

Protecting Virginia's landscapes

April 2, 2013 – The trees that line the streets and sidewalks of Virginia do a lot more than make the commonwealth's cities beautiful - they help create a more vibrant and healthier place to live. The College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech is a leader in ensuring that these urban forests are protected and continue to be a vital part of our landscape.



The Virginia Geospatial Extension Program trains tree stewards and others to use technology to map the state's forests.

Through research and the efforts of Virginia Cooperative Extension, the college is studying the impact and value of urban forests while instructing everyone from new landowners to planning officials on the best ways to manage and protect them. About 166 million trees make up more than 1,300 square miles of urban and community forests in the state. "Research shows that the value of urban forests is wide-ranging, from the benefits of cleaning the air and water to increasing tourism and creating jobs," said John McGee, an Extension geospatial specialist. "We want to give as many people in the commonwealth as possible the knowledge of how they can care for the forests that they love."

The Virginia Geospatial Extension Program trains clients to use the most cutting-edge research and technology - including geographic information systems, global positioning systems, and remote sensing - to map out forests. Through partnerships with the Virginia Community College System and the Virginia Space Grant Consortium, Extension provides geospatial workshops that focus on training people who will share what they've learned with their schools, agencies, and businesses. Participants take their

knowledge about mapping systems back to their communities so they can make informed decisions regarding forest management, urban development, and land-use issues.

Benefits of these programs are far-reaching and include assistance in managing coastal resources, tourism development for the Blue Ridge Parkway, and assessing cities' urban tree canopy.

Researchers are also using knowledge gained from this program to examine the potential for developing biofuels around the state. Virginia's forests could be a valuable source of alternative energy in places such as the tobacco region, where development could spur economic growth.
