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### Peer-to-Peer Communication:

#### One of Forestry Extension's Most Important Mechanisms

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Picture for a moment that you and a few other folks have been tasked with communicating critical technical information to over 400,000 people. You have limited resources and time, yet much to share. Sound problematic? Just wait. Also imagine that the number of folks you are trying to reach is rapidly increasing. No doubt daunting, but also a reality for forestry Extension in Virginia. As a person who owns or cares for Virginia's forests, you are in a position to help.

Virginia has over 400,000 forestland owners and the numbers are growing. Recent migrations to the state's rural areas have drastically increased the amount of forestland owners in the state. At the same time, Virginia's forestland is shrinking. More owners and smaller parcels in an era of forest loss certainly changes the dynamic for forestry Extension, but not its importance. Despite these challenges, much is accomplished every day in the way of reaching Virginia's forestland owners. However, much is also needed.



At this point you may be wondering “what does all of this have to do with me?” It matters because as a person who owns or cares for Virginia's forests, you can play a vital role in the Extension process. There are only so many forestry Extension professionals working to provide educational opportunities to the state's forestland owners. Folks that have taken advantage of these opportunities are in a good position to positively influence others who are need of information. And it's not necessarily how much you know, but who you are that is most important.

Peer-to-peer communication occurs frequently in our lives. For example, friends or family members might make valued recommendations about a babysitter. Or a colleague might advocate a new type of technology. If we root for the same football team, we might share suggestions about the best place to watch the big game. On a larger scale, peer-to-peer communication can also bring about change in behavior and thinking among groups of people. This is particularly true when sharing a common trait or interest – for example owning or caring for Virginia's forestland.

In short, talking with your peers as much as possible can help facilitate sustainable forestry in Virginia. Forestland owners and managers often trust other forestland owners and managers more so than outside educators. Because of this, Extension looks to knowledgeable and engaged forestland owners to assist in spreading up-to-date information.

As a subscriber to the *Virginia Forestland Owner Update*, it is possible for you to help make a difference. You receive up-to-date information about topics related to Virginia's forestland. On the other hand, there are thousands in Virginia who do not. As a peer, you are the most effective avenue for communicating the ideas, concepts and practices regularly shared in this and other Extension publications and meetings.

The challenges faced by forestry Extension in Virginia are significant, but not altogether impossible. As a knowledgeable and engaged citizen, your help is greatly appreciated. You have the credentials necessary to pass on, in the most effective way, all of your sustainable forestry knowledge. Are you ready to spread the good word?

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**Editor's note:** Something as simple as sharing your copy of the *Virginia Forest Landowner Update* is helpful. Stay tuned for additional opportunities for you to become involved with peer to peer communication.