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VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

Events, news, and information promoting the stewardship of Virginia's forest resources.

LANDOWNER PROGRAM

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Cost-share Assistance for Forest Landowners: Is it Worth it?

By: David Richert, *Virginia Department of Forestry*

Last year, Congress passed the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, commonly known as the 2008 Farm Bill. Among other things, the 2008 Farm Bill invests in sustainable agriculture and forest production to strengthen America's rural economies, guarantee food and fiber production, and cultivate conservation benefits. One program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers forest landowners between 75% and 90% cost-share assistance for managing forest stands, planting trees, controlling certain invasive plant species, and improving wildlife habitat. For the forest landowner who has never participated in USDA Farm Bill cost-share programs, financial assistance for sustainable forest management sounds attractive, but is it worth it?

Mr. and Mrs. "Calloway," forest landowners with approximately 90 acres of woodland and 10 acres of pasture in the New River Valley, are familiar with conservation cost-share programs, even though they haven't participated in nearly 20 years. According to Mr. Calloway, "We participated in a program to develop a spring on our property back in the late 1980's, and we received high quality technical expertise, but we've never gone back for assistance, partly because we feared the administrative process would be too troublesome." In fact, many forest landowners share Mr. Calloway's opinion—relatively few forestry projects in the New River Valley were funded by the EQIP program under the previous (2002) USDA Farm Bill. But this year, as a result of a growing to-do list of forest management needs, an allocation of \$414,000 in EQIP funding for forest management projects within the state of Virginia, and encouragement from their Virginia Department of Forestry area forester, the Calloways have decided to participate in the EQIP program.

For the Calloways (as with any forest landowner), participation in the EQIP program starts with a Forest Stewardship Plan - a multiple-use plan that blends the landowner's objectives with a professional forester's assessment and recommendations, and includes a 5-year timeline for forest management activities. The Calloways' Forest Stewardship Plan describes forest conditions and recommends forest management activities for three stands: two mature cove-slope hardwood forests, and a younger mixed pine / hardwood stand, that was probably marginal pasture land left to natural succession. The Calloways have kept a current Forest Stewardship Plan for their property for more than 15 years, and are now working under the fourth revision, completed this spring.

The Calloways want to remove poor quality hardwood trees (forest stand improvement) to improve the growth and value of the desirable trees. This will be accomplished by applying herbicide to girdled trees (a process known as "hack and squirt" chemical treatment), and in other areas by simply felling undesirable trees with a chainsaw. In addition to this forest stand improvement, the Calloways want to manage troublesome populations of multiflora rose and tree-of-heaven (invasive species control), fence their livestock out of the forest (livestock exclusion fencing), and establish hardy, streamside shrubs on a steep bank that is eroding (critical area stabilization).

Once the Forest Stewardship Plan is up to date, the forester drafts a multi-year schedule of specific forest management practices (from a list of USDA-approved practices) and determines the per-unit costs by practice (also from a USDA-approved list). These specifics (along with detailed maps of where each practice will be implemented) allow the USDA and the Calloways to enter into a participation agreement. Eventually, the Calloways and the USDA will enter into a multi-year contract; the Calloways will agree to complete these forest management activities, and the USDA will agree to reimburse the Calloways as these forest management practices are completed.

But first, the Calloways need to fill out their EQIP application and verify that they're eligible to receive federal cost-share funds. This involves a trip to their local USDA Service Center with their area forester (Virginia Department of Forestry). At the Service Center, the Calloways obtain a farm



Figure 1. A forester marks a crop tree for release from unwanted competition. The tree with poor form on the right-hand edge of the photo will be removed to improve the timber value of the stand.

Events Calendar			For the most complete listing of natural resource education events, visit the on-line events calendar at www.cnr.vt.edu/forestupdate		
Contact	Date	Location	Event	Time	Fee
BW	July 20-23	Norton	Trees to Products teacher's program Learn how a trees are made into useful products; 30 professional education credits for teachers.	all day	\$25 * includes meals & lodging
FT	July 23	Radford	Mow is Less: Simple Steps to Green Your Yard Learn to reduce the amount of grass you mow, improve aesthetics, conserve energy, and create wildlife habitat around your home.	7:30 p.m.	Free
BW	July 30	Abingdon	Other Income from Your Forest Learn about emerging ecosystem service markets.	6 - 7:30 p.m.	TBA
AD	Aug. 12 & 19	Charlottesville	Family Forestland Short Course: Focusing on Land Transfer to Generation NEXT	TBA	\$40/couple
AD	Sept. 5	Madison Co.	Real Charcoal - Make it Yourself!	8:00 a.m. - noon	Free

If you have a natural resource education event you would like listed, please submit details to forester@vt.edu:
Upcoming submission deadlines for calendar:

Edition	Events Occurring	Submission Deadline	Edition	Events Occurring	Submission Deadline
Summer 2009	Aug., Sept., Oct.	June 9, 2009	Winter 2010	Feb., Mar., April.	Dec. 9, 2009
Fall 2009	Nov., Dec., Jan..	Sept. 9, 2009	Spring 2010	May, June, July	Mar. 9, 2010

Event Contacts			
Contact	Name/Affiliation	Phone	e-mail/website
DCR	Department of Conservation & Recreation	804/786-1712	www.dcr.virginia.gov/parks
BP	Bonnie Phillips	804/786-5056	bonnie.phillips@dcr.virginia.gov
CH	Craig Highfield	410/267-5723	chighfie@chesapeakebay.net
SA	State Arboretum	540/837-1758	www.virginia.edu/blandy
JM	Jimmy Mootz	804/367-0656	jimmy.mootz@dgif.virginia.gov
HH	Helen Heck	804/443-1118	helen.heck@va.usda.gov
WSM	Warm Springs Mountain Preserve	540/839-3599	www.nature.org
FC	Franklin County Extension Office	540/483-5161	macleme1@vt.edu
JG	Jennifer Gagnon	540/231-6391	jgagnon@vt.edu
MY	Matt Yancey	540/564-3080	yancey@vt.edu
FT	Frank Taylor	540/731-3649	ftaylor@rcps.org
NC	Nottoway County	434/645-9315	bwright@vt.edu
JC	Jim Chamberlain	540/231-3611	jachambe@vt.edu
BW	Bill Worrell	276/889-8056	bworrell@vt.edu
AD	Adam Downing	540/948-6881	adowning@vt.edu

Register Now for On-line Woodland Options for Landowners

If you are interested in learning the basics about how to manage your woodlands but haven't been able to attend an in-person short course, you may be interested in On-line Woodland Options for Landowners. This 12-week Internet-based course takes you through all the steps of designing and drafting a management plan for your property. The basic level of participation requires you to complete reading assignments, short quizzes and evaluations - great for absentee landowners. The advanced level of participation provides hands-on exercises, taking you out onto your property to determine land use history, find and mark your boundary lines, draw stand maps, and formulate management objectives. A tree identification book and learning modules help you identify your trees. A cadre of natural resource professionals is available via the class discussion board. These mentors will answer your questions and provide basic advice. Finally, an optional end of the semester field trip will answer any additional questions you have and will review many of the field skills taught during the on-line portion (e.g., compass and pacing).

The 2009 class begins June 1. Registration fee of \$25 includes all required course materials. Please visit www.valeaf.org to register or contact Jennifer Gagnon jgagnon@vt.edu 540/231-63941 for more detailed information on the course.

Hybrid Poplar Research and Demonstration Areas

by: Amy Brunner, *Virginia Tech Forestry Department*

Commonly referred to as poplars, aspens and cottonwoods, the genus *Populus* includes some of the fastest-growing trees of the temperate zone. Poplars are widely distributed throughout the Northern hemisphere with eight of the 29 *Populus* species being native to the U.S. One frequent point of confusion to clarify is that *Liriodendron tulipifera*, though commonly known as yellow or tulip poplar, is actually a member of the magnolia family and not a true poplar.



A hybrid poplar nursery.
Photo by: Chris Schnepf,
University of Idaho.

Poplars have a long history of cultivation for various uses, including pulp and paper, solid wood products, and environmental remediation. Worldwide, poplar cultivation relies mostly on select hybrid clonal varieties that typically produce between 4 and 10 dry tons of wood per acre per year (8-22 metric tones per hectare per year) and can achieve a height of 60 feet in as little as six years. Poplar is widely considered to be the top woody perennial candidate for biomass feedstock production, and thus, major efforts are now focused on developing poplar as a bioenergy crop.

Conventional tree breeding, assisted and accelerated by genomics technologies, can develop superior poplar trees for biofuels, biopower or high-valued biomaterials production that are also well-adapted to local environments. Working with GreenWood Resources, Inc., one of the world's premier hybrid poplar breeding programs, researchers at Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the Institute of Sustainable and Renewable Resources, and Windy Acres Nursery are initiating work to develop productive hybrid

poplar varieties for Virginia. With funding from the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, field trials studying nearly 100 hybrid poplar varieties are being established this spring at Gretna, Petersburg, and the Powell River Project's reclaimed mine land in Wise County.



Hybrid poplar plantation.
Photo by: Howard Schwartz,
University of Colorado.

Later this year (dates to be announced in the Forest Landowner Update summer edition), landowner workshops at the field sites and a fall symposium at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research will provide opportunities for citizens of the Commonwealth to learn about hybrid poplar and its potential as a woody biomass crop for Virginia.

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Farm bill cont. from pg. 1

number from the USDA Farm Service Agency (the Calloways brought a copy of their deed to prove ownership). Additionally, the Calloways had to complete paperwork determining their financial eligibility—producers with an income of more than \$1 million per year aren't eligible. The area forester's recommendations were reviewed by USDA staff, and the application was submitted. The entire process took less than 2 hours, even with some complications establishing the tract boundaries from an old 1929 deed.



Figure 2. Mr. "Calloway" receives assistance from a helpful USDA customer service representative.

Application submitted, Mr. Calloway took time to reflect on the process. If approved, the Calloways will receive \$41 per acre to do forest stand improvement, and \$1.75 per linear foot to build livestock exclusion fencing. (These are standard cost-share payments. Had the Calloways qualified as "limited resource," "socially disadvantaged," or "new" farmers with less than 10 years of agricultural or forestry production, they would have received even more.) Once their participation is approved later this spring, the Calloways will visit their USDA Service Center again to sign the contracts, and then they'll be ready to start the work.

"I don't think this application process was anywhere near as difficult as I had feared," Mr. Calloway decided, "and for a small investment in time, the benefits will be well worth it."

Applications are still being accepted from forest landowners to participate in the EQIP program. If interested, forest landowners should contact their local area forester and/or their USDA Service Center to participate. This winter, we'll check back with the Calloways to see what they've accomplished in the first year of their EQIP program.

For more information on cost-share programs in Virginia, please contact David Richert, david.richert@dof.virginia.gov 276/228-2879

The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. Headquartered in Charlottesville, there are Forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide service to citizens of the Commonwealth. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.

With nearly 16 million acres of forest land and more than 144,000 Virginians employed in the forest products industry, Virginia forests provide more than \$27.5 Billion annually in benefits to the Commonwealth.

Dear Woodlander:

Grapevines were one of my favorite things as a kid playing in the woods. I especially liked them for swinging! Not only did they make decent swings, but also a refreshing drink of sweet water if cut in the early spring, when the sap was flowing.

An exceptional vine would last all afternoon, but for every good vine, I suspect we found 1 or 2 that just wouldn't hold-up. With a few tugs, the vine, along with several twigs and branches, would come to rest on the forest floor.

We'd always leave it lie, but someone else may have just begun to imagine its usefulness. Grapevines, as a craft item and decorative piece, have become quite popular in recent years.

Grapevines can be lots of fun in the right place. They can also be a lot of work for landowners interested in high quality timber.

The Way of the Grapevine

by: Adam Downing, *Virginia Cooperative Extension*

Wild grapevines (*Vitus* spp.) are common in many woodlots. The fruit produced, in late summer to early fall, feeds a variety of wildlife. Black bears, cardinal, fox sparrow, gray fox, mockingbird, ruffed grouse and wild turkey are among at least 53 different wildlife species that use the plant for food. Wild grapevines also provide cover and rest sites for many birds and small mammals. Grapes in your woodlot can enhance its value for wildlife but, grapevines left unchecked, may also degrade the woodlots attractiveness to wildlife.

Grapevines have a very limited ability to grow upward by themselves as trees do. Their reaching and climbing skills, however, are exceptional! While wild grape can survive and grow in partial shade, their life goal is to be at the top, in full sunlight. How does a plant that can't support itself vertically, grow tall and reach the top? Grapevines use trees and other plants to reach tall heights.

Foliage and vines of wild grape will completely cover tree crowns as they greedily grab as much sunlight as possible. If vine growth is left unmanaged, it's bad news for trees. Once a tree is over-topped with grapevines, unless someone or something intervenes, damage will occur. The most visible and common damage is mechanical. This is a result of two factors. First of all, a tree can't usually compete with grapevines for sunlight. Vine growth is usually very rapid. An over-topped tree is weakened by receiving less sunlight. The second factor is the sheer mass of vine entanglements. A weakened tree, with weight hanging from it's crown, will eventually break, often resulting in permanent damage or death.

The nature of grapevine growth in a woodlot is often destructive, yet this plant provides certain benefits. Fortunately, this is not an all or nothing situation. A landowner who values his or her property for attracting wildlife may want to allow wild grape to grow in a designated area. A 1/4 - 1/2 acre area is large enough to grow a healthy plot of grapes to yield many benefits for wildlife, yet small enough to manage.

Wild grapevines are fairly easily controlled. Minimum requirements are a sharp pruning saw, medium sized squirt bottle and a dose of perseverance. Grapevines needing control should be cut in two places. The first cut should be made just above the ground and sprayed with an appropriate herbicide. Greater control of re-sprout is achieved when spraying the cut stump. Coat the surface of the stump with an approved herbicide as soon as possible after making the cut. Some recommended herbicides for use in forestry settings and grapevines control are [Common Name (Brand Name)]: Glyphosate (Accord), Picloram + 2,4-D (Tordon RTU, Pathway), and Triclopyr (Garlon 3A, Pathfinder). Remember, when dealing with chemicals, it's of utmost importance to read and follow the label!

Limited success may be achieved without the use of a chemical if the area is densely shaded. However, grapevine roots may graft, allowing a cut vine to receive nourishment from a healthy plant many feet away.

The second cut should occur about shoulder height on the vine left hanging in the tree. This cut serves two purposes. Grapevines have the ability to re-root as a cutting if the cut vine comes into contact with mineral soil. Secondly, a vine with a cut at eye level is much easier to spot than one in contact with the ground. It's easy to lose track of where you've been and what's been cut when doing this kind of physical labor.

Timing is important when undertaking a grapevine job. If you are considering a timber harvest or thinning, and grapevines are prevalent in your woodlot, they should be controlled before any of these activities. Timber harvesting and thinning makes more sunlight available to the remaining vegetation. Additional sunlight on a few grapevines will quickly produce many grapevines making control much more challenging.

Grapevine cont. on pg. 6

Grapevine cont. from pg. 5

Time of the year is also important. Mid-summer through early fall is the best time to control vines with or without herbicides. Winter and early spring are good times, while visibility is better, to identify and flag vines needing control.

The worst time of year to control grapevines with the cut & spray method is early spring when the sap is flowing. A cut made this time of year will "bleed" so much that the herbicide will literally be flushed out and made unavailable for uptake by the plant.

Like other aspects in nature, balance is essential. As owners of forestland, you have the opportunity to be part of the balancing act!

Where trade names appear, no discrimination is intended, and no endorsement by Virginia Cooperative Extension Service is implied.

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