

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

School of Forestry & Wildlife Sciences

FEATURE STORY

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Empowering communities through science

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Working with Nature for Society's Well Being

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Fall 2021 Commencement 12/11



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Auburn-Tuskegee partnership creates STEM opportunities for minority students



Wildlife summer practicum gives opportunity for hands-on training

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Students gain real-world experience during internships



SFWS celebrates its newest alumni

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AND WILDLIFE SCIENCES



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A Message from the Dean

Dear alumni and friends,

We fondly remember the summer of 2021 as a return to normalcy at Auburn University. We celebrated our graduates with joy and time-honored reverence; the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center was once again bustling with the sounds of children enjoying summer camp, and gratefully our forestry and wildlife sciences students were able to return to the Solon and Martha Dixon Forestry Education Center to benefit from hands-on learning at summer practicum.

We have learned from COVID that being together, having the shared human experience of learning, and receiving in-person instruction is critical for both the young and old. Though the Alabama Extension Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources, or FWNRR, programs continued successfully in a virtual capacity, we are excited to have the FWNRR team return to service within our communities throughout Alabama, where they are most needed. In this issue, meet our team of specialists, regional agents and coordinators who are working hard to deliver a diverse spectrum of programs to improve the quality of life of our citizens.

I am also proud to report our faculty continue to be widely recognized for their significant research achievements. This summer Associate Professor Maria Soledad Peresin received a prestigious NSF career grant to address critical societal issues with new products from biomass. Clinton-McClure Professor Latif Kalin was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to perform research in Brazil and Regions Professor Brian Via and his postdoctoral fellow Munkaila Musah received top awards from the Forest Products Society for accomplishments within the wood engineering discipline.

As we move forward into the fall semester with in-person instruction and events, we are hopeful and eager to welcome our alumni and friends back to campus in celebration of the historic milestone of 75 Years of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences at Auburn University!

Best Regards,

Janaki R.R. Alavalapati, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences

Administration

Dean's Forum & Alumni Social

Thursday evenings
6-7 p.m. CT

Zoom links for each event are available at sfws.auburn.edu. For more information about the anniversary celebration, visit sfws.auburn.edu/sfws-75th-anniversary.

The School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences 75th anniversary celebrations will continue this fall with the virtual dean's forum and alumni socials beginning this October with the School of Forestry's first dean, Emmett Thompson.

Dr. Glenn Glover, alumnus and emeritus professor, will serve as moderator of the question-and-answer series. After the forum concludes, alumni will have the opportunity to socialize and reminisce about their time at Auburn within one of four virtual breakout rooms, grouped into 20-year graduation/enrollment periods – 1947-1967, 1968-1988, 1989-2009 and 2010-present.

The forum and social is open to faculty, staff, students and the school's alumni. The series will be hosted via Zoom and will be live streamed via the school's Facebook page at facebook.com/ausfws/live.

Mark your calendars to participate in one or all programs held on Thursday evenings from 6-7 p.m. CT.

October 28
Dr. Emmett Thompson

November 18
Dr. Richard Brinker

January 20, 2022
Dr. James Shepard

February 17, 2022
Dr. Janaki Alavalapati



Academics & Learning

Faculty and students recognized for outstanding achievement during open house

The School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences faculty and staff honored awardees for their outstanding academic performance and contributions during a spring awards celebration open house on April 14. Due to the pandemic, guest attendance was restricted to awardees and a few faculty members and staff. However, many of the students took the opportunity to write personal notes or recorded their words of appreciation to share with the generous donors who made the awards possible through their contributions to the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.



Dean Janaki Alavalapati on the left and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Scott Enebak on the far right are shown with Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist Adam Maggard, who received the Harold E. Christen Award for Service to Teaching.

Research & Discovery



Maria Soledad Peresin, assistant professor of forest biomaterials in the Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, has been selected for the prestigious National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development, or CAREER, program.

Prestigious NSF career grant to fund Peresin's research to address critical societal issues with new products from engineered biomass

Maria Soledad Peresin, assistant professor of forest biomaterials in the Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, has been selected for the prestigious National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development, or CAREER, program.

The CAREER program is a foundation-wide activity that offers the NSF's most prestigious awards in support of early career faculty who have the potential to serve as academic role models in research and education and to lead advances in the mission of their department or organization. Applicants must be untenured assistant professors at the time of application.

Funding for Peresin's research, which began in April and will last five years, is expected to total \$691,619.

Peresin — recently promoted to associate professor with tenure, effective this fall — aims to unlock the potential of certain components of plant or animal biomass to design engineered biomaterials. To do this, she will work to advance the fundamental understanding of naturally occurring systems to address critical societal issues, such as the removal of emerging contaminants from drinking water.

"I am delighted to be one of the 2021 NSF CAREER award recipients," Peresin said. "The proposal was a lot of work, but it was worth every bit of effort in terms of the doors that this grant opens to us. I certainly consider this achievement to be a reward to my entire research team, to whom I am very grateful. Without their hard work, resilience and professionalism, I would have not been able to establish this program."

At Auburn's Forestry Products Development Center, or FPDC, Peresin's multidisciplinary research team gathers expertise in chemistry, pharmacy, materials sciences, engineering and product development to stimulate ideas for new businesses in food, pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical sectors. The team achieves this through the development of novel value-added product development from biomass — including wood, annual crops, agro-forestry and sericulture, among others — focusing on surface modification of nanocellulose fibers for water remediation, macromolecules immobilization and developing composite materials using biobased polymers.

The project will focus on developing and using renewable, natural polymers — chemicals composed of the building blocks of smaller repeating molecules — to design efficient and sustainable absorbents, which are highly porous structures for the removal of contaminants such as antibiotics, analgesics and herbicides from water bodies. Natural polymer systems are inexpensive and could lead to more affordable filtration systems across the globe — increasing the economic impact of this research.

This program also provides her with an impactful platform for education and contributing to improved science literacy in Alabama. Peresin has established a successful mentoring program within Auburn University that involves internships and exchange programs with Tuskegee University and international institutions, such as the University of British Columbia and KU Leuven of Belgium for both undergraduate and graduate-level students.

Peresin is also a founding faculty member of the Sustainable Biomaterials and Packaging, or BIOP, Society at Auburn, which provides another forum for disseminating information, recruiting new students and informally educating others on the utilization of bio-based materials, including its use to address water quality issues.

"This award is a game changer in many aspects, not only for the prestige, but also because of the unique nature of this five-year funding," Peresin said. "This will allow me to focus on developing my research program in alignment with my education and outreach efforts toward increasing opportunities in STEM for underrepresented minorities."

Peresin has partnered with Professor Becky Barlow, the school's Alabama extension coordinator and the Harry E. Murphy Professor, to disseminate the outcomes of her work through outreach events such as the yearly ForestHER workshop, an educational program for female forest landowners. Additionally, she will work with Auburn High School teachers on developing specific modules to be included in advanced placement biology and environmental sciences classes, with the aim of making them available to the entire state of Alabama through the Alabama Science in Motion program.



Tian ranked among the world's most influential climate scientists

Within its release of the world's most influential climate scientists, the international news agency Reuters has named Hanqin Tian, professor in Auburn University's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, to its list of top scholars leading the study of climate change.

Tian, who serves as the Solon and Martha Dixon Endowed Professor and director of the International Center for Climate and Global Change Research, was ranked 118th out of 1,000 international scientists. Known as a preeminent scholar of global environmental change, Tian also leads Auburn's Climate, Human and Earth System Science (CHESS) Cluster, an interdisciplinary group of faculty working to advance solutions to persistent environmental challenges.

"Dr. Tian's contributions to the study of climate systems continue to advance solutions to many of the grand challenges facing our society, including protecting natural resources and developing environmentally sustainable solutions," said Auburn Provost Bill Hardgrave. "His exemplary record of research and scholarship certainly makes him one of the most influential scholars in the field."

Two of Tian's former graduate and postdoctoral fellows, Chaopun "Crystal" Lu and Wei Ren, also are included on the list.



Kalin receives Fulbright Scholarship

Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences Professor Latif Kalin has been selected to receive a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to perform research in Brazil.

Kalin, who holds the title of Alumni and Clinton-McClure Professor of Hydrology and serves as associate director of the school's Center for Environmental Studies at the Urban-Rural Interface,

will work at the Federal University of Santa Maria, or UFSM, as part of a project to quantify sediment load to the Salto Dam and to identify sediment hotspots in the Upper Uruguay River Basin.

The Salto Dam provides 44% of Uruguay's electricity but is threatened by the access sediment coming from the Uruguay River Basin, 73% of which is in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, where the host institute, UFSM, is located.

"Soil erosion and sediment transport are global problems, and tackling global problems, such as disease outbreaks, food and energy needs and environmental degradation, requires a holistic approach, thus learning from each other and knowing each other," Kalin said. "This opportunity will allow me to be a scientific and cultural ambassador of the U.S., transfer my knowledge gathered over the years working in the southeastern U.S. to southern Brazil, as well as learn their practices and their success and failure stories."



Via and Musah win top awards at Forest Products Society international conference

Regions Professor of Forest Products Brian Via and Munkaila Musah, a post-doctoral research fellow, within the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences won two major awards from the Forest Products Society, or FPS, at the organization's 2021 virtual international conference in June.

Via, who is also director of the Forest Products Development Center, received the Engineering Achievement Award, which recognizes accomplishments and innovations in the wood engineering discipline including structures, building codes, consensus standards, design procedures and education, as well as individuals who generate reproducible, innovative modalities in science and engineering education.

Musah, a post-doctoral research fellow at the Forest Products Development Center at SFWS, is the first place recipient of the FPS 2021 Wood Award, the organization's most prestigious award at the graduate-research level, rewarding groundbreaking original research on a wide range of topics in forest products. Musah's winning paper was "Durability of the Adhesive Bond in Cross Laminated Northern Hardwoods and Softwoods."

"Dr. Via and Dr. Musah are certainly deserving of these top awards from the Forest Products Society," said Janaki Alavalapati, dean of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. "Their dedication to the continuous research and advancement of this field puts a spotlight on the abundant opportunities that exist for students and researchers within the forest products and biomaterials industry."

School of Forestry & Wildlife Sciences

SFWS NEWS • Summer 2021

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The SFWS newsletter is distributed to alumni and friends of the school. Inquiries and suggestions concerning the newsletter should be directed to the school's Office of Communications and Marketing at the address below.

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Giving

Questions concerning the school's development program, including annual and corporate giving, planned gifts and estate planning should be directed to Heather Crozier, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences Building, 602 Duncan Drive, Auburn, AL 36849. Inquiries may also be made by email to vannhea@auburn.edu or by phone at 334-844-2791.



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Alabama Extension Empowering communities through science

The Smith-Lever Act in 1914 formally authorized what we know as cooperative extension, that is, presenting science-based information to the public to inspire action and positive changes for an improved quality of life. Founded on a “grassroots” approach, extension professionals often live and work in the same county or counties as the public they serve. This approach facilitates interaction with the public and provides an improved understanding of public need.

Today the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, or ACES, helps fulfill the land-grant outreach mission for both Alabama A&M and Auburn University by providing information on topics such as row crop farming, animal science and forage, human sciences, water resources, aquaculture and fisheries, food safety, horticulture, home grounds, forestry, wildlife, natural resources and extension needs in urban communities. Youth programs are also offered through 4-H camps and county or local clubs.

The ACES Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources, or FWNR, team helps address specific questions and concerns that citizens

of Alabama may have about managing and enjoying the state’s abundant natural resources. The FWNR team consists primarily of regional extension agents, or REAs, and extension specialists who work for ACES and may have an additional appointment or affiliation with either Alabama A&M University or Auburn University.

Regional extension agents work in one of seven geographic areas across Alabama and typically are housed in a county extension office. Forestry, wildlife and natural resources REAs assist the public and land management professionals with questions about forestry, wildlife, ponds, invasive species and other natural resource management topics. They also organize local workshops, field days and write extension and popular press articles.

Extension specialists have state-wide responsibilities and may be housed within an academic unit on Alabama A&M’s or Auburn’s campuses. A primary responsibility of specialists is to communicate research results to natural resource professionals and the public through extension publications, workshops, social media posts and other

outlets. Specialists support the work of REAs through workshops, answering questions over the phone, via email, or through other forms of written communication. Specialists and REAs may also work together to write science-based publications.

The FWNR extension team offers continuing education training to natural resource professionals and workshops for landowners who want to learn more about managing their land. They also partner with other state and federal agencies, as well as numerous non-governmental organizations and county forestry planning committees, to plan and host programs and field days.

In 2020, the number of online workshops and educational videos Alabama Extension hosted expanded to help offset the loss of face-to-face workshops and field days that were planned but canceled or postponed due to COVID-19. One of the unexpected benefits of this shift to the online platform was that extension greatly improved its ability to meet the needs of those who cannot attend a face-to-face workshop or wish to learn at home.

The new FWNR team newsletter, Backyard to the Back 40, was also new in 2020. It is produced quarterly and includes contributions from REAs and specialists. Additionally, FWNR plans to offer a mix of online and in-person workshops in 2021. Some of the topics they will cover in workshops and publications include the following:

- Community forestry, including tree risk assessment, chainsaw safety, arborist education and beekeeping
- Forest management, professional logging manager, forest business resources and alternative income generation
- Identification and control of invasive plants, animals and insects
- Water quality and farm pond management
- Wildlife management techniques for game and non-game species, including wildlife damage control

To find a FWNR team member near you, and for a complete list of upcoming workshops and webinars, visit aces.edu.

Forestry, Wildlife & Natural Resources Regional Extension Agent Map



Northwest Set
(Vacant)

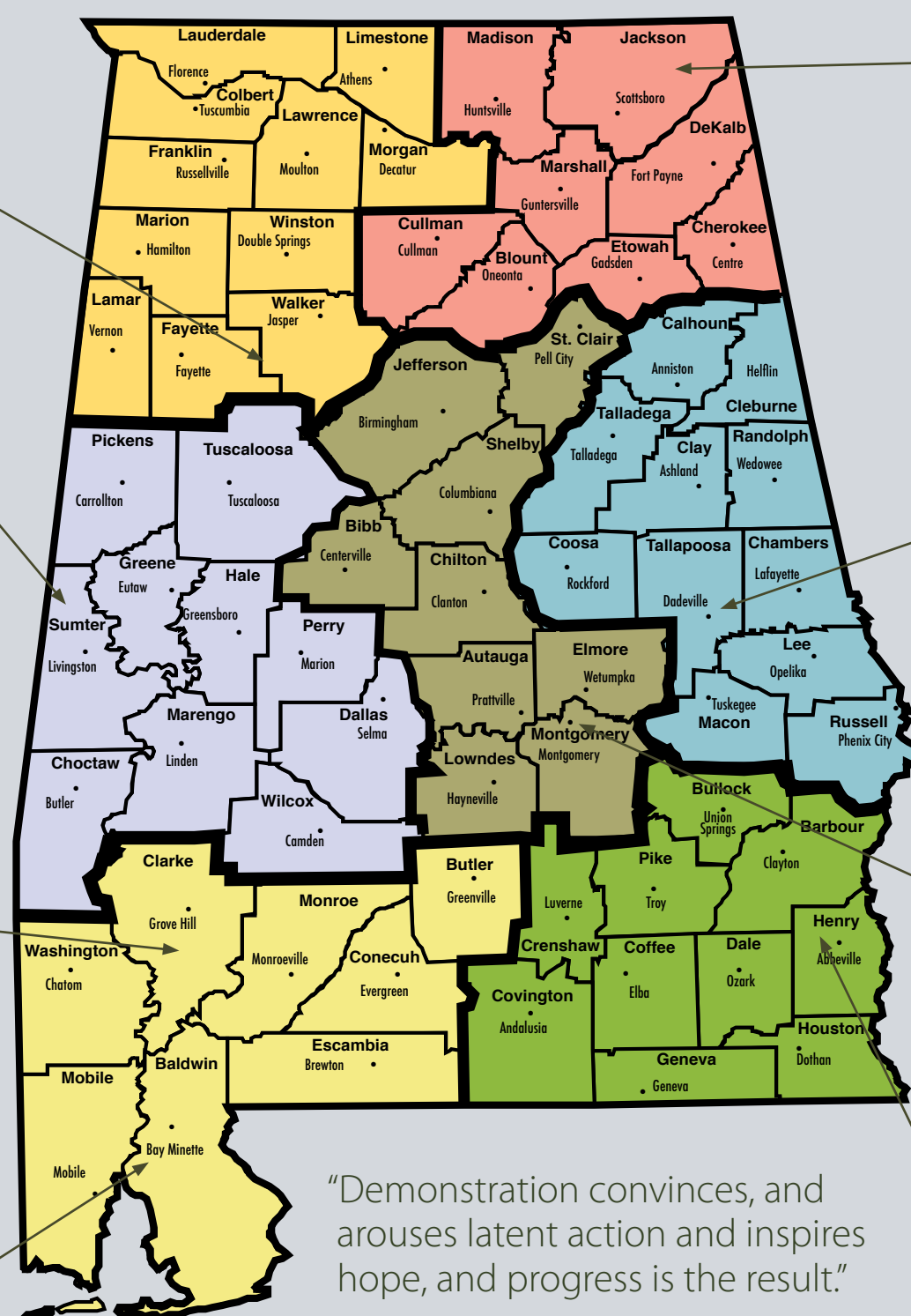
West Central Set
(Vacant)



William “Jack” Rowe
(AL-TOM Community Forestry REA)



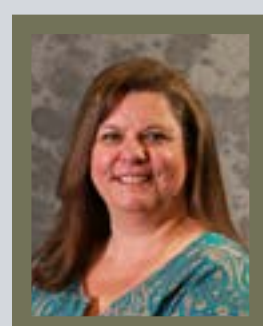
SOUTHWEST SET
James “Ryan” Mitchell



NORTHEAST SET
Norm Haley



EAST CENTRAL SET
Drew Metzler



CENTRAL SET
Lynn Dickinson



SOUTHEAST SET
Bence Carter

“Demonstration convinces, and arouses latent action and inspires hope, and progress is the result.”

– Smith-Lever Act of 1914; hearings, report, and debate

Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources Specialists and Staff



Wesley Anderson
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND EXTENSION SPECIALIST

Much of Anderson’s research and extension efforts have been directed at non-game wildlife conservation, particularly herpetofauna, and wildlife damage management. His extension program will focus on backyard wildlife damage management, invasive wildlife control and non-game conservation. In addition, he is working to expand the Alabama Master Naturalist program and offer it online for the first time. He will also teach courses on human-wildlife conflicts and wildlife conservation history and law at Auburn. Anderson received a bachelor’s degree in biology from Davidson College, a master’s degree in wildlife, aquatic, and wildland science and management from Texas Tech University, and a doctorate in wildlife ecology and conservation from the University of Florida.



Becky Barlow
HARRY MURPHY PROFESSOR OF FOREST MEASUREMENTS & MANAGEMENT AND EXTENSION COORDINATOR

Barlow’s current extension efforts focus on educational opportunities to help forest landowners manage for multiple uses including traditional forest management, silvopasture, non-timber forest products and forest aesthetics. She is a registered forester in Mississippi and Alabama and teaches courses in forest measurements and land management at Auburn. She is currently the FWNR team coordinator and was also recently named the interim associate dean for extension/assistant director for agriculture, forestry, wildlife and natural resource extension programs. Barlow received a bachelor’s degree in landscape architecture and master’s and doctorate degrees in forestry from Mississippi State University.



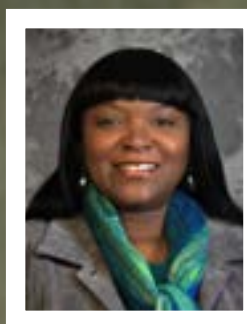
Beau Brodbeck
EXTENSION SPECIALIST IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY AND ARBORICULTURE AND AN AFFILIATE FACULTY IN THE SFWS

Brodbeck’s educational outreach programs and publications serve the forestry and urban forestry communities in Alabama. Over the past 20 years he has worked in various facets of forest and urban forest management. He began his career as a forestry consultant before transitioning to become an urban forestry specialist at Auburn University managing Alabama’s hurricane recovery program in the aftermath of Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina. His research has focused on human dimensions of urban forest management as well as migrant labor within the forest industry. He holds a Ph.D. in forestry from Auburn University and is both an Alabama Registered Forester and ISA Certified Arborist. Brodbeck currently serves in various leadership positions, including as trustee at Tree Fund, past president of the International Society of Arboriculture Southern Chapter, Alabama Forestry Council and the Alabama Urban Forestry Association.



Richard Cristan
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF FOREST OPERATIONS AND EXTENSION SPECIALIST

Cristan’s extension program area is forest operations where he primarily facilitates the Alabama Professional Logging Manager, or PLM, trainings along with conducting continuing education workshops for loggers and foresters. While he primarily works with forestry professionals, he also helps landowners with questions relating to timber harvesting, forestry best management practices for water quality protection, site preparation, competition control and forestry herbicides. He also teaches courses in forest operations, urban forestry and forest surveying. Cristan received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Tennessee in forestry with concentrations in forest resource management and forest biometrics, respectively, and his doctorate from Virginia Tech in forestry with concentration in forest operations and water quality. Richard is currently the treasurer for the Southeastern Society of American Foresters and is part of the Alabama Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation committee and Logger Education and Inconsistent Practices subcommittee.



Karnita Garner
EXTENSION ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIALIST WITH ACES IN THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE LIFE AND NATURAL SCIENCES (CALNS) AT ALABAMA A&M UNIVERSITY (AAMU)

Garner’s extension interests include advancing outreach efforts that increase the adoption of recommended environmental best management practices. In addition, her research efforts involve assessing the impact of traditional, and new and emerging contaminants on aquatic ecosystems. She currently serves as the team leader for the Urban Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources Management team at AAMU and provides statewide leadership over three extension programs. Garner received her bachelor’s degree in environmental science and master’s and doctorate degrees in plant and soil science. She is a former NASA EPSCoR Fellow and Environmental Protection Agency Star Fellow. She is also the 2016 recipient of the USDA-NIFA Regional Award for Excellence in Extension.



Kelly W. D. Knowles
OUTREACH PROGRAMS ADMINISTRATOR

Knowles promotes and organizes the FWNR team efforts through website, social media and newsletter coordination and assists with report preparation and client relationship management. Additionally, Knowles provides internal graphic design support for the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. During her tenure at Auburn, she has served on many ACES, university and Alabama Natural Resources Council committees. Knowles received a bachelor’s of fine arts degree in graphic design from Auburn University.



Nancy Loewenstein
EXTENSION SPECIALIST OF DENDROLOGY

Loewenstein focuses her efforts on the identification, ecology and control of

invasive plants, and on the identification of trees and other native plants. She also teaches dendrology and co-teaches a new class on invasion ecology. Loewenstein serves on the Alabama Project Learning Tree steering committee and the Alabama Cogongrass Task Force. She is also the executive director of the Alabama Invasive Plant Council and manages the Alabama Extension Invasive Plant Page Facebook page. Loewenstein received her bachelor’s degree in forest management from Auburn University, a master’s degree in forest biology from Virginia Tech and her doctorate in physiological ecology from the University of Missouri.



Adam O. Maggard
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF FOREST SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT AND EXTENSION SPECIALIST

Maggard specializes in financial and economic aspects of forest management and planning, optimizing the use of forest resources, multiple use management and sustainability, productivity of managed forest stands, business planning and management of timber and non-timber forest products. In addition, he also teaches courses in forest management, business management for forest products and leadership. Recently, he was elected president-elect of the Alabama chapter of the Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals. Maggard received a bachelor’s degree in forest resources and conservation and a master’s degree in business management from the University of Florida, and master’s and doctorate degrees in natural resource ecology and management from Oklahoma State University.



Mark D. Smith
W. KELLY MOSLEY ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSOR OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND EXTENSION SPECIALIST

Smith’s research and extension efforts focus primarily on wild pig damage management. He has been an active member of The Wildlife Society, or TWS, since 1992 and has held numerous positions at the student, state, southeastern and national levels of TWS. He was recognized as a TWS Fellow in 2018 and currently serves as chair of the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group. Smith received a bachelor’s degree in fisheries and wildlife from Michigan State University and earned a master’s degree in wildlife sciences and a doctorate in forest resources from Mississippi State University.

Several SFWS alumni honored by USFWS for efforts to protect Red Hills salamander

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently honored the Red Hills salamander habitat purchase team — a group that includes several graduates of the Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, or SFWS —with a Regional Director’s Honor Award for Conservation Partners. The team is working to conserve the Red Hills salamander, a unique, threatened amphibian endemic to a specific region of Alabama, found nowhere else in the world.

An additional award for Conservation Partners was presented to Chuck Sykes, the director of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fish, or WWF, a division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, or ACDNR. Sykes, a 1992 SFWS wildlife biology graduate, was honored for the key role he played on this team as well as his other career accomplishments.

The state of Alabama recently purchased two tracts totaling 4,911 acres of Red Hills salamander habitat in Monroe County, an acquisition made possible by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or USFWS, which awarded the ADCNR nearly \$9 million in land conservation grants. This purchase is the largest land deal authorized and put together under the Endangered Species Act’s Section 6 program.

On the team, Sykes was joined by fellow SFWS alumni Ericha Nix ’02, a wildlife biologist with WWF’s Nongame Wildlife Program; Keith Gauldin ’92, chief of the Wildlife Section of the Alabama division of WWF; Jeremy Doss ’01, acting chief enforcement officer for the state lands division; and Andrew Nix ’93, who recently retired as forester with the WWF’s wildlife section. Rounding out the team are state lands Director Patti Powell-McCurdy and Doug Deaton, an operation support specialist with WWF’s wildlife section.

The team’s main goal is to acquire lands in the Red Hills region to protect the phaeognathus hubrichti, better known as the Red Hills salamander, or RHS — and ultimately “de-list” it as a threatened species. In 2020 and 2021, the ADCNR was awarded more than \$11 million from USFWS grants to conserve the species, said team member Nix.

“RHS was federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species act 45 years ago, and little progress had been made toward range-wide recovery of the species until now,” Nix said.

Working with conservation partners and willing land sellers, the ADCNR purchased



Chuck Sykes, director of ADCNR’s Wildlife and Freshwater Fish, or WFF, Division, speaks at an event celebrating the acquisition of additional critical Red Hills salamander habitat in 2020. Sykes, along with the ADCNR’s Red Hills salamander habitat purchase team, were recently honored with a USFWS Regional Director’s award for their work to conserve Red Hills salamander habitat in Monroe County, Alabama. Photo by Kenny Johnson, ADCNR.

more than 6,600 acres for RHS conservation, Nix added. Combined with the Red Hills Complex, the acquired land now totals over 11,000 acres that permanently protect habitat for the RHS and other imperiled species, while also providing public access for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting.

The RHS was discovered in Butler County in 1960. The dark, large, lungless amphibian is unique not only because of its terrestrial burrowing, but for its extremely narrow global range.

Land conversion is ongoing in the Red Hills region, greatly reducing upland hardwood forest habitat, Nix said. And the past dozen years have brought an upsurge in forestland ownership changes, part of a broader trend caused by the restructuring of the timber industry in the U.S.

Nix said securing large tracts of land for RHS is a great success for protection of the species, but public and private land acquisition efforts alone will not conserve the RHS. The team also provides outreach and education efforts, technical assistance and financial incentives to the private landowners — all key components of recovery efforts to protect RHS and other natural resources.

“While we continue to work to protect the species, we are also encouraged by

“While we continue to work to protect the species, we are also encouraged by the cooperation and partnerships that allowed for the successful protection of such an important region in Alabama that will be beneficial for all species while also providing great outdoor recreation opportunities for the public.”

- Chuck Sykes

the cooperation and partnerships that allowed for the successful protection of such an important region in Alabama that will be beneficial for all species while also providing great outdoor recreation opportunities for the public,” Nix said.

To recognize the key role Sykes plays on the RHS purchase team — as well as his years-long contributions to conservation efforts in Alabama and throughout the Southeast — the USFWS honored him with an individual Honor Award for Conservation Partners.

Chris Blankenship, ADCNR commissioner, said Sykes’ work is well deserved.

“Chuck is a tireless advocate of improving hunting and fishing opportunities and has a true passion for proper management of our vast fish and game resources,” Blankenship

teen, she filled her summers working for the Youth Conservation Corp in Anniston, Alabama, prepping tents on the national forest sites, blazing and cutting part of the Pinhoti Trail and conducting timber stand improvement.”

Smith said Watson followed in the footsteps of her father, a 1950 Auburn University engineering graduate, when it came time to choose a college.

True to her early roots, Watson has been active in public and private school outreach in papermaking, forest products and forestry careers, and served as a leader of the Boy Scouts of America, where she was also a merit badge counselor, trained scouts for the wood badge and served on staff.

“As a timber buyer for Mead Coated Board in the 1990s and now as a senior procurement forester for WestRock, she maintains that confidence and success, always bringing organization, attention to detail and a collaborative spirt to the workplace.”



Watson and her husband, William, live in Georgia, close to their son Will and his wife, Christen, and granddaughter Ansley, who was born in 2020.

Parent of SFWS student contributes leadership gift in honor of Professor Becky Barlow

A recent parent gift to the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences has been made in honor of a professor who made a substantial impact on her son’s education.

Sandi Ponce, mother of former forestry student Drew Ponce, said the recent leadership gift supports the outreach efforts of extension coordinator and Harry E. Murphy Professor Becky Barlow.

“When our son decided to transfer from Auburn University to a college out west that has an emphasis on forestry conservation and fire, we knew we wanted to give to Dr. Barlow as a token of appreciation,” Ponce said. “Dr. Barlow’s passion for the field of forestry and her students is evident. Our son is dyslexic and often needed someone to explain a concept to him a second time, or simply present a concept in a different way.

“Dr. Barlow met with him during office hours and beyond. She was a constant source of encouragement during challenging times,” she said. “It is clear Dr. Barlow not only desires to

“Dr. Barlow’s efforts to reach her students in an individual manner, with sights on their future in their career field, is admirable, as shown by the Ponce family’s gift in her honor. This gift highlights how our school’s faculty are going above and beyond to support students so that they can find success in their academic and professional lives.”

- Dean Alavalapati

equip students with skills related to forestry, but also sacrifices her own time to help them to succeed. Dr. Barlow is a professor, mentor, friend and inspiration. She has made an indelible mark on our family, and for that we are grateful.”

Barlow said a commitment to helping students — whatever their needs — is a crucial part of her job.

“Supporting students during their time at Auburn is a priority for me, and I feel like it is our responsibility as faculty,” Barlow said. “When teaching, I use learning strategies acquired during my prior experience as an educational coach in professional forestry settings and as a trained teacher of children and youth with learning disabilities. These skills and techniques

are proven to also work well when teaching all students in a college classroom setting.”

Using her experience as a basis, Barlow has three goals when it comes to teaching and learning in the classroom – involve students in real-world application of what is taught, engage students through active learning and improve overall student communication skills by integrating writing and public speaking assignments into coursework.

“The first year I taught, it struck me that students of today will be professionals in our field in just a few years! So, I try to get to know them and treat them with respect. “

School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences Dean Janaki Alavalapati said the Ponce family’s gift reflects Barlow’s dedication to students in



and out of the classroom, a commitment that resonates throughout the school.

“Dr. Barlow’s efforts to reach her students in an individual manner, with sights on their future in their career field, is admirable, as shown by the Ponce family’s gift in her honor,” Alavalapati said. “This gift highlights how our school’s faculty are going above and beyond to support students so that they can find success in their academic and professional lives.”

Ducks Unlimited creates Fund for Excellence in memory of member, Auburn alum Garrett Hood

Ducks Unlimited has established a Fund for Excellence at the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences in the name of the late Garrett Hood, an Auburn University alumnus who was an avid member of the wildlife conservation organization.

Garrett, the son of Joan Dudley Hood and Kenneth G. Hood of Auburn, lost his life in 2019 at age 23.

In joining Ducks Unlimited, Garrett, who was born and raised in the Auburn area, followed in the footsteps of his father, an Auburn graduate, Ducks Unlimited member and longtime supporter of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. Garrett was introduced to Ducks Unlimited when he began attending banquets with his father as a child.

That sparked a passion for conservation that went hand in hand with his love of hunting excursions in which companionship meant more to him than the success of the hunt, according to those who knew him, including Senior Director of Development Shawn Battison of the Alabama/Florida/Georgia region of Ducks Unlimited.

“I had the pleasure of meeting Garrett many years ago at an Auburn Ducks Unlimited event and was given the opportunity to get to know him through his efforts as a volunteer,” Battison said. “He was truly an asset to Ducks Unlimited and an even better human being. I can’t think of a more fitting way to remember Garrett than by providing a scholarship in his name to the next generation of conservationists.”

Rachel Shelton, chair of the Auburn chapter of Ducks Unlimited, said Garret was known for his constant giving to the organization and his thinking out of the box to ensure the success of the local Ducks Unlimited chapter.

“Garrett had many plans for his life, and those plans always included Ducks Unlimited and Auburn University,” Shelton said. “The purpose of this scholarship is to ensure those plans and his legacy of a giving spirit continue.”



This latest Fund for Excellence continues a tradition of support from the organization, said Heather Crozier, director of development at the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.

“Ducks Unlimited has such an enormous connection with the school, as well as a long history of generous giving,” Crozier said. “This gift, in memory of a young man who was passionate about both Ducks Unlimited and Auburn University, is especially poignant.”

“Garrett had many plans for his life, and those plans always included Ducks Unlimited and Auburn University. The purpose of this scholarship is to ensure those plans and his legacy of a giving spirit continue.”

- Rachel Shelton

SPOTLIGHT on alumni

Written by Avy Elmore



ASHLEY SMITH '95

Ashley Smith joined the Alabama Forestry Association in 2013 as director of education programs. She is responsible for education programs conducted by AFA, including Project Learning Tree, Teachers Conservation Workshop, Professional Logging Manager training, continuing education workshops and online programs. In addition, Smith serves as staff liaison to the SFI state implementation committee, or SIC, and is responsible for all SIC committees and programs.

Smith has 20 years of experience in forestry serving most recently as assistant director of Trees Columbus, a non-profit organization focused on planting and protecting urban trees in Columbus, Georgia. Earlier in her career, she worked with WestRock (at the time Mead Coated Board) in communications and public affairs roles as well as wood procurement for the Mahrt Mill. Throughout her career she has been active in voluntary roles, including serving as a Russell County soil and water conservation district supervisor since 2006.

Smith earned a bachelor's degree in forestry operations from Auburn University and currently holds the designation of registered forester in Alabama.

Why did you choose to attend Auburn?
Because I grew up in a rural area as part of a farming family, I wanted a future career working in natural resources. Between a daddy who farmed and parents who grew trees on family forestland, I realized from an early age many natural resources were sustainable with proper management. As a land grant university with a long tradition of providing outstanding education in such fields, Auburn offered everything I wanted in a college experience.

What led you to choose your major?
When I started Auburn, I declared horticulture as my major. I eventually changed to agriculture journalism and later considered agriculture-science education as another path. With so many options in areas that I enjoyed, choosing a lifelong career path as a college student seemed very difficult! After taking the class forestry for the small woodland owner, I knew forestry was the perfect match for me!

How did SFWS prepare you for your career?
I learned the forestry fundamentals at summer practicum and added to that knowledge with on-campus classes. Field trips to mills and forests throughout the region greatly contributed to my understanding of forestry. The school encouraged summer internships, assisting with resumes and bringing companies to campus for interviews. The back-to-school picnics and monthly Forestry Club meetings provided opportunities to get to know other forestry students. In hindsight, I quickly realized after college what a close-knit community forestry really is. The forestry friendships made in college last a lifetime. With so many learning opportunities and a supportive group of professors and students, the school prepared me

well for a lifelong career in forestry.

What is your current role at the Alabama Forestry Association?
Working at the Alabama Forestry Association, or AFA, provides the opportunity to interact with all parts of Alabama's forestry community, from loggers to landowners, foresters to wildlife biologists and other natural resource professionals. The official title states "education program director," which currently translates to coordinating the state's sustainable forestry initiative implementation committee, Alabama Professional Logging Manager program, Alabama Project Learning Tree, Alabama Teachers Conservation Workshop, Alabama Forestry Young Leaders, AFA online education programs and other related activities. The title matters little; what matters most is why. Everything I do, and really everything done at AFA, promotes Alabama's forest community so that our industry remains strong. We need Alabama's forests for both the economic and environmental benefits. Working at AFA allows me to share the many benefits of forests with others. I love my job!

Why is staying involved and in touch with SFWS valuable to you?
Staying involved with SFWS allows me to stay up to date on the latest forestry trends, information and research. I am able to connect with friends from my time at Auburn while also making new ones. I enjoy meeting the students and learning more about them before they enter the workforce.

What is your favorite memory from your time at SFWS; was there a professor or faculty member who had a great influence/impact on you during your time in the school?

Although summer practicum seemed never-ending, I look back at that time and place it as an important part of my college experience. So many collective memories from camp – boundary line recovery, the blue hole, pitcher plant bogs and cypress swamps to name a few. Our fall dendrology field trip/camping experience in Tennessee and North Carolina proved meaningful as well. We hiked beautiful mountain trails and saw the giant poplars at the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest; it was an amazing forest to see and experience – a must do for tree people! In my time as a student, Auburn professors left a great impact, and their influence has stuck with me to this day.

What is your favorite thing about being an SFWS alum?
I love being able to say that I am part of Auburn forestry alumni! Perhaps because of the Auburn Creed and our unique appreciation for and understanding of forests as renewable natural resources, Auburn forestry alumni maintain a longstanding tradition of being good people and hardworking professionals.

Do you have any advice for students entering the work force right now?
As an Auburn SFWS alum, get ready to begin your real-world education experience! Enjoy meeting the many forestry and natural resource professionals who make Alabama's forest industry so strong. All the various pieces and parts work together to create the economic and environmental natural resource balancing act. It all matters – the jobs, the products, the trees, the animals, the water, the soil, etc. Working together, we can make it ALL work for future generations.



WILLIAM GREEN '14

William Green, Jr. is the director for the Alabama Farmers Federation's forestry and wildlife commodity divisions in Montgomery, Alabama. Additionally, he also serves as the executive director for the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association. Since joining the federation's staff in 2016, Green has assisted landowners across the state by working with state and federal agencies, private industry, universities and other NGOs to increase funding available to manage invasive species, promote practical research and sustainable forest management and provide quality educational materials.

Green earned a bachelor's degree in wildlife sciences from Auburn University.

Why did you choose to attend Auburn?
To be honest, I'm not sure I had the choice. I'm a third-generation Auburn graduate – both grandfathers, my father and my sister all graduated from Auburn. I'm from Montgomery County and grew up coming to Auburn for football and basketball games so I knew early on I wanted to come here.

What led you to choose your major?
I've always loved being outside and working with animals, but it took me a while to find the obvious choice in wildlife sciences. My grandfather had a lengthy career as a large animal veterinarian, and I had every intention of following in his footsteps. I originally started out in the zoology program across campus, but after my freshman year I decided that I wanted to go a different route. I spent a single semester in building science, but knew quickly that I wasn't meant to be a contractor, so I transferred out with no real plan. I walked around with my official transcript in my backpack for about two weeks trying to figure out what I wanted to do. By total chance, I ended up at SFWS after dropping a friend off for class. I followed him in and spent some time walking around the building, talking to current students and transferred in that day. Even though it took me a while to find it, it was a great fit.

How did SFWS prepare you for your career?
The best thing the school gave me was a sense of direction. I was so unsure of what I wanted to do for so long that when I finally found a home in SFWS everything

clicked. Growing up in a rural area, I was used to hunting, but Auburn helped expose me to several different aspects of wildlife science that totally changed my perspective on what a career could look like. The faculty really helped cultivate my interests and encouraged me to take some chances that I may not have taken otherwise.

What is your current role at the Alabama Farmers Federation?
I am a commodity director for the Alabama Farmers Federation overseeing our forestry and wildlife divisions as well as serving as the executive director for the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association. I serve as a voice for our members working with state and federal agencies, Auburn, Extension, policy makers and other stakeholders. That can cover a broad range – whether it is working with USDA to increase funding to remove wild pigs, helping landowners get the information they need to better manage their property or working with industry recruiters to find new opportunities to expand the forest products market here in Alabama.

Why is staying involved and in touch with SFWS valuable to you?
I love what I do and know I wouldn't have gotten here without the school and several alumni who were incredibly generous with their time and resources. I hope by staying involved I can have the same impact to current students that our alumni had on me.

What is your favorite memory from your time at SFWS; was there a professor or faculty member who had a great influence/impact on you during your time in the school?

Through a scholarship, I had a great opportunity to spend some time traveling to McIntosh, Alabama and visit with Mr. Boykin, the donor. Besides getting to know the other recipients and some of the professors who went there, we spent a full day talking with the family and learning about him and his farm. It was a wonderful day hearing from somebody with a lifetime of experience, and I still smile thinking about some of the conversations with Mr. Boykin.

What is your favorite thing about being an SFWS alum?
I'm very proud to be an Auburn alum, specifically from the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. When compared to some of the other colleges on campus, we may be small, but I believe we've had a significant impact. There are so many great people who have come before and after me, and I'm fortunate to work with a lot of them across the state. I'm humbled to be a part of that tradition.

Do you have any advice for students entering the work force right now?
Don't be afraid to make mistakes — they're unavoidable. Make your choice and learn from the results. Also, it can be tempting to look around at what your classmates are doing and try to compare yourself to them. Comparing your situation to somebody else's will drive you crazy – stay in your lane and focus on your own career.