

# State Partnerships Work:

**Virginia forestland owners need technical and financial assistance. Together, state foresters and state conservationists deliver.**

State forestry agencies are the primary deliverers of forestry technical assistance nationwide. When they team up with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)—the leading federal source of cost-share grant assistance for forestland owners—great things happen for America's forests.

Over the course of three decades, NRCS and the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) have cultivated an outstanding working relationship that has made Virginia a leader in developing contribution agreements and innovative approaches that leverage the partnering agencies' programs and workforce capacity.

**Forests in Virginia cover 16 million acres, or 62% of the state. Of all the state's forests, families own and manage the majority (about 9.5 million acres).**

VDOF-NRCS agreements have helped NRCS enhance the direct technical assistance it provides to the state's 410,000 family forestland owners. One agreement allowed for the hire of a VDOF forestry liaison to NRCS. Another expanded the agencies' shared workforce to 22 senior area foresters, 41 area field foresters, one longleaf pine forester specialist, two pine resource forester specialists, and 37 field technicians.

Between 2018 and 2020, Virginia forestland owners received \$7.1 million in NRCS assistance to develop 125 forest management plans and implement 247 associated projects on more than 94,000 acres. VDOF and NRCS have also trained more than 300 professionals to improve thousands of acres of forestland. Their sustained efforts have made for cleaner air and water, healthier forests, and enhanced wildlife habitat.



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In 2011, NRCS and the Virginia Department of Forestry received the Two Chiefs Partnership Award for their exceptional collaboration in support of forests.

In Louisa County, Matt Dowdy (pictured below at far right) has created a “forester’s playground” with funding and technical assistance offered through NRCS' Conservation Stewardship Program. He has reforested portions of his 550 acres with native species and is implementing several practices to stimulate growth of early successional forest habitat for wildlife. Dowdy is also considering options for planting longleaf pine and warm-season grasses in the forests' understory by skidding corridors and allowing stands of thinned pines to naturally regenerate with native hardwoods, like white oak.

Sussex County's Bill Owen (pictured below at middle left) has worked with NRCS, VDOF, and a host of other partners to help reestablish longleaf pine, a fire-dependent tree species, where it once thrived across southeastern Virginia. To date, Owen has planted more than 1,200 of his 1,850 acres in longleaf. His property, the Owen Preserve at Raccoon Creek Pinelands, is protected through an easement with The Nature Conservancy and is the largest project of its type in the state.

Another NRCS program, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), promotes coordination and co-investment to address regional natural resource concerns. Virginia’s first state-level RCPP project was built on the strength of the longstanding partnership between NRCS and VDOF.

Launched in 2015, VDOF's "Forests: Fundamental for Conservation in Virginia" RCPP initiative made \$1.3 million available to Virginia's forest landowners to improve their forested acres. In total, the five-year project implemented practices—like riparian forest buffer establishment, forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, and fire breaks—on 3,600 acres and completed management plans for 10,410 acres.

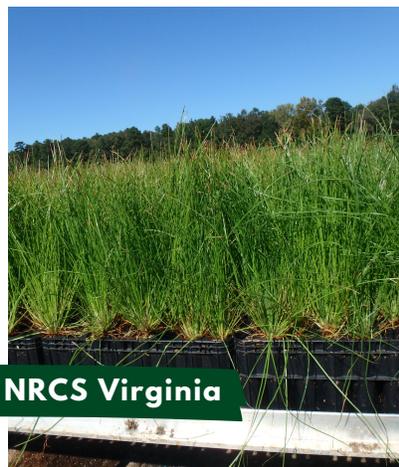


Photo credit: NRCS Virginia