



College of Forestry, Wildlife & Environment

FEATURE STORY

Auburn's Center for Natural Resources Management on Military Lands
expands services, staff pg. 8-9

WHAT'S INSIDE

NEW! Staff Corner: Meet Ashley Brantley, Sarah Crim pg. 3

2025 CFWE Annual Report pg. 4-5

NEW! CFWE Student Life: Beyond the Classroom pg. 7

Auburn faculty seek to strengthen Alabama's forest industry pg. 8

Forging a Legacy of Service: Celebrating 2025 Outstanding Alumnus James Parker pg. 13

CFWE NEWS • Spring 2026

Working with Nature for Society's Well-Being

In This Issue

Staff Corner	3
Annual Report	4-5
Academics & Learning	6
Student Life	7
Research & Discovery	8-9
Extension & Outreach	10-12
Alumni & Friends	13-16

Upcoming Events

Summer Commencement, 8/8
Homecoming Tailgate, 9/26
Career Fair, 9/30
Scholarship Ceremony, 10/12



cfwe.auburn.edu/giving
Learn how you can support the CFWE.



cfwe.auburn.edu/newsletter
Visit our website to read past issues and access digital content related to stories you see here.



website



photo gallery



related articles

When you see one of the icons below, you know more content is available online.



Incoming freshmen, transfers discover CFWE engagement opportunities



CFWE faculty, graduate students honored for research, mentorship

On Campus & Beyond

Visit our [Flickr site](#) to view our photo gallery or cfwe.auburn.edu for more stories.



Weaver Lecture presented by prominent wildlife, forestry researcher



Students gain skills presenting management plans to landowners

602 Duncan Drive
1161 W. Samford Ave., Bldg. 8
Auburn, AL 36849-0001

Wildlife and Environment
College of Forestry,
Auburn



NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
AUBURN, AL
PERMIT NO. 9

THE DEAN



Dear Alumni and Friends,

Warm greetings from the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE). We are experiencing strong momentum across our land-grant mission, driven by dedicated faculty, staff and students and strengthened by your continued support. With

Nick Wiley now serving as Advisory Council Chair, we are advancing strategic efforts that will further elevate the college’s impact and national visibility.

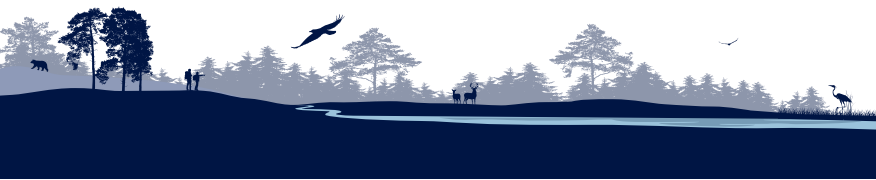
Our academic programs continue to grow and thrive, with enrollment nearing 500 students and credit hour production increasing significantly. Student outcomes remain strong, with high rates of employment and continued education. We are proud to see our students excel through hands-on, real-world learning experiences that define the CFWE journey—from internships and field research to industry engagement opportunities like the ARPA Conference. We are especially proud of students like President’s Award recipient William “Tine” Latimer, who exemplify leadership, service and academic excellence, and of alumni like Dylan Thomas who return to invest in the next generation.

Our research enterprise is expanding, with \$8.4 million in new funding supporting work that strengthens forest industries, advances ecosystem health and addresses emerging environmental challenges. Faculty are leading innovative projects in forest operations, disease ecology and forest health, while earning national recognition, including Dwain G. Luce Professor Heather Alexander’s Distinguished Leader Award. These efforts are amplified through outreach and extension programs that deliver real-world impact—from supporting military installations through the Center for Natural Resources Management on Military Lands to expanding accessibility and engagement at the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center.

We are proud to celebrate alumni like James Parker, our 2025 Outstanding Alumnus, whose career reflects service to both natural resources and national defense. The continued generosity and engagement of our alumni and friends sustain our mission and create new opportunities for our students and programs. Thank you for your commitment to CFWE. Together, we will continue to lead, innovate and serve—shaping a stronger future for our communities and natural resources.

War Eagle!

Janaki R. R. Alavalapati, Emmett F. Thompson Dean



Administration

Nick Wiley appointed CFWE's new Advisory Council chair

By Jamie Anderson



As the newly appointed chair of Auburn’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment Advisory Council, Nick Wiley will lead the council in its efforts to advocate for and provide strategies to help the college advance its land grant mission of teaching, research, extension and outreach.

Wiley grew up in the rural landscape of South Georgia. After earning his Bachelor of Science in Biology from Georgia Southern University in 1983 and a Master of Science in Wildlife Science from Auburn University in 1986, he went to work as a wildlife conservation professional.

In 1988, Wiley accepted a position with the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission. He worked for the agency for 30 years as a wildlife biologist and administrative leader through changes that saw the agency become the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). During the last eight years of his tenure with the agency, he served as executive director.

After retirement from FWC, he moved on to serve as chief conservation officer and chief operating officer at Ducks Unlimited

(DU). After 8 years with DU, he moved back to Florida and is now serving as executive director for the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, a nonprofit conservation organization focused on supporting FWC and funding and delivering priority conservation projects across Florida.

Wiley and his wife Evelyn enjoy spending time with family and experiencing the fruits of conservation efforts through hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities.

“Mr. Wiley’s leadership and experience at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission and Ducks Unlimited will be an extraordinary asset to the college. As an Auburn graduate, he brings both a deep connection to our mission and a proven ability to elevate organizations, positioning our college for greater national prominence and impact.”
– Dean Alavalapati

Members of the council are alumni, friends, associates and/or professional colleagues chosen for their accomplishments, exemplary service and interest in serving and supporting the college. Wiley will serve as chair of the Advisory Council for two years.

Learn more about the Advisory Council and its members at cfwe.auburn.edu.

Alexander honored with distinguished leader award

By Blair Milford



The College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) Dwain G. Luce Endowed Professor Heather Alexander was awarded the 2025 Distinguished Leader Award this semester from the Association for Fire Ecology (AFE). The AFE grants this award to individuals who have become exceptional leaders in fire ecology research, education or management.

The AFE is an international organization dedicated to advancing fire ecology and forest management knowledge while also educating researchers about the uses of fire in resilient landscape management. Recognizing wildland fire as a critical ecological process, the AFE emphasizes the deep evolutionary and cultural connection between fire, ecosystems and human communities.

Alexander was awarded the AFE’s Distinguished Leader Award due to her exemplary contributions in research,

College of Forestry, Wildlife & Environment

CFWE NEWS • Spring 2026

Dean Janaki R.R. Alavalapati

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Adam Maggard

Associate Dean for Research Latif Kalin

Extension Coordinator Mark Smith

Managing Editor Jamie Anderson

Contributing Editor..... Cole Sikes

Contributing WritersBlair Milford, Catherine Jackson, Virginia Johnson

Designer..... Kelly Knowles

Contact Us

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.

Auburn University
College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment
Office of Communications and Marketing
602 Duncan Drive • Auburn, AL 36849
334-844-9248 • cfwecom@auburn.edu

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.



AUBURN
College of Forestry,
Wildlife and Environment



cfwe.auburn.edu

Auburn University is an equal opportunity educational institution/employer. Produced by the CFWE Office of Communications and Marketing.

management, teaching and outreach. She was nominated for this award by current and former members of the Forest and Fire Ecology Lab at Auburn where she serves as the principal investigator of the lab.

Alexander has been a member of the CFWE faculty since 2020 as a professor of forest and fire ecology. Her research examines the impact of changing fire regimes on forest dynamics, the influence of tree traits on forest flammability and the consequences of changing forest composition on forest ecosystem functions. Alexander has also spent more than a decade investigating wildfire implications for forest growth and regeneration dynamics in Siberian forests supported by permafrost soils.

At the CFWE, Alexander’s role involves performing research, instructing courses and serving as a mentor to the many students involved with her research program. She teaches multiple classes focused on forest fire and forest ecology where she trains and leads undergraduate and graduate

students in the applications of forest fire management, while providing them with unique, hands-on opportunities. “She is by far the best supervisor and mentor I have ever had,” one of her students said. “She has created an incredibly collaborative lab where members at all stages learn from and support one another, leading to both stronger science and better-trained people.”

Outside of the university, Alexander is an active voice in the fire ecology community. She has organized sessions and lectured at the International Fire Ecology Congress and served on the advisory board for the Longleaf Partnership Council of America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative and the User Board for Consortium of Appalachian Fire Managers.

“Reflecting back over my career, I feel fortunate to have had so many incredible opportunities,” Alexander said. “I’ve mentored and taught outstanding students, collaborated with bright and thoughtful scientists

and traveled from deep South Texas to the Siberian Arctic to witness firsthand the many ways that fire shapes ecosystems.”

“Throughout all my endeavors, my students, colleagues and family provided unwavering support that allowed me to grow both as a person and as a scientist. This award isn’t just about me; it’s about all the people around me who have allowed me to lead. Ultimately, my successes are their successes, and awards like this belong to us all.”

– Heather Alexander

Alexander adds that her lab’s experiences reflect wide-ranging, cross-disciplinary partnerships and student-centered projects that define the organization. Advancing fire ecology research remains central to their purpose.

The breadth and diversity of Alexander’s lab is testimony to her commitment to advancing her field of study and the development of her students, said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean in the CFWE.

“We are very proud of Dr. Alexander’s work. She is a globally recognized researcher, exceptional teacher and collaborative leader whose influence extends across disciplines, professions and regions,” said Alavalapati.

For more information on the Auburn Forest and Fire Ecology lab, visit their website or contact Alexander at heather.alexander@auburn.edu.



Staff Corner

Meet Ashley Brantley, CFWE's student services, internship coordinator *By Jamie Anderson*



For Ashley Brantley, joining Auburn University’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) as a student services coordinator in 2025 felt like coming home.

Brantley, who holds both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in horticulture from Auburn, was formerly a 4-H youth development agent and an agriculture and natural resources agent at the University of Georgia. She says the college’s emphasis on natural resources management closely aligns with her core values and brings her personal fulfillment through its mission to educate the next generation of natural resource stewards.

“In those roles, I enjoyed working with the public and connecting individuals to resources that helped them make informed decisions,” said Brantley.

As a graduate research assistant, she enjoyed working closely with both undergraduate and graduate students. That experience sparked her interest in returning to a student-focused role where she could offer

more personalized support and help students work toward their academic and career goals—ultimately leading her back to Auburn and the CFWE.

In her current position as student services coordinator, Brantley supports CFWE students in several impactful ways. As the Parks and Recreation Management internship coordinator, she teaches Professional Preparation in Parks and Recreation, which helps prepare students for their required internships. She also assists in planning CFWE events, including the annual career fair, and helps employers connect with CFWE students to share internship and career opportunities. Additionally, she serves as the academic advisor for the Parks and Recreation Management students and a portion of the Wildlife Enterprise Management students.

“My favorite aspect of my job is working one-on-one with students to develop a plan that helps them reach their goals. I especially enjoy hearing about the amazing places they have been and the exciting experiences they have had along the way.”

– Ashley Brantley

Outside of the office, Brantley spends time with her kids at their volleyball and baseball games. In her free time, she also enjoys gardening and learning more about native plants, which are relaxing ways for her to stay connected to something she is passionate about. Her other pastimes include hiking through the Yates Lake Wildlife Management Area, baking and watching movies.

Meet Sarah Crim, KPNC's education director *By Cole Sikes*



Sarah Crim has been serving others ever since she graduated from Auburn University. Holding both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in forestry from Auburn, she has been involved with helping students achieve academic greatness

and opening doors to outdoor education for people of all ages.

A graduate of the Auburn College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE), Crim began her career at the CFWE as director of student services.

“Through this position I was able to work with undergraduate students as they progressed through their academic studies and help them decide on their career paths and professional journeys,” Crim said. “During this time, I came to also be in connection with the Kreher Preserve and Nature Center (KPNC) and served on the hiring committee for the KPNC’s first manager.”

To this day, Crim enjoys reminiscing about her educational experiences at the CFWE with faculty and staff, while also witnessing the next generation of undergraduates creating academic memories of their own.

“I love walking down the halls and seeing photos of my past, whether it be past professors or past practicum experiences, alongside photos of the present. To see old traditions mixed with new and the growth of the college is truly heartwarming. I love getting to be a part of the college that gave me so much.”

– Sarah Crim

As her family grew, so did her appreciation for outreach and outdoor education. She longed to provide the same experiences for her children as well as others in the community, Sprouting from this desire was Forest Friends, Crim’s first outdoor education program. Sixteen years later, this program is still going and

helped give rise to the ever-popular Woodland Wonders Nature Preschool, which was established in 2019.

Today, Crim serves as education director of the KPNC and has helped exponentially grow the preserve’s education offerings and outreach initiatives.

“I have been honored to be a part of the KPNC and its growth in the community,” Crim said. “It means so much to me to have been a part of so many people’s lives and adventures there.”

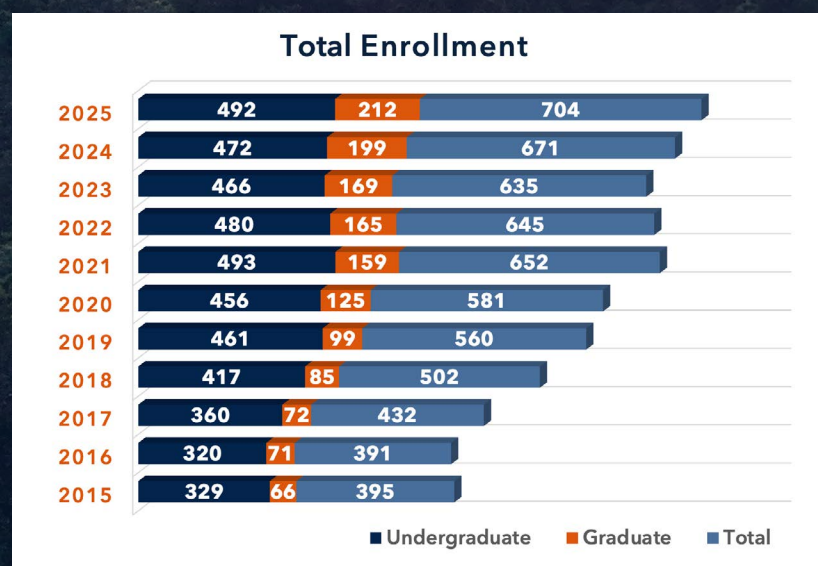
Crim says that, when she is not in the woods, she can normally be found spending time with her family around Auburn and Opelika, Alabama, or potentially on a run with friends. Outside of the Auburn community, Crim adds that she still has more national parks to cross off her list and more live music concerts to attend.

Academics & Learning



Established in 2019, the FEWL Academy celebrated the graduation of its seventh cohort last fall.

INCREASED
UNDERGRADUATE
ENROLLMENT
TO NEARLY
500



INCREASED
CREDIT
HOUR
PRODUCTION
15%



84% of undergraduate students participate in high impact practices like research.

86%
EMPLOYMENT
SUCCESS
RATE



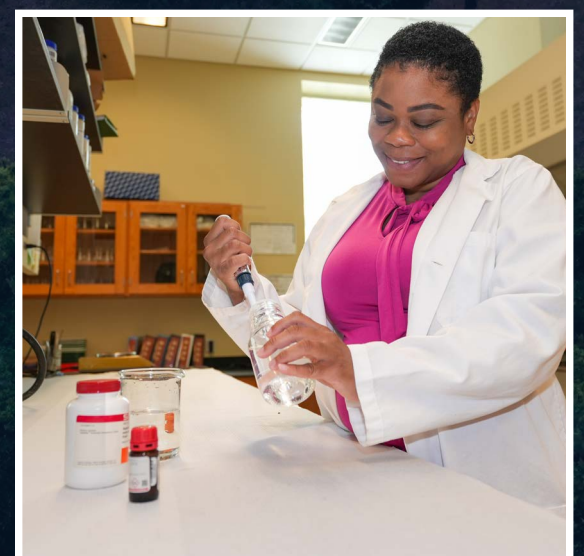
Increased Career Fair student participation by 93%.

Research & Discovery

CFWE AWARDED
\$8.4 Million
IN CONTRACTS
& GRANTS IN 2025

139 **NUMBER OF**
RESEARCH
PROPOSALS SUBMITTED
IN 2025

82%
CONTINUING
EDUCATION
SUCCESS
RATE



Faculty study emerging threats to forest health.

Extension & Outreach

FORESTRY, WILDLIFE & NATURAL RESOURCES EXTENSION ACHIEVED



AWARDED **3,581 CEU CREDITS**
TO FORESTERS AND LOGGERS

ENGAGES MORE THAN
10,531 participants
NATURAL RESOURCES 4-H PROGRAM



Participants in the 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program Contest.



KPNC completes first year as Alabama First Class Preschool.



The Dixon Center recorded 13,729 user days, including CFWE's summer practicum.



Auburn's BOT approves Dixon Center's new 64-bed dorm facility.

THE CENTER FOR
NATURAL RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT ON
MILITARY LANDS
BROUGHT
\$5.4 Million
TO AUBURN UNIVERSITY
IN 2025

Alumni & Friends



An Evening of Gratitude celebrates students, donors.



Woodlands & Wildlife Society members gather for fellowship.

Back to the beginning: WLEM alumnus returns to advance program *By Cole Sikes*



Dylan Thomas and his wife, Hannah, pose with their beloved bird dogs.

Dylan Thomas had a change of heart during his undergraduate career at Auburn University. A new hobby led him to experience his true passion: outdoor recreation and bird dogs. With this newfound purpose came adventures, expertise and a new career path within the outdoor recreation industry. As a graduate of Auburn’s Wildlife Enterprise Management (WLEM) major, Thomas now returns to his alma mater to shepherd the next generation of wildlife enterprise professionals.

MAN’S BEST FRIEND

A native of Atlanta, Georgia, Thomas would spend his childhood summers escaping the metropolitan scene to New Hampshire, where he enjoyed fishing, hiking and adventuring through the abundant forests and waterways. However, Thomas and his family were never alone on these treks.

“Dogs have always been a big part of our family,” Thomas said. “We have never been without at least one family dog. When our extended family got together at the lake house in New Hampshire, everyone and all their dogs would be hanging out doing various activities all day. Those are some of my fondest memories.”

After arriving on the Plains to begin college, Thomas found himself missing the family dog and longing for a four-legged companion of his own. Feeling a pull strong enough to defy his parents’ wishes at the time, he researched breeders and adopted a new furry friend to fill the void.

“I did not know it at the time, but that pup I brought back to my apartment changed the trajectory of my life—spiritually, academically and professionally,” Thomas said. “She opened a whole outdoor recreation

world which I had not seen before but immediately became infatuated with. She was the reason I switched my major at Auburn to WLEM. She provided professional opportunities I would not have gained on my own, such as guiding upland waterfowl hunts and private wing-shooting experiences for industry events. Above all, she gave me purpose and clarity during a time when most college students are searching for what they want to do with their lives.”

Just like that, Thomas was hooked on a new career path, willing to do whatever it took to succeed and expand his professional horizons. He turned to wildlife recreation as his purpose and found the perfect home at Auburn’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE).

NEW CAREER, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Thomas was drawn to the WLEM program at Auburn to learn how to make his new passion a career. Soon after transitioning to the major, he knew he had found a degree path that would provide the essential knowledge and future connections necessary to break into the outdoor industry. Courses such as Hunting and Fishing the World, Wildlife Enterprise Field Techniques and Advanced Wildlife Enterprise Management would provide the skills and expertise to make his dream a reality.

Upon graduating from Auburn’s WLEM program in 2021 with a minor in business, Thomas continued gaining industry experience working for outdoor companies such as Orvis and Diamond Bird Dogs LLC. These positions gave him the opportunities to lead upland guided hunts, train dogs, coordinate shooting clay events and host his own outdoors show focused on wing shooting sports.

Building on these experiences, Thomas began a new role as an Auburn University professor of practice in January, where he can now give back to other WLEM students by providing the unique guidance only a WLEM alumnus can offer.

“I have held several roles within industry. Now I have the opportunity here at Auburn to step back, recognize the big picture, and help students navigate a path to their own career success through my experience, knowledge and growing network of connections.”
– Dylan Thomas

Transferring the practical and critical thinking skills obtained from classroom lectures to the field will be imperative for graduating top-tier WLEM students.

Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE, shares his excitement about Thomas’s addition to the program.

“Dylan brings an energy and authenticity to the WLEM program that is impossible to teach,” said Alavalapati. “His industry experience, passion for outdoor recreation and commitment to mentoring students make him an invaluable addition to our college. He understands our students because he was one of them, and that perspective will help shape the next generation of leaders in the outdoor enterprise field.”

Visit cfwe.auburn.edu to learn how Thomas is paying it forward and shepherding the next generation of wildlife enterprise professionals at Auburn.



FEWL Academy member, forestry student honored with President's Award *By Blair Milford*



William "Tine" Latimer is shown at the President Awards Ceremony with President Christopher B. Roberts on the left, and Janaki Alavalapati, the CFWE's Emmett F. Thompson Dean, on the right.

The Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) proudly honored forestry student William “Tine” Latimer as this year’s President’s Award recipient, recognizing a student whose impact deeply reflects the college’s mission and values.

The President’s Award recognizes students who embody the highest standards of academic excellence, leadership and service. Latimer,

originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee, has made meaningful contributions across the CFWE through leadership, research and service. His roles include vice president and treasurer of the college’s Student Government Association, where he advocated for CFWE students and helped strengthen connections between students, faculty and administration. As a student ambassador, he

represented the CFWE to prospective students and alumni, sharing the opportunities and community that define the college’s experience.

Within the Auburn Forestry Club, Latimer led a major charity initiative supporting children’s hospitals, bringing together students, faculty and industry partners in a shared commitment to service. He also prioritized leadership development through the Forest, Environment and Wildlife Leadership (FEWL) Academy, gaining exposure to the intersections of natural resources, business and public policy that shape the future of the workforce.

“Tine’s record reflects the very best of the CFWE. His commitment to academic excellence, leadership and service, combined with his ability to connect research, industry and community impact exemplifies the kind of forward-thinking leader our college strives to develop.”
– Dean Alavalapati

Latimer’s influence extended into his research, where he served as an undergraduate research fellow studying drought tolerance and its implications for sustainable

forest management. As a research assistant, he conducted statistical modeling and data analysis supporting peer-reviewed work focused on forest health, productivity and sustainable management practices.

Recognized as a University Honors Scholar and Presidential Scholar, Latimer earned eleven scholarships and was named to the Dean’s List each semester, further reflecting his dedication to academic excellence within the CFWE.

Beyond campus, he completed a land management internship with The Westervelt Company, where he evaluated operational efficiency and long-term asset performance to support data-driven decision-making.

Following graduation, Latimer plans to pursue hands-on experience in forestry and land management while earning a Master of Business Administration, with the goal of working at the intersection of forestry, business and sustainability.

CFWE Student Life: *Beyond the Classroom*

Wildlife Pre-Vet graduate defines CFWE student life by hands-on, real-world experiences gained *By Cole Sikes*

Courtney Ortel, a recent graduate of the Wildlife Sciences Pre Veterinary Medicine major from Huntsville, Alabama, credits the hands-on learning and real-world applications of her classroom studies as the defining experiences of her time in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE).

Her favorite class, Habitat Management with Associate Professor Will Gulsby, brought together many of the concepts and skills she built throughout her coursework and allowed her to apply them in practical, meaningful ways. The class strengthened her understanding of wildlife management while

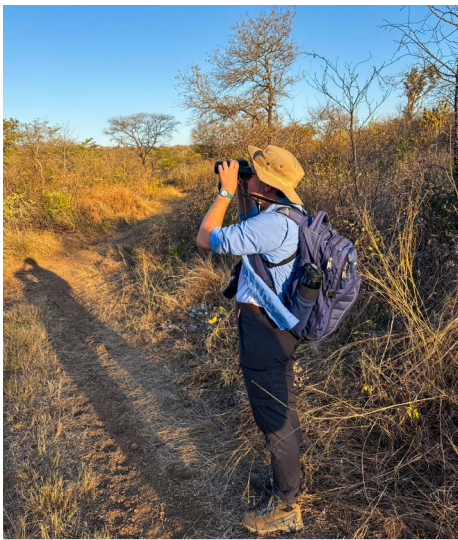
reinforcing how classroom knowledge translates directly to the field.

When it comes to mentorship, Ortel points to Wesley Anderson as an especially influential wildlife professor. During the past four years, Anderson’s kindness, patience and unwavering support have made a lasting impact. He consistently encourages students to get involved in wildlife-related opportunities and helps them connect with the resources needed to grow as wildlife professionals, says Ortel.

One of Ortel’s most valuable experiences at Auburn was participating in the CFWE’s wildlife management study abroad trip in South Africa. During the two week

course in Eswatini and South Africa, she explored how culture, history, government and ecology intersect to shape wildlife management practices. Experiencing the region’s landscapes and wildlife firsthand was unforgettable and truly the trip of a lifetime.

Looking ahead, Ortel will attend the Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine to earn her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree. With a goal of working in wildlife management or research as a veterinarian, she’s excited to continue building her skills and contributing to the future of wildlife conservation.



Ortel is seen observing wildlife during a study abroad trip to South Africa.

Geospatial Information Science major gains field skills performing research, fulfilling internship with Georgia Power *By Cole Sikes*



Evan Farry assists Georgia Power team in the field as an intern.

Evan Farry didn’t always see the landscape the way he does now. Growing up in Chelsea, Alabama, the forests, wetlands and rolling terrain

of the Southeast were familiar—but it wasn’t until he arrived at Auburn’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) that those places began to tell a deeper story.

As a Geospatial Information Science major with a minor in Geography, Evan quickly discovered that maps were more than static images—they were living tools, revealing patterns and connections hidden beneath the surface. In the classroom and the field, he learned how data and technology could translate the natural world into something measurable, understandable and, ultimately, actionable.

One course, in particular, changed everything. In Forest Ecology, Evan found himself immersed in hands-on fieldwork—walking through stands of timber, studying ecological relationships and beginning to see forests not just as scenery, but as complex, dynamic

systems. It was a turning point that reshaped how he understood the environment around him.

Along the way, mentors made that journey even more meaningful. Associate Professor Lana Narine stood out—not just for her clear and engaging teaching style, but for the genuine care she showed her students. In her classroom, difficult concepts became approachable, and learning felt less like a task and more like a shared pursuit of understanding.

Evan’s student experience extended well beyond campus. As a natural resources/GIS intern with Georgia Power, he stepped into the real world of applied geospatial science, using GIS to tackle challenges tied to natural resources and utility systems. It was there that the connection between data and decision-making became tangible—where the skills he’d developed in class were put to work in meaningful ways.

Back at Auburn, he continued to deepen his experience through research. Whether assisting with data collection for a doctoral project on wetland processes or investigating how tropical storms impact southeastern ecosystems as an undergraduate research fellow, Evan found himself contributing to work that could shape how natural systems are understood and managed.

Now a graduate, Evan looks ahead with a clear sense of purpose. He hopes to build a career in forestry management or the public utility sector, using geospatial tools to guide smarter, more informed environmental decisions.

For Evan, the journey has been about more than earning a degree—it’s been about learning to see the world differently, one layer of data at a time. Farry recently accepted a new position as a GIS analyst with Spire Inc., a natural gas company, in Montgomery, Alabama.

CFWE students gain industry experience, build networks at ARPA *By Blair Milford*



CFWE students and faculty attend the ARPA Conference in Orange Beach, Alabama.

Students in the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) recently gained hands-on industry experience at the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) Conference in Orange Beach, Alabama.

A group of Parks and Recreation Management (PARK) students including Ketch Daniel, Cooper Anderson, Elizabeth Burns, Maleah Gonzalez, Abigail Page and Harper Echeverry, attended the conference alongside CFWE faculty members Michael Brunson and Allie McCreary.

Throughout the three-day event, they participated in educational sessions, served as room monitors and connected with parks and recreation professionals from across the state.

The conference sessions covered a vast array of topics, including aquatics management, summer camp programming, leadership development and the use of artificial intelligence in recreation planning. These sessions provided insights into both day-to-day operations and the evolving innovations shaping the field.

In addition to attending sessions, the students engaged directly with industry professionals through networking events and the conference exhibit hall. These interactions allowed them to ask questions, explore career paths and gain a clearer understanding of opportunities within parks and recreation.

For many students, the conference provided the opportunity to expand their knowledge of classroom theory in a real-world setting. Throughout these sessions, students were encouraged to engage with new topics and perspectives in real time.

“The sessions I monitored pushed me to go outside my comfort zone. It was a great opportunity to interact with topics I wouldn’t normally explore and learn more about the professional recreation world.”
– Elizabeth Burns

As students engaged in conversations with professionals and peers throughout the conference, many

began to realize the value of simply showing up, introducing themselves and being open to connection. These moments, while sometimes informal, played a significant role in shaping their experience.

“My key takeaway was the importance of putting yourself out there,” said Daniel. “By embracing every networking opportunity, I was able to connect with professionals who offered insights you can’t always get from a textbook.”

The conference also highlighted the value of hands-on, interactive learning sessions designed to actively involve participants rather than just presenting information. This allowed students to see firsthand how creativity and engagement play a role in successful programming.

“It was a fast-paced, hands-on environment that got everyone involved and comfortable with each other,” Gonzalez said. “It also gave me the chance to connect with professionals about potential future employment in a more relaxed setting.”

Auburn faculty seeks to strengthen Alabama’s forest industry *By Jamie Anderson*



Graduate student Abu Tahiru interviews a logging truck driver.

Faculty in Auburn University’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) are working to better understand—and help solve—the day-to-day challenges facing Alabama’s forestry and forest products industry.

Through funding from Auburn’s Rural Partnership Institute (AURPI), a CFWE Forestry Team led by professors Marissa “Jo” Daniel, Richard Cristan, Adam Maggard and Lana Narine is studying how regulatory changes, operational pressures and new technologies affect loggers, truck drivers, mills and forest-based businesses across Alabama and the Southeast.

For many in the industry, these challenges show up on the ground: navigating changing air quality regulations, deciding whether costly new equipment is worth

the investment or managing truck weight limits that affect hauling efficiency. The research team is generating practical, data-driven insights designed to support safe, efficient and financially sustainable forest operations—while helping policymakers and industry leaders better understand how regulations play out in real working conditions.

“Improving the efficiencies of forest operations is an integral component of our work. If we want a strong, resilient forest economy, we have to understand what operators are actually facing and help them better adapt to a changing market and regulatory landscape.”
– Marissa Jo Daniel

To do that, the researchers have conducted interviews and surveys with forestry stakeholders across the supply chain. These conversations focus on issues such as how businesses decide whether to adopt new harvesting or trucking technologies, how compensation structures affect logging businesses and third-party truck drivers and how the forest industry is being impacted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s updated National Ambient Air Quality Standards for fine particulate matter (PM2.5).

“These stakeholder engagements have directly shaped both our research questions and our workforce development efforts,” Daniel said. “The industry is telling us what works, what doesn’t and where the biggest pressure points are.”

Current projects include studying the differences in how interstate and state highways are used for log truck transportation in Alabama, how truck weight limits affect logging businesses and drivers and what barriers—such as licensing requirements, insurance costs and equipment investments—make it difficult for new logging truck drivers to enter the profession. The team also aims to estimate logging equipment carbon emissions, diesel exhaust

fluid use and fuel consumption—information that can help operators anticipate compliance costs and identify efficiency improvements. The goal is to translate these findings into practical outcomes: clearer guidance for loggers and truck drivers, a better understanding of regulatory compliance costs and research results that can be turned into training materials and Extension programming.

“Ultimately, these initiatives are about building confidence and competence. That means improving technical skills, increasing awareness of regulations and helping current and future forestry professionals be better prepared for the realities of the job.”
– Marissa Jo Daniel

Looking ahead, the team plans to launch new scale studies to support Alabama’s forestry and trucking industries, expand simulator-based research to better understand truck performance and operator decision-making and continue strengthening long-term benefits for the workers, landowners and communities that sustain Alabama’s forest economy.

Simonis helps develop new framework for cross-species disease transmission

By Cole Sikes

Bats, much like humans, are exposed to the risks of cohabitation when it comes to sharing germs. In tight quarters, it can be increasingly difficult to prevent disease transmission. For bats, the added layer of small communal dwelling spaces makes the situation even trickier.

A highly important member of the animal kingdom, bats help provide free pest control, pollinate flowering plant species and mitigate disease spread from insects such as mosquitoes. Due to the myriad of benefits they provide society, bat conservation has become a calling for one Auburn scientist.

Molly Simonis, an Auburn University assistant professor of disease ecology and avid bat researcher in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) and the College of Veterinary Medicine, has been working to identify the major factors contributing to zoonotic disease transmission across different species, with a special focus on bats.

In a recent study published in Ecology, a premier journal of the Ecological Society of America, Simonis and a partner university report advances in modeling frameworks for cross-species disease transmission among these flying mammals.

Bats are known biological reservoirs of several pathogens. Zoonotic diseases, or infectious diseases that naturally transmit from animals to people, can be a threat to human health. As the world witnessed recently with the COVID-19 pandemic, zoonotic disease types have the capability to cripple economies, industries and global health, furthering the importance of disease ecology research.



Simonis claims that one important factor in pathogen transmission between host species is the degree of relatedness between those species. Further, when different species are in close contact, as when multiple bat species roost together, close relatedness between species can facilitate infections jumping to different hosts.

By using mathematical equations, the research team has created a modeling framework to simulate infections among co-roosting bat species and measure resulting infections within a shared roost over time that will help scientists to better understand how disease transmission between bat species is affected by their relatedness.

With this new tool at the disposal of the research community, disease ecologists can now incorporate the ‘family tree’ into disease transmission

models, which Simonis states will provide, “a better understanding of ecological and evolutionary barriers to cross-species transmission and its risks to public health.”

The study recently published by the team in Ecology, “A general framework for modeling pathogen transmission in co-roosting host communities,” illustrates the potential for this ecological modeling framework as endless. By creating a generalized epidemiological framework that can be used to study the pathogens of today and tomorrow, Simonis is eager to see how this work will advance overall understanding of cross-species transmission, particularly zoonotic pathogen transmission from bats to other hosts.

As a whole, this research serves as a prime example of the CFWE’s commitment to quality, impactful research. Janaki Alavalapati,

CFWE Emmett F. Thompson Dean, reinforces the accomplishments of Simonis and her team.

“Dr. Simonis and her team are not only advancing our understanding of disease ecology but also building tools that will shape how future generations protect wildlife, safeguard public health and respond to emerging global challenges.”
– Dean Alavalapati

“This work exemplifies the kind of bold, innovative science that defines our college,” Alavalapati said. “Their commitment to discovery reflects the very best of Auburn’s mission and the transformative impact our research can have far beyond campus.”

Auburn researchers advance detection and control strategies to protect regional forests

By Jamie Anderson



An Auburn University research team in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment, led by Lori Eckhardt, CFWE professor of forest health and director of Auburn's Forest Health Cooperative, has completed the initial phase of its brown spot needle blight (BSNB) research study, delivering innovative tools and strategies to safeguard the region's forest industry.

Auburn University has completed the initial phase of its brown spot needle blight (BSNB) research study, delivering actionable results to industry that will help tame the proliferation of the needle blight now decimating pine forests across the southeast.

A GROWING ECONOMIC THREAT

Pine forests are essential to the Southeast's economy, especially in Alabama, where forest products generate more than \$12.5 billion annually and support over \$1.5 billion in exports. However, this vital sector faces increasing pressure from invasive pests and diseases like BSNB. Currently affecting 58 of Alabama's 67 counties, the disease poses a serious economic risk. Researchers estimate that if just half of the state's susceptible loblolly pine trees become infected, losses could reach \$2 billion. Nationwide, forest damage from

pests and pathogens already costs an estimated \$4.5 billion annually. To address this growing threat, Eckhardt and her colleagues—including CFWE faculty Lana Narine, Janna Willoughby and Joseph Fan—launched the study in 2022 with support from the U.S. Forest Service. During Phase I, which concludes in December 2026, the team established 22 plots, capturing tree growth, disease severity, physiological traits, environmental variables and spore dynamics across Alabama and trained a new generation of scientists, with doctoral students, Jaden King, Swati Singh, Temitope Folorunso and Gabriel Silva leading various components of the study while mentoring undergraduate researchers.

PHASE I DEFINES A SYSTEMS-LEVEL MITIGATION STRATEGY

“Overall, this study gives industry a much clearer picture of what causes

needle blight and how it spreads, which is critical for managing it effectively,” said Eckhardt. “Instead of treating needle blight as a simple problem with a single cause, the research shows it is a complex disease involving multiple fungi that interact with each other and the environment. That deeper understanding will help avoid one-size-fits-all solutions that may not work.”

Because the project produced strong datasets and new tools, Eckhardt says that landowners will now have better ways to detect and monitor the disease early. With accurate mapping and monitoring the team anticipates that land managers, growers and foresters will be able to identify high-risk areas sooner, concentrate resources where they're needed most and avoid unnecessary treatments in healthy areas.

“This systems-level approach—looking at genetics, environmental conditions and disease patterns together—helps us to better understand why outbreaks happen in some places but not others,” said Eckhardt. “This supports smarter decision-making, such as adjusting management practices, timing interventions more effectively and reducing conditions that allow the disease to spread.”

Further, Eckhardt says the team has laid the groundwork for practical prevention and control strategies. By understanding how multiple pathogens work together, industry can develop more targeted treatments, improved monitoring protocols and better long-term management plans that reduce disease spread rather than simply reacting after damage has occurred.

Just as importantly, the publications and methods generated by the scientists will ensure that scientists

and industry professionals can continue using and building on this work, ultimately supporting ongoing innovation, improving resilience and helping protect productivity and environmental health over time.

PHASE II EXPANDS MONITORING, DETECTION AND FOREST HEALTH SOLUTIONS

With additional support from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) through the State of Alabama, the team will continue its work over the next several years.

Looking ahead, Phase II will expand the research with additional team members, including Hao Chen, assistant professor of forest genomics, and Annakay Newell, Extension specialist and assistant professor of forest health. This next phase will focus on understanding how environmental factors like climate and landscape influence disease spread, developing AI-driven monitoring systems using Earth observation data and identifying fungal traits that increase disease severity. The team will also prioritize outreach and education to ensure their findings are translated into practical tools for land managers.

“Ultimately, the work led by Eckhardt and her interdisciplinary team provides a clearer path forward for protecting pine forests, reducing economic losses and strengthening the long-term sustainability of the southeastern forest industry,” said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE.

To learn more about the project and research team, visit cfwe.auburn.edu or scan the QR code.



Zutao Ouyang receives Early Career Research Fellowship

By Cole Sikes



The Gulf region has a new champion at Auburn University to advance scientific knowledge of ecosystem health and community resilience.

Auburn College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE) Assistant Professor Zutao Ouyang is being recognized and supported for his early career advancements. An expert in ecosystem modeling, Ouyang has been named an Early-Career Research Fellow in the 2025-2027 cohort of the National Academies of Sciences Gulf Research Program (GRP). The 2025-2027 cohort features eight fellows focused on the GRP's environmental protection and stewardships track, a project focus area that advances knowledge in scientific design, implementation and the evaluation of nature-based solutions, according to the GRP. Ouyang's experience in ecosystem modeling is a strong expertise in addition to an already

stout research team, furthering the impact potential of the cohort. “Our Early-Career Research Fellows are leading the way in applying science for the public good,” said Karena Mothershed, director of GRP's Board on Gulf Education and Engagement. “Whether advancing nature-based solutions to strengthen ecosystems and community resilience or reimagining STEM education to foster a deeper sense of place, these fellows are applying their expertise to real-world challenges to create a bright future for the Gulf region.” Ouyang leverages his geospatial and ecosystem modeling expertise to analyze and design natural resource management strategies and climate solutions. In recognition of the groundbreaking research Ouyang co-led with a team from Stanford University and other international institutions on global hydrogen and methane budgets, his work was recently published in the prestigious journals, Nature and Science. Ouyang has also applied his expertise to advance academic instruction through the Geospatial Information Science major. One of the few programs offered in the Southeast, the Geospatial

Information Science program brings together information technology, spatial science, data analysis, natural resources and ecological modeling to prepare students for in-demand technological careers where “Big data” drives decisions. “I am honored to be selected as an Early-Career Research Fellow in the GRP,” Ouyang said. “This fellowship recognizes my research, and I am excited to join the GRP community and engage with fellow scientists, practitioners and policymakers working across disciplines to help urban green infrastructure that are not only effective under extreme and compound climate events, but also equitable and responsive to local needs.” An independent program founded on science in 2013, the GRP's mission is to “develop, translate and apply science to enhance the safety of offshore energy, the environment and the well-being of the people of the Gulf region for generations to come.” The GRP is a direct response to the Deepwater Horizon crude oil disaster in 2010, which inflicted more than \$61 billion in economic and environmental damages. Since its inception, the program has devoted

its resources and expertise to the progress of rebuilding this coastal region. Currently, the GRP has catalogued more than 90 projects and 490 events supporting the generation of lasting solutions to the Gulf. Each fellow receives support from the GRP during the imperative pre-tenure chapter of their respective careers in the form of a \$76,000 award and a mentorship network to assist with their professional research growth. With his new support, Ouyang is poised to contribute heavily to the continued success of the GRP. “Dr. Ouyang represents the next generation of scientific leaders whose work bridges data science, ecology and decision-making,” said Janaki Alavalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the CFWE. “Ouyang's appointment to the GRP underscores the vital role Auburn plays in developing innovative solutions for the most pressing environmental challenges of our time. We are proud to see his work contributing to solutions that strengthen the health and resilience of the Gulf region.” Ouyang assumes this role immediately and is currently collaborating with his fellows in the restoration journey for a healthier, prosperous Gulf region.

Auburn's Center for Natural Resources Management on Military Lands

expands services, staff *By Cole Sikes*



Supporting the United States military has been the mission-critical purpose of Auburn University's Center for Natural Resources Management on Military Lands (CNRMML). Since its inception in 2022, the center has established a model partnership with military installations that is redefining how public universities support the military's operations and conservation priorities. In 2026, the CNRMML is now expanding its services to meet the diverse and growing needs of its partners while bolstering the outreach mission of the Auburn College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE).

FULFILLING A NEED

The Department of Defense (DOD) is the country's fifth largest landowner, overseeing more than 8.8 million acres of property. Within these sites are water bodies, forests and wildlife habitat, many of which exist in proximity to the military's installations and operational areas, requiring significant management expertise to address natural resource issues and ensure compliance with regulatory policies. As one can imagine, it literally takes an army to efficiently manage these lands so that the DOD can sustain operational training, testing and research.

More than a decade ago, in 2013, Congress authorized the establishment of Intergovernmental Support Agreements (IGSAs) for U.S. military branches to partner with state, local and tribal governments for installation support services. The goal of this legislation was to reduce costs and enhance mission effectiveness.

Three years later, Auburn and Fort Benning, Georgia, a local installation of the U.S. Army, signed an IGSA to supply ecological monitoring services. Then in 2022, Auburn and the U.S. Army

solidified this partnership by signing a historic, 10-year Regional Intergovernmental Support Agreement (RIGSA) to provide natural resource management services to eight military bases across the southeastern region of the U.S., including Redstone Arsenal and Fort Rucker in Alabama; Forts Benning, Gordon and Stewart in Georgia; Fort Polk in Louisiana; Fort Bragg in North Carolina and Fort Jackson in South Carolina. To facilitate these services, the CNRMML was created in the CFWE to be the administrative arm to fulfill these agreements through the Army's task orders.

"The mission of the CNRMML is to assist and enhance natural resource management programs on U.S. military installations while concurrently creating research, education and outreach opportunities for Auburn," said George Matusick, the CNRMML director.

"We aim to bridge the gap that currently exists between natural resource managers on military lands and the natural resource management education and research. Our vision is to emerge as the preeminent resource for natural resources managers on U.S. military installations."

– George Matusick

Shortly after the CNRMML's establishment, the RIGSA agreement was expanded. Now more than 50 U.S. Army installations in the continental U.S. can secure services through the Auburn RIGSA agreement.

"The initial expansion allowed us to work collaboratively with several installations who were interested in working with us but were not named in the original agreement," Matusick said.

"This was critical for expanding partnership opportunities outside the southeastern U.S."

The CNRMML has grown exponentially with the scope of its ecological services that include prescribed burning, GIS mapping, wild game management, tree planting and site preparation, non-native invasive species control, threatened and endangered species surveys and monitoring. To facilitate this growth, Auburn hired and placed full-time employees at installations such as Fort Benning, fully integrating Auburn within IMCOM's land management systems.

Beyond expanding its footprint, the center's success is largely due to Matusick and his team's efforts to improve access to services for military resource managers. Toward this end, the team has worked closely with Auburn to streamline the acquisition and fulfillment process, making it easier and more efficient for managers to receive this support.

At Fort Benning, the CNRMML facilitates the installation's conservation goals and land management through its partnership with the Natural Resources Management Branch (NRMB), a group responsible for the overall management of military lands.

"The RIGSA is a highly effective tool for managing Army natural resources, cutting administrative execution time by an average of 35% compared to traditional contracts," said James Parker, chief of Fort Benning's NRMB and an Auburn alumnus.

"Working with George and the Auburn University team provides Fort Benning with a reliable partnership and cost-efficient services."

– James Parker



In some cases, the CNRMML staff will secure third-party contractors to provide services requiring specialized equipment or technical capabilities. In the past, this process could potentially be cumbersome for military installations because of numerous bidding processes, vetting protocols and communication between vendors. Now, with CNRMML managing these services, whether directly or through contractors, from start to finish, the center is helping fulfill each installation’s unique needs.

“We have the ability to acquire services from a wide range of private companies, state and local governments, non-profit organizations and other universities, which allows us to find the best-positioned service provider for our military partners on any given task,” Matusick said.

EXPANDING SERVICE HORIZONS

Military installations are complex and contain numerous features, facilities, amenities, structures and training areas that support their operations and personnel. Although the RIGSA between Auburn and the U.S. Army originally focused on natural resource-related services, the CNRMML has recently expanded to include environmental compliance, architecture and engineering services.

To oversee these endeavors for their clientele, the center recently welcomed two new assistant directors to its leadership staff, John Richards and Brandi Boutwell. Richards, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran and two-time Auburn alumnus, will focus on developing a program capable of supporting military partners with services to maintain compliance with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National

Environmental Policy Act and many other federal, state and Army-specific laws and regulations. Boutwell, a registered architect, Auburn alumna and holder of a National Council for Interior Design Qualification certification, is tasked with developing a program capable of supporting military partners with services to maintain and upgrade infrastructure, including buildings, bridges, roadways and more.

“John and Brandi's expertise will allow the CNRMML to provide this critical set of services that allows our military partner installations to function and ensure mission sustainability.”

– George Matusick

A third expanded horizon for the center’s services will include cultural resources management. The U.S. Army manages more than 4,000 historic buildings, 54,000 archaeological sites, 17 National Historic Landmarks and 31 sacred Native American sites. Without proper guidance on legal, ethical and scientific preservation of historical sites, artifacts and culturally significant landscapes, operations and research can quickly be halted at the Army installations.

As the CNRMML expands the breadth of its impact and reach, it remains committed to strengthening its services to ensure the high-quality assistance its clients have come to expect continues to be the standard.

LEADING THE CHARGE

One of the most important goals of the CNRMML is to be an example of what is possible through intergovernmental partnerships. As an R1 research institution, the military gains access to Auburn’s technical expertise and state-of-the-art resources to ensure the optimal success of its task orders. Outreach and extension are also an integral part of the university’s land-grant mission, and the center provides new and impactful opportunities to engage the military through this partnership.

A small fraction of state academic institutions are utilizing this relatively new congressional authorization. The rapport that the CNRMML has built with the U.S. Army has allowed the center to lead the charge of forging new relationships with the federal government while also securing important sources of extramural funding, which have become scarcer in recent years.

Matusick says that in 2025, the CNRMML secured approximately \$5.4 million in funding

for the fiscal year. This amount has increased year over year, providing beneficial revenue sources for the CFWE and the university.

“Expanding the volume and types of services we provide is increasing the number of partnership opportunities, our impact on the management of military lands and extramural funding to Auburn University.”

– George Matusick

Incorporating experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students is also a priority of the CNRMML. For the first time this year, the center conducted a student field trip to a military installation. The CNRRML staff, along with host partners at Fort Benning, facilitated a day-long exhibition of NRMB operations, led by Chief Parker. Students gained invaluable hands-on learning and perspective about military lands management while witnessing prescribed fire demonstrations, a gopher tortoise relocation into native habitat, red-cockaded woodpecker habitat management in pine forests and technical equipment operations.

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE

The CNRMML aims to continue taking its mission to the far reaches of the nation, leveraging its expertise and resources with the successful execution of DOD partnerships. In less than 5 years, the center has formed impactful partnerships with installations throughout the eastern United States, serving those who serve while forging professional and reliable relationships with the U.S. military.

“The CNRMML exemplifies the forward-thinking partnerships that define Auburn’s land-grant mission,” said Janaki Alavalapati, the CFWE’s Emmett F. Thompson Dean. “In only a short time, the Center has established itself as a trusted partner to the U.S. military by delivering innovative, efficient solutions that support both mission readiness and natural resource stewardship.”

“As the center expands its services and reach, we see tremendous opportunity to further elevate Auburn's impact, create meaningful experiential learning opportunities for our students and continue serving those who serve us with excellence well into the future.”

– Dean Alavalapati

Scan the QR code to learn more about the CNRMML’s impactful service to our military.



John Richards ‘08, Assistant Director of Environmental Compliance

John Richards is a veteran of the Marine Corps and finished his 20+ year military career as the assistant director of the environmental management division at Camp Lejeune, NC, ensuring environmental compliance and managing similar programs to those of Auburn University’s Army partners. Prior to taking this position, Richards was living and working in Wichita, Kansas, as an environmental, health and safety manager for a defense manufacturer. He earned a Bachelor of Environmental Science from Auburn University in 2008, and a Master of Environmental Engineering in 2016 from the Air Force Institute of Technology. In this role, Richards will be developing a program capable of supporting military partners with services to maintain compliance with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and many other federal, state, and Army-specific laws and regulations.



Brandi Boutwell, Assistant Director of Architecture & Engineering

Brandi Boutwell is a Registered Architect, a NCIDQ Certified Interior Designer and a U.S. Green Building Council LEED Accredited Professional. In her previous role as Lead Architect for Fort Benning’s Engineering Division, Brandi led the execution of dozens of projects from conception through construction, often involving large, diverse teams of engineers, architects and project managers. She has a complete understanding of military construction practices, the demands on federal civilians tasked with maintaining military installations and how Auburn can best serve military partners. She is a graduate of Auburn’s College of Architecture, Design and Construction. Boutwell will be developing a program capable of supporting military partners with services to maintain and upgrade infrastructure, including buildings, bridges and roadways. This is a critical set of services that allows our military partner installations to function and ensure mission sustainability.

Roberson elevates events and experiences at Crooked Oaks *By Blair Milford*



Evelyn Roberson blends creativity, thoughtfulness and intentionality in her role as events, hospitality and client services coordinator at Crooked Oaks. Roberson’s path into hospitality started early. As a child, she often attended traditional southern gatherings with her mother, where she became fascinated by the small details that made each event feel intentional and welcoming. This early exposure to the events space stayed with her and carried into a career that has spanned multiple industries, including higher education, and always centered around service. Throughout her career, that consistent focus led her to specialize in events and hospitality where she could combine creativity

with meaningful connections. Outside of her new role, Roberson has a deep appreciation for the arts. She enjoys discovering and supporting Alabama artists and has built a personal collection that reflects a wide range of mediums. She is also a creator and recently completed her second commissioned piece. Her connection to Auburn runs deep, shaped by the years she spent supporting her two children during their time as undergraduate students at the university. Her first visit to Crooked Oaks made an immediate impression. “The minute I drove past the azaleas, magnolias and Japanese maples surrounding the gate of Crooked Oaks, I was awestruck by the beauty of the estate,” Roberson said. “I was excited about the opportunity to use my experiences to build relationships and welcome guests to such a special place.” In her role, Roberson focuses on expanding and diversifying event opportunities while increasing the use of Crooked Oaks’ spaces. Her day-to-day work blends strategy with execution, from building client relationships and guiding prospective guests through the booking process to managing the details that ensure

each event runs smoothly. At the center of it all is her commitment to hospitality and creating experiences that reflect both the client’s vision and the unique character of the property.

“I enjoy designing spaces and experiences that foster learning, collaboration and connection.”
– Evelyn Roberson

Crooked Oaks itself plays a key role in that experience. Originally shaped by the vision of former Auburn head football coach Pat Dye, the property continues to serve as a venue for weddings, meetings and private events while also supporting academic engagement through the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE). The blend of legacy and purpose is what makes Crooked Oaks stand out from the crowd. For Roberson, creating these memorable events starts with listening.

“I listen carefully because brides and event planners often emphasize what matters most to them,” she said. “When they feel supported and confident in the details, they can fully enjoy the event.” Janaki Alavalapati, CFWE Emmett F. Thompson Dean, shares his

excitement about Roberson’s addition to the college. “Evelyn brings a rare blend of creativity, professionalism and genuine hospitality to Crooked Oaks,” said Alavalapati. ***“Her ability to craft meaningful experiences while honoring the unique character of the property strengthens not only its legacy, but also our college’s commitment to outreach, learning and community. We are thrilled to welcome her to the CFWE.”***
– Dean Alavalapati

As she looks ahead, Roberson is excited to continue growing awareness of Crooked Oaks and introducing it to new audiences. Through thoughtful programming and well-executed events, she hopes to highlight what makes Crooked Oaks unique while creating opportunities for guests to connect with the space in new and engaging ways. To inquire about hosting a special event or arranging accommodations at Crooked Oaks, email crookedoaks@auburn.edu or scan the QR code to submit a short form.



Newell launches new Extension program to support healthy trees *By Catherine Jackson*

Alabama’s trees are an essential part of the state’s landscape. From backyard shade trees to pine species that support rural economies, trees are important. To help address growing tree health challenges, Extension Specialist Annakay Newell of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System launched TreeStrong Alabama, a statewide program designed to help landowners, homeowners, municipalities and green-industry professionals keep forests healthy and resilient. Healthy trees provide shade, wildlife habitat, economic value and environmental benefits. TreeStrong Alabama combines research-based information, practical management tools and local support to address some of the most pressing threats facing Alabama’s forests and urban trees. Tree health is becoming increasingly important as the state experiences changing weather patterns, drought stress, invasive pests and continued

development pressure. These factors can weaken trees and make them more susceptible to short- and long-term decline. By identifying problems early and following recommended management practices, Alabamians can help protect the trees that contribute to the state’s natural resources and quality of life. “It has been exciting to see the response to TreeStrong Alabama over the past year,” said Newell, who is also an assistant professor of forest health in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment. “The program is helping landowners, homeowners and natural resource professionals stay informed about the forest health issues affecting Alabama’s trees and forests, while giving them practical tools they can use to protect and manage those resources.” The program focuses on three primary goals: early detection and rapid response, education and training and community support and capacity building.

Early detection efforts help communities identify pests, diseases and other threats before they spread and cause significant damage. Educational programming includes workshops, webinars, publications and hands-on demonstrations for landowners, homeowners, arborists, foresters and landscape professionals. Community support efforts strengthen partnerships with municipalities, schools, Extension personnel and industry groups to improve local tree-health management and long-term resilience. ***“One of the most rewarding parts of the program has been seeing how eager people are to learn about forest health.”***
– Annakay Newell

“We’ve connected with people across the state through workshops, a forest health short course and our monthly webinar series. The turnout has exceeded my expectations.” TreeStrong Alabama also provides seasonal tree-health alerts,

identification and management guides, training opportunities and youth outreach activities. Concurrently, the program works with municipalities to support urban tree health and reduce risk from declining or hazardous trees. Several educational opportunities are scheduled throughout 2026. Individuals interested in forest health may attend workshops and webinars, follow Alabama Extension forest health updates and invite program organizers to local events. Whether caring for a single backyard tree or managing thousands of forested acres, TreeStrong Alabama offers resources to help protect and sustain Alabama’s trees for future generations. “I am looking forward to continuing to expand the program’s reach, develop new educational opportunities and connect even more Alabamians with the information and resources they need to keep their trees healthy,” Newell said.



e *Extension Spotlight* Meet Andrea Robards, extension agent

Andrea Robards is an Alabama Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources Extension agent. She serves the 8 -county southwest region, and her primary office is at the Jon Archer Agricultural Center in Mobile County. Robards is a Pacific Northwest native who has called Mobile home since 2020. She completed her bachelors in ecology with a minor in environmental science at Western Washington University and her masters in forest science, fire ecology and management at Colorado State University. Her forestry background includes work

in prescribed fire, silviculture, wildlife and tree mortality. She is a certified prescribed burn manager in the state and appreciates the long history Alabama has in utilizing fire as one of many forest management tools. She enjoys supporting Alabama's residents through outreach programs, workshops, site visits and general inquiries. “As an extension agent, I strive to provide education and practical, research-based solutions for landowners and residents of Alabama. In these interactions, we also learn a great deal from Alabamians. When you reach out for assistance, you

are making us aware of issues as they arise in our forests and habitats. That information is then filtered to our specialists in Auburn, enabling them to stay on the leading edge of diseases, pathogens and ecosystem concerns before they reach detrimental levels. It's a very rewarding career and I'm honored to be part of Auburn's Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources team.” Robards is a proud veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard where she excelled as a helicopter flight mechanic conducting search and rescue operations, environmental and legal compliance.



Forging a Legacy of Service: 2025 Outstanding Alumnus James Parker’s Journey from Auburn Forestry to Military Stewardship By Virginia Johnson

James Parker has created a career deeply rooted in service to both land and country. As an alumnus of the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE), Parker’s work in natural resources management has supported both environmental protection and military readiness, earning his recognition as the 2025 CFWE Outstanding Alumni Award recipient.

Reflecting on the path that led him to forestry, Parker gives credit to an unexpected moment early in his life.

“I am deeply humbled to receive the Outstanding Alumni Award from the CFWE,” said Parker. “When a 9th-grade agribusiness class first sparked my passion for forestry, I never could have imagined where this path would lead.”

Parker graduated from Auburn in 1999 with a Bachelor of Science in Forestry and went on to earn a Master of Science in forestry in 2000. He began his career working as a contractor for the U.S. Army before being hired at Fort Benning in Georgia where he has now worked for more than 20 years.

Today, Parker serves as chief of the Natural Resources Management Branch (NRMB), where he leads a team of professionals that are

responsible for managing more than 180,000 acres of land. His work focuses on protecting and enhancing natural resources while supporting military training across the installation.

“The only reason my team and myself are here with a job is because of the Army,” Parker said. “Everybody, including us in the NRMB, are here to support training the best soldiers in the world. We do it in a way nobody thinks about; we’re here to sustain the training landscape.”

Balancing environmental needs with training demands requires careful planning and coordination. Parker and his team use an ecosystem management approach, focusing on the entire landscape rather than individual parts. This allows them to protect natural habitats for a wide range of plant and animal species while maintaining land that is safe and effective for training.

Those who nominated Parker emphasized his long-term leadership and impact on both the land and the profession.

“Mr. Parker’s tireless work and involvement with our college aims to improve the field of forestry and natural resource management and our college. His contributions are



2025 Outstanding Alumnus James Parker (center) is shown with George Matusick, director of the Center for Natural Resources Management on Military Lands on the left, and Janaki Alayalapati, the Emmett F. Thompson Dean of the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment, on the right.

extremely valuable,” said Daowei Zhang, the Alumni and George W. Peake Professor in the CFWE. “He is very much deserving of this award.”

A key part of Parker’s leadership is the strong emphasis he places on teamwork. His branch brings together people with different areas of skill, but they work as one unit. Whether working on forestry projects, wildlife management or fire operations, each member contributes to the same mission.

“It’s one team,” Parker said. “Whether it’s a wildlife project, a forestry project, prescribed burning or wildfires, we all work together.”

Parker’s career reflects the values promoted by the CFWE: service, integrity and leadership. From an unexpected high school class to managing thousands of acres of land, his work shows the impact forestry professionals can have on both natural resources and the communities they serve.

Auburn alumnus reflects on wildlife enterprise management journey By Cole Sikes



It’s been all focus and feathers for Auburn University alumnus Spencer Parker since graduating from the Plains. Transforming a lifetime’s passion into a career in guided hunting and shooting sports changed the trajectory of his life, allowing for unique professional growth, critical thinking and fun. Today, he leads others in experiencing their own outdoor passions while providing top-tier hospitality and expertise. Parker says that if it wasn’t for Auburn, his journey might have looked significantly different.

ENJOYING THE CHASE

Growing up in Decatur, Alabama, Parker was intrigued by the outdoors. He could normally be found outside during most of his childhood, participating in family activities, sports and his high school bass fishing team. Utilitarian skills such as operating heavy equipment and performing mechanical maintenance were instilled at a young age and have proven to be evergreen in value post-higher education. The more time he spent in nature, the more curious he became. Like an engineer wonders how something is

created, Parker thinks about wildlife ecosystems in a similar vein.

“I have a craving for knowledge about how the natural world works—how plants and animals interact with each other to make ecosystems function,” Parker said.

“When I enrolled in the Wildlife Enterprise Management (WLEM) program, it fueled the fire inside me to learn as much about wildlife and native habitat as I could, while imparting those principles in the field to others to enhance their experience.”
– Spencer Parker

Parker was originally enrolled at Auburn to study business management. His heart felt strongly that he was destined for an adjacent path, and he found the WLEM program within the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment (CFWE). The WLEM major is one of the few cross-disciplinary programs in the nation founded on the principles of

wildlife management, hospitality services and business management. Collaboratively instructed by the CFWE, Auburn’s Harbert College of Business and College of Human Sciences Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management, graduates of this premier program depart Auburn prepared to begin abundant careers at worldwide facilities focusing on hunting, fishing and wildlife-based recreation while also providing hospitality and business portfolio management.

TALKING THE TALK

The WLEM curriculum’s multidisciplinary coursework is robust and provides a trifecta of real-world knowledge from the three collaborating Auburn units. In the CFWE, coursework ranges from wildlife classes in Mammalian Ecology & Management to skill-and-safety subjects in Sporting Firearms & Archery.

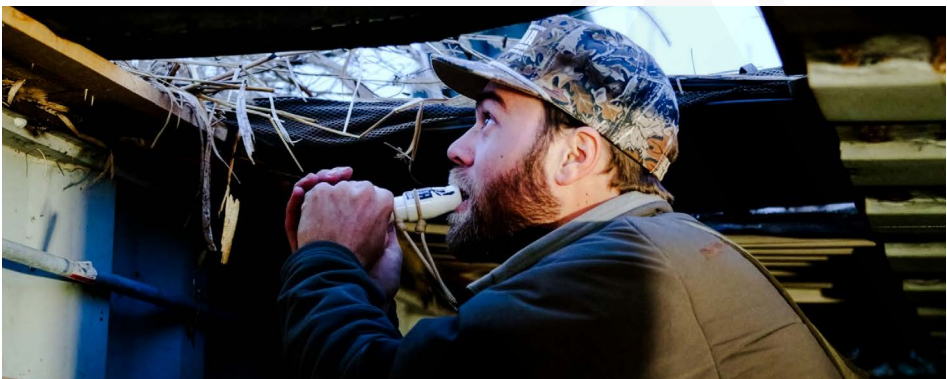
“You would be surprised how many people in the outdoor industry have very little understanding of basic habitat requirements for wildlife, wildlife biology and general habitat management,” Parker said. “I believe that it is the responsibility of good habitat managers to provide data and research, backing up what you are doing and why. It is very important to be well-versed in academic literature

so that you can explain and implement practices that improve wildlife habitat. We are in a new era where we do not have to rely on ‘what Grandpa said’ or ‘this is how it has always been done.’ There is so much great research going on across all fields of study. Use it to your advantage.”

Parker recalls receiving excellent instruction and advice from CFWE faculty, including Stephen Ditchkoff, Will Gulsby, Janna Willoughby, Mark Smith and others. Their guidance offered applied science opportunities through site visits and field trips, providing science-based knowledge and invaluable career advice based on decades of combined professional experience.

“They made going to class easy for me as I genuinely wanted to learn more from them because of the passion they have for their areas of expertise,” Parker said. “It was contagious. I highly recommend students take advantage of their knowledge and experience while they can. The faculty truly want to see you succeed and are willing to help any way possible.”

Learn more about Parker’s wildlife enterprise management career journey taking him from Auburn to Florida by scanning the QR code or visiting cfwe.auburn.edu.





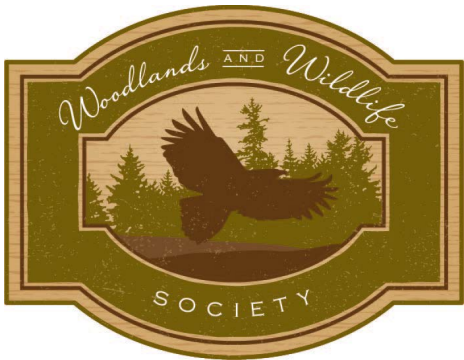
Members:

Ms. Marley A. Acosta-Lee '25
Mr. Thomas D. Bowen III '11
Ms. Nadia S. Bowles '23
Mr. Jacob C. Brown '11
Mr. Samuel C. Colville '18
Mr. Connor Cox '25
Mr. Brandon Keith Craft '15
Ms. Samantha A. Crowe '25
Mr. Shawn M. Custred '15
Mr. Thomas Davis '25
Mr. Chase Lee Dixon '11
Mr. Eric Lee Dooley '18
Mr. William Dunnam '20
Mr. Cedric O. Ellis '17
Mr. Ethan Christopher Fowler '17
Mr. William M. Green '14
Ms. Ari Hansen '23
Ms. Mary Ashlee Hughes '25
Ms. Morgan Kelly '25
Mr. Jack Kennedy '25
Mr. William Thomas Liner '14 – President

Mr. Eddie L. Love '15
Mr. Russell Cary Miller '11
Mr. Sebastian Drake Rodriguez '15
Ms. GiGi Sharp '25
Ms. Cailey S. Smith '25
Mr. Charlie Smith '12
Mr. Orum Snow '22
Mr. John Strauss '25
Mr. Sam Tate '15
Mr. Kenneth Brian Watts '12
Mr. Stephen Zenas '18
Mrs. Emma Vaters Zimmer '18



If you’re within 15 years of graduating from the CFWE, consider joining or renewing your membership today. Your annual membership will fund the Compass Circle/Bashinsky Ever Auburn Scholarship or an area of your choice. Scan the QR code to be directed to the Compass Circle webpage to learn more.



Members:

ACEOA, Inc.
African Safari Club of Florida Conservation Fund, Inc.
Alabama Ag Credit, FLCA
Alabama Audubon
Alabama Chapter ACF
Alabama Conservation & Natural Resources Foundation, Inc.
Alabama Forest Owners Association, Inc.
Alabama Forestry Association
Alabama Forestry Foundation
Alabama Forests Forever Foundation
Alabama Power Company
Alabama Recreation and Parks Foundation
Alabama TREASURE Forest Association
Alabama Wildlife Federation, Inc.
Dr. and Mrs. Janaki R.R. Alavalapati
Mr. and Mrs. Dan Starke Albritton, Jr.
ALFA Foundation
Ms. L. Jean Allen
Dr. Brenda Maudine Allen
Mr. Jay P. Altmayer II
Mr. and Mrs. Wilmer Gordon Armistead, Jr.
Auburn OWMH, LLLP
Auburn-Opelika Tourism
Dr. and Mrs. Orville Euing Bach, Jr.
Mrs. Louisa Mann Baker
Mr. Charles W. Barkley
Mr. William Barlow
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Wayne Bassett
Mr. James Manning Bates
Mrs. Rachel Baughman
BB Partners LP
Mr. and Mrs. Donald Jeffrey Bentley
Big Cedar Education Foundation

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Black
Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Blankenship
Mr. Christopher Blankenship
Mrs. Constance H. Hanlein Blevins
Blooming Grove Wildlife Foundation
Mr. Christopher W. Bodine
Dr. Jonathan W. Bolton and Mrs. Claire M. Wilson
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Lewis Boutwell
Ms. Starr Lynn Boykin
Bradley Murphy Forestry Trust
Mrs. Robyn Bridges
Dr. and Mrs. Richard Brinker
Ms. Naomi Brooks
Mr. Hayes Decaley Brown II
Mr. and Mrs. Alan P. Bruce Burgin Timberland Management, LLC
Mr. Robert F. Burgin III
Mrs. Jeanne Burkhalter Callaway Foundation, Inc.
Mr. and Mrs. James Camp Canfor Southern Pine, Inc.
Mr. Ben Carothers
Mr. and Mrs. David Frank Carroll
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Edward Carter III
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph L. Cawood
Dr. and Mrs. Arthur H. Chappelka III
Charles Barkley Foundation
Charley Walker Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Chitty
Mr. Chuck Chitty
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Ms. Linda P. Cicero
Mr. T.R. Clark
Coastal Land Trust, Inc.
Mr. and Mrs. Bryan Wayne Cole
Mrs. Denise Michelle Cole
Mr. and Mrs. George Malcolm Comer
Mr. and Mrs. David Richard Conway, Jr.
Mr. Michael Cooper
Crooked Oaks Legacy Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. John S. Crozier
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bozeman Crumpton III
CSP Technologies

Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation
Dr. Marissa "Jo" Daniel
Col. (Ret) James Wilburn Danley and Dr. Beverly W. Danley
Ms. Alesia M. Davenport
Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Day
Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ross Delaney
Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Dixon, Jr.
Mr. Kevin Dodd
Mr. and Ms. Gregory Donaldson
Mr. Dave Donaldson
Drummond Company, Inc.
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Mr. Reid Duvall
Mr. Arthur C. Dyas
Mrs. Ellen Dyas
The Dye-McDonald Trust
E. E. Delaney Foundation, Inc.
Mr. Carl Douglas Edem
Mr. Lanier Edwards
Mr. and Mrs. George Brian Ethridge
Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Lafayette Evers
Dr. Joe Hardeman Exum, Jr.
F. Allen and Louise K. Turner Charitable Foundation
Dr. and Mrs. Thomas W. Fell, Jr.
Mr. Steve R. Forehand
Forest Landowners Association Education & Research Foundation
Mr. Robert Fox
Mrs. Shelby Freise
Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Gallagher
Garden Club of Alabama, Inc.
Dr. Larry George Gerber and Dr. Viena Louise Katainen
Dr. and Mrs. George Edward Gibson, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. David Benjamin Giles
Dr. and Mrs. David Louie Gilliland
Mr. Charles Gleghorn
Dr. Glenn R. Glover and Mrs. Flavin W. Glover
Mr. Tim Gothard
Great Southern Wood Preserving, Inc.
Green Diamond Resource Company
Mr. William M. Green

Mr. Steve Greep
Mrs. Mary Kay Greer
Mrs. Joyce H. Griffin
Mr. Glenn H. Guthrie
Mr. and Mrs. Scott Guthrie
Mr. and Mrs. Jonathon Haack
Dr. and Mrs. John E. Hackman
Mr. Richard W. Hall
Mr. and Mrs. Laird Hamberlin
Mrs. Roberta Cecile Hand
Mr. John Anderson Harp
Ms. Ann Harper
Harrigan Lumber Company, Inc.
Mr. and Mrs. John Patrick Harrigan
Mr. and Mrs. William Dwight Harrigan III
Mr. and Mrs. Troy Alan Harris
Mr. Nick Hartley
Mr. Rick Harvey
Mr. Rodney M. Havens
Helm Properties, LLC
Mr. and Mrs. David Brian Helm
Mr. and Mrs. Mark Hennessy
Mr. and Mrs. Arthur C. Herndon II
Mr. and Mrs. William Webster Hindman
Mr. Alex Hinson
Mr. John David Hoerath
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Franklin Hoerlein
Mrs. Margaret Elaine Holler
Mrs. Nicole Holler
Dr. Mary A. Hooten and Mr. William Russell Hooten
Maj and Mrs. James M. Hoskins
Mr. David E. Housel and Mrs. Susan M. Housel
Ms. Fontaine Howard
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas D. Hudson
HudsonAlpha Institute for Technology
Mr. Jeb L. Hughes
Dr. and Mrs. David Hyink
International Paper
Mr. Chris Van Isaacson
Ms. Michelle A. Isenberg
Jasper Lumber Company
Mr. Alan H. Jaye
John Deere Company
Mrs. Debra K. Johnson
Mr. Rhett Eugene Johnson, Jr.
Mr. Ron Jolly

Mrs. Belinda Jane Jones
Mrs. Kay Hathaway Jones
and Mr. Burke Jones
Mr. Phillip Jones
Dr. Robert H. Jones and
Dr. Jeryl Christley Jones
Mr. Mike Jordan
Ms. Danielle Judd
Dr. Crystal A. Kelley
Mrs. Gwen Kelley
Mr. and Mrs. James A. Kelly, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Leo Michael Kelly
Dr. Jodie R. Kenney and
Mr. Michael Kenney
Mr. and Mrs. James
Jackson King, Jr.
Mr. Joey King
Dr. Emily B. Kling
Kykenkee, Inc.
Mr. Thomas T. Lamberth
Land O'Lakes, Inc.
Mr. and Mrs. John
Harry Lange III
Larson & McGowin, Inc.
Mr. Hugh Cannon Lawley
Mrs. Margaret C. Lawrence
Ms. Mandy Ledkins
Ms. Nelda K. Lee
Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Leuenberger
Mr. Curt W. LeVan
Mr. Kristopher Watson Lewis
Mrs. Rebecca Lewis
Mr. and Mrs. John
Lambert Lindley
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald
Craig Lipham
Mr. Dana Carl Little
Mr. Wayne Little
Long Leaf Land & Timber
Louisiana-Pacific Corporation
Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Guy Lovell
Dr. Mark Lowe
Ms. Hebe Lutz
M.C. Dixon Lumber
Company, Inc.
Made Goods
Mrs. Alice Johnson Mallory
Manulife Investment
Management
Dr. Frank Dwayne Marcum
Mr. and Mrs. James
William Martin
Mr. and Mrs. John Lind Martin
Mr. Alexander McCall
Mrs. Kathleen McCollum
Mr. Brett McCool
Dr. Nancy Carter McDonald
Mr. William David McEwen
Judge Frank "Trippy" McGuire
Mr. J. Michael McKenstry
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph
Wilkinson McNeel III
Mr. and Mrs. William
Douglas McWane
Mr. and Mrs. Bryant Mende
Ms. Judy Lane Messer
Mid South R C & D Council
Mr. and Mrs. Lovick Pierce Miller

Mr. Todd Winfield Miller
Mr. Robert Milstead
Mrs. Amanda Mize
Molpus Woodlands Group, LLC
Monte L. Moorer Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Scott
Corcoran Moody
Mr. Phearthur Moore
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Moore
Mr. Emory W. Mosley, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Daniel
Louis Moultrie
Dr. Jane D. Mount
Dr. Gary R. Mullen
Mr. Richard Mullen
Ms. Stephanie Mullins
Mr. Brad M. Murfee
Nan Altmayer Foundation
National Christian
Foundation - Tampa Bay
National Wild Turkey Federation
NAVCO Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Adam
Marc Nemeroff
Mr. Jim Ni
Mrs. Joanna E. Nichols
Norfolk Southern Corp
Mr. and Mrs. Daniel P. Norman
Ms. Natalie Norman
Mr. and Mrs. Dennis
Edward Norton
Nurturing Wonder PTO
Mr. and Mrs. Richard
Jack Oates
Dr. Noemi' Oeding and
Dr. Luke A. Oeding
Oser Forestry Services
Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth
Lewis Oser
Osmose
Mr. and Mrs. Steve Patterson
Mrs. Linda S. Pearce
Mr. and Mrs. James
Herbert Peters
Mr. and Mrs. Tim Peters
Mr. and Mrs. Paul
Andrew Pinyan
Dr. and Mrs. Joel
Candler Pittard
Mr. James Emil Pittman, Jr. and
Mrs. Elizabeth Gentry Arthur
Dr. and Mrs. Brent
Andrew Ponce
Mrs. Susan Poole
Mr. Jason Pratt
Mr. Andrew Prilliman
Mr. and Mrs. Larry Dale Prince
PrintPack
Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth
Dean Pylant III
Mrs. Margee Bright Ragland
Mr. Joshua Raglin
Regions
Resource Management Service
Rex Lumber Company
Mr. James E. Richardson
Ms. Rebecca O. Richardson
River Bank and Trust

Mr. Joe Dalton Roberson
Mr. and Mrs. Douglas
Earl Roberts
Mr. and Mrs. John
Boyd Robinson
Mr. and Mrs. Richard
Marion Rogers
Mr. and Mrs. Ben M. Rooke, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Darryl
Conrad Rosser
Russell Lands, Inc.
Safari Club International
Ms. Erica Marie Santana
Mr. Josh L. Sandt, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Brian Savoy
Dr. and Mrs. Lewis
G. Scharpf, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Paul
Edward Schrantz
Mr. and Mrs. Gerald
Schwarzauer, Sr.
Mr. and Mrs. John Sechrist
Ms. Emily S. Sexton
Mr. and Mrs. Robert
Preston Sharp
Dr. Stephanie L. Shepherd
Prater and Mr. Bradley A. Prater
Singleton Family
Foundation, Inc.
Mr. and Mrs. Austin Singleton
Mr. Thomas Gray Skipper
Mr. and Mrs. Charles
Benjamin Smith, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. John
Prentiss Smith, Jr.
Mr. Keevin Marvin Smith
Ms. Pennie Lawson Smith
Dr. Wayne H. Smith and
Dr. Mitzi C. Austin
Smurfit WestRock
Southeastern Land Group
Southern Company
Stallworth Land Company
Mr. Clinton Stanton
Mr. Frank Stewart III
Mr. H. Christoph Stuhlinger
Mr. and Mrs. Rick L. Stukes
Mr. and Mrs. Edwin
Lewis Sweeten
Mr. Charles Franklin Sykes
Mr. and Mrs. Charles
Melvin Tarver
Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Taylor
Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Taylor
Mr. Fabio Terlevich
Mr. William R. Terry
Mr. Dwayne Hulon Tew
The Ocean Foundation
The Solon and Martha
Dixon Foundation
The VW, LLC
The Westervelt Company
The Wilcox Foundation
Mr. and Mrs. Charles
Emmett Thompson
Dr. and Mrs. Emmett
F. Thompson
Ms. Juli Thompson
Timber Products
Inspection, Inc.

Tinkey Timberlands
Mr. and Mrs. Michael
Frederick Tinkey
Top Family Foundation, Inc.
Mrs. Dana Griffin Town
Mr. Mike Tracy
Mr. Oscar G. Traczewitz II
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Triemer
Turkeys For Tomorrow
Ms. Susan Wilcox Turner
Ms. Doris B. Tyler
Mr. and Mrs. Noll A.
Van Cleave, Jr.
Mr. Stewart Vance
Mr. and Mrs. John Edward Vick
Mr. and Mrs. Bennie
F. Vinson, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Keith
W. Wacker, Sr.
Mr. and Mrs. James
D. Wadsworth
Mr. Michael Frederick Walker
Mr. and Mrs. William
Forrest Walker
Mr. and Mrs. Marc Ashley Walley
Dr. and Mrs. William Walley
Walstad Investment Group
Mr. Cade Warner
Weiler Equipment
Dr. John Charles Welker
Mr. and Mrs. Gary West
Mr. and Mrs. Max Douglas West
The Westervelt Foundation
Weyerhaeuser
Mr. and Mrs. Marvin
Guy Whitley, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Matthew
Alan Whitley
Willann, LLC
Dr. and Mrs. Shaun R. Williams
Mr. and Mrs. Jeremy L. Williams
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald L. Williams
Dr. and Mrs. John
Thomas Williamson
Mr. Larry D. Williamson
Dr. Martha W. Wilson
Mr. and Mrs. Dennis
Keith Womack
Mrs. Tammy Henderson Wood
Mrs. Cherie Leist Woodard
LTC and Mrs. Leonard
S. Woody, Jr.
Mrs. Eleanor Devery Wright
You Might Be For
Auburn Foundation
Mrs. Tracy Young-Brown
Mr. and Mrs. Rick Carl Zellmer
Ziebach & Webb
Timber Company
Mr. and Mrs. Elmo D. Ziebach
Mr. and Mrs. Elmo
Douglas Ziebach, Jr.

To learn more about the Woodlands and Wildlife Society, scan the QR code or visit cfwe.auburn.edu/woodlands-and-wildlife-society.



Auburn’s wild turkey research advances with support of Alabama-based wildlife nonprofits *By Cole Sikes*



Researchers at Auburn University will continue to stay on the cutting edge of wild turkey research in thanks to funding from Alabama-based wildlife conservation organizations. Will Gulsby, Auburn College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment associate professor of wildlife management, and his laboratory are answering questions for wild turkey enthusiasts across the country. This research, funded by the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF), Alabama State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) and Turkeys for Tomorrow (TFT) will allow the research team to continue uncovering more mysteries about wild turkeys—fueling more effective management for this popular game species.

Wild turkey populations are being threatened, and learning more about their behavior, reproduction, health and predator pressure is imperative to mitigating risks to their well-being. TFT, established in 2021, supports its mission by backing science and those that carry out systematic approaches to turkey conservation. Their alignment

with Gulsby’s ongoing research made their partnership an easy fit. “TFT is a science-based conservation organization that is actively engaged to stabilize wild turkey populations,” said Jason Lupardus, chief executive officer of TFT and certified wildlife biologist.

“We are honored to support Dr. Gulsby and his students to help us come up with solutions for wild turkey decline while we create a pathway for young professionals who will be our future conservation leaders. We invest in others that share our core values—and if not you, then who?”

– Jason Lupardus

Gulsby and his graduate student, Reese Stogner, are focusing on the relationships existing between turkeys and predators by analyzing traps, feeding regiments and gobbling frequency within a designated 100-acre research area. To acquire this

data, the team established study sites on private property where feeding had not occurred in the previous five years. Once granted access by the landowner, they set out to tag predators to track their behavior and impact on turkey nesting sites. Simultaneously, the team is deploying surveys to see who truly benefits from the use of feeding: turkeys or their nest predators.

“The wild turkey research led by Dr. Gulsby has been cutting-edge,” said Tim Gothard, executive director of the AWF, Alabama’s largest and oldest non-profit conservation organization. “His ongoing work on the relationship between supplemental feeding, turkey predator populations and hen nest success will provide another round of useful information that landowners and land managers can utilize to refine their habitat management strategies to benefit this important game species. The AWF appreciates Dr. Gulsby’s dedication to expanding the knowledge base for managing wild turkeys and for the opportunity to support his work.”

The increasing use of bait by hunters could potentially be negatively impacting turkey nests by attracting

some of their most prominent nemeses such as raccoons. It is Gulsby and Stogner’s hope that the completed project will provide clarity on this nutrient-predator relationship. This practical research serves as a worthwhile investment for the state’s wildlife research supporters.

“Since the start of the NWTf in 1973, science-based management has been a pillar of the organization,” said Derek Alkire, NWTf director of conservation operations. “Funding ongoing research like this project remains a priority, as it helps resource professionals tackle today’s most challenging questions around wild turkey conservation.”

Gulsby says the ultimate goal of this research is to provide landowners with data-driven guidance to better manage their properties for wildlife conservation.

“Armed with this knowledge, hunters and land managers can make more informed decisions to balance their conservation goals with hunting practices,” he said.

Emmett & ViAnn Thompson Lecture
in Forest Economics and Policy

On Feb. 24-25, 2026, the CFWE hosted its second annual Emmett & ViAnn Thompson Lecture in Forest Economics and Policy featuring Cade Warner, president and CEO of The Westervelt Company, at The Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center. This lecture series was established in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment by the college’s founding dean, Emmett F. Thompson, and his wife, ViAnn, to enrich the college’s academic programs with speakers of national and international acclaim who possess expertise in forestry and natural resources with a focus on forest economics and policy. Shown from left to right are Emmett F. Thompson Dean Janaki Alavalapati, ViAnn Thompson, Emmett Thompson and Cade Warner.

