

College of Forestry, Wildlife & Environment



FEATURE STORY

Solon Dixon Center to build new dormitory

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CFWE NEWS • Fall/Winter 2026

Working with Nature for Society's Well-Being

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THE DEAN



This year has been marked by meaningful progress across the college, reflecting our commitment to excellence in leadership, learning, research and service. We are proud to recognize outstanding faculty achievements, including Jim Noles being honored with the Friend of Cumberland Award from Samford University; Lori Eckhardt being named a prestigious Sigma Xi Fellow; and Richard Cristan being awarded the college's Regions Bank Endowed Professorship. These honors underscore the dedication and impact of our faculty.

Advancing academic innovation and student success remains a top priority. Adam Maggard was appointed associate dean for academic affairs, strengthening leadership across our academic programs. In response to workforce needs and industry growth, the college established a new parks and recreation degree option, expanding career pathways for students. We also launched Auburn's first online graduate certificate in environmental law, reinforcing our commitment to flexibility, access and relevance.

Our research enterprise continues to address critical global challenges. Latif Kalin was named associate dean for research and graduate programs, providing strategic leadership for research growth and graduate education. Faculty research gained international attention as Zutao Ouyang, in collaboration with Stanford researchers, led a groundbreaking study highlighting the importance of reducing hydrogen leakage and methane emissions to ensure the long-term sustainability of a global hydrogen economy.

Outreach and engagement remain central to our land-grant mission. Eve Brantley's appointment as director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System signals a new era for Extension across the state. We were also inspired by volunteers and retired faculty who helped replace the Azalea Place landmark bridge at the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center, supported by a generous gift from the Frank Allen and Louise K. Turner Foundation.

Looking ahead, the Solon Dixon Center announced plans to construct a new 64-bed dormitory, supported by the Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation and Auburn alumni Ken and Barby Oser, with \$3 million still to be raised. We also celebrate the generosity of our alumni and friends through new scholarships, naming investments at Crooked Oaks and the addition of two-time Auburn alum Elizabeth Fritsch to our development team.

As we look ahead, I am confident the college will continue to lead with purpose, innovation and service—advancing Auburn's land-grant mission while preparing the next generation of leaders to make a meaningful difference in Alabama and beyond.

War Eagle!

Janaki R. R. Alavalapati
Emmett F. Thompson Dean

Administration

Noles honored with Friend of Cumberland Award from Samford University

by Cole Sikes



Auburn University faculty member Jim Noles has been recognized for his support to the Cumberland School of Law at Samford University with the conferral of the 2025 Friend of Cumberland Award.

As part of the law school's Distinguished Alumni Awards, the Friend of Cumberland Award is "given to a friend, although not a graduate, who has contributed time and resources to enhance the quality of the law school and the educational experience of the students." Noles was nominated and awarded this honor in fall 2025.

Previously as a private law practitioner of more than 25 years, today Noles provides his expertise to Auburn students from both law and non-law backgrounds as a professor of practice in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE). At the CFWE, he is pioneering the new undergraduate minor in environmental law and teaching courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

His relationship with the Cumberland School of Law dates to his arrival in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1997, where he worked with his firm's recruiting programs and hiring committee which gave him ample opportunity to build connections with law students and, later, mentor their studies and career aspirations. He has also served on the Alabama State Bar's Environmental Law Section's executive committee, developing the section's new scholarship program and advocating for young legal scholars to discover opportunities in environmental law careers.

Through his sustained engagement with the Cumberland School of Law, Noles has helped strengthen the bridge between legal education and applied environmental practice. By advising students, supporting scholarship initiatives and encouraging interdisciplinary perspectives, he has contributed to preparing the next generation of legal professionals to navigate complex environmental and natural resource challenges. This commitment to mentorship and service reflects the same student-centered approach he brings to his work at the CFWE.



Jim Noles, Professor of Practice, Environmental Law

"When I was considering law school, and when I was in law school, I was blessed to have a number of attorneys and older law students gift me with counsel and advice," Noles said. "I'm just trying to pay it forward in whatever context I can."

Noles is excited to add another component to the CFWE's environmental law offerings. A new graduate certificate in environmental law is now available to students who have a passion for the laws and policies that protect many of the country's natural resources.

"This well-deserved recognition demonstrates that Mr. Noles service has not gone unnoticed by his peers in legal academia," said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE.

"We are proud that he will lend his legal expertise to provide the highest quality education for our students within the college's new environmental law programs."

– Dean Alavalapati

Two-time Auburn alum and former National Guard medic joins CFWE development team

by Blair Milford

The Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) is pleased to welcome Elizabeth Fritsch, a dedicated Auburn alumna whose passion for environmental stewardship and public service led her to join the college's development team. With deep, personal ties to Alabama's natural resources and a strong background in fundraising, Fritsch brings both experience and heart to her role supporting the CFWE's mission.

Fritsch is a two-time Auburn graduate, earning her bachelor's degree in political science and her master's degree in public administration with a focus on nonprofit management. Her passion for public service led her to serve six years in the Alabama National Guard as a medic while a student. Fritsch also worked as a student employee in Auburn's Annual Giving Office and Office of Gift Planning, where she discovered her passion for fundraising and advancement work.

"I am excited to join the CFWE because of the environmental and community work we do," Fritsch said.

"While every college at Auburn does great work, I was especially impressed by the land management services the CFWE offers to the citizens of Alabama. Coming from a rural area, the economic development and land management resources the CFWE and Alabama Extension provide are especially important to me and my community."

– Elizabeth Fritsch

After working in the Office of Gift Planning, Fritsch knew that fundraising for Auburn was her calling. Growing up in Andalusia, Alabama, where forestry and agriculture were central to everyday life, she believed the CFWE's work and involvement aligned closely with her background and values. She also recognized that the college's alumni and donor community reflected the people she grew up around. Her military experience, which included spending significant time outdoors, further strengthened her appreciation for the environment and those who care for it.

In her development role, Fritsch hopes to support faculty, staff, students and researchers by expanding philanthropic partnerships. Her main focus is attracting private donors, corporations and foundations that have not previously been affiliated with the college, helping to connect more people to the important work taking place across the CFWE and the state.

Fritsch is especially excited to engage Auburn and CFWE alumni and friends with some of the college's most impactful programs and properties, including the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center (KPNC), Crooked Oaks and newer academic programs, such as the Parks and Recreation Management major.

"The KPNC is such a special place enjoyed by many in the community," Fritsch said. "Crooked Oaks is a legacy property, and I am excited to share that with more people. The Parks and Recreation Management major is also something I consider 'uniquely Auburn,' so I am excited about promoting and fundraising anything to highlight how special Auburn and the CFWE are."



Elizabeth Fritsch, Development Officer

Fritsch is proud to serve the CFWE and its friends as she works to forge new connections that will advance the college's mission. Through her dedication to environmental sustainability, community engagement and philanthropy, she is honored to help support the faculty, students and alumni who work every day to preserve the CFWE and the state's natural resources.

Cristan awarded Regions Bank endowed professorship

by Blair Milford

Richard Cristan has been awarded the Regions Bank Endowed Professorship in Forest Operations. An associate professor of forest operations in the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) and Alabama Extension specialist in forest operations and timber harvesting, Cristan is recognized statewide and nationally for his expertise. Specializing in forest operations, forestry best management practices (BMPs), site preparation and forest management, Cristan provides education and training to forest landowners, loggers and foresters across Alabama and the country.

The Regions Bank Endowed Professorships represent a partnership between Regions Financial Corporation and Auburn to strengthen the future of Alabama's forest industry through high-quality research and education in the CFWE. This professorship is granted in support of exceptional faculty and enhances the college's programs in forest operations, utilization, management and economics.

"I am honored to be awarded the Regions Bank Endowed Professorship in Forest Operations," said Cristan. "My Extension programming has been centered around the forest industry where I help facilitate the Alabama Professional Logging

Manager (PLM) trainings along with hosting and presenting at continuing forestry education (CFE) workshops for Alabama Registered Foresters and loggers," said Cristan.

Regions Financial Corporation invests in the community to support and advance education that prepares young people for future success. As a major owner and manager of forestland in Alabama, Regions has a vested interest in supporting long-term growth and innovation within the forestry sector. Its partnership with Auburn ensures continued development through robust research, industry collaboration and workforce training within the CFWE.

"In the future, I plan to keep expanding my impact within forest operations by building upon my existing area of emphasis with the forest industry and making sure our CFWE students have the knowledge and expertise they need in forest operations."

– Richard Cristan

Janaki Alavalapati, the CFWE Emmett F. Thompson Dean, shares his congratulations and support for Cristan's selection. "Dr. Cristan's expertise in forest operations and his commitment to Extension education

directly embodies the CFWE's dedication to research, industry collaboration and workforce training," said Alavalapati. "This endowed professorship recognizes his contributions to supporting Alabama's forest industry and strengthening the college's academic programs."

Cristan's appointment is effective immediately and he looks forward to furthering the college's commitment to faculty excellence and leading advancements in sustainable forest operations that support Alabama's working forests and the state's vital natural resource economy.



Richard Cristan, Extension Specialist & Regions Bank Endowed Associate Professor, Forest Operations

College of Forestry, Wildlife & Environment

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

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Giving

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



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Alabama Treasure Forest Scholarship



The College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment held its annual Evening of Gratitude last fall at the Auburn University Alumni Center honoring students, faculty and the generous donors that sponsor the college and its endeavors. Shown are recipients of the Alabama Treasure Forest Association Scholarship in Wildlife and Forestry and the John Dorrill, Jr. Memorial Annual Scholarship. From left to right are Cat Hendricks, Meg Gautney and James Ray with William Green, the director of the Forestry & Wildlife Divisions at Alabama Farmers Federation, who is second from left.



photo gallery

Maggard selected as CFWE associate dean for academic affairs by Cole Sikes



Adam Maggard, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Harry E. Murphy Associate Professor, Forest Systems Management

staff and students as he works to enhance the college's academic programs and elevate the overall educational experience," said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE.

"Throughout his tenure with the CFWE, Dr. Maggard has built a distinguished record of teaching excellence, program leadership and student engagement that reflects the high standards of this position."

– Dean Alavalapati

A faculty member at Auburn since 2017, Maggard's areas of expertise include forest business, finance and investment as well as timber markets, forest management and forest landowner outreach. He has taught several courses at the CFWE, including those in forest management and administration, forest business and investment, forest economics and forest valuation. Maggard co-developed and oversees Auburn's online Forest Business and Investment Master of Science degree and the Forest Finance and Investment Graduate Certificate program.

In another unique role, Maggard co-leads the CFWE's Forest, Environment and Wildlife Leadership (FEWL) Academy. Through curricula and engagement with state and national leaders, this program prepares students with leadership abilities necessary for the critical problem-solving of issues related to the management,

utilization and stewardship of natural resources. Since the academy's inception, Maggard and Alavalapati have graduated 82 distinguished students from the program, adding to their academic portfolios and invaluable experiences that shape their future careers.

As an Extension specialist, Maggard has coordinated approximately 150 community-based outreach events, refereed 12 journal articles and 26 Extension publications and composed 22 feature articles as well as 13 timely information briefs. He is also credited with being lead organizer for two Auburn-hosted, international cross-laminated timber (CLT) conferences (2022, 2024).

Among Maggard's accolades are 15 Extension awards across the university, state, regional and national levels including the CFWE Harry Murphy Extension and Outreach Award (2020, 2025) and the Alabama Farmers Federation Duncan Award for Excellence in Production Agriculture and Forestry Extension (2022).

On the state level, Maggard was honored at the Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards as the Conservation Communicator of the Year by the Alabama Wildlife Federation in 2024. Nationally, Maggard was recognized by the Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals three times in the last five years for his outreach accomplishments as

well as the Forest Landowners Association and Forest Landowner Foundation as Extension Forester of the Year in 2023.

"Auburn's focus on elevating the student experience, strengthening academic quality, supporting faculty excellence and expanding partnerships provides the framework for my approach to academic leadership. I will work to ensure that our college's academic programs are aligned with Auburn's institutional goals, that our students receive a transformative educational experience and that our faculty and staff are supported in ways that enable them to thrive," said Maggard.

As associate dean, Maggard is poised to further elevate the CFWE's academic excellence, stewarding the continued success and future promise of its students. He succeeded Todd Steury as of Jan. 1, 2026.

Through collaborative leadership, thoughtful planning and a devoted commitment to student and faculty success, Maggard aims to help position the CFWE for a future defined by innovation, growth and academic distinction.

"The CFWE stands at a pivotal moment of opportunity, and I am committed to guiding the college forward with a strategic, student-centered and mission-driven approach to academic leadership."

– Adam Maggard

CFWE expands online programs with Auburn's first environmental law graduate certificate by Jamie Anderson



Auburn's newly approved Environmental Law graduate certificate program will prepare natural resource professionals and others working in environmental fields with knowledge about various environmental policies and laws, such as the Endangered Species Act.

The College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) has expanded its online graduate program offerings with the addition of the newly created Environmental Law Certificate. Approved by Auburn University's Board of Trustees last November, the program will prepare natural resource professionals and others working in environmental fields with knowledge about various environmental policies and laws.

Geared for working professionals, the certificate is designed to advance the level of knowledge and skills for individuals interested in issues related to current laws governing environmental protection, natural resource management, sustainable development and land-use planning.

Issues of environmental law permeate virtually every aspect of the state and national economy, and the consistent evolution of this field of law requires that professionals working with natural resources possess not only knowledge of environmental law and regulation, but also an understanding of the policies and processes underlying it.

From the operations of traditional industries, such as agriculture, mining and forestry, to newer developments in renewable energy, AI and data centers, all must deal with issues of environmental law. Thus, the value of leaders, managers and employees versed in this field of study provides abundant opportunity that, to date, has not been widely available at the graduate certificate level.

As one of the nation's most biodiverse states, the creation of this certificate at a major university in Alabama is no coincidence. Auburn graduates with a working knowledge of environmental laws, such as the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, will be sought after by various industries, agencies and non-governmental organizations to help them understand and ensure compliance with environmental policies and regulations.

The program will benefit the state and beyond by increasing the number of professionals and public servants who have a thorough understanding of environmental laws, including their requirements, the processes by which they are enacted and the mechanisms for their enforcement. For example, industry professionals will gain an increased understanding of environmental permitting processes and obligations, which will enhance their ability to successfully (and properly) locate, adapt or expand their business enterprise.

"While it is expected these professionals will already possess undergraduate degrees pertinent to their fields, a graduate certificate in Environmental Law will provide them with a body of knowledge increasingly necessary

for their current successful functioning, and I suspect, their ultimate personal advancement," said Jim Noles, attorney and professor of practice in the CFWE.

Designed to be flexible, students are required to complete 15 credit hours to earn the graduate certificate. This includes six credit hours of core electives focused on environmental and property law and nine credit hours of concentration electives, including Environmental Ethics, Coastal Law, Energy Law, Natural Resource Policy and Conflict and Collaboration in Natural Resource Management.

"Importantly, the certificate is not intended to train individuals to practice law; rather, it is designed to educate individuals about the laws," said Todd Steury, former associate dean for academic and faculty affairs in the CFWE.

"Graduates will have enhanced their ability to comply with environmental laws and communicate about legal issues related to the environment and natural resources."

– Todd Steury



Auburn's new parks and recreation degree option supports industry growth, expands student career opportunities by Jamie Anderson

Students now have greater access to exciting career opportunities in the field of parks and recreation thanks to a new degree option approved by Auburn University's Board of Trustees last November.

At their quarterly meeting, the Auburn Trustees approved the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment's (CFWE) proposal to create a transfer-friendly Leadership and Planning Option for the existing Parks and Recreation Management major.

A NEW OPTION, DRIVING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The new Leadership and Planning Option will provide students with training on how to plan, conduct, develop and administer outdoor recreation programs. Students will take courses in community- and nature-based recreation, event management, programming, leadership and communications.

The novel curriculum prepares students for positions within city and county park and recreation systems as programmers, sports and recreation league

managers, camp and event coordinators, outdoor educators, field guides and other similar occupations focused on creating recreational opportunities and events for the public.

"Not all students are interested in the administrative aspects of managing parks and recreation departments and facilities, preferring to have more hands-on involvement with events such as fishing and soccer tournaments, mountain biking and running races, or other educational activities and community programs," said Todd Steury, former CFWE associate dean for academic and faculty affairs. "The Leadership and Planning option is custom-made for these students."

TRANSFER-FRIENDLY AND ACCESSIBLE

Given the 'outward-facing' orientation of these recreation careers, the new degree option places greater emphasis on leadership and communications, and less on the administrative, financial and facilities management aspects of the

major. This approach significantly reduces the number of course electives and alleviates the need for an internship, which is a requirement for the Parks and Recreation Management major.

"We anticipate the flexibility of this option will be very appealing to transfer students or those who have less time to dedicate toward completing an internship. They can easily transfer to Auburn, having fulfilled their core curriculum requirements, and still graduate on time with a highly employable bachelor's degree. Those who have seasonal commitments or competing priorities will also find the degree accessible."

– Todd Steury

FILLING AN IN-DEMAND NICHE

According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for nearly 2% of the total U.S.

GDP in 2021. Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that employment of "recreation workers" is expected to grow by 10% between 2021 and 2031, outpacing the average growth rate across other job categories. Further, Innovate Alabama reports the state's outdoor recreation industry supports 65,000 jobs and generates \$3 billion in wages and salaries.

To meet this demand, Auburn's new Leadership and Planning Option will fuel the state's workforce with qualified talent trained to administer recreation facilities and plan and lead outdoor recreation programs and events within municipalities, counties and state-run parks and recreation facilities.

"We are proud to offer students and employers an innovative program that will empower them to provide citizens with high-quality outdoor recreation experiences across Alabama's vast natural landscapes," said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE.



Research & Discovery

Kalin to serve as CFWE associate dean for research, graduate programs by Jamie Anderson



Latif Kalin, Associate Dean for Research & Graduate Programs, Clinton-McClure Professor, Hydrology

Auburn University Alumni and Clinton-McClure Professor Latif Kalin has been named associate dean for research and graduate programs in Auburn's College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) following an internal search.

As associate dean, Kalin will advise graduate students as the college's graduate programs officer and collaborate with faculty and staff to facilitate contracts and expand extramural funding opportunities to advance the CFWE's multidisciplinary research platform. "Since joining the CFWE faculty in 2006, Dr. Kalin has accrued a strong record of research

excellence, mentorship and service," said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE. "He will provide decisive leadership and proactive support for CFWE faculty, staff, graduate students and research centers, including the Center for Natural Resource Management on Military Lands (CNRMML), to advance the college's research excellence and graduate education."

Kalin's research and teaching focus on modeling water quality and quantity, including the study of pollutant removal in natural and constructed wetlands, as well as the impacts of land use and land cover change on water quality and quantity. He has authored 104 refereed journal articles and 13 book chapters and served as principal investigator (PI) or Co-PI on more than \$15 million in competitive grants, primarily funded by federal agencies such as the FAA, USDA, EPA and NOAA.

During his career, Kalin's scholarly contributions have been recognized through multiple honors. Most recently, he was named Auburn Alumni Professor in 2020, Fulbright Scholar in Brazil in 2022 and Provost

Fellow in the SEC Academic Leadership Development Program for 2023–2024.

Kalin has also served on grant review panels for several government agencies and as a science advisor to the EPA on a Clean Water Act technical report and as a member of the Science Advisory Board of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program. He has also chaired national committees, including the Association of Civil Engineers Environmental Water Resource Institute (ASCE-EWRI) Surface Water and Wetland Hydrology Technical Committee and the USDA Multistate Research Project S1089, which recently received the Southeastern Region Excellence in Multistate Research Award.

At Auburn, Kalin's record of service includes leadership and membership in several university-level committees, including the International Advisory Council, the Computational and Infrastructure Working Group, the Council of Energy, Environment and Economic Research, the Graduate Council and the Senate Competitive Research Grant Committee.

Prior to this role, Kalin held the position of associate director of the CFWE's Center

for Environmental Studies at the Urban-Rural Interface. He received a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the Middle East Technical University in Turkey and his master's and doctoral degrees in civil engineering from Purdue University.

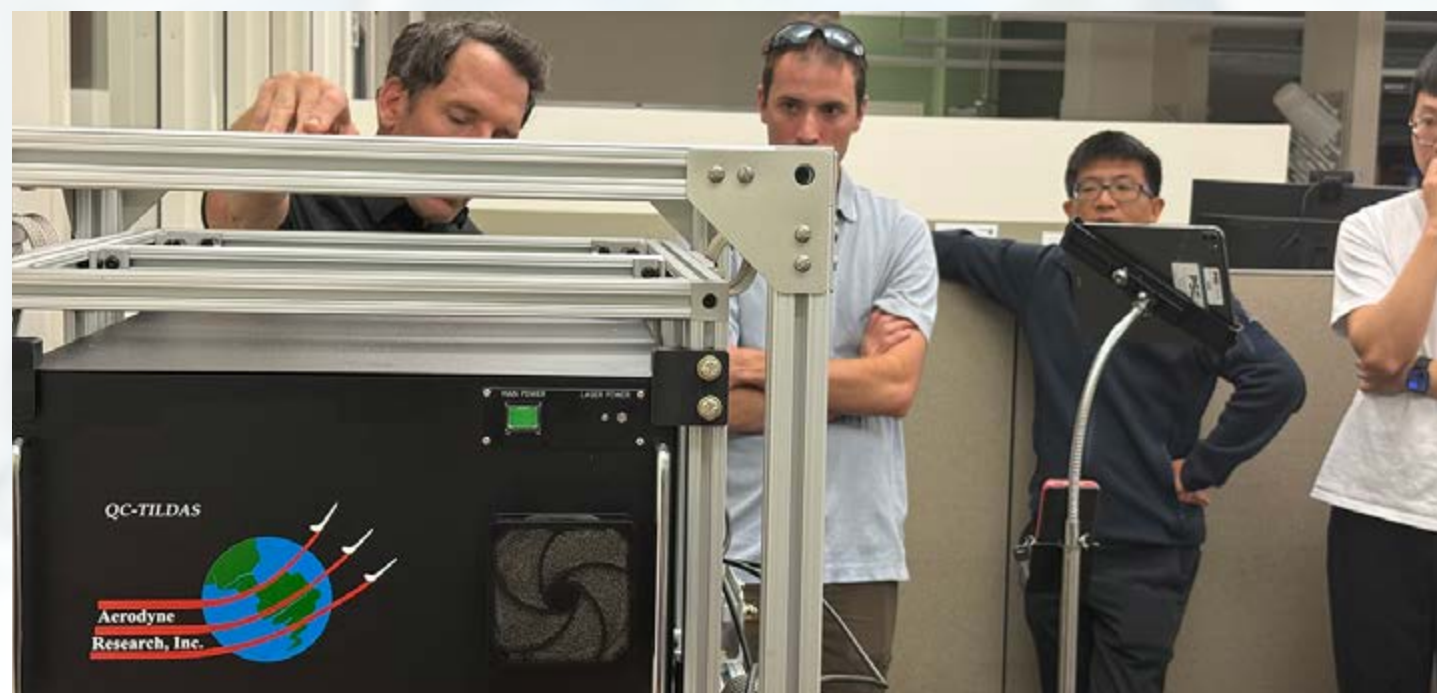
Kalin succeeded Daowei Zhang, the CFWE Alumni and George W. Peake, Jr. Endowed Professor of Forestry, as associate dean as of Jan. 1, 2026.

With a strong record of scholarly achievement, extensive leadership experience and a deep commitment to advancing interdisciplinary research, Kalin is well-suited for the position.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to serve the CFWE as associate dean for research," said Kalin. "I look forward to working alongside our talented faculty, staff and students to build on our strengths and create new opportunities for impactful research and engagement."

– Latif Kalin

Auburn, Stanford researchers lead breakthrough study revealing global hydrogen economy must reduce leakage, methane emission for long-term adoption, sustainability *by Jamie Anderson*



Researchers at Stanford University test the Aerodyne Tildas hydrogen analyzer, the world's first commercialized H₂ analyzer, used in the lab to measure atmospheric hydrogen concentrations. Photo credit: Rob Jackson, Stanford University

Hydrogen holds promise as an alternative energy source that will play an important role in decarbonizing the global energy system, potentially fueling our industrial production, homes, commerce and infrastructure one day.

However, scientists warn there is reason to be cautiously optimistic. Hydrogen (H₂) interacts with methane, ozone (pollution) and water vapor in the atmosphere in ways that may warm the climate, thereby potentially negating its benefits.

A new study co-led by an Auburn University researcher and recently published in the esteemed scientific journal *Nature* suggests that embracing a “hydrogen economy” will require a deeper scientific understanding of the global hydrogen cycle to support a climate-safe, sustainable hydrogen economy.

Unlike greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide and methane, hydrogen itself does not trap heat in Earth’s atmosphere. Through interactions with other gases, however, hydrogen indirectly heats the atmosphere roughly 11 times faster than carbon dioxide during the first 100 years after release, and approximately 37 times faster during the first 20 years.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

“This indirect warming raises concerns about the climate consequences of potential hydrogen leakage, and highlights that the climate benefits of a future hydrogen economy will depend on minimizing leakage through the hydrogen value chain and reducing natural gas (methane) emissions,” said Zutao Ouyang, leading author of the study and assistant professor of ecosystem modeling in Auburn’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE).

To assess the impact of this leakage, Ouyang collaborated with an international consortium of scientists known as the Global Carbon Project to develop the first comprehensive accounting of global hydrogen sources and sinks, assessing changes in atmospheric hydrogen and their climate consequences.

The study, “The Global hydrogen budget,” was co-led by Ouyang and Rob Jackson, Stanford University professor and chair of the Global Carbon Project, in collaboration with researchers from approximately 30 international institutions from France, Australia, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, Norway and Austria.

“The team collected direct measurements of hydrogen in the atmosphere, along with the most comprehensive ever data collection and modeling to estimate the major sources and sinks of hydrogen and produce a first-of-its-kind global picture,” said Pep Canadell, the executive director of Global Carbon Project, and chief research scientist at CSIRO Environment, Australia. After, they projected future hydrogen emissions, removals and atmospheric levels under different scenarios of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), using a simplified Earth system model to estimate how these changes could affect the climate.

Since hydrogen production began to increase 30 years ago, researchers estimate that atmospheric hydrogen concentrations have increased by about 70% from preindustrial levels through 2003, then briefly stabilized before rising again around 2010. The authors found that this increase is largely due to leakage from increased hydrogen production and, surprisingly and less well known, to hydrogen formation from the

thereby increasing indirect climate warming. More hydrogen means more methane, and more methane means more hydrogen.”

The authors agree that for a hydrogen economy to become widely accepted, the unintended warming-driven interactions between hydrogen and methane must be minimized to build trust in hydrogen as a viable decarbonization pathway.

“By quantifying the previously unaccounted warming feedback between hydrogen and methane that are missing in current climate projections, we hope to improve future climate scenarios and support decision-makers in minimizing both economic losses and climate risks associated with hydrogen leakage.”

– Zutao Ouyang

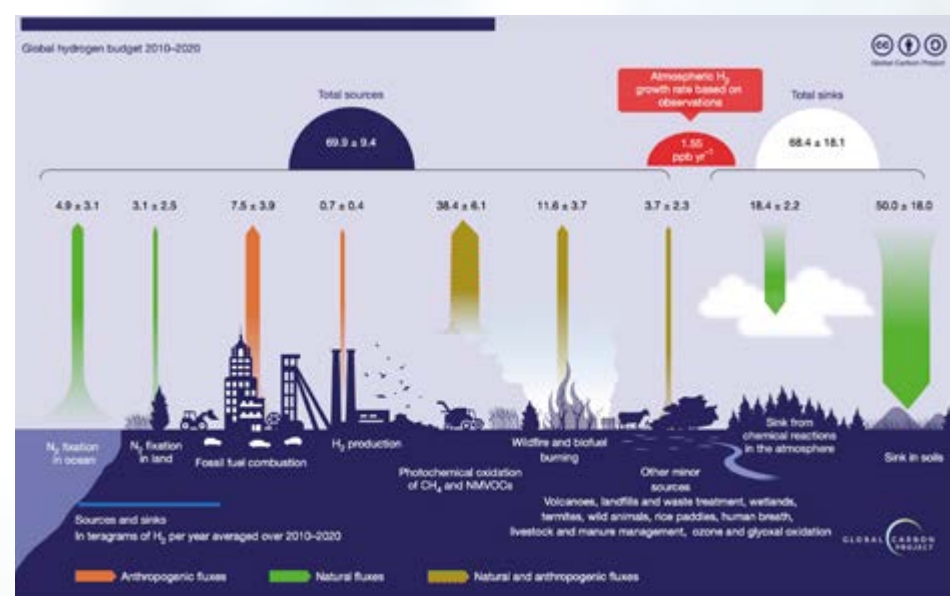
oxidation of increasing methane emissions from human activities.

Methane (CH₄) emissions—especially from fossil fuel extraction, distribution and use—have an important, but often under-appreciated, influence on atmospheric hydrogen. Methane and hydrogen share the same pathway by which they are cleaned or oxidized in the atmosphere. Because methane oxidation itself produces hydrogen, this creates feedback that can raise atmospheric hydrogen concentrations when methane emissions increase, further competing for the detergent that cleans the atmosphere of methane.

Though the overall climate effects are currently relatively small, these complex interactions have the potential to undermine the positive effects of hydrogen.

CALCULATING THE RISKS

“The largest source of hydrogen in the world is the oxidation of methane in our atmosphere,” said Jackson. “But methane and hydrogen also compete for atmospheric cleansing detergents. This competition extends methane’s lifecycle in the presence of hydrogen,



The global hydrogen budget provides the world's first comprehensive accounting of global hydrogen sources and sinks, enabling an assessment of changes in atmospheric hydrogen and their climate consequences.

Eckhardt selected as Sigma Xi Fellow *by Blair Milford*



Lori Eckhardt, Alumni Professor, Integrated Forest Pathology and Entomology

Lori Eckhardt, Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) Alumni Professor of integrated forest pathology and entomology, has been selected as a Fellow of Sigma Xi. This selection recognizes Eckhardt’s leading research on forest health, sustained record of scientific excellence and leadership in advancing collaboration, communication and outreach across science and natural resource communities.

Founded in 1886, Sigma Xi is an international science honor society whose mission is to encourage, support and recognize excellence in scientific research and innovation. The distinction of Fellow of Sigma Xi is a lifetime honor reserved for members who have demonstrated extraordinary achievement in research, teaching, mentorship, leadership, service and science advocacy. New Sigma Xi Fellows are nominated by at least two current Sigma Xi members and are selected through a competitive review process, making the honor a reflection of both scholarly impact and professional integrity.

Eckhardt is being recognized for her influential research examining the complex interactions among fungi, insects and pine hosts. Her work has significantly advanced

the understanding of forest health, resilience and sustainable management. Eckhardt’s research has helped inform landowners, public agencies and industry partners while addressing real-world challenges facing forest ecosystems in the southeastern United States and beyond.

“Being chosen as one of the Sigma Xi Fellows is a deeply meaningful honor. It reflects not only years of dedication to research, teaching and service, but also the incredible students, colleagues and collaborators who have shared this journey. I am humbled and proud to represent Sigma Xi and Auburn in this capacity.”

– Lori Eckhardt

Eckhardt has been a member of the CFWE faculty since 2005 and has built an internationally recognized multidisciplinary research program. Her academic background spans molecular biology, virology, plant pathology and entomology, allowing her to work across traditional disciplinary boundaries and collaborate with experts in chemical engineering, wildlife biology, forestry and plant sciences. These collaborations have resulted in impactful global partnerships, including sustained research and educational engagement in South Africa, Nicaragua and Canada, offering Auburn students meaningful international research experiences.

In addition to her research accomplishments, Eckhardt is a dedicated educator and mentor. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in forest health and renewable natural resources and has mentored more than 125 students at the high school, undergraduate, master’s and doctoral levels. Many of her

mentees have earned prestigious awards and fellowships, reflecting a testament to her commitment to student success, professional development and scientific communication.

Eckhardt’s scholarly output includes more than 130 publications, 600 scientific presentations and \$10 million in extramural research funding. She is the founding director of Auburn’s Forest Health Cooperative, which continues to receive sustained support from government, industry and private stakeholders, emphasizing the applied relevance and long-term impact of her work.

Her service extends well beyond the classroom and laboratory. Eckhardt serves as director of the Sudden Oak Death State Laboratory for Alabama and Mississippi, participates in national and federal scientific advisory efforts and currently chairs the Auburn University Senate. She also serves as president of the

Alabama Council of University Faculty Presidents, reflecting her commitment to shared governance, faculty advocacy and institutional leadership.

“Dr. Eckhardt’s influence extends far beyond her impressive research record,” said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE. “She is a nationally respected leader, a dedicated mentor and an advocate for science that serves society. Her selection as a Sigma Xi Fellow reflects the profound and lasting impact she has made on her field, students and the scientific community.”

Eckhardt was formally recognized as part of the 2025 Sigma Xi Fellows cohort at the International Forum on Research Excellence in October 2025. Her selection highlights Auburn’s continued leadership in research, mentorship and public engagement and reinforces the CFWE’s role in advancing solutions to today’s most pressing natural resource challenges.

International Conference on Forest Carbon & Resilience

Last fall, the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment hosted people from across the globe who gathered to discuss the latest research involving forests, carbon storage and programming, future outlooks and many other perspectives involving the world’s forests. Shown is Steven Taylor, Auburn University senior vice president for research and economic development, who provided the conference opening remarks.



Extension & Outreach



Extension Spotlight

Meet ACES “FWNR” Team member, Kyle Marable

Kyle Marable is the Alabama Extension agent for Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources (FWNR) in East Central Alabama. He is a native of the region and is passionate about the resources it has to offer. Kyle is a Certified Wildlife Biologist with a preference for upland game bird management, early successional habitat creation and longleaf pine ecosystem restoration. He not only enjoys helping landowners reach their management goals,

but also educating all audiences about the benefits of wildlife conservation and management. Kyle’s wildlife career began at the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment. After graduating, he spent time focusing on hands-on habitat restoration in Western Kentucky working for Quail Unlimited. He has a master’s degree in wildlife from Mississippi State University where his research focused on wild turkey movement, resource

selection and mortality. Prior to joining Alabama Extension, Kyle spent ten years as a resource stewardship biologist with the Alabama Wildlife Federation. He continues to look for educational opportunities to grow as a resource professional and keep up to date with current research.

When not serving as an Extension agent, Kyle enjoys his role as husband to wife Amber, a two-time Auburn alumna, and father to their two children.



Auburn University appoints Eve Brantley as the director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System

by Auburn University Office of Communications and Marketing



Eve Brantley, 1862 Extension Director

around science-based solutions and her deep understanding of Extension's statewide role will help advance the work of our land-grant mission and support the citizens who rely on Extension every day. I would also like to thank Dr. Mike Phillips for his years of impactful service as the 1862 Extension Director for Auburn University. I am confident that Dr. Brantley and ACES can build upon this foundation to create an even brighter future for the constituents we serve."

Steve Taylor, Auburn's senior vice president for research and economic development, said Brantley's experience will strengthen the university's extension enterprise.

"I am confident that Dr. Brantley's expertise, professional integrity and dedication to public service will greatly benefit our university and the Alabama constituencies we serve," Taylor said. "Her background aligns with the position's charge to provide innovative leadership, advance applied scholarship and deliver high-impact outreach across rural, urban and suburban communities."

As the 1862 Extension director, Brantley will serve as the chief administrative officer for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, which is administrated jointly by Auburn and Alabama A&M. She will provide vision and leadership that support the system's long-standing tradition of excellence in education,

applied research, service and statewide outreach. She will report directly to Auburn President Roberts in collaboration with Alabama A&M University President Daniel K. Wims and will work in joint leadership with the 1890 Extension administrator at Alabama A&M.

In this role, Brantley will guide more than 700 faculty and staff across both campuses and in all 67 Alabama counties. She will oversee strategic planning, statewide programming and partnership development with public and private organizations that support Extension's work across Alabama.

"I am excited for the opportunity to continue to serve the university and the people of Alabama," Brantley said.

"Our Extension professionals do outstanding work every day to improve quality of life for Alabama communities. I look forward to strengthening the connection between Extension and the university's academic enterprise, including supporting faculty in their efforts to translate research into practical solutions for Alabama residents, creating opportunities for student learning and ensuring that our extension efforts reinforce the teaching and research missions of the institution."

– Eve Brantley

Brantley brings a distinguished record of leadership, collaboration and community engagement. Her career spans more than two decades of Extension work, including service as a professor and Extension specialist focused on water resources, stormwater management and watershed stewardship. Brantley provided leadership on irrigation watershed planning for Alabama farmers and the agriculture industry. She has coordinated more than 200 watershed and stormwater management workshops, supported the installation of demonstration practices statewide and enhanced miles of stream habitat. She has trained thousands of natural resource professionals through hands-on programs that support the needs of Alabama communities.

Her professional experience also includes service as an Extension educator with Auburn's Marine Extension and Research Center and work with the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Brantley holds a doctorate from Auburn University, a master's degree from Clemson University and a bachelor's degree from Berry College.

Auburn University has named Eve Brantley as the 1862 Extension director for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, effective Jan. 1, 2026, Auburn President Christopher B. Roberts announced today.

The appointment follows years of Brantley's leadership within Alabama Extension, where she has served in roles ranging from multi-county agent to associate director. She also served as director of Auburn's Water Resources Center and has been a long-standing member of the faculty in the College of Agriculture's Department of Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences.

President Roberts said Brantley's leadership reflects Auburn's dedication to community impact and the university's land-grant mission.

"Dr. Brantley has demonstrated a strong commitment to serving Alabama communities through research, education and collaboration," Roberts said. "Her ability to bring people together

-Cont. KPNC's landmark bridge replaced with funds from Turner Foundation

"This renovation is critical to ensuring the safety of visitors and preserving the structure and surrounding trail which has served our community for decades," said Buckman.

The new bridge has been constructed with the oversight of civil engineers who approved the design. The new arch-style construction places the weight bearing farther away from the stream banks, enabling the bridge to be more than double in length and be lighter than before. To mitigate

the environmental impacts of the new bridge over time, the stream banks are outfitted with erosion control measures that will, in turn, create suitable habitat for native plants and wildlife.

According to Buckman, the fallen tulip poplar still resides, though cut back, and has been a popular place for children, and children-at-heart, to climb and play.

"During the next five years, we plan to raise funds for forest management across the KPNC,

and Azalea Place will be among the top priorities," he said.

"The Turner Foundation's generous support for this new bridge has laid the foundation for restoring one of Louise's, and infact all of our visitors, most treasured spaces here at the KPNC."

– Michael Buckman

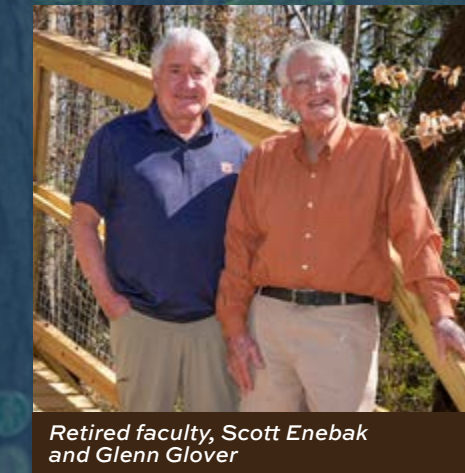
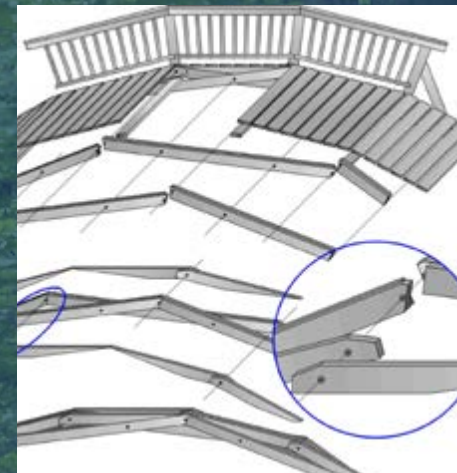
Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE, also shares his gratitude

toward Davenport and the foundation for their gift.

"This generous gift from the Frank Allen and Louise K. Turner Foundation is more than an investment in infrastructure—it's a powerful affirmation of our shared commitment to environmental stewardship," said Alavalapati. "This preserve holds the hearts of so many people in our community, and thanks to this support, it will continue to inspire and connect people with nature for generations to come."

CFWE retired faculty put their ingenuity and skills to task for the KPNC

by Jamie Anderson



Retired faculty, Scott Enebak and Glenn Glover



Never to shy away from a challenge, Auburn College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment retired faculty members and long-time volunteers, Glenn Glover and Scott Enebak, have given new life to a treasured feature of the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center (KPNC).

Inspired by the genius of Renaissance artist, engineer and scientist, Leonardo DaVinci's arch bridge, the pair chose plans modeled after this design to overcome several logistical and ecological issues posed by the site location of the Azalea Place Bridge.

Although the KPNC is in the Piedmont clay geological region, the areas around the preserve's streams are often dominated by sandy alluvial soils, as is the case with the Azalea Place Bridge. In fact, owing to a large rainstorm that had hit the area soon after the bridge's last repair in 2024, the supporting soil had finally washed away around the beam support. At that point, it was clear that without extensive riprapping and a large concrete support, the existing bridge could not be recovered.

One criterion for a new bridge was sufficient length to move the ends of the bridge away from the stream edge to avoid future erosion endangering the bridge. Several alternative designs were considered, including the laminated design used for the 16-foot bridge located at KPNC's Fern View, built by Glover in 2022.

Building a flat bridge of sufficient length to span 30 feet for Azalea Place would require very large beams. Thus, this design was deemed infeasible, given that large lifting equipment could not be driven to the bridge site. Glover and Enebak considered alternatives such as a suspension-type bridge but found that impractical due to the substantial engineering and construction it would require.

After some research, Glover found a designer in Canada who had developed and tested what he calls the "Rainbow" arch bridge influenced by DaVinci's earlier design, using various lengths of 2x6 pressure treated lumber. Conveniently, the plans provided a materials list, patterns for cutting the wood and directions

for building arches using multiple smaller arch pieces.

"This design seemed feasible since it would provide the necessary 32-foot arch span," said Glover. "Further, the arches could be built offsite, disassembled, moved to the site and reassembled."

Glover and Enebak got to work with materials for one arch to create a "test build." This ensured the plans could be followed and would overcome the logistical challenges necessary to complete the construction at the site.

Another major design hurdle to overcome was the necessity of large, deep concrete footings on each end of the bridge to ensure the arches would not spread when weight was applied to the bridge frame. Because of the site location, and the volume of cement, rock, sand and water this would require, Glover and Enebak sought an alternative.

An internet search revealed a bridge design that is often used for roadway bridges – a "tied arch bridge." For roadway bridges, either cables or a steel structure is used at the base of an arch support system. The base keeps the arch from spreading and provides the structure for the roadway base. It was decided with feedback from engineers that this concept would work for the Azalea Place arch bridge.

"All we needed then was a few strong student helpers to get the bridge components from the parking lot to the site and reassemble across the creek," said Enebak.

Once the arches were re-assembled on site, a 3/8" cable was run through the holes on both ends, then large turnbuckles were inserted into the cable and tightened until end-of-arch to end-of arch measured 32 feet to design specifications.

On Saturday, Sept. 20, 2025, fifteen volunteers gathered to move the 350–400-pound arches onto foundation blocks that were then secured with mobile home tie-downs to create a solid structure. KPNC's student caretakers, Tyler Wreschinsky and Max Nemeroff installed the decking to further stabilize the bridge. Approaches were added, making the total bridge length 40 feet. Glover, with the student's help, fabricated and installed the railing frame and wire mesh fencing. Finally, Glover and Enebak added handrails.

"Reflecting back, the month's-long project was indeed complicated and heavy, but the new Azalea Place Rainbow Bridge does look really good at the KPNC and may become the "go-to" place for visitors when word of the new bridge spreads," said Enebak.

Content with the design and construction, Glover feels confident the arch bridge will be serviceable for many years.

"It is not only functional, but an aesthetic addition to the Preserve's trails," said Glover. "The view from the top of the arch into the tree branches and along the stream bed is exquisite."

KPNC's landmark bridge replaced with funds from Turner Foundation

by Cole Sikes



The original Azalea Place bridge shows sign of structural damage after a tulip poplar falls nearby.

The Kreher Preserve and Nature Center (KPNC) has reinforced a beloved landmark. The Azalea Place bridge, built more than a quarter century ago by the founding Kreher family, faced safety and structural concerns. Today, it is receiving long-overdue attention and love thanks to a generous donation from the Frank Allen and Louise K. Turner Foundation.

The KPNC sits just north of downtown Auburn, Alabama, and the Auburn University

campus. It hosts thousands of people each year for recreation, environmental education and outreach opportunities. It is also home to the state's first and only First Class Pre-K nature preschool. Its origins date back to 1993 when Louise Kreher Turner and her husband, Frank Allen Turner, donated approximately 119 acres of forested land to the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) to create a nature preserve and a beacon of environmental education. Miles of hiking trails

connect the many features of the KPNC including creeks, a pond, homestead and pavilion.

"The area surrounding this bridge is called Azalea Place," said Michael Buckman, KPNC manager. "In the early years of the KPNC, Louise Kreher Turner identified this spot as a particularly beautiful and serene place—a place of peace. She and the volunteers of the time, among them Margaret Holler, Karni Wilson and Jane Bell, who all still volunteer today, planted many of the native understory plants in this area, including native azaleas. This is how it got its name. It is a special place where you can see a lot of rare native plants at different times of the year. The bridge and the bench just added to the beauty of the space."

The bridge on the Azalea Place trail serves as a crucial thoroughfare for connecting trails on the east side of the property. However, during the last 25 years, the bridge had lost structural integrity because of erosion

and the subsequent widening of the stream. Since the bridge was no longer sufficient length to span the creek, it had become unusable for visitors. Perhaps the final straw for the bridge occurred when a large neighboring tulip poplar fell next to it, further worsening the issue. Despite efforts by KPNC volunteers to repair the bridge, the elements became too much for the bridge to weather, and it was deemed impassable. Through a generous gift from the foundation, the bridge has finally been replaced.

Alesia Davenport, current president of the Frank Allen and Louise K. Turner Foundation, is excited to provide the needed resources to a place that she holds dear. This new, safe crossing is now a reality thanks to the philanthropic endeavors of Davenport and the foundation. The foundation's gift has provided the materials needed for KPNC volunteers to redesign and construct the new bridge to be durable, long-lasting and able to withstand future weather events.



Dixon Center to construct new dormitory, with major support from the Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation

by Jamie Anderson



Construction of the 32-room, 12,000-square-foot dorm will begin in 2026, with completion anticipated by Summer 2027.



The design includes a spacious covered patio and atrium, creating an inviting space for student collaboration and community.

Auburn University's Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center will seal its reputation as a top destination for natural resource training in the Southeastern U.S. with the construction of a new 64-bed dormitory. Located in Andalusia, Alabama, the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center, or Dixon Center, is a 5,400-acre residential field station that hosts the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment's (CFWE) immersive forestry and wildlife summer practicum. The center is also home to several other research and training programs, including the Alabama Forestry Commission's Forestry Academy and the National Wildland Firefighter Apprentice Program, facilitated by the U.S. Forest Service to train employees in all aspects of wildland fire suppression and prescribed fire applications.

During its November 2025 meeting, Auburn's Board of Trustees approved the construction of the 32-room dormitory which is expected to be completed by summer 2027.

The Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation has made a substantial commitment to fund the \$5.7 million project. This represents yet another significant philanthropic investment by the foundation, which has supported the center since its inception.

A VISION BROUGHT TO LIFE

Following the sale of the Dixon family's timber-related entities, consisting of sawmills, a plywood mill, timber, resin,

central to the Dixon Center's educational mission and the heart of what Solon Dixon hoped to achieve with the gift of land.

A PHILANTHROPIC LEGACY

Since it was created, the continued engagement and support of the Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation has fueled the expansion of the Dixon Center to become one of the finest educational facilities of its type in the nation.

"Through the Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation, the visions and gifts continue to support, promote and improve the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center," said Philip Jones, the foundation's current president. "As directors and stewards of the foundation's resources, we are honored and proud to carry on Mr. Solon's and Miss Martha's legacy."

Today, the property includes the 6,500 square-foot Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation Learning Center, which houses a state-of-the-art auditorium, classroom, conference room, the Martha Dixon Administrative Building and the Charles Dixon Auditorium. There are also two large dormitories, five semi-private dormitory buildings, a recreation center, a classroom, a computer lab building, a maintenance shop and a cafeteria. The original Dixon family home is also on the property, preserved as a historic landmark and museum.

Completed in 1979, the stick-built board and batten-style dormitory buildings were two of the Dixon Center's earliest construction projects. Both buildings have undergone extensive maintenance and upgrades due to South Alabama's tropical climate. However, the aging infrastructure of the dorms still poses significant and ongoing challenges.

"Despite the efforts of dedicated staff, the structures now face critical issues such as rot within the exterior walls, crumbling interior sheet rock and historic water damage," said Joel Martin, the center's director. "These challenges not only compromise the safety and comfort of occupants but also hinder the center's capacity to continue its critical mission to host educational programs, such as the CFWE's summer practicum."

Replacing the two dorms with one updated structure will ensure the facility's continued operation and enhance the user experience for the thousands who visit the Dixon Center each year.



The \$5.7 million project will provide 64 beds and modern amenities. Shown is the north elevation architectural rendering.

"By addressing the structural deficiencies and modernizing the facilities, we aim to create a welcoming and efficient environment conducive to learning and collaboration."

— Joel Martin

USHERING IN A NEW ERA OF LEARNING EXCELLENCE

The approximately 12,000-square-foot dormitory will feature an updated floor plan that will offer contemporary amenities, enhanced privacy and security and suite-style shared bathrooms.

"The directors are excited to see the construction of the new dormitory which will be a continuing contribution to the enhancement of Mr. Solon's and Miss Martha's visions for the center," said Jones.

This steadfast support has profoundly impacted and catalyzed the growth and success of the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center.

"The foundation's investments have enabled the center to evolve as a vital hub for education, research and conservation efforts that directly benefit the college, as well as a range of stakeholders within the state and nation," said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE.



"We are incredibly grateful to the foundation, as well as Auburn University's leadership, for their support that will ensure the Dixon Center will continue to benefit future generations who visit to receive the hands-on field training so crucial to their natural resource-focused careers."

— Dean Alavalapati

Naming Opportunities

The CFWE is committed to shaping the future of conservation—and invites alumni and friends to be part of that legacy. Through a capital campaign, the college will raise \$3 million to bring this transformative project to life. A philanthropic gift, regardless of size, will make a lasting impact. For those interested in creating an enduring tribute through naming opportunities or estate planning, please contact Heather Crozier, Director of Development, at vannhea@auburn.edu.

Scan the QR code to support the Dixon Dorm Project.



CFWE alum provides generous gift to support Dixon Center's new dorm

by Cole Sikes

As Auburn alumni, Ken and Barb Oser of Milton, Florida, understand the importance of a quality educational experience and have seen firsthand the benefits of an Auburn degree.

Motivated by their experiences at the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center, the Osers have provided a significant gift toward the construction of the facility's new 64-bed dormitory to be completed by summer 2027.

Although Ken did not attend summer practicum at the Dixon Center during his

collegiate education, the Osers have attended workshops at the center, and believe that its facilities and instruction are first-class.

"Auburn and the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment are very special to me and my wife," Oser said. "We met at Auburn, and the college gave me the skills to enter into the forestry profession running."

Early in Oser's career, he had the opportunity to train several new foresters. He says the skills he acquired at Auburn have proven to be better

than those he has encountered from newer professionals who attended other universities.

"Continuing to provide high quality experiential learning opportunities for students is imperative to our mission, said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment. "Strategic investments in facilities and programs such as the dorm project ensure future generations receive critical hands-on field training in preparation for their natural resource careers."

Katherine Owen Sechrist endowed scholarship supports future natural resource leaders

by Blair Milford



investment to support Auburn students who aspire to pursue natural resource careers.

Sechrist grew up surrounded by the different forests, rivers and landscapes that would shape her understanding of the vital role natural resources play in Alabama's identity and economy. Being one of the most biodiverse states in the country, she hopes her support will help ensure future generations of conservation-minded professionals will be prepared to manage and protect Alabama's natural resources.

"70% of Alabama is covered by forests," said Sechrist. "This has made me aware of the importance of forests in our state. I thought it was important that the CFWE provide instruction to students about this state resource. Additionally, my family has always valued college education. Including my granddaughter, four generations of my family have attended Auburn."

Marking her second endowment in the CFWE, the Katherine Owen Sechrist Endowed Scholarship serves as a testimony to her long-standing commitment to helping young people succeed by easing financial barriers and empowering academic achievement, hands-on learning and career preparedness.

CFWE Emmett F. Thompson Dean Janaki Alavalapati expressed his deep appreciation for Sechrist's generosity and vision for CFWE students.

"Generous gifts such as this expand student access to high-quality education and allow our college to fully engage in their academic and professional development. Ms. Sechrist's commitment to the CFWE speaks to the values Auburn instills in its alumni, and we are grateful for her continued investment in our students."

— Dean Alavalapati

Through this endowed scholarship, Sechrist's legacy of service, stewardship and love for Auburn will continue to inspire students for years to come and assist in building meaningful careers dedicated to protecting the natural world she has cherished throughout her life.

For more information on giving opportunities in the CFWE, please contact Heather Crozier, CFWE director of development, at vannhea@auburn.edu, or visit the CFWE giving page for more information.

Kelly family establishes scholarship for aspiring forestry and wildlife professionals

by Cole Sikes



A substantial contribution has been made to the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) to assist students with pursuing their academic futures. Inspired by their experiences with forestry and wildlife professionals, the Kelly family of Shelby County, Alabama, established the Kelly Family Endowed Scholarship in hopes of ensuring the future of quality natural resource professionals.

Jim and Janice Kelly have a vested interest in the natural world. Although they are both Auburn alumni, they did not attend The Plains to learn about forestry or wildlife. Jim is a graduate of the Harbert College of Business and Janice is an alumna of the College of Human Sciences. The Kellys, along with their daughters Elizabeth and Lindsey, enjoy recreational hunting on their property in Coosa County, Alabama—specifically quail hunting with their two dogs.

Managing this property includes annual forest and wildlife habitat management that requires the knowledge and expertise to achieve their desired property goals. Recent successes with agencies such as their local

Alabama Forestry Commission office have transformed their property into an ideal habitat for quail and an understanding of why natural resource management is important. Soon thereafter, other species such as white-tailed deer, turkeys and rabbits made homes there as well.

Several of the natural resource professionals that work with the Kellys were not typical students. Many of these individuals were Auburn undergraduates obtaining their degrees later in life while simultaneously leading families and working full-time jobs. Feeling inspired by their educational journeys, Jim and Janice felt the passion to continue to create more opportunities for hard-working people like their acquaintances in Coosa County.

“Establishing sound practices to enhance forests and wildlife ecology is a long game, and it takes vision,” Jim said. “Our experience is that the Auburn CFWE prepares men and women to live and work in partnership with their neighbors in their community. They do what they do because they want to make a difference.”

“As we’ve gotten to know recent CFWE graduates, we’ve continually been impressed with their knowledge, dedication and desire to not only help landowners meet their objectives but also make a difference for generations to come.”

– Jim Kelly

Crooked Oaks receives generous investments to name two spaces on property

by Cole Sikes



The evening sun sets behind the River Bank & Trust Front Porch at Crooked Oaks.

River Bank & Trust, along with a member of its organization, has invested in the naming of two unique spaces within Crooked Oaks, the former homestead of Auburn’s beloved football coach, Pat Dye.

The River Bank & Trust Front Porch and Buddy and Paddy Moore Suite are now integral features of Crooked Oaks where guests of the property can enjoy reflecting on the memory and heritage of Auburn’s legendary coach, who personally developed the landscape of the 400+ acre farm as a hunting retreat, nursery, event and lodging space for visitors.

River Bank & Trust is an Alabama-based financial organization whose mission is to serve its clients across the state and beyond with personal attention, expertise and genuine hospitality. Now managed by the Auburn College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE), Crooked Oaks and River Bank & Trust are connected through this shared purpose.

Located behind Crooked Oaks’ iconic lodge, the River Bank & Trust Front Porch was a favorite spot of Coach Dye’s, where his guests would circle in the property’s rustic wood rocking chairs to share stories and reflections of their days spent hunting and enjoying nature

at Crooked Oaks. The porch is quintessential to the property’s charm, enabling visitors to join in the Auburn tradition of gathering outdoors to enjoy camaraderie in the spirit of Coach Dye’s renowned southern hospitality.

In keeping with their community-centric values, this was a meaningful investment for River Bank & Trust. Brian Ethridge, president of the River Bank & Trust Birmingham Region and executive vice president, says that this mutual focus makes the bank’s choice to invest in Auburn an easy one.

“River Bank & Trust decided to make a donation to support Auburn and the CFWE because of everything it means to the community and the citizens of our state,” Ethridge said.

“Our bank is built on family and community. The outdoors—forestry, wildlife and our environment—are a big part of growing up and living in Alabama. We are fortunate to live in a state with incredible biodiversity. When we get a chance to support positive things in our community, we are going to do it.”

– Brian Ethridge

A second donation was made personally by the Ethridge family to honor the legacy of two family members who especially loved spending time at Crooked Oaks. Eugene “Buddy” and Paddy Moore, parents of Ethridge’s wife, Melissa, enjoyed staying in the dogtrot, or breezeway room, of the lodge, which is now recognized as the Buddy and Paddy Moore Suite. Their relationship with the property began with a friendship with Coach Dye, dating to 1981, when he moved to Auburn to become the university’s next head football coach.

Moore’s career in the trucking industry led to several opportunities to get involved in his community, giving back to those who helped him along the way and paying it forward to the next generation through philanthropy, such as Auburn’s Buddy Moore Trucking Endowed Supply Chain Management Scholarship.

Continuing his spirit of giving is an important objective of the Ethridge family.

“Our family decided to make the donation because of all the great memories we have of Buddy and Paddy Moore and their long relationship with Coach Dye,” Ethridge said. “Our family spent many Thanksgivings at Crooked Oaks, visiting and hunting with Coach. We also did it to honor

Coach’s wishes of leaving a legacy for Auburn and the CFWE. The time we spent in the woods hunting was really more about enjoying the beauty of the landscape, creeks and fresh air rather than whatever we were hunting.”

For the CFWE, this investment reinforces its charge to reinvigorate Crooked Oaks to honor Coach Dye and create more opportunities for others to experience his legacy. Donations fund operations and maintenance, enabling Crooked Oaks to fulfill its educational mission to support experiential learning opportunities for Auburn students.

“These investments from River Bank & Trust and the Ethridge family exemplify the power of partnership while also shaping the future,” said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE.

“By celebrating the heritage of Coach Dye and the Moore family through these named spaces at Crooked Oaks, we are preserving a place where the confluence of Alabama’s natural beauty, Auburn’s community values and Dye’s lasting memories can be enjoyed for generations to come.”

– Dean Alavalapati

Honoring the Moores and Coach Dye’s shared friendship is testimony to the impact Crooked Oaks has had on the Auburn community. It is the hope of River Bank & Trust and the Ethridges that others may soon experience the property in the same light, creating memories of their own that echo throughout the land.

To learn more about naming opportunities, contact Heather Crozier, CFWE development director, at vannhea@auburn.edu.



The breezeway at Crooked Oaks lodge featuring the Buddy and Paddy Moore Suite entrance and Auburn memorabilia placed by Coach Pat Dye.

