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Heritage Extension in Virginia: Merging Tourism and Forestry Education in an Outdoor Setting **by: John F. Munsell, Matthew Yancey, Adam K. Downing, Jon Rockett, Jennifer L. Gagnon, Virginia Tech**

People are increasingly seeking excursions and experiences that include a connection to history. This growing interest presents a unique opportunity for forestry and natural resources management education. Virginia's Partnership for Outdoor Classrooms aims to provide new experiences for landowners by combining outdoor forestry and natural resources education with heritage tourism. These classrooms will not only be of interest to landowners already involved in continuing education, but will also attract those who have not typically taken advantage of educational opportunities. This also presents an unmatched opportunity to improve the visibility of forestry and natural resources management among the general public by developing management demonstrations at key sites in frequently visited historic areas.

We are presently creating a series of outdoor classrooms and curriculum to communicate aspects of forestry and natural resources management in settings with interesting history. Classrooms will provide a historical setting for viewing and discussing various aspects of applied forestry and offer opportunities to learn about how managed forests change over time. Each demonstration will have a permanent inventory system to help record biological change and allow educators to describe this change in terms of economic and ecological benefits. Demonstrations will also be interpreted from a technical and historical standpoint. Our belief is that this partnership will significantly enhance forestry and natural resources management education in Virginia.

To date, four classrooms are in the developmental stages. Each classroom captures unique aspects of forestry and natural resources management, offers indoor and outdoor training, and provides a great opportunity for landowners to learn while also enjoying a bit of heritage tourism. Classrooms at the Powell River Project Research and Education Center in Wise County, Shenandoah Valley Agriculture Research and Extension Center in Augusta and Rockbridge Counties, and James Madison's Montpelier in Orange County are well underway. Most recently, Arlington County's Urban Forestry Commission and its Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources have expressed interest in developing an urban forestry classroom.

These locations all offer tremendous forestry education and heritage tourism opportunities:

- At the Powell River Project, we are working to take the "next step" in coalfield reclamation by researching and demonstrating sustainable forest management in natural and planted forests on former surface coal mine sites. Our objective is to offer sustainable forest management in a setting profoundly affected by historical land use.
- We are combining longstanding beef management with sustainable forestry at the Shenandoah Valley Agriculture Research and Extension Center – home to the Cyrus McCormick Farm where the mechanical reaper was invented. As a National Heritage Site, the Farm offers a fantastic opportunity to combine technical forestry education with a heritage experience.

- We are developing a working forest management and restoration classroom in second-growth forests at Montpelier. The working forest will showcase a variety of research-based forest management tools. A trail system will service the classroom and tie into an existing network of trails traversing the estate's old-growth Landmark Forest.
- Lastly, preliminary work to develop an outdoor classroom in Arlington County is underway. In this instance, key aspects of Arlington's green infrastructure will serve as the outdoor classroom. Property owners, urban planners, and community leaders will be able to learn about urban forestry in a setting with numerous historical opportunities and progressive green initiatives.



Outdoor classrooms from left to right (a) John Rockett, Extension Specialist for Mined Land Reclamation & Forestry, explains restoration projects at the Powell River site; (b) Cabins at McCormick Farm; and (c) the planning committee discusses trail layout at Montpelier. All photos by John Munsell, Virginia Tech.

We are excited about the potential for these classrooms and others yet to be discovered to enhance forestry education in Virginia and look forward to your future involvement and support. You can track the progress of these efforts at: <http://www.cnr.vt.edu/vpoc/>

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