



A U B U R N U N I V E R S I T Y

# School of Forestry & Wildlife Sciences



2019 - 2024  
Strategic Plan



# WORKING WITH NATURE FOR SOCIETY'S WELL-BEING

## HISTORY & OVERVIEW

Auburn's forestry program was first established as the joint Department of Horticulture-Forestry in 1946. In 1950, the Department of Forestry was created and later accredited by the Society of American Foresters. In 1984, the department was awarded "School" status in recognition of its growing prominence in research, outreach, and undergraduate and graduate education. Fifteen years later, Auburn's Department of Wildlife Sciences merged with the School of Forestry to create what is now the Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences (SFWS).

Today, the SFWS offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in a variety of natural resources disciplines. Our core undergraduate degree programs include Forestry, Wildlife Ecology and Management, Wildlife Pre-Veterinary Medicine Concentration, and Natural Resources Management, as well as graduate degrees at the master's and PhD levels. In recent years, SFWS' curricula has expanded beyond its core programs with the adoption of 3 new undergraduate degrees, including the Geospatial and Environmental Informatics, Sustainable Biomaterials and Packaging, and Wildlife Enterprise Management programs. The SFWS has also expanded to offer distance education and online learning platforms with the availability of an online non-thesis master's degree and professional certification programs in the areas of Restoration Ecology, One Health, and Forest Finance and Investment. Since the launch of these programs, SFWS undergraduate and graduate student enrollment has increased nearly 50 percent, respectively.

At the SFWS, professors are world-class scientists who offer unsurpassed classroom instruction and abundant opportunities for experiential learning. Our faculty also lead research which ranges from biological, ecological and geospatial, to socioeconomic and policy aspects of forestry, wildlife, and natural resource conservation. The diversity of SFWS research allows students the opportunity to participate in research aimed at finding solutions to some of the most critical issues facing society. Undergraduates are exposed to research methods such as data collection, laboratory analysis, computer modeling, and other activities that have the potential to influence human health, climate resiliency, forest policy and product development, and wildlife and natural resources management strategies.

The SFWS is housed within a recently constructed 110,000-square-foot building that features a 100-seat auditorium, eight technology enhanced classrooms, modular conference rooms, research laboratories, libraries, project rooms, a student advisement suite, and a student lounge. Adjacent to the building is a picnic pavilion and acres of forested green space available for student learning and enjoyment. In addition to this facility, the SFWS offers nearly 6,000-forested acres and many educational facilities dedicated to instruction and experiential learning, including the 120-acre Kreher Preserve and Nature Center and the 400-acre Mary Olive Thomas Demonstration Forest, both located within Auburn, and the 5,300-acre Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center near Andalusia, Alabama.

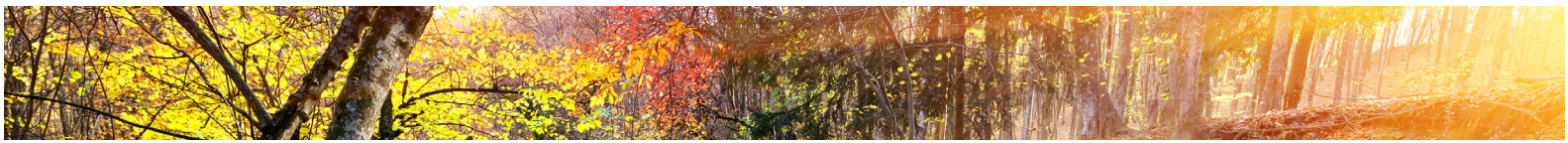
The SFWS is a flagship institution for natural resource-based degrees and is the backbone to Alabama's \$24 billion forest, wildlife and natural resources industry. Its combined assets of faculty, facilities, and curriculum are preparing the next generation of leaders with the knowledge and ability to conserve and manage our natural systems for a sustainable future.



*"The Longleaf pine and the raptor signify the merging of the forestry and wildlife programs to create the School of Forestry & Wildlife Sciences."*

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## MISSION

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The land-grant mission of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences is to improve social, economic, and environmental well-being of citizens in Alabama and beyond. The school pursues this mission by elevating the Auburn experience, pursuing transformative research, engaging stakeholders through impactful service, and achieving operational excellence.

## VISION

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Through innovative and strategic programming, strengthening/building partnerships, and energizing/engaging our alumni, friends, and stakeholder base, the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences aspires to become the “go-to place” for forestry, wildlife sciences, and natural resources programs in the U.S. Southeast and beyond.

## CORE VALUES

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The cornerstones of the school’s operations are its core values of excellence, inclusion, and connectivity.

## STRATEGIC GOALS

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Our goals represent the highest SFWS priorities for the next five years. The accomplishment of these goals will best position our school to achieve its mission.

### 1. Elevated Auburn Experience

Inspire and prepare students for life and natural resource careers through delivery of an excellent and supportive experience characterized by distinctive, innovative curricula and engaging student life programs. Achieve a robust and diverse enrollment of students while enhancing academic quality.

### 2. Transformative Research

Elevate research and scholarly impact to address society’s critical issues and promote economic development in Alabama and beyond.

### 3. Impactful Service

Expand our service capabilities to foster greater innovation and engagement that enhances the quality of life and economic development in Alabama and beyond.

### 4. Operational Excellence

Implement operational efficiency and effectiveness measures that continuously support a culture of high performance at all levels of the SFWS. Recruit, retain and invest in our outstanding people through development, support, recognition, and rewards. Enhance school communication and engagement.

## THEMES

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The School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences embraces five themes within its efforts to achieve the four goals of its strategic plan. These themes also help us realize our vision and advance our land-grant mission.

SFWS themes include: Organizational Excellence, Diversity and Inclusion, Technology and Communication, and Globalization.

**Organizational Excellence:** Fostering an environment where students, staff, faculty, and stakeholders can proactively share innovative ideas to advance our academic, research, and extension/outreach programs is important. We should not hesitate to embrace bold ideas and calculated risks to stand out among our peers. In the face of limited resources, focus and prioritization should be the guiding principles for new investments. Societal challenges/opportunities such as climate mitigation, bio-economy, and environmental health and wellbeing, for example, warrants multi-disciplinary experts working together. Collaboration and partnerships with other schools/colleges, universities, and stakeholders is not an option but a necessity for the school to leverage resources to meet its goals.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** Diversity in terms of race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and so forth contributes to the real-world representation of our work place and classrooms. Understanding, accepting, and valuing our differences fosters a more creative and innovative learning environment. Involving and empowering all groups of people promotes a sense of belonging and supports a democratic decision-making process. Creating a diverse and inclusive environment is key to attracting and retaining the best and brightest students, faculty, and staff.

**Technology and Communication:** Technology is critical to our operations and to enriching and amplifying our teaching, research, and service activities. Using appropriate technologies in a timely manner saves time, reduces costs, offers us new opportunities, and increases our revenue base. The school is committed to assuring that our information and technology platform is secure and up to date. Communication is vital to raising awareness of the school’s academic, research, and outreach pursuits. We will continue to intensify our communication and marketing efforts through print, electronic, and social media to showcase our programs and recruit high achieving students, faculty, and staff.

**Globalization:** “If you are not a global player, you cannot become a global leader.” With advanced technologies and communications, the number of people who live in one continent, study in another continent, and work in an entirely different continent at the same time is expected to increase. Similarly, to be relevant and impactful, organizations must also seek to foster collaborations and partnerships with diverse institutions from all continents of the world. It is imperative to address global issues such as climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and conservation, and the emerging bio-economy, while continuing our strategic and opportunistic approaches to expanding our international reach and promoting SFWS academic, research, and outreach programs.

## GOAL 1. ELEVATED AUBURN EXPERIENCE

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The SFWS offers world-class faculty, state-of-the-art labs, expansive field sites, and cutting-edge, knowledge-based technological resources. Our students are provided the highest-quality classroom instruction, hands-on learning experiences, and professional development opportunities to acquire discipline-specific knowledge and skills in preparation for a competitive job market and a diverse global workforce within business, industry, government, and non-profit sectors.

### DISTINCTIVE, INNOVATIVE CURRICULA

The SFWS faculty support two long-established degree programs, Forestry, Wildlife Ecology and Management, and Wildlife Pre-Veterinary Medicine Concentration that serve as its core curricula. In addition to these, the SFWS has expanded its academic footprint to include several other undergraduate degree programs that draw from its faculty's diverse expertise. These include Natural Resources Management (NRM), Sustainable Biomaterials and Packaging (BIOP), Geospatial and Environmental Informatics (GSEI), and Wildlife Enterprise Management (WLEM).

The NRM degree offers an innovative, interdisciplinary combination of social and ecosystem sciences to develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills to address the challenges of complex natural resource issues. Students customize their degree for a variety of specializations by choosing a minor in Natural Resource Ecology, Nature-based Recreation, Urban Environmental Science, and Watershed Management, or any other offered on campus including minors in the areas of business, communications, fisheries, and sustainability. Likewise, the BIOP degree is an interdisciplinary program that requires courses from three collaborative units on campus including the Colleges of Business and Architecture, Design and Construction, and the Department of Biosystems Engineering within the College of Agriculture, to prepare students for careers within emerging bio-based industries such as nanotechnology, packaging, and construction.

The GSEI degree program provides students with rigorous training within the areas of information technology, spatial science, data analysis, natural resources, and ecological modeling to prepare them for in-demand technological careers. Graduates will be prepared for a wide variety of career opportunities within public agencies and government, private corporations, and consulting firms. Finally, the newest SFWS program, the WLEM degree, provides interdisciplinary knowledge and skills relating to wildlife management, business, hospitality, and client relations for careers within nature-based, for-profit outdoor enterprises.

#### *Beyond Teaching Discipline-Specific Knowledge and Skills*

*We continuously reassess our curricula to ensure that it reflects the content, structure, and delivery methods needed for students to be successful after graduation. As such, it is necessary to continually improve and expand highly impactful practices such as field-based instruction, undergraduate research, internships, and study abroad offerings. To accomplish this goal, the SFWS will strive to increase the portion of SFWS students, including those with financial hardships, that participate in a high impact practice. Further, the SFWS will increase incentives for faculty to develop and instruct study-abroad courses, undergraduate research offerings, provide leadership for student organizations, cultivate and promote internships, and engage in other high impact practices.*

#### *Broadening Delivery Channels*

*To meet the future needs of our students, the SFWS will broaden its instruction delivery channels to reach new, emerging, and non-traditional undergraduate and graduate student segments. To engage these populations, the SFWS will create online undergraduate minor programs and expand its online degree and certificate programs beyond the present offerings of the online non-thesis master's degree and three graduate certificate programs.*




## ENHANCING STUDENT OUTCOMES

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During the 2-semester course, the SFWS Forest, Environment, and Wildlife Leadership (FEWL) Academy members have opportunities to meet with leaders and policymakers in Montgomery and Washington, D.C. Here they are shown with Zia Haq, far left, senior analyst and defense production act coordinator in the Bioenergy Technologies Office, Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.





*Strategies for achieving these goals may include increasing the number of incentives for faculty to develop and instruct online courses and increasing section offerings by piggybacking undergraduate and graduate online courses.*

### ENGAGING STUDENT LIFE PROGRAMS

Employee surveys demonstrate that SFWS graduates are well-versed in the technical aspects of their specific careers. In addition to classroom and experiential learning, the SFWS also trains students to develop effective communication and leadership skills. To that end, the SFWS sponsors an annual school-wide career fair and “soft skill” workshop intended to help students develop professional and interpersonal skills such as communication, team work, conflict resolution, work ethic, and character attributes of integrity, empathy, adaptability, and emotional intelligence; which are often noted as crucial for career success. Finally, good leaders are not born, they are developed and mentored throughout their lives. To assist undergraduates in this process, the SFWS has established a new initiative called the Forest, Environment, and Wildlife Leadership, or FEWL, Academy. The two-semester FEWL Academy is available to eligible rising juniors with an interest in developing leadership abilities necessary for the critical problem-solving of issues related to the management, utilization, and stewardship of natural resources. In recent years, the SFWS has also launched a young alumni society which provides opportunities for members to grow their leadership skills through the mentorship of current SFWS students.

#### *Strengthening Professional and Career Preparedness*

*The SFWS will continue to expand beyond its teaching discipline-specific knowledge and skills to encourage student participation in “soft skills” training opportunities designed to enhance professional development and leadership abilities. This effort will be reflected by an increase in undergraduate and graduate student participation in programs such as the Forestry, Environment, & Wildlife Leadership Academy; SFWS Career Fair; SFWS student clubs; and other related activities.*

#### *Enhancing Co-Curricular Experiences*

*Given the increasing diversity of SFWS students, it will be important to achieve a more coherent and supportive co-curricular experience for students as well. The SFWS will improve student cohesiveness among degree programs and inclusivity of non-traditional students with the expansion of student activities, organizations, and other ancillary program offerings available to its diverse student populations.*

### ROBUST AND DIVERSE RECRUITMENT, ENROLLMENT, AND RETENTION STRATEGIES

Historically, SFWS forestry and wildlife degree programs have attracted students from rural areas in Alabama. To promote student diversity beyond its traditional socio-demographic profile, the SFWS has adopted a proactive recruitment effort to reach a more diverse population of high school students within urban areas. As a result, we are recruiting students who may not have experienced the “outside” but yearn for a career in the areas of natural resource management. Additionally, the innovative curricula, diverse occupations and vast career opportunities associated with the new Wildlife Enterprise Management, Sustainable Biomaterials and Packaging, and Geospatial and Environmental Informatics degrees are expected to attract nontraditional students, women, and minorities. Further, the SFWS will continue to expand its portfolio of cooperative partnerships with schools that are predominately under-represented such as those at Tuskegee University and the University of West Alabama. Transfer students are also part of the larger picture to grow the SFWS undergraduate enrollment without sacrificing academic standards or affordability. In 2019, the first dual enrollment program, Path-2-Plains, was launched between Auburn University and Southern Union State Community College for students to pursue the geospatial and environmental informatics degree.

#### *Recruiting Top Students and Raising Academic Standards*

*The SFWS is committed to actively recruiting top undergraduate students and raising academic standards. To achieve this goal, the SFWS continually seeks to elevate its branding and communication efforts to better distinguish its academic programs from other units at AU and beyond. To do so, the SFWS will engage its students, alumni, and stakeholders to highlight SFWS curricula, experiential learning, academic and post-graduate achievement, and potential career opportunities. These efforts will be bolstered with the development of digital communications to visualize, automate and systematize marketing campaigns in support of recruitment.*

#### *Improving Student Success*

*To assure successful student outcomes, the SFWS will seek ways to improve student advisement and financial support to promote retention. In support of this goal, the SFWS will increase engagement with external stakeholders to develop new fellowship and scholarship opportunities for all SFWS degree offerings, particularly for non-forestry degrees where opportunities are limited. The SFWS will also increase the effectiveness of student mentoring and advising by decreasing undergraduate student/faculty advisor and student/professional advisor ratios. Finally, we will seek methods to improve student communications through emerging online platforms and other technologies.*

## GOAL 2. TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

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### FACULTY AND RESEARCH-ENGAGED STUDENTS: CULTURE, PROCESSES AND CAPABILITIES

The SFWS research program has long been a major strength and source of national and international renown for the unit. The SFWS program is one of the most productive at Auburn University in terms of extramural funding and refereed article production on a per capita basis. The program is highly diversified with traditional strengths in wildlife and forest biology, forest products, forest economics, and forest engineering. In recent years, those strengths have expanded to include climate modeling, disease ecology, water sciences, and other interdisciplinary themes. Correspondingly, over time our extramural funding base has diversified to include non-traditional sources such as NASA, the CDC, Department of Defense, as well as others. Traditionally, our funding base has been predominantly federal in origin although the proportion of federal dollars in our extramural funding has diminished.

As state and many federal budgets become smaller and there is increasing emphasis on relevance, we anticipate greater breadth in our research activities and extramural funding base. There will be greater emphasis on societal impacts of our research that will, in turn, enhance its transformative influence. As examples, SFWS research in the areas of climate modeling and water science is highly pertinent to the increasing frequency of hurricanes along coastlines throughout the world. Research in disease ecology can unravel relationships between forest fragmentation and incidence of mosquito-vectored diseases. Forest products research can develop new products from wood that will rejuvenate the economies and standard of living in rural areas throughout the southeastern U.S.

The climb in extramural dollars will stimulate and require increases in our numbers of graduate research assistants, or GRAs. Assistantships are critical for the successful conduct of research and as our research portfolio expands, additional graduate students will be recruited. This will afford us opportunities to build the portion of our graduate program that is research based and provide cutting-edge interdisciplinary training for bright students from across the U.S. and world.

#### *Increasing Research Capacity*

*To support the growth of its research program, the SFWS will seek opportunities to increase its research capacity, including the number and quality of SFWS graduate student research opportunities for domestic and international students. To this end, we will explore opportunities to develop and expand collaborative student exchange programs with international universities. Further, we will increase resources and funding associated with SFWS graduate student assistantships and fellowships. Efforts will include strategies to increase the number of graduate teaching assistantships available.*

### IMPACT AND FOCUS

The SFWS research trajectory leading to enhanced relevance and transformational impacts is built upon a rising 3-year average in extramural funding through our planning horizon. The impetus for increased attraction of federal, state, and foundation funding is focused upon particular foci or centers of excellence within the school. Focal topics reflect sustained funding potential associated with societal issues that are likely to remain problematic such as economic duress in rural areas, increased frequency of aberrant climatic events including drought, flooding, and hurricanes, and rising emergence of tropical diseases and disease vectors. Strong collaborative relationships at national and international levels have already been established for many research foci although we will also address newly emerging issues that link natural resources with society as well as capitalize on new funding opportunities in the long-term.



## ADDRESSING SOCIETAL ISSUES

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Students participate in various cutting-edge research aimed to address natural resource issues such as health-related interactions among people, animals, and the environment. Shown is graduate student Nicole Castaneda placing a mosquito trap in Atlanta for a study to determine if the number and species of birds influence West Nile virus occurrences.





Strategies for expansion of SFWS research and graduate education depend on closer integration with society's needs to ensure that our work is truly transformative and relevant. Many critical linkages between natural resources and society are only now beginning to be explored but are key to enhancing society's well-being. Our goal is to conduct that exploration and apply the accrued knowledge for the benefit of all people.

#### *Strengthening Research Culture and Career-Long Research Engagement*

In the next few years, the SFWS will strengthen its research culture and career-long research engagement. This will be accomplished in part by promoting opportunities, increasing recognition, and expanding financial resources in support of interdisciplinary research for SFWS faculty and students. Measured progress toward this goal will be shown by increased opportunities and incentives for faculty interaction and engagement. This is expected to increase the generation of interdisciplinary research proposals. Further, the SFWS will expand efforts to secure more federal, legislative, and the amount of foundation dollars for high impact research. To do so, we will increase the sources and amount of federal and legislatively financed research expenditures and engage the Auburn University Foundation to present/conduct meetings or workshops to explore new foundation funding opportunities.

### **GOAL 3. IMPACTFUL SERVICE**

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Forest products and recreation contribute more than \$12.5 billion to Alabama's economy and employ 111,000 Alabamians with a payroll of \$3.4 billion per year. Alabamians spend 10.5 million days and \$913 million a year enjoying the state's wildlife resources. However, when surveyed, many of Alabama's small-scale private landowners state that their primary reason for owning land is to pass it on to their heirs, with outdoor recreation and scenic beauty rounding out the top three reasons. Timber production comes in fifth in order of importance for small-scale private landowners in Alabama who own fewer than 100 acres of forestland. However, landowners who own more than 100 acres report that they would like to generate some revenue from their land but are often unsure how to proceed. Our overarching program objective is to increase the knowledge level of Alabama's citizens to encourage the active and sustainable management of Alabama's natural resources. Our goal is to improve quality of life as it relates to a variety of natural resources issues by, not only providing information, but providing the inspiration clients need to put that information into practice.

### **SERVICE OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENT**

The mission of the SFWS is to "...improve social, economic, and environmental well-being of citizens in Alabama and beyond." Our outreach programs engage thousands each year through programs offered at the school's Kreher Preserve and Nature Center and the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center. SFWS faculty and staff regularly partner with other departments, agencies, schools, and not-for-profits to offer K-12 and postsecondary educational programs, skill development workshops and technical seminars, field training exercises, research project assistance, and community programs.

Similarly, the mission of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) Forestry, Wildlife & Natural Resources (FWNR) Team is accomplished by providing science-based programs and educational materials that are responsive to the natural resources needs of the public. The FWNR team consists of state specialists who partner with regional Extension agents who are each housed in one of seven regions across the state. The team also supports county Extension coordinators and staff when they need natural resource-based programming in their county. Our topics of expertise include: 1) community forestry, including risk assessment, chainsaw safety, arborist education and beekeeping; 2) forest management, including principles, practices, and stewardship for landowners; 3) professional logging management, including forest business resources, alternative income generation, prescribed fire, and land management for women and minority landowners; 4) invasive species identification and control; 5) water quality and farm pond management; and 6) wildlife management, including game and non-game management techniques and wild pig control.

The SFWS Extension and outreach team provides timely information and technical assistance through printed materials, websites, social media, seminars, workshops, and site visits. We take a lead role in youth education and professional in-service training and host face-to-face and online workshops, demonstrations, and field days that will benefit all Alabama citizens, including but not limited to the general public, landowners, land managers, and youth. As we look to the future, we plan to increase our online course offerings and continue to increase our return on investment, or ROI, through increased collaborations and grant writing. Online courses and increased collaborations will expand our reach beyond our current client base. Increased grant writing by all members of the group will advance our team toward self-sustainment.

### Addressing Natural Resource Issues

Through faculty and staff involvement, the SFWS strives to be Alabama's "go to" resource for addressing natural resource issues. Our goal is to extend the reach of our expertise through innovative, inclusive, and convenient educational programming and strengthen collaborations with other academic institutions, state and federal agencies, NGOs, and industry partners. From faculty work through the ACES and elsewhere, accomplishment of these goals will be reflected by increased SFWS online programming, increased ROI figures, and increased collaboration with regional agents. Outputs from these efforts will include increased client contacts, program results, publication numbers, and successful grant applications.

The SFWS will also look to strengthen partnerships with other land-grant institutions including Tuskegee and Alabama A& M Universities to develop new economic and educational programs. It is expected that this can be achieved through increased collaborations with research faculty at other institutions, increased advisement to faculty regarding needed outreach activities, increased work force development opportunities, and the development of workshops and other programs to facilitate graduate student outreach experiences and skills.

### Advancing Economic Development

The SFWS will strengthen engagement with public and private sectors to advance economic development. By leveraging SFWS academic expertise and regional Extension agent networks, we expect to enhance economic development through educational programs. These efforts will enhance workforce development, create opportunities, and improve overall quality of life of Alabamians. Advancements toward these goals will include developing work force opportunities with Alabama A&M and Tuskegee University. Further, the SFWS will seek to expand programming between ACES and research faculty involved with products with potential economic development such as biomaterials and packaging.

### Attaining Self-Sustainment

To expand impact, SFWS Extension faculty will also advance toward self-sustainment, including more revenue generation from programs and increased external fund-raising. Efforts will include developing financially self-sustaining extension programs that better balance program costs and revenues while developing capacity to successfully obtain extramural funding for program support at all levels (e.g., specialist to county agents). Measured progress toward these goals will include increased external funding for programming, increased CEU programming, and providing grant-writing training for regional agents.



## IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

The SFWS provides natural resource-related educational programs for adults and children such as the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center's Woodland Wonders Nature Preschool, an innovative and revolutionary concept of nature-based, emergent learning designed for preschool-age children.





## GOAL 4. OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

### EXCEPTIONAL AND ENGAGED FACULTY AND STAFF

To advance Auburn's land-grant mission of education, research, and outreach, the SFWS is committed to investing in its outstanding faculty, staff, and support resources that enable the delivery of its programs for the benefit of its students, stakeholders, and society. The SFWS is committed to recruiting the best and brightest faculty and staff, mentoring them to establish their programs, supporting their development and career goals, recognizing their needs and accomplishments, and rewarding them with fair and appropriate incentives. As part of this process, the school dedicates and actively pursues resources, strives to reduce barriers to productivity and advancement, identifies methods to improve communication and morale, and seeks to optimize procedures and operational efficiencies.

#### *Encouraging and Rewarding Professional Growth*

*The SFWS will actively encourage and reward professional growth by increasing the availability of technology and training opportunities to enhance the knowledge and skills, communications, and efficiencies of its faculty and staff.*

*This will be supported by encouraging and increasing the number of faculty participating in sabbaticals. Further, we will increase the number of faculty and staff participating in formal professional training opportunities.*

### OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

The SFWS strives for operational excellence by using resources responsibly while promoting fiscal accountability and compliance with university policies and procedures. As part of this commitment, we have adopted many new technologies that assist with the consolidation and streamlining of office procedures. As we continue to grow, it will be increasingly important that the SFWS effectively utilizes its space, equipment, technology and human resources while continuously supporting a culture of high performance.

While the school is blessed with a relatively new building, state-of-the-art indoor labs, and several unique outdoor living labs, there will be some emerging needs as the school continues to grow. In the next five years, the SFWS will explore avenues to create infrastructure relating to our packaging systems program and a nature preschool that will enhance its outreach program. As the school grows in size and excellence over the next five years, we are committed to hiring additional faculty and staff to ensure its sustainability. The school will continue to use shared governance as a means of decision-making and advancing the SFWS mission while continuing to promote a respectable and safe working environment, collegiality, and a positive attitude in serving our clientele.

#### *Improving Service and Effectiveness*

*The SFWS will improve efficiencies by identifying and redesigning major academic, administrative, and business processes to reduce costs while improving service and effectiveness. Identifying these processes will facilitate strategies to eliminate redundancies and increase cost efficiencies. Examples of successful implementation may include increasing the number of practices designed to create autonomy for SFWS business, information and technology exchange, and communication. Further, the SFWS will look to increase the involvement of supervisors in training and managing employee financial matters involving hiring, payroll and purchasing, and increase centralized administrative purchasing to better capture economies of scale.*

#### *Leveraging Internal and External Stakeholders and Partners*

*The SFWS will evaluate its resources and leverage internal and external partners to achieve our goals. We will continue to evaluate the condition and optimize the use of its office, laboratory, facility, and technological resources to meet future needs. If found to be insufficient, the school will prioritize needs and develop strategies to repair, replace, and/or enhance resources to support its programs. This will include efforts to increase human resource capacities to support program growth and increased productivity. The SFWS will also conduct a formal evaluation of human resource, building space, equipment, and technology. Based on this evaluation and SFWS goals, we will develop an optimization plan to acquire resources and engage internal and external partnerships to meet the school's current and future needs.*

### INCREASED COLLABORATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

With the Auburn University strategic budget model in place, the SFWS will explore all possible avenues to increase its revenue base. New investments and reallocation of resources will be guided by our priorities and growth opportunities. The school will take a proactive approach in making its fiscal platform transparent to faculty and staff and intensify its development efforts to mobilize resources from alumni and stakeholders. With the launch of its new undergraduate majors and online graduate programs, there will be opportunities to build new collaborations and partnerships with a range of clientele.

As part of our land-grant mission, the SFWS will continue to promote the environmental, economic, and social wellbeing of Alabama and beyond. As a member of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network USA, the school is committed to incorporate the principles of sustainability to improve the SFWS, Auburn University, Alabama, and the world.

### *Strengthening SFWS Visibility and Reputation*

*Enhanced marketing and communication will be emphasized to strengthen the visibility and reputation of the SFWS and its programs. We will identify and engage with new stakeholders, particularly those representing new curricula, research expertise, and non-traditional student populations to demonstrate career opportunities, identify student internships, build scholarships and fellowships, and diversify the school's leadership.*

*To better distinguish and elevate the school's image, we will engage vendors to enhance our communications and marketing portfolio to include video, social media advertising, and other digital platforms. We will develop a comprehensive marketing plan that will identify our target audiences and optimal marketing channels to build SFWS brand awareness, support our teaching, research, and outreach objectives, and achieve our recruitment and fundraising goals.*

### *Achieving New Affiliations*

*Finally, we will engage our faculty and staff to effectively inform, engage, and integrate new stakeholders to achieve life-long and mutually beneficial affiliations. As a result, we will diversify our student profile and leadership while increasing philanthropic giving through industry, public, and private organizations and other institutions representing the school's diverse interests.*

## SFWS STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

A five-month process was followed to develop the 2019 - 2024 School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences Strategic Plan. In June 2019, an 8-member, faculty and staff lead Strategic Planning Coordination Committee (SPCC) was formed at the direction of SFWS Dean Janaki Alavalapati. The faculty members of the SPCC included a range of experience and expertise that were representative of the school's faculty and programs. Two staff persons were also included to represent SFWS administrative support functions. Members of the SPCC included:

- Christopher Anderson, Associate Professor (chair)
- Edward Loewenstein, Associate Professor
- Brian Via, Professor
- Susan Pan, Assistant Professor
- Mark Smith, Professor and Extension Specialist
- Adam Maggard, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist
- Sue Robinson, Executive Assistant to the Dean
- Jamie Anderson, Communications and Marketing Specialist

The SPCC first met in July 2019 and established the following procedure and timeline for completion of a SFWS Strategic Plan. For further guidance, the SPCC later met with Tim Becker, founder and owner of Probity Business Group. Mr. Becker was retained by Auburn University to assist with the strategic planning efforts across campus and provided advice and input to the SPCC on our procedural process. The following was a general timeline of the SFWS Strategic Plan formation.



## FOSTERING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The SFWS seeks to achieve a robust and diverse enrollment of students while enhancing academic quality and student outcomes.



## ENGAGING ALUMNI AND STAKEHOLDERS

The SFWS engages alumni and stakeholders during events held throughout the year. Shown center is Dean Janaki Alavalapati with Hunter Grimes and David Padgett of First South Farm Credit, sponsors of a regional reception held in Andalusia, AL.



## 1. COMMITTEE ORGANIZATION MEETINGS

Using the 2019 - 2024 Auburn University Strategic Plan as a basis, the SPCC determined that the SFWS Strategic Plan would include four major goals representing its academic, research, and outreach programs and administrative functions:

- Goal 1: Elevated Auburn Experience
- Goal 2: Transformative Research
- Goal 3: Impactful Service
- Goal 4: Operational Excellence.

SPCC members were then assigned in pairs to one of the major goals and began engaging with SFWS faculty and staff to develop relevant sub-goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) in support of each goal.

## 2. STRENGTH-WEAKNESS-OPPORTUNITY-THREAT (SWOT) ANALYSIS

The primary mechanism for SFWS engagement was to conduct an individual SWOT analysis with faculty and staff for each goal. A SWOT analysis is intended to organize important internal (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors that are expected to affect the organization. Each SWOT analysis was facilitated by the lead SPCC representatives for each goal to provide an open forum for employee input to the SFWS Strategic Plan. All SFWS faculty and staff were invited to attend and contribute to each SWOT analysis. Those unable to attend were encouraged to provide their input directly to the SPCC. SWOT analyses for all the goals were generally well attended (15-25 persons each) and were held July 19-26, 2019.

## 3. INITIAL DRAFT OUTLINE OF THE SFWS STRATEGIC PLAN

Following the SWOT analyses, the SPCC generated draft sub-goals related to issues that were identified and ranked as key concerns/priorities among SFWS faculty and staff. Decisions regarding potential sub-goals and action items were produced with assistance from SFWS leadership (Dean, Associate Dean of Research, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, and SFWS Extension Coordinator). Upon completion, an initial draft outline of the SFWS Strategic Plan was submitted to faculty and staff for review and input.

## 4. FINALIZATION OF THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLANS AND KPIs

An organizational half-day meeting was held for faculty (Sept. 16, 2019) and staff (Sept. 24, 2019) to elicit comments regarding draft sub-goals and to generate KPIs for each sub-goal in support of the SFWS Strategic Plan and a complimentary Operational Plan. Revisions and KPIs were incorporated by the SPCC and reviewed by SFWS leadership. In some cases, Auburn University KPIs were used as reference to guide the development of the SFWS Strategic and Operational Plans. Following subsequent revisions by SFWS leadership and SPCC members, new drafts of the Strategic and Operational Plans were submitted electronically to all faculty and staff for final comments and suggestions. Minor revisions and suggestions were incorporated and prepared as final documents.



## REWARDING GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

The SFWS actively encourages and rewards professional growth. During the annual AU Employee Appreciation luncheon, Dean Janaki Alavalapati is shown acknowledging employees for their work in support of the university's mission.