

## **New Benefit for Virginia's 375,000 Forest Landowners\***

**By: John Campbell, Virginia Department of Forestry**

Forest landowners in Virginia will have greater access to state and federal programs and assistance as well as expanded market opportunities for their products now that an agreement has been signed that recognizes forest management plans – prepared under the auspices of three different agencies – equally.

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDof); the Virginia office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Virginia Tree Farm Committee have executed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that will improve efficiency; lead to greater participation in the agencies' programs and financial incentives; promote private forestry service providers, and enhance product marketability through the forest certification process.

"This memorandum of understanding will be a tremendous boost to Virginia's forest landowners," said State Forester of Virginia Carl Garrison. "No longer will a landowner have to get separate forest management plans for the same tract in order to participate in the many programs, services and assistance offered by the state and federal governments. In addition, as demand increases for certified wood products, having the American Tree Farm System's 'seal of approval' means that more markets will be available for the various forest products these landowners are providing."

Jack Bricker, NRCS State Conservationist, said, "NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to forestry landowners through its Farm Bill programs and staff. Forestry resource concerns are one of several priorities in Virginia that NRCS funds through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In addition to funding conservation practices that address conservation needs on forest lands, EQIP also provides funding to landowners to develop Forest Management Plans. These plans are developed for landowners by private consulting foresters called Technical Service Providers. EQIP funding pays for about 75% of the cost of developing these plans. This MOU will result in more effective and more coordinated program delivery and better customer service."

John Matel, communications chair for the Virginia Tree Farm Committee, said, "The Virginia Tree Farm Committee is happy to be working with the Virginia Department of Forestry and the Virginia office of the Natural Resource Conservation Service to help conserve and protect the forests of the Commonwealth. Since 1941, the American Tree Farm System has been helping landowners in Virginia protect our state's wildlife, soil and water resources while sustainably producing wood and other forest products. Recognizing how our work



***Pictured (from left to right): Rob Wait, Virginia Tree Farm Committee Chair, Carl Garrison, Virginia State Forester, and Jack Bricker, NRCS State Conservationist, sign the Memorandum of Understanding.***

fits into the bigger picture and having our certification programs recognized by others gives those of us on the Tree Farm Committee great satisfaction. Working together, we can make our forests more productive and keep our environment cleaner and greener. This agreement is a strong step in that direction.”

Now that the MOU is in place, a forest management plan prepared under any of the programs will meet the plan requirement for the others. However, a landowner with a forest management plan simply has to “opt in” to enter any of the other programs – just having a plan does not automatically enroll him or her in another program.

This MOU will benefit all Virginians, not just forest landowners, as managed forests offer enhanced ecosystem services, such as clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and aesthetic values.

The agreement was signed July 7th by Virginia Tree Farm Committee Chairman Rob Wait, NRCS’ Jack Bricker and VDOF’s Carl Garrison.

*The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. Headquartered in Charlottesville, the Agency has 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 forestland and more than 144,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide more than \$27.5 Billion annually in benefits to the Commonwealth.*

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