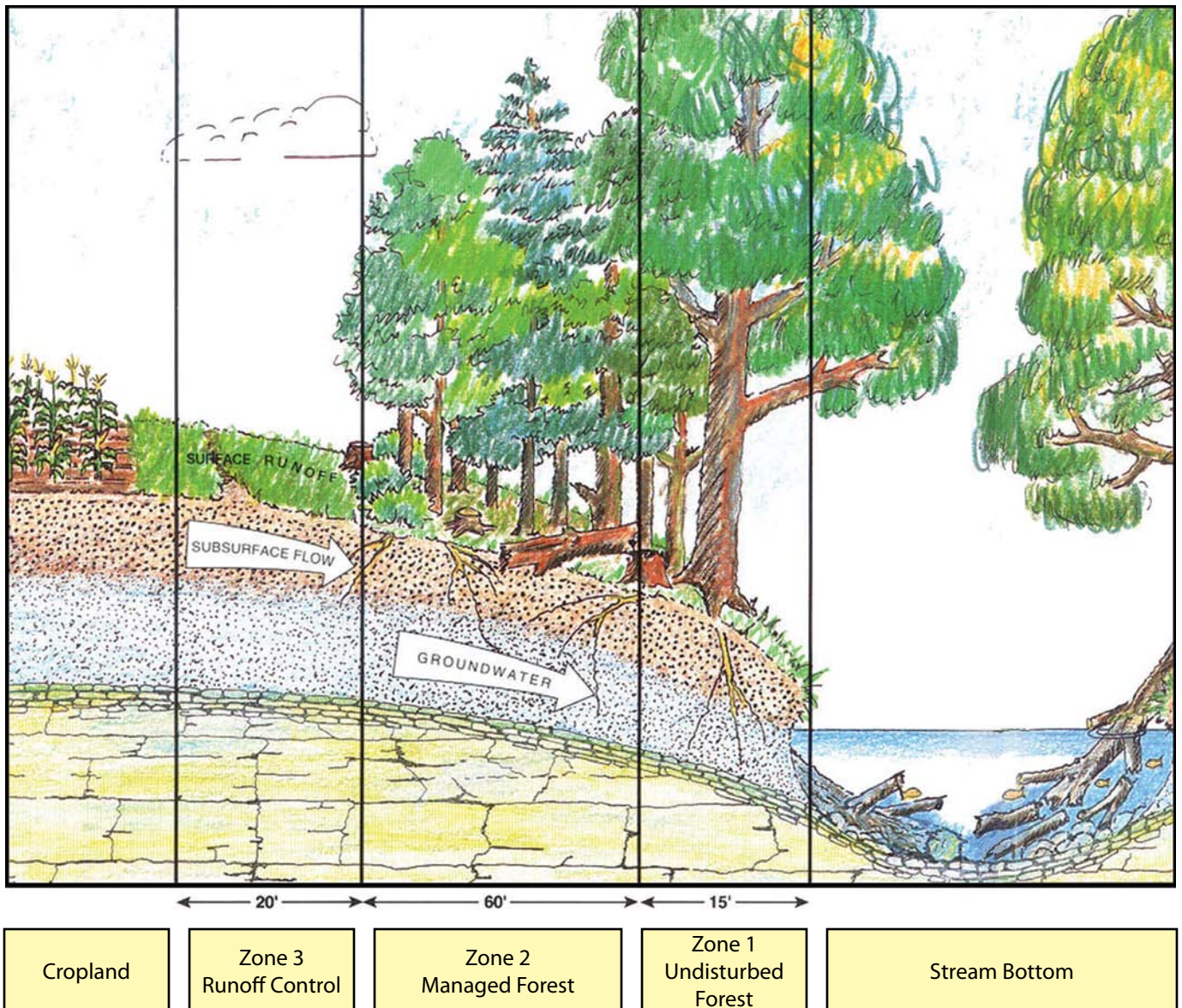
Over the past two decades, scientists at Virginia Tech, around the United States, and in other parts of the world have begun to recognize the important role that riparian areas play in maintaining healthy surface waters. The riparian area is that area of land located immediately adjacent to streams, lakes, or other surface waters. Some would describe it as the floodplain. The boundary of the

riparian area and the adjoining uplands is gradual and not always well defined. However, riparian areas differ from the uplands with their high levels of soil moisture, frequent flooding, and the unique assemblage of plant and animal communities. Through the interaction of their soils, hydrology, and biotic communities, riparian forests maintain many important physical, biological, and ecological functions and important social benefits.

Water Quality

One of the most important functions of riparian forests is to protect water quality by reducing the amount of sediment, nutrients and other pollutants that enter streams, lakes, and other surface waters. Improved water quality mainly occurs as contaminants are buried in sediments, taken up by riparian vegetation, absorbed onto clay and organic particles, immobilized, or denitrified by soil microorganisms.

Riparian forests also provide important physical protection for the stream. Plants protect the soil surface from wind and water





Buffer beauty: Roanoke County recently reduced erosion in Mudlick Creek in by creating a riparian buffer.

erosion, stabilize streambanks, and modify temperature, light, and humidity within the riparian area and the stream itself. Riparian vegetation slows the force of stormwater runoff and allows time for water to infiltrate the soil and for sediments to be captured. Within the soil, plants create small zones of aeration where oxygen diffuses from their roots, providing important places for microbial metabolism.

Living Resources

Rich soils, regular inputs of nutrients, and water availability contribute to the high productivity and diversity of vegetation within the riparian area. The diversity and productivity of the riparian plant community and its proximity to water are especially attractive for many species of wildlife. Some animals are permanent residents, while others visit the area to feed or find water. Because of their linear shape, riparian forests can also provide protected travel corridors for wildlife to travel from one area to another.

Riparian forests are also critical components of the aquatic community. In headwater streams, riparian forests provide nearly all of the food for the aquatic community by dropping leaves, branches, insects, and other materials into the stream. Forests also contribute the most critical component of a stream's physical structure—large woody debris. Woody debris provides cover for aquatic species and creates areas for rest and reproduction. In addition to providing food and habitat for the aquatic community, riparian forests are important for the role they play in moderating stream temperatures and influencing water chemistry.

Social and Community Benefits

Riparian forests provide many important benefits to humans. Their pleasing combination of land, water, vegetation, and wildlife draw us as places to relax and observe nature. These areas are attractive for many recreational pursuits, like swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, hiking, and nature observation. Riparian forests can also provide important benefits to communities as they function to moderate the impacts of flood waters, improve water quality, and reduce sedimentation in streams and reservoirs.

Virginia's Riparian Buffer Implementation Plan

In October 1996, members of the Chesapeake Bay Executive

Council, including the governor of Virginia, recognized the role that riparian forests play in benefiting stream water quality and living resources and adopted what is known as the Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative. In doing so, council members agreed to work to preserve, protect, and enhance existing forested buffers and to plant an additional 2,010 miles of streamside buffers in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed by 2010. Virginia's commitment to this goal is to restore 610 miles of riparian forest buffer.

In 1998, the Commonwealth of Virginia expanded the effort statewide by adopting the Virginia Riparian Buffer Implementation Plan. The goal of the plan is to continue to restore the quality of Virginia's streams and lakes by ensuring that all streams and shorelines in the commonwealth are protected by a riparian buffer. To meet this objective, the agencies of the commonwealth have agreed to work with individuals and communities in their efforts to restore streamside lands. They are increasing their efforts to provide education, technical assistance, and funding to Virginia's landowners.

Join the Effort

If you are the owner of riparian lands, or live in a community that borders a stream, you can join in the effort to restore Virginia's streamside forests. The best place to start is to contact your county forester, local Soil and Water Conservation District, wildlife biologist, or Virginia Cooperative Extension office. Let them know that you have riparian lands that you wish to restore, or that you would like to volunteer to help restore community areas.

If you are interested in creating or expanding a riparian buffer on a property that is under easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, please contact the stewardship specialist at your local VOF office. If you are unsure which office serves your easement, please contact Jason McGarvey, communications and outreach manager, at (804) 786-9603 or jmcgarvey@vofonline.org.

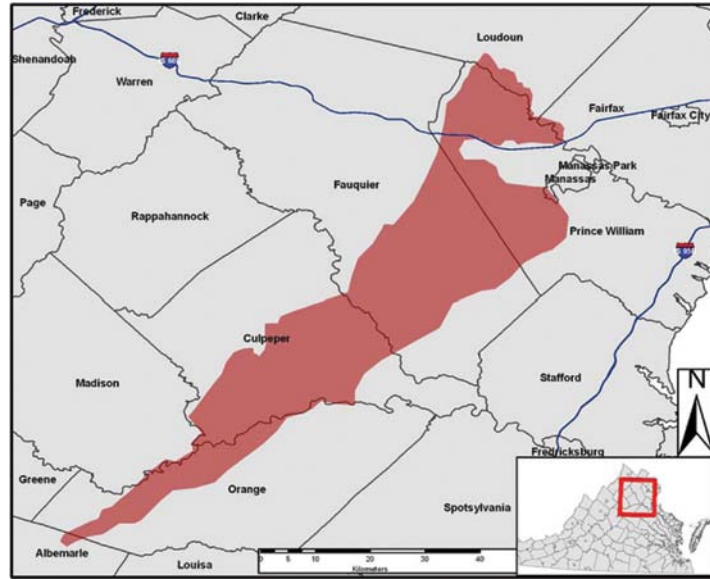
About the authors: Julia C. Klapproth is a faculty assistant-natural resources at the Maryland Cooperative Extension; James E. Johnson is an extension forestry specialist at the College of Natural Resources, Virginia Tech. This article is adapted from "Understanding the Science Behind Riparian Forest Buffers: An Overview," by Virginia Cooperative Extension. The full article is available at online at pubs.ext.vt.edu.

Preserving Virginia's "Important Bird Areas"

By Mary Elfner, coordinator, Virginia Audubon

Conservation-minded landowners in Virginia should be aware of the Audubon Virginia Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program, as you may have land in one of 19 designated IBA sites. IBAs have no formal protection. They are, however, recognized by state, national and global bird experts as critical to bird conservation.

Each of these sites is unique as to which high-priority bird species serve as criteria for the IBA designation. For example, in the Culpeper Basin IBA in the Piedmont of Virginia, it's the presence of northern bobwhite and eastern meadowlark in sufficient numbers that makes this place critical to bird survival at the state level. Despite its tremendous value to Virginia's grassland bird species, only 3 percent of the Culpeper Basin IBA is formally protected, the least of any IBA. Due to its close proximity to the rapidly suburbanizing areas along the I-95 and I-66 corridors, the greatest threats to the IBA are a result of the widespread expansion of urban areas. Such development is placing enormous pressure on once rural farmland, changing both the rural character and natural value of the landscape for birds. Additionally, changes in farming practices that lead to more frequent mowing, larger fields with 'cleaner' field edges, the loss of large fallow fields and old farm structures that barn owls use to nest and hunt, and greater use of pesticides are also significant threats to birds within the IBA. Ensuring the future of these vulnerable species will depend on the involvement of local communities, farmers, landowners, and local decision makers.



Courtesy Virginia Audubon Council

The National Audubon Society's Virginia IBA Program is interested in working with landowners in the Culpeper Basin IBA regarding the State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program—a Conservation Reserve Program through the Farm Service Agency. This Culpeper Basin IBA SAFE project will use native trees, shrubs, and warm season grasses to restore bird habitat along the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers, as well as upland habitat adjacent to their tributaries; thus, creating wildlife corridors of diverse habitats in various stages of succession.

In order to qualify, the

following criteria must be met:

- The land must be located, or partly located, in the Culpeper Basin IBA (*see map*).
- Participants must create habitat by planting either trees or warm season grasses.
- If intended use is to restore native grasses, the proposed area must be a minimum of 10 hectares in size.
- Enrollment of land in SAFE projects will be restricted to those properties along either the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers or upland habitat adjacent to their tributaries.

For more information, please e-mail melfner@audubon.org or call (804) 788-7660. Learn more about the Audubon IBA Program by visiting <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/virginia/>.

A Lasting Legacy: Paul Mellon's Philanthropy Lives On

During his lifetime, philanthropist Paul Mellon was a generous supporter and firm believer in the work of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, demonstrated by the more than 5,000 acres he protected through VOF's conservation easement program. Now, more than 10 years after his death, Mr. Mellon's vision for land conservation continues to live on through his estate, which recently gave VOF a \$100,000 gift.

"This gift will help us continue the important work in which Mr. Mellon believed so passionately," said Executive Director Bob Lee. "We are truly grateful for his vision and to the executors of his estate for continuing to fulfill that vision."

VOF was one of many prestigious institutions that Mr. Mellon supported, including Yale University, Choate Rosemary Hall, the University of Virginia, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. In addition to his philanthropic interests, he was admired for his passion as a thoroughbred racehorse owner and was one of only five people ever designated an "Exemplar of Racing" by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame.

You, too, can make the Virginia Outdoors Foundation part of your lasting legacy by including VOF in your estate plans. Talk to your attorney about naming VOF as a beneficiary of your will. Sample bequest language is available by contacting the development office at (804) 840-2388 or visiting our Web site at www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/bequest.

Invasive Pests Spread Through Firewood

By the Virginia Department of Consumer and Agricultural Services

When packing for fall hunting and camping trips, picnics, hikes or other outdoor activities, there is one item you definitely need to leave at home: firewood.

Why not bring firewood with you? According to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Plant and Pest Services, Virginia's native trees and forests are threatened by non-native invasive insects and diseases that live in dead and dying wood. These pests may be accidentally spread to new areas by outdoor enthusiasts and homeowners moving firewood from one location to another. Once transported into a new site, these destructive insects and diseases can become established and eventually kill local trees.

The emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, and Sirex woodwasp are three wood-infesting species that can be transported long distances on firewood with disastrous results.

The emerald ash borer, an invasive insect from Asia, feeds on ash trees. In its adult form, the beetle consumes ash tree foliage and actually causes little damage. The real devastation comes from the larvae, which feed on the inner bark and disrupt the ash tree's ability to transport water and nutrients. Emerald ash borers are responsible for over 20 million dead and dying ash trees in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois since their accidental introduction into the United States in 2002.

The Asian longhorned beetle entered the U. S. inside packing material from China and was first discovered in Brooklyn, New York

in 1996. It preys on a variety of hardwood trees, including maple, birch, poplar, willow, elm, ash, mimosa, and sycamore. The infested tree dies when the immature insects, growing inside it, bore through tissue that carry water from tree roots and nutrients from the leafy canopy above, substantially disrupting vital pathways.

The Sirex woodwasp and its symbiotic wood destroying fungus are native to Eurasia and North Africa but were trapped in New York State in 2004. This insect-disease combination is a possible threat to pine trees in the U. S., especially Monterey pine and loblolly pine. The insect causes damage principally by injecting toxic mucus and wood decay fungi into living pine trees. The fungus and the mucus weaken the tree and kill it.

You can help stop the spread of these and other insidious pests into new areas where they can destroy precious trees. Protect Virginia's trees and forests by using firewood from local sources instead of bringing it with you when you travel to campsites, picnic areas, vacation getaways or other destinations. If you have moved firewood, burn all of it before leaving. Do not transport firewood across state lines or into campgrounds or parks.

For additional information about these destructive pests and actions to combat their spread, log onto <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/eab/firewood/>, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/ep/>, or http://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/firewood_eab.htm. You may also call the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Plant and Pest Services at (804) 786-3515.



Emerald ash borer



Asian long-horned beetle



Sirex woodwasp

Online Resources About Invasive Species

These Web sites contain information on identifying and managing invasive species. You may also request information about invasive species by contacting VOF communication and outreach manager Jason McGarvey at (804) 786-9603.

List of invasive alien plant species of Virginia

http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/documents/inolist.pdf

Managing Invasives in Natural Areas, Parks, and Small Woodlands

http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/documents/mnginv.pdf

Virginia Invasive Species Management Plan

http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/vaisc/documents/VISMP_final.pdf

National Invasive Species Information Center

<http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/unitedstates/va.shtml>

Virginia Native Plant Society

<http://www.vnps.org/invasive.html>

Virginia Department of Forest

<http://www.dof.virginia.gov/health/index.shtml>

U.S. Forest Service Invasive Species Management Plan

<http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/management/fhm-invasives.shtml>

The Center for Invasive Species & Ecosystem Health

<http://www.bugwood.org/>



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For more information about VOF and land conservation in Virginia,
visit our Web site at www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org

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