



West Virginia Division of Forestry
www.wvforestry.com
Joe Manchin III, Governor
Randy Dye, Director/State Forester

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Leslie Fitzwater, Media Specialist, 304-558-2003, ext. 342
Leslie.C.Fitzwater@wv.gov

Contact: Jama L. Jarrett, Media Specialist, 304-558-2003, ext. 341
Jama.L.Jarrett@wv.gov

West Virginia Division of Forestry Celebrates 100 Years of Protecting and Nurturing State's Forests

Charleston, W.Va. – One hundred years ago, West Virginia's forests had been cleared for agricultural use, over harvested to meet the needs of society and charred from wildfires. A century later, West Virginia is the second most forested state in the nation with trees covering 80 percent of the land. This successful reforestation is due in large part to the professional foresters of the state's [Division of Forestry](#) (DOF). The men and women of the DOF work with volunteer fire departments, the forest products industry and federal agencies to protect 12 million acres of forestland from wildfire; they train, license and regulate the state's professional loggers to assure good water quality for West Virginia residents; and they assist landowners with proper management of the state's privately-owned forests thereby guaranteeing healthy forest for future generations.

The DOF begins a yearlong celebration of its centennial starting July 1, 2009. Events will include a celebration at the state capitol in February 2010, informational displays at fairs and festivals throughout the state and historical presentations to various groups throughout the year.

"West Virginia's forests are one of the state's greatest natural resources," said Gov. Joe Manchin. "A century of hard work and dedication by the Division of Forestry has produced healthy, viable forests that provide multiple benefits to the state's residents, including breathtaking scenic beauty, clean air and water, extensive wildlife habitat and top-quality raw materials for the economically-important forest products industry."

DOF Director/State Forester Randy Dye says that although the centennial events will highlight the agency's history, not all of the focus will be on the past.

"We not only want to remember the past as we celebrate our centennial this year, but we also want to have an eye to the future and explore new and innovative ways to better manage and protect West Virginia's forests," he said. "The personnel of the Division of Forestry are committed to doing our best to ensure the continued health of our forests for another hundred years and beyond."

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The DOF operates with three main areas of operation: wildfire suppression, landowner assistance and logging regulation.

Wildfire suppression

Although the DOF has changed considerably over the past 10 decades, its number one priority has remained the same: protecting West Virginia's forests from destruction by wildfire. The state's forestland became vulnerable to fire after the timber boom at the turn of the 20th century that led to the near-depletion of the once-plentiful timber resource. Wildfires easily and rapidly spread across cut-over areas feeding on thick layers of slash that included branches, foliage, tree tops and broken and dying trees left behind by unregulated logging. Accounts from residents who lived in West Virginia during the early 1900s relate stories of haze, smoke and the smell of charred wood frequently permeating the entire state. The dangers of not being able to locate, track or control forest fires led to the destruction of logging camps and sawmill towns, as well as the death or injury of the trees that were left standing. In 1908, a rash of wildfires burned more than 1.7 million acres of land and prompted action by the legislature, which passed the West Virginia Reform Law of 1909. This law entrusted the Office of Fish and Game Warden with the responsibility for forest protection, thereby establishing the earliest incarnation of the DOF.

Landowner assistance

DOF foresters work with thousands of West Virginia landowners each year, providing them with one-on-one professional forestry assistance in management techniques. Advice can cover everything from proper development of management plans to tree planting and wildlife habitat enhancement, to creation of forest roads and recreation areas and conducting successful timber harvests. This forest management program also oversees cost-sharing initiatives for forest landowners, cooperative research with state universities, tracking, weighing and certifying of all West Virginia-dug ginseng roots, growing and selling of tree seedlings at Clements State Tree Nursery and forest management activities on seven state forests.

Logging regulation

The third major focus of today's DOF is implementation and enforcement of the Logging Sediment Control Act (LSCA) of 1992, a set of state laws enacted to prevent soil erosion and stream sedimentation that can result from commercial timber harvesting operations.

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The LSCA mandates operator licensing, professional logger certification, harvesting notification and use of best management practices to ensure clean water for more than 1.8 million West Virginians. The men and women of the DOF train, license and certify timber operators and professional loggers, make on-site inspections and, when necessary, enforce the laws and regulations set forth by the state. In the forestry community, the LSCA is commonly recognized as one of the nation's toughest forestry laws, and serves as a model to other states in their development of water quality legislation and program procedures.

Centennial events for the West Virginia Division of Forestry will be scheduled throughout the coming year. For updated information, please visit the DOF Web site at www.wvforestry.com.

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