Top 10 Items to Know for Virginia Forest Landowners

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As a new landowner or landowner looking for new alternatives, you should consider taking time to gather the necessary tools and information prior to taking action on your forestland. Owning land is fulfilling in and of itself, but can become overwhelming when you think about all your management options. To help you, first, think about what should be done. This can be a matter of opinion if you ask any natural resource professional “what should I do?” Doing some homework first, then presenting ideas to your Extension Forester or State Forester in your county will save you both time and money – both of which most people find they can use more of. Here are some top 10 items forest landowners should consider BEFORE seeking help:

1. Get involved and educate yourself - what are your ownership goals? Why do you own your property? How do you want your property to look in the future? What would you want to inherit in a piece of property – a well maintained forest, or a liability?
   - Visit [http://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu](http://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu) for your Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program resource portal. Also [http://www.ext.vt.edu/topics/environment-resources/index.html](http://www.ext.vt.edu/topics/environment-resources/index.html) for a host of Extension material.

2. What does your property look like from a bird’s eye view? Get to know your neighbors and see if your ideas collectively will do more good – they usually do! Locate your property boundaries and be sure your corners are marked clearly! (see [http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/maintaining-forest-property-boundaries.pdf](http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/maintaining-forest-property-boundaries.pdf))
   
   - County tax maps are available on county GIS websites, or you can still search the local courthouse for a deed or plat description. As a last resort, a surveyor may need to be hired.

3. How about the long term? You own it now, who will own it later? What will be the future of your property? See [http://www.ext.vt.edu/topics/environment-resources/legacy-planning/index.html](http://www.ext.vt.edu/topics/environment-resources/legacy-planning/index.html) - Estate Planning for Forest Landowners resources in Virginia.
4. Also, keep and **maintain good records**, including your **tax basis** at the beginning of ownership so it will be less expensive when and if you harvest timber (your basis is what you paid for the land, timber and buildings and expenses such as survey and attorney fees). See [www.timbertax.org](http://www.timbertax.org) and search for the annual “Timber Tax Update” publication – a very helpful and practical tool to look over and hand to your tax advisor.

5. **Know your trees!** It all begins with **tree identification**, whether looking for markets for your timber or insect and disease identification, you should know at least our top 10 tree species in Virginia – White oaks, red oaks, hickory, tulip poplar, maple, Virginia pine, loblolly pine, gum, beech, and birch.


6. **Common Invasive Species** (plants, diseases, wildlife and insects) – Probably one of our largest areas of concern since invasives displace our native plants and animals and can quickly take over if not managed early on in the identification process.

   - [http://www.invasive.org/eastern/srs/](http://www.invasive.org/eastern/srs/)
   - Bugwood Network ([www.bugwood.org](http://www.bugwood.org))
   - Smart Phone Apps ([http://apps.bugwood.org/](http://apps.bugwood.org/))

7. **What wildlife** lives on my forestland and what concerns should I have? Often times wildlife are much more enjoyable than they are an issue. It really depends on your goals for the land, but keep in mind you are now living in what was their home - so get along!

8. **Consider increasing your involvement and educational opportunities** and join your state landowner association – the Virginia Forestry Association - [http://www.vaforestry.org/](http://www.vaforestry.org/). Also see your two national associations – National Woodland Owner’s Association and the Forest Landowner Association. All these organizations work to promote forestry as a sustainable resource, and lobby for sensible forest policy and landowner rights with land ownership.

9. **Consider obtaining a written forest management plan** for your property. These plans are provided by your State Forester in your county at a fee, or private consulting foresters. Other plans can be made on your property specifically for wildlife management ([http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/about/offices/](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/about/offices/)), or conservation planning. Also, it will be helpful to research what type of land use taxation your county supports (see Commissioner of Revenue Office) and, whether a forest management plan is required.

10. **Now that you have done some work on your own, it’s time to contact a professional forester. Where is your local Extension Office and who is your or your State Forester serving your county** and/or your Extension Forester serving your region? Visit [www.dof.virginia.gov](http://www.dof.virginia.gov) for your county forester and [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu) searching “local offices” for your county Extension Agent or District Extension Forester (see “local assistance” tab at bottom [http://www.ext.vt.edu/topics/environment-resources/index.html](http://www.ext.vt.edu/topics/environment-resources/index.html))

“Now get out and enjoy the land! Peace of mind is priceless”......author unknown