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ENGAGEMENT

matters

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A Few Words from Bob Smith

It is hard to believe that the semester is just about over and students are starting to think about summer jobs and other activities. In two short weeks we will graduate over 140 students from the college and they will begin a new stage in their lives. Not only have they spent four or five years studying their respective disciplines, they have also had the opportunity to serve the community in a variety of ways. The overall goal of our engagement efforts is to develop a life-long service attitude, so our students will participate in their communities, not just live in them. Maybe Emerson said it best: "It is one of the most beautiful compensations in life...we can never help another without helping ourselves."

We are very fortunate in our college because our work allows us to work with communities to help them efficiently manage their natural resources. I often tell people that our students' classroom is the outdoors, and they will eventually be graded on the condition of our environment. In the past few weeks I have been visiting with some graduating seniors in the college, and it is refreshing to see such good people entering the workforce and our communities. It is easy to be depressed when we are continually reminded of the bad news of the day, but talking with our students reinforces the great future we have in front of us.

This issue covers a wide range of student and faculty service activities over the past semester. Our students helped with research looking at coyote populations and visited high school classes in southwest Virginia, faculty worked with the public to map the distribution of an invasive species, and a walk in the woods has reached over 500 individuals. Our outreach activities of the college are geared to assist local decision makers on how to work with the natural resource issues that they face, or as one of Virginia Tech's mottos states, we are "putting knowledge to work." If you have any questions regarding our engagement program, please feel free to contact me at 540-231-7679 or rsmith4@vt.edu.

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ENGAGEMENT matters

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Partnering for Sustainable Solutions

The College of Natural Resources and Environment's Engagement Program partners with landowners and communities to provide science-based solutions to natural resources and the environmental issues facing the world. Its goal is to improve the lives of the citizens of Virginia and beyond by providing information to make better decisions to sustainability manage and utilize natural resources.

FEATURE

Of Mice and Coyotes: An Undergraduate Research Experience

Jake Estienne and Roxana Dalton
Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation
College of Natural Resources and Environment

In the summer of 2012, we worked in Bath and Rockingham Counties on the Virginia Appalachian Coyote Study (VACS) as part of a Fralin Life Sciences Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF). Our projects were part of a larger study of coyote space use, diet, and feeding ecology conducted by graduate students Dana Morin and David Montague in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation. There has been a lot of public concern about coyote range expansion into Virginia, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF)



A coyote captured by remote camera walks past a hair-snare station on Warm Springs Mountain in Bath County, Va. Photo courtesy of VACS.

sponsored a study to evaluate potential impacts in western Virginia.

One project that we conducted focused on designing and evaluating a snare to obtain hair non-invasively from coyotes. Coyotes, like many predators, can be difficult to observe and study directly, and a hair snare is a device used to non-invasively gather genetic material for analysis. Stable isotope analysis on the collected hair can determine the diet of that individual for the previous three months. While diet information can be obtained by collecting scat, stable isotope analysis could show a broader picture of what an animal consumes – it describes the overall diet, rather than a just single meal.

During this project, we designed and constructed six hair-snare stations. We deployed the hair snares in July and monitored them with game cameras to observe coyote behavior at the hair-snare stations. The snares consisted of a rub pad with carpet tacks to snag hair, and they were baited with a scent lure. We observed 11 coyotes at snare stations on the trail



Jake Estienne sets up a hair-snare station for coyotes in Bath County, Va. Photo courtesy of Jake Estienne.

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Coyotes, continued from page 2

cameras, and four of the coyotes showed interest in the hair snare by smelling or pawing at the rub pad. Through continued use, especially during seasons when coyotes are more active, we could collect viable hair samples for isotope and genetic analysis.

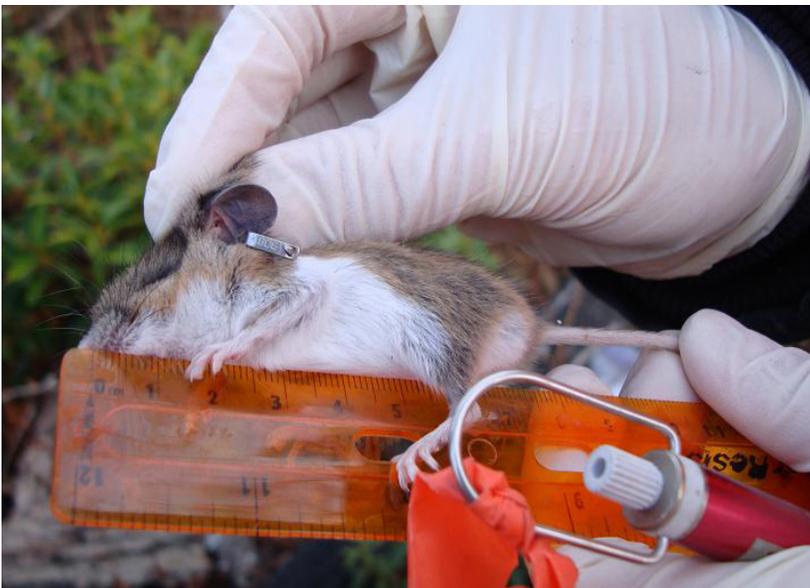
In a second project, we studied coyote prey base and diet content. We trapped and tagged small mammals in several different locations in Bath County, which allowed us to estimate the abundance of mice, chipmunks, and voles. We collected coyote scat monthly along roads and trails. By dissecting the scat and identifying the food materials it contained, we calculated the frequency of occurrence of small mammals in coyote diets, compared to the abundance of small mammals we trapped. We used these data to examine whether coyotes are generalists that consume prey items in proportion to their availability, or whether they are specialists that target specific prey items. We found that coyotes appear to behave as generalists with a highly varied diet and they took Eastern chipmunks and voles relative to their abundance, but coyotes consumed



Roxana Dalton measures body parts of a mouse as part of a study of coyote diets. Photo courtesy of Roxana Dalton.

fewer mice than expected based on mouse abundance relative to other prey items.

This program provided us a number of valuable opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, develop our research skills, and share our results. We worked with a wide variety of wildlife professionals and students. We were mentored by two professors at Virginia Tech, Dr. Mark Ford and Dr. Marcella Kelly. We were helped in the field by Robert Alonso (Colorado State University) and graduate students from Virginia Tech. We also collaborated with Dr. Pieter deHaart and several students from the Virginia Military Institute on design and placement of snares, and we worked with VDGIF, US Forest Service, and The Nature Conservancy. At the end of the summer, we presented the results of these projects at the Fralin Life Sciences Symposium. We are grateful to the Fralin SURF program and to our mentors for the opportunity to complete this project.



Researchers trapped and tagged small mammals to estimate abundance and explore whether coyotes are generalists or specialists. Photo courtesy of Roxana Dalton.

-- Jake Estienne (jakee4@vt.edu) is a senior majoring in Wildlife Sciences.

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The PINEMAP Fellowship Program: Notes from Year One

John Kidd and John Seiler
 Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources
 College of Natural Resources and Environment

Forest resources researchers at Virginia Tech are part of a coordinated agriculture project (CAP) titled Pine Integrated Network: Education, Mitigation, and Adaptation Project (PINEMAP), which was awarded in 2011 by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. This CAP is a multidisciplinary consortium of research universities, forest cooperatives, the U.S. Forest Service, and other institutions; it focuses on the millions of acres of privately owned planted pine forests in the southeastern United States. Disciplinary groups within PINEMAP are related to silviculture/ecophysiology, modeling, genetics, economics/policy, education, and extension. In addition to its goals related to mitigating climate change and improving management of southern pines, PINEMAP is designed to promote citizens' understanding of risks to pine forests and opportunities to address those risks. Secondary-school teachers and students are targeted audiences for educational and training programs that provide a better understanding of the relevance of forests, forest management strategies, and climate impacts.

We developed the PINEMAP Undergraduate Fellowship Program to achieve educational and training goals within PINEMAP's Education discipline. The fellowship program allows undergraduate students from across the U.S. to apply for an innovative, integrative fellowship combining a summer undergraduate research experience with a fall distance-delivered course titled Effective Communication Skills. Undergraduate fellows are placed individually with a research mentor from a PINEMAP institution. Each mentor supervises the undergraduate through a 12-week paid summer fellowship. Fellows are expected to experience the range of activities involved in the rigorous scientific research of PINEMAP. Fellows return to their home universities

for fall courses and participate in the distance course. The program's first year tested the structure and function to determine whether the program can accommodate larger participant cohorts. Five of six undergraduate fellows successfully completed the program in December 2012. The program will support up to 12 fellows in 2013 and 18 in 2014.

During summer 2012, all six fellows successfully completed their summer internship. Regardless of individual placements, fellows were hired as temporary wage employees of Virginia Tech. Fellows re-

ceived up to \$7,000 for 12 weeks of full-time work at the mentor's university. Fellows in the 2012 program worked at either Virginia Tech (three fellows), North Carolina State University (one fellow), or the University of Florida (two fellows). Graduate students participating as mentors were in PINEMAP's Silviculture, Economics, and Education disciplines. Undergraduates were encouraged to conduct a small, related research project under the guidance of mentors. Fellows were required to keep a weekly journal for reflecting on various aspects of their summer fellowship.

During the fall semester, fellows were required to participate in the Effective Communication Skills class co-taught by Virginia Tech faculty. Fellows signed up for three credit hours of letter-graded, independent study at their home university. Course instruction included students identifying standards of learning (SOL) for their state and considering how presentations based on summer research could meet specific SOL requirements. For example, one presentation focused on photosynthesis

and utilized a terrarium and a carbon dioxide (CO₂) gas analyzer, allowing students to see photosynthesis decrease atmospheric CO₂ and see respiration increase atmospheric CO₂. Fellows initially outlined



For additional information on this program, contact John Kidd (jbkidd@vt.edu) or access the fellowship program webpage at: www.pinemap.org/education/undergraduate.

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Will Kennerley (far right), a 2012 PINEMAP fellow, demonstrates how forests can impact atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to a high school biology class in Southwest Virginia. Will used a small scale terrarium “forest” and carbon dioxide gas analyzer to track changing carbon dioxide levels. Photo courtesy of April Addington.

their presentations and practiced them several times in front of peers and course instructors over a four-week period. During this time, fellows coordinated with local public secondary-school teachers to schedule visits to deliver highly polished presentations (Table 1). Over 1,000 public school students in Virginia heard presentations on forests and climate change. Later in the semester, students used their summer research to write a scientific

fellows can present to secondary schools earlier in the fall semester. This should ease the burden on students during the fall and allow more time for discussion of assignments and experiences. Additionally, we will conduct evaluation research to identify: 1) outcomes of participants in the program, and 2) how the fellowship program is meeting its goals.

abstract, create a scientific poster, and develop a presentation. Each student was graded based on class participation, submitted assignments, and evaluations of at least 10 public school presentations. Final grades were provided to the sponsoring faculty member at the student’s home institution.

Based on what we learned in 2012, we will be making some adjustments. We will be increasing the level of communication required from all participants. Hourly pay for the summer will be reduced but extended into fall as an incentive for continued participation in outreach to public school students; the maximum wage available remains unchanged. Course material for the class will begin mid-summer so that

Table 1. Individuals reached through the PINEMAP Fellows Program.

Outreach metric	Number
Fellowships completed	5
Presentations delivered	54
Schools visited	16
Teachers visited	29
Students reached	1060

-- John Kidd (jbkidd@vt.edu) is the coordinator of the PINEMAP Undergraduate Fellowship Program, with the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation.

-- John Seiler (jseiler@vt.edu) is professor in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation.

Finding Nutria in Virginia: Public Information Guiding Management Response

Scott Klopfer
 Conservation Management Institute
 College of Natural Resources and Environment

The nutria (*Myocaster coypus*) is an invasive aquatic rodent species found in southeastern Virginia. Recently, a team of researchers from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service partnered with the Conservation Management Institute to examine the expansion of the nutria in Virginia and to determine what management actions should be taken.

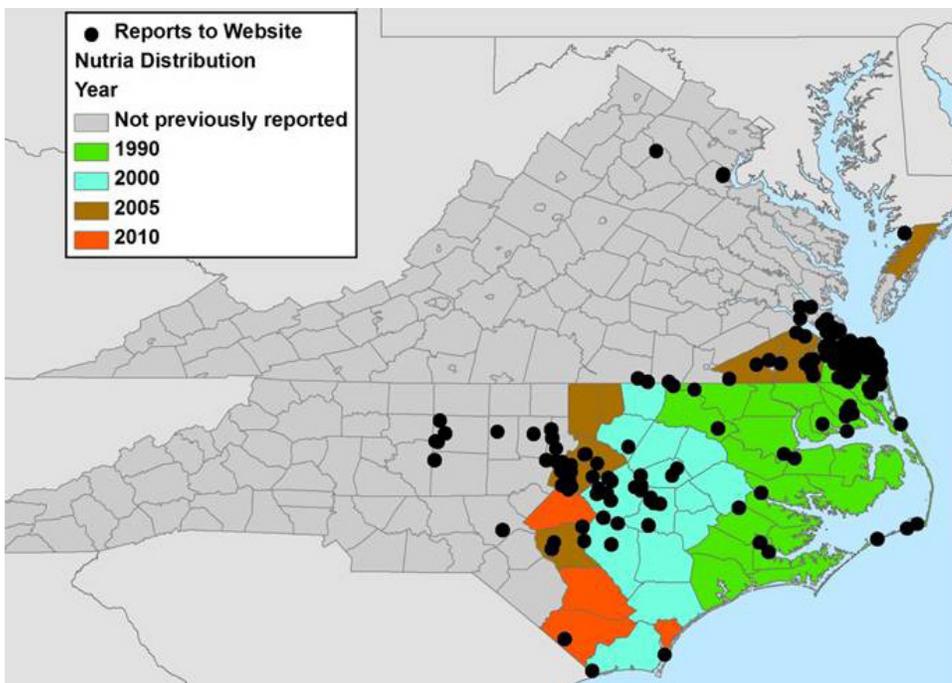
The nutria is native to South America but has been widely introduced in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Billed as an alternative source of ranched fur during the 1930s and 1940s, this species was both intentionally and unintentionally released into the wild. It eventually gained a foothold in a variety of wetland types on the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts. The nutria can be particularly harmful to wetland ecosystems and water-control structures due to their feeding and digging habits. The subsequent damage to native wetlands, agricultural crops, and property is a growing concern for biologists and for citizens.



Invasive nutria destroy critical wetland habitats.

One of the challenges of initiating a nutria management effort in Virginia was to create a current map of where nutria are found. Based on personal experiences and first-hand reports, the team determined that the area from Virginia Beach eastward to the Great Dismal Swamp and north to the James River was certainly infested with nutria. However, the question remained – have nutria spread from this core area into the surrounding watersheds?

Continued on page 9



Reported nutria distribution by year. Black circles show nutria locations reported to the nutria website. Figure courtesy of Scott Klopfer.

Taking the Public on a Walk in the Forest

Neil Clark
Virginia Cooperative Extension

Over the last three years, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) has teamed up with various partners to bring natural resources education to over 500 scouts, birders, students, landowners, and members of the general public through Walk-in-the-Woods programs held at the New Kent Forestry Center near Providence Forge, Va. The intent of these Saturday-morning strolls is to educate the public about the benefits of healthy forests and show how foresters sustainably manage forests for multiple objectives. Of course, the side benefit is the opportunity to soak up nature in a range of forest types during spring, when things are coming to life.

The New Kent Forestry Center provides a perfect backdrop for such an event. This historical tree nursery was the birthplace of the majority of the planted pines across the Commonwealth, and many tools and techniques of loblolly pine propagation were developed here. The hike begins in a riparian forest, which demonstrates the importance of forests for erosion control, stream-bank stabilization, and wildlife habitat. Participants see several snags and hollowed-out “wolf” trees, which provide food sources and nesting locations for animals, including woodpeckers and black bears.

Next, participants observe vernal pools, which are springtime puddles. Various amphibians travel great distances back to the same pools where they were born to lay eggs for the next generation. Wood frogs, fairy shrimp, and several species of salamanders depend on vernal pools for their survival. The trail continues downhill, leading into the floodplain and wetlands. Here baldcypress—capable of living for thousands of years—and swamp tupelo dominate areas that are inundated with water for most of the year. Wood ducks, beavers, and common sweetleaf find favorable conditions here.

The trail then leads back up to field edges, where early successional tree species, wild grape, and ailanthus



The Walk in the Forest event has educated and inspired over 500 scouts, birders, students, landowners, and members of the general public. Photo courtesy of Lisa Deaton.

(an invasive species) are prolific. Heading back into the deep woods demonstrates the gradient from oaks to the beech-maple climax forests. The mile-long march culminates at an observation point on the banks of the Chickahominy, where young ospreys can be seen fledging.

The event is hosted by the Rappahannock Chapter of the Society of American Foresters, with Lisa Deaton, Forest Education Specialist with the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF), leading the charge. The program is made possible by the contributions of the Society of American Foresters, VCE, Williamsburg Bird Club, Historic Rivers Master Naturalists, Newport News Waterworks, Virginia Living Museum, VDOF, Virginia Forestry Association, American Tree Farm System®, Virginia Waterfowlers' Association, and the Boy Scouts of America.

— Neil Clark (southeast@vt.edu) is a Natural Resources Extension Agent for the Southeast Region.

Building Connections in a Social Media World

Dan Goff

Department of Geography
College of Natural Resources and Environment

I found a job, a dog, and a fiancée, all through Twitter. Nicole and I met each other through Twitter, and not long after “following” each other, we discovered we were at the same Jimmy Buffett concert. We adopted our Australian Shepherd, Doppler, from a Twitter friend whose dog had an unexpected litter. About a year after I started using Twitter, I was offered a job writing local weather forecasts for a news website in my hometown.

Launched in 2006, Twitter began as a way to share short status updates or information with people via text message. This introduced an interesting limitation: anything posted to the site must be 140 characters or less, the size of a standard cell phone text message. Twitter quickly grew into a much larger service, and now most users visit the Twitter.com website or use one of many applications designed to interact with the service. It now boasts more than 200 million active users, who create more than 400 million individual updates (called “Tweets”) per day.

If you’ve heard of Twitter, chances are you may think it’s just for reading what the latest celebrity had to say, or that it’s a place where you do nothing but share what you had for lunch and other uninteresting things. Now don’t get me wrong – I’m sure there’s an absolutely wonderful

niche for enthusiasts of peanut butter and jelly sandwich photographs. However, there are also plenty of people who use Twitter to make a direct connection with the environmental world.

While Twitter can seem overwhelming when you’re first jumping in, here are three points to focus on as you start:

1. Take a few minutes and create an engaging profile. By default, your profile image is a colored background with an egg. Having an actual photo will make you appear more approachable. The same goes for your description: talk about who you are and what your interests are.

2. Use the search feature, and look for both Tweets and people of interest. Avoid using common, generic keywords like “birds,” which might return Tweets with common phrases like “for the birds” or about the popular game Angry Birds. Instead, look for more specific words or phrases such as “cerulean warbler” or “watershed management.” Enclosing a phrase in quotation marks works much like it does with Google, and it searches for those words in that exact order.

3. Remember that Twitter is a two-way conversation. Tweet about the things you’re interested in and your activities, and make sure to interact with others. Join in other conversations, and reply to people when they comment on your Tweets.

It’s easy to turn Twitter into a popularity contest, and worry more about how many followers you have or how many people have marked a particular Tweet as a favorite. Take the time to create an engaging profile and interact with other users, and the connections will follow.

Dan spoke about how social technology has changed weather forecasting and communication at last November’s TEDxVirginiaTech conference.

You can view his talk on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtA1lju_ehE.



Forestry professor Eric Wiseman shares some good news in less than 140 characters.

-- Dan Goff (@WxDan and dbgoft@vt.edu) is a senior majoring in meteorology and geography in the Department of Geography.

Nutria, continued from page 6

To answer that question, the team sought assistance from the public in areas potentially occupied by nutria. Ads were placed in local newspapers requesting that reports of nutria be submitted to a website along with some basic information about location. In addition, the team targeted naturalist groups, fur trappers, and nuisance-animal control officers for information on their observations of nutria within the area. This effort received a great boost after local TV and print news outlets highlighted the effort and described the potential damage an expanding nutria population can present.

The resulting public response was beyond expectation. Within hours of the first media coverage, the number of nutria reports increased to over 400 reports. The reports confirmed the existence of a core nutria area, and they also provided information about adjacent areas where team members then conducted site visits to confirm nutria presence. Some of these reports have shown to be very accurate and support the idea that nutria continue to expand their range in Virginia.

Working with the public to improve our knowledge of nutria in Virginia has proven to be a cost-effective way to gather preliminary information to guide our management strategies. Furthermore, by working with the local news outlets, the team was able to engage the affected communities, help them understand the nutria issue, and get them involved in developing a solution.

The team will continue to work with citizens to further enhance our information about nutria in Virginia, as well as in an expanded study area in North Carolina. We hope this information will help to define the nutria expansion problem and help develop management recommendations.

— Scott Klopfer (sklopfer@vt.edu) is the director of the Conservation Management Institute, a research center in the College of Natural Resources and Environment.

For more information on the nutria project or to report a nutria sighting, please visit the project website at www.ReportNutria.org.

Jennifer Gagnon, project associate in the College of Natural Resources and Environment, received Virginia Tech’s 2013 **Alumni Award for Excellence in Extension**. She is the state-wide coordinator of the Virginia Landowner Education Program. Learn more about her accomplishments at www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/04/042313-facstaffaward-gagnon.html. Jennifer also received the 2012 **Gold Award for Exceptional Programs** from the Southern Regional Extension Forester for her “Real Forestry for Real Estate” efforts.



Kathleen Alexander, associate professor of wildlife in the College of Natural Resources and Environment, received Virginia Tech’s 2013 **Alumni Award for Excellence in International Outreach**. She has connected her research and outreach in Botswana with her teaching and research at Virginia Tech to improve human health, animal health, and sustain-

ability. Read more about her accomplishments at www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/04/042313-facstaffaward-alexander.html.

William (Bill) Worrell, Natural Resources Extension Agent, received the 2012 Young Forester Leadership Award from the Appalachian Society of American Foresters.



Bill Worrell (left) receives the Young Forester Leadership Award from Chuck Gresham, APSAF chair.

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Upcoming Events:

Trees-to-Products Summer Teachers' Program

July 15-18

See the program webpage for more information:

www.anr.ext.vt.edu/enviroandnatres/programs/trees-to-products.html

Working Woods Walk

July 21 from 2-4 p.m. at [James Madison's Montpelier](#)

\$5 with the purchase of a mansion tour; \$10 for the Working Woods Walk alone.

This two-hour hike of the Montpelier Demonstration Forest will help visitors understand society's dependence on forests now and during the Madison's time. Contact [Adam Downing](#) for more information

Focusing on Land Transfer to Generation NEXT

August 13 and 20 from 12:30 – 7 p.m. in Fredericksburg

\$60/person or couple

Are you prepared to pass the environmental and heirloom values rooted in your forest to the next generation? Join us for a workshop with free legal guidance from professionals in intergenerational land transfer. [Register online](#) or contact [Adam Downing](#) for more information.