

The Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA) program funds allocated to Virginia Tech University help prepare Virginia landowners to manage natural resources more effectively and keep the forest products industry profitable and viable. RREA funds are leveraged with state, private, and institutional funds, engaging numerous partners to deliver educational programs to landowners and land managers. Each RREA dollar is typically leveraged with \$15 of state, private, and/or local funds. In FY 2008, RREA funds were used as described below.

The Virginia Geospatial Extension Program (VGEP) provides geospatial (geographic information systems [GIS], global positioning system [GPS], and remote sensing) support to local governments, state agencies, and other stakeholders across the Commonwealth of Virginia. The VGEP provides geospatial workshops and facilitates development of geospatial data to support



local and regional economic development and natural resource management. In a recent remote sensing workshop, nearly 85% of attendees stated that the workshop increased their understanding of remote sensing, and more than 66% maintained that they will incorporate an aspect of the workshop in their work to manage coastal resources. In addition to supporting geospatial professional development, the VGEP is currently engaged in several projects to support local needs, including the urban tree canopy (UTC) initiative, the Blue Ridge Parkway Tourism Destination Centerpiece project, the Southern Virginia bioenergy project, and facilitating local government efforts to implement GIS products and services.

Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program (VFLEP) Forest & Farmland Conservation Strategies

At the 17th Annual Environmental Virginia Symposium at Virginia Military Academy, Governor Tim Kaine stated that “if we continue as we have, Virginia will develop more land in the next 40 years than we have in the last 400 years.” In an effort to curtail rapid loss of forestland, the governor set a goal of conserving 400,000 acres in Virginia by the end of his term. To inform landowners about the conservation tools available to them, VFLEP developed a nine-hour short course called Forest & Farmland Conservation Strategies. The course covers a wide range of conservation tools, including comprehensive planning, Right to Farm and Practice Forestry laws, bargain sales, conservation easements, purchase and transfer of development rights programs, Agricultural and Forestal Districts, and use-value taxation. A panel of landowners who have used these tools answer questions from the students to wrap up the day.



Since its inception in 2007, this course has been offered across the Commonwealth to more than 200 landowners, natural resource professionals and local leaders, who own more than 10,000 acres of forestland. Highlights included a talk by Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Bob Bloxom, and two talks each by Nikki Rovner, Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources, and Kevin Schmidt, Director, Office of Farmland Preservation.

The **Virginia Master Naturalist Program** was officially launched in 2006. The program’s mission is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the Commonwealth of Virginia. At the state level, the Virginia Master Naturalist program is sponsored jointly by VA Cooperative Extension, the VA Departments of Game and Inland Fisheries, Conservation and Recreation, and Forestry, and the VA Museum of Natural History.



Wild Flower ID during Master Naturalist Program

The program consists of a network of Virginia Master Naturalist chapters across the state. Each chapter is responsible for recruiting and training volunteers and for working with partners to create and coordinate volunteer service opportunities. The training consists of a minimum of 40 hours classroom and field time covering a core set of curriculum objectives. The objectives focus on ecology, natural resource management, basic natural history of the animals and plants of Virginia, and skills for teaching and field research. To become a certified Virginia Master Naturalist, each volunteer must also complete 40 hours of service. This service can be in the form of education, citizen science, or stewardship. Positive impacts on Virginia’s natural resources and on natural resource education have already been documented. For example, the Central VA Master Naturalists designed and built an interpretive wetlands trail at Sweet Briar College that will be used for K-12 standards-based educational programs. The Rivanna Master Naturalists

assisted the City of Charlottesville in conducting a tree survey that will be used to develop an environmental plan for the city’s new comprehensive plan. Other projects have included monitoring of hawk populations, leading a Junior Naturalist 4-H club, and leading school programs at a local natural area.

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