

ENGAGEMENT matters

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College of Natural Resources
324 Cheatham Hall, 0324
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Arlice K. Banks, Editor
Phone: 540-231-7051
Fax: 540-231-7664
arbanks@vt.edu

Bob Smith, Contributing Editor
Phone: 540-231-7679
Fax: 540-231-7664
rsmith4@vt.edu

Submissions may be sent to
the editor or contributing editor
at the above address or via e-mail.

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Did You Know. . .

Wildlife Professor Emeritus
Robert Giles has launched
a new blog, Faunal Force, a
discussion of modern wildlife
resources management systems.
The site offers short pieces on
topical issues in applied ecology,
ranging from watersheds to
wildlife law enforcement to
mine reclamation. Comments
and discussion are invited. Visit
<http://www.faunalforce.typepad.com/faunalforce/> to read
and respond.

FEATURE

Landcare: Inventing the Future, One Community at a Time

David Robertson, Visiting Assistant Professor, Virginia Tech
College of Natural Resources, Department of Forestry

Ned Yost's primary interest is restoring native brook trout to the North Fork of the Roanoke River that runs just feet from the front door of his cabin. He recognizes that many of his neighbors are more interested in other things, like raising cattle and cutting timber. Ned and his neighbors are working together via Catawba Landcare to improve a broad range of economic, social, and environmental conditions (the **triple bottom line**) in their community.

Catawba Landcare is part of a growing international landcare movement that began in Australia in the 1980s and has since spread to more than a dozen other countries, including the United States, where the College of Natural Resources at Virginia Tech is playing a leadership role in helping the landcare movement get off the ground. Our participation in the landcare movement began on a typical October day in 2005 when Dr. Jerry Moles, consulting Director of Land Stewardship for the New River Land Trust, arranged for a group of landowners from the Grayson County area of southwest Virginia to meet with faculty in the College of Natural Resources at Virginia Tech to discuss the many challenges and opportunities facing landowners in the 21st century. After discussing a range of items—rising land values and taxes, the fluctuating price of beef and timber, emerging markets for ecosystem services—one of the faculty members, who had just returned from a trip to Australia, suggested that the group of Grayson landowners seemed to have much in common with the community landcare groups forming in other parts of the world. Following some additional research and discussion,

the landowners decided to incorporate as Grayson LandCare, thereby forming the first "landcare" group in the United States.

We have partnered with the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Conservation Management Institute within the College of Natural Resources, US Department of Agriculture and the National Associations of Conservation Districts (NACD), Resource Conservation & Development Councils (NARC&DC), and Regional Councils (NARC) to promote landcare throughout the United States. As a result, several other landcare groups, such as Catawba Landcare in southwest Virginia and Montreat Landcare in western North Carolina, have been established.

One surprising and exciting result of these landcare activities has been the spin-off of new landcare businesses. For example, the local-regional landcare movement has helped to establish two new producer-owned businesses: Blue

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Harry Groot of the Blue Ridge Forest Cooperative (BRFC) describes forest landcare principles to university and community partners.

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Ridge Forest Cooperative (BRFC) and Grayson Natural Foods (GNF). BRFC is a certified sustainable forest products company that adds value to low-value forests and forest biomass. GNF is a value-added livestock production business currently focusing on beef. Both of these businesses are owned and operated by members of the landcare groups. These businesses are serving as inspiration for other landcare industry opportunities, including revolving loan funds and banking schemes for ecosystem service credits.

In October 2007, the Landcare Center and partners hosted a 2007 National Landcare Workshop sponsored by USDA. Approximately 90 participants represented a variety of local communities, state agencies, and natural resource conservation and development concerns from throughout the country. One of the outcomes of the workshop was the recognition that as the local-regional landcare movement and industry continues to grow throughout the United States, it is now important that we study its economic, social, and ecological impacts to better understand the utility of the landcare **triple bottom line** as a tool for achieving a broad range of integrated conservation and development objectives. It is important that we demonstrate and further develop the most successful aspects of landcare so that the movement and industry will develop in a way that provides significant positive impacts. Toward this end, we work with our partners to develop grant proposals and seek other sources of funds to support these innovative activities.

In 2006-2008, Virginia Tech and partners have hosted a series of visiting landcare specialists as part of the USDA Landcare Study Tours and the Victoria-Virginia International Landcare Fellowship

sponsored in part by our Australian colleagues. Recent visitors include Horrie Poussard, a “founder” and “mastermind” of landcare in Australia, and John Robinson, coordinator of the Werribee and Maribyrnong Landcare groups in Australia, as well as Dennis Garrity, Chair of Landcare International and Director of the International Center for Agroforestry based in Kenya. There are extensive opportunities for cultural exchange and international study as part of the global landcare movement.

Landcare is *people* taking care of the land. As such, it is a new way of talking and thinking about natural resource management that gets us beyond the human-nature dichotomy and the old jobs versus the environment debates of the wilderness preservation and modern environmental movements. The landcare movement provides natural resource managers with an opportunity to host a dialogue about the role of people in nature. Natural resource professionals tend to focus their attention on the resource: the land, the water, the *wildlife*. These are the things we are trained and encouraged to understand and manage. However, we seldom pay enough attention to the keystone species in most of the world’s ecosystems: homo sapiens. Human beings are increasingly the single most important element, the primary driver of change, in most ecosystems, locally and globally. As the human population and the per-capita impacts of our lifestyles and livelihoods continue to increase, people will become an even more important element of Earth’s ecology in the future. *What do we do about the people? How do we manage ourselves?* These are the questions that natural resource managers must ask in the 21st century, and landcare will likely be a part of the answers.

For more information on landcare, contact David Robertson at davidrobertson@vt.edu.

First Think Light Symposium - Innovative Lightweight Panels

Urs Buehlmann, Extension
Specialist, Wood Products

Virginia Tech and FDM Magazine, in conjunction with Stiles Machinery, are offering a two-day lightweight panel symposium featuring materials, processing, and design specialists in lightweight panel technology in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on November 17 and 18, 2008 (first symposium) and on November 19 and 21, 2008 (second symposium, repetition of first symposium).

The first day will be used to provide theoretical background information and learn about providers of lightweight panel solutions. Martin Stosch, a leading lightweight panel expert from Germany, with other experts will give in-depth information about lightweight panel materials and technologies including panel types, processing technology, hardware and fasteners, and consumer preferences. Their presentations will be backed up by a unique take-home document covering all aspects of lightweight panels as a tool for further learning and reference.

A second day will be spent experiencing lightweight panel technology “hands-on” on the shop floor, making, formatting, edgebanding, assembling and finishing lightweight panel products. The hands-on technology set-up will include a lightweight panel line, a panel saw, edgebanding technology for lightweight panels, as well as hardware insertion and assembly solutions, and will be held in cooperation with Stiles Machinery.

For further questions and registration, visit <http://www.woodscience.vt.edu/thinklight/> or call 540-231-7107.