



THE 500-YEAR FOREST FOUNDATION

Newsletter

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Your donation helps protect and sustain forests that store one ton of carbon per acre annually.

South Side Virginia's Gill Farm Is Newest 500-Year Forest

CHARLES W. Gill always felt that his family's 580-acre farm in Brunswick and Mecklenburg counties in South Side Virginia was far from run-of-the-mill. "I knew this place was special," he says, particularly its 365 forested acres.

The forest borders the Meherrin River for 2.5 miles and has a mix of oaks, poplars, beech, hickory, maples and Virginia pines, some of which he's been told are hundreds of years old. Eagles and ospreys snag fish out of the ponds.

Charles saw his family's land become rare in a much more troubling way as "the only big block of timber for miles around since everything was being clear cut." Determined to protect it, he put it under easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, "but it does not protect the forest." To save the trees, he contacted the 500-Year Forest Foundation through the Land Conservation Assistance Network.



A baseline assessment by conservation services firm SKTWorks calls the Meherrin one of the last "high-quality, relatively unaltered Piedmont-Fall Zone aquatic systems with remarkably healthy and abundant populations of native warm-water fish and mussel species." Indeed, Gill Forest restrictions will help protect habitat for the Atlantic Pigtoe Mussel, a federal species of concern deemed by Virginia to be threatened. SKTWorks said the restrictions also preserve views the public enjoys from VA 621 and Interstate 85 and during recreation on the Meherrin, a Virginia Scenic River that flows to the Chowan River and then to the Albemarle-Pamlico Sound.

500-Year Forest Foundation director Ches Goodall said, "It is very gratifying to work with landowners so committed to land conservation." About a month after the no-cut easement was in place, Charles Gill said, "I am still trying to adjust to the reality that the forest here will really be saved. That was the last tribute I could make to my parents."

Two new directors, Dutnell and Racke, join board



PETER DUTNELL AND DANIELLE Racke have joined the board of The 500-Year Forest Foundation.

Peter, owner with his wife Susan of 500-Year Forest Ravens Hill, will occupy the board seat reserved for a forest owner. He will work to strengthen networking and mentoring among forest owners. Ravens Hill became a member forest in 2017. Despite the unrelenting demands of a sheep and cattle operation, Peter has continued support for the 500YFF at owners meetings and other

gatherings. He is a serious birder, conducting nature walks and bird counts, and has helped train both Master and Junior Naturalists.

Danielle is educational coordinator for the University of Lynchburg's Claytor Nature Center, working to connect young people with nature through camp and other activities. She has BA degrees in Music and in Biology from Knox College, an MS in biology from Western Kentucky University and an MA in Biology from

the University of Virginia. She is pursuing an MBA from the University of Lynchburg.

Among her many professional activities, Danielle chairs the certification advisory board of the Virginia Association for Environmental Education and is a voting member of the Virginia Resource Use Education Council. She has taught and mentored student researchers in biology, education and environmental science.



Elfner and Hutcherson bring administrative and legal expertise

Mary A. Elfner is the foundation's new program director. She has worked in many capacities on wildlife, land and water conservation and protection and currently is a vice president for the Richmond Audubon Society and on the board of the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. She has a BS from Warren Wilson College in Environmental Studies and Chemistry and a MS from the University of Georgia in Environmental Policy and Wildlife Biology.



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In addition, Mary has had stints with the National Audubon Society, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Savannah-Chatham County Metropolitan Planning Commission. She was executive director of the Coastal Georgia Land Trust.

Kerry Hutcherson, an attorney with Rudy Coyner & Associates, will serve as counsel for the foundation. He has a BA from Virginia Tech, a Master's of Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a J.D. from the University of Richmond. After graduating law school in 2007, Kerry was hired as Staff Counsel of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation where he focused

on conservation easement defense and enforcement. He also drafted and reviewed hundreds of conservation easement deeds.

Kerry joined Rudy Coyner to expand his practice area to include commercial and residential real estate transactions, land-use law and other land-related legal services. Kerry continues



to work with prospective conservation easement donors, owners of properties that are currently protected by conservation easements, and private land trusts.

Yearend forest reports reveal busy and wet 2019

Directors visited Gill Forest in January 2019, ultimately adding the 500-Year Forest profiled in this issue. In March, Frank and Eleanor Biasioli hosted the 2019 forest owners' meeting at the Ivy Creek Natural Area and their Greene County 500-Year Forest.

Summer found Randolph College students inventorying the Biasioli, Edgeworth and Ravens Hill forests under the guidance of their professor, Karin Warren, a 500-Year Forest Foundation director. Karin secured a Randolph College grant for the work, which she described in the proposal this way: "Each inventory will include tree density, species (native and non-native), abundance of coarse woody debris, scrub, and herbaceous species, diameter, average stand age, and observation/assessment of human disturbance."

The Foundation continued support of the Department of Conservation & Recreation's efforts to purchase the Chestnut Ridge Natural Area Preserve/500-Year Forest and adjoining forest lands owned by Bob and Darlinda Gilvary.

Below, we are graced with excerpts from Jean Kolb's 2019 Kolb Forest report.

Summer rain was, like last year, a prominent factor. Tree trunks no doubt added a wide ring, and branches produced more foliage than we've ever seen. By November, fallen leaves lay thick all over the forest floor, completely hiding the single, overwintering leaf of a number of cranefly orchids I know about. I uncovered them.

*The rain increased two native forest grasses (*Brachyelytrum erectum* and *Muhlenbergia sobolifera*). They've been around sparingly for years, but this year they multiplied vigorously. It was unusual for mosses to stay green nearly all summer. Their one-cell thick leaves must be moist for photosynthesis to take place, and our north-facing slopes helped them retain water.*

Stilt grass, of course, enjoyed the rain, which reduced spraying days, but the crew resprayed last year's areas, limiting next year's seed production. Some sprayed areas now have no stilt grass; some retain plants here and there. I spent many hours spraying clethodim on isolated patches myself. The crew sprayed the few Wavy-leaf basket grass plants, and I hope got them all.

VanYahres Tree Service inoculated four of our few white ash trees on the mountainside against the Emerald Ash Borer. Others did not look good. Shirley Halladay helped me pull invasives on lower slopes; Peter Mehring removed stilt grass and garlic mustard along a stream and on higher slopes and cut bittersweet vines everywhere. Large bittersweet vines in our forest are a thing of the past.

Mehring-Kalton Forest added

THE MEHRING-KALTON FOREST, our latest Cooperating Forest, is part of a 611-acre family parcel (below) that lies on the east side of Hungrytown Road in Albemarle County, VA.

Peter Mehring already has a deep connection to the 500-Year Forest Foundation. His work in the Kolb Forest, primarily purging invasives (see Jean Kolb's report, this page), led to his volunteering for field days, owners' meetings, biotic blitzes and more. It has been a longstanding goal to make the relationship more formal.

The foundation usually employs conservation easements that follow the land, even as ownership changes. With Cooperating Forests, the connection is with current forest owners willing to engage in information-sharing and other networking activities, with no easement restrictions.



Thank you to our Donors

What we do is only possible with the support of the people you see on this list. The following gifts were received through December 31, 2019. Asterisks denote more than one donation in the period. Carbon Conserver gifts start at \$1,500, Soil Saver at \$600, Stream Steward at \$300, Flora Fancier at \$150, Fauna Fan at \$60 and Tree Tender at \$30.

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Forests continue to inspire givers

Among the donations acknowledged here is one from Dr. Harold E. Young, Jr., given in honor of his neighbor Florence Wilson and her Edgeworth Forest. Dr. Young made the gesture emphatic by tucking our Edgeworth/Wilson newsletter photo into the donation envelope along with his check. Thank you.

Al Kemper, *in honor of Dale &
Ted Harris*

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The 500-Year Forest Foundation, a non-profit organization, works in partnership with private forest owners to produce future old-growth forests.

You can help.

For more information or to contribute, volunteer or recommend a forest, go to www.500yearforest.org or www.facebook.com/500yearforest. You can email us using 500yearforests@gmail.com



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WWW.500YEARFOREST.ORG

PO Box 1272
Charlottesville, VA 22902

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Director's Letter



Frank Biasioli

For 45 years, my wife Eleanor and I have dedicated ourselves to preservation and conservation. It started with our first home—a lovely old country house in Cismont, VA—and grew to include three other historic houses and an old grist mill. Through the Piedmont Environmental Council and the 500-Year Forest Foundation, we’ve added 150 acres of hardwood forest to the list of things saved. Our efforts, while extremely rewarding, sometimes feel futile against the centuries-long backdrop of development and growth that has meant a global loss of forest lands and now an urgent climate crisis.

Against such odds, many are working to conserve rural properties and they deserve more credit for their efforts than they often receive. They stand as witness to what has been lost and what still could be as they confront current threats to forests. Ted Harris, the 500-Year Forest Foundation’s founder, gets my thanks for creating such a coalition—one of the most rewarding affiliations of my conservation life.

In 2019, I ended a stint as a 500-Year Forest Foundation director. Shortly before I left the board, my wife and I organized and hosted a forest owners’ meeting, a periodic gathering that deserves to happen more frequently. It provided an opportunity for a group of people that I hold in high regard to meet and hike together and allowed Eleanor and me to show off our forest. More than anything, it reminded us all that we’re not alone in this fight.