Support our Future

Inside pages describe the reunion events held this September for the classes of 62, 63, and 64. I want to thank all participants for a great turnout, recognize their outstanding career contributions, and for their extra efforts that continue to this day. Along the way, they had the opportunity to meet our faculty and interact with current students. The reunion participants had many astute questions about faculty research and the future direction of our program.

In addition, the reunion participants wanted to be part of the future of our program. Toward that end the Class of 62, 63 and 64 has moved to establish a Forestry Alumni Scholarship Fund (i.e., an endowment fund in the U of M Foundation, with earnings dedicated to scholarship support). Some details are described in the reunion story in this issue, and details will also be available on the Department website.

We have received substantial gifts to start this fund and hope to build further with contributions from alumni classes past and future. As one who regularly sees the very positive impact of scholarship recognition and support on students, I can attest to the effectiveness of such gifts—in a word, success! Do consider adding your name to the list of classes and donors.

This issue of the Forest Scene also contains stories highlighting faculty work abroad, new curriculum changes, a current student, recent graduates, and strategic planning for our department. We rely on support from our alumni, and not just financial support. The back section of this issue describes other ways for you to stay in touch and to be engaged. We would love to hear from you and to see you reconnect!

Alan Ek, Professor & Head, Forest Resources

Faculty Study Abroad: Norway

Anyone looking for Associate Professor Dennis Becker in his office this past year was met with a sign counting down the hours until his return. Since past January, Dr. Becker has been living and working in Norway. He is currently in Ås, Norway at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences in the Department of Ecology and Natural Resources.

While in Norway, Professor Becker was involved in multiple projects. Becker’s area of expertise is in natural resource policy, economics, planning, and two of the projects were related to biomass energy. First, he was part of conducting a national classification of Norwegian forest biomass energy and carbon policies for the purpose of comparing these to US policies and identifying transferable practices. This project was funded by a Fulbright Fellowship. Secondly, he worked with the Swedish Energy Agency and Forest Research Institute of Sweden to implement Swedish bioenergy technology and forest supply chain logistics in Minnesota.

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In addition, Professor Becker was part of two landowner survey studies. One study was developed and administered to Norwegian private forest landowners to investigate willingness to manage forests for carbon mitigation and carbon offset markets. The other survey, funded by the European Union, asked Norwegian private forest landowners about management objectives, demographics, and owner values and attitudes. Studies of this kind help steer policy and ensure it fits with landowner objectives as well as with larger forest management objectives.

One of the things Professor Becker has learned while on leave abroad is that Norway is equally vexed with issues relating to the environment. “Even as one of the richest countries in the world, Norway is struggling to create a coherent national energy policy with affordable renewable energy alternatives,” Becker says. “It was helpful to see that they also struggle but observe how they navigate conflict to implement change.” From this experience, he hopes to bring some new ideas and practices back to Minnesota to test and evaluate in the coming year.

This fall, the Department of Forest Resources is conducting strategic planning. We have been soliciting input from all of our stakeholders, and if you have not yet had a chance, you can go to www.forestry.umn.edu and click on “Provide Input to Strategic Plan” to do just that. Below are answers from a few of our faculty describing what they see as some of the most important issues that will be affecting forests and related natural resources now and in the near future. Through our strategic planning process, the Department of Forest Resources will be positioned to be able to address issues like these through teaching, research, and outreach.

Professor Howard Hoganson: Society has many groups chasing fewer and fewer dollars. We often hear “do more with less.” Forest management tends to be viewed as a long-term investment, making it hard to compete with investments that provide more immediate returns. Forestry needs to be more proactive about management opportunities and needs, emphasizing environmental and economic benefits and likely costs of delaying investments. The general public does not realize that forest management really can’t change or “fix” a large forest very fast. For example, less than 2% of Minnesota’s forests can likely be regenerated in a single year. Forestry needs more communications about the importance of good long-term game plans, emphasizing benefits from continuous investment, and effective management tends to be viewed as a long-term investment, making it hard to compete with investments that provide more immediate returns. Forestry needs to be more proactive about management opportunities and needs, emphasizing environmental and economic benefits and likely costs of delaying investments. The general public does not realize that forest management really can’t change or “fix” a large forest very fast. For example, less than 2% of Minnesota’s forests can likely be regenerated in a single year. Forestry needs more communications about the importance of good long-term game plans, emphasizing benefits from continuous investment, and effective strategies for helping sustain healthy forests in an uncertain world.

Assistant Professor Diana Karwan: Forests are dynamic, living entities. Understanding their response to change will be key to managing forests and natural resources in the coming years. Currently, two concerning sources of change are climate, including shifting weather patterns, and invasive species. Climate changes can result in a cascade of effects relating to weather patterns, such as shifts in precipitation and wet-dry cycles, which, in turn, affect water resources, ecosystem health, fire susceptibility, and many other resource concerns. Nested within this, is the threat from invasive species coming into forests and ecosystems already adapting to change.

Professor Paul Bolstad: The biggest near-term impacts will come from introduced species, particularly pests and pathogens, but also from aggressive invaders. Ash’s days are numbered outside of a few high-valued individuals we’ll treat, with gypsy moth and hemlock woolly adelgid are around the corner. Imagine Minnesota without oaks due to sudden oak death, or forests without overstory trees because native seedlings have been shaded out by buckthorn. We’ll see a warmer, more variable climate with higher average rains, longer summers, but deeper and longer late-summer droughts. Some species will migrate, but the changes are happening much faster than any warming in the geologic record. Savannas and grasslands in the Boundary Waters, anybody?

SPECIAL NOTE: In the last issue, we recognized donors who made the restoration of the Sam Green painting possible. We included recognition of A. James Phillips [class of 66] as deceased. Subsequently, James returned from travels and reported that, in fact, he was alive and well. We apologize for this error, and we thank James for his sense of humor. We also received donations from Larry Donovan and Ann Risvold that were not acknowledged in the previous issue. Thank you to James, Larry, Ann, and all donors on this project.
The New FNRM Curriculum

Communication is very important in recruiting for higher education, and something as simple as the name of a degree program can play a significant role in recruiting. This has been especially true for “discovery” majors, like natural resources, that are often discovered later in a student’s college experience or career. Today there are many more options of majors to choose from for students entering college. As a consequence, faculty have sought to provide naming that is effectively understood by the University, students, employers and society in general.

With this in mind, we debuted a new name for our program this fall. The new major is titled “Forest and Natural Resource Management” (FNRM) and has three tracks for students to choose from. Students can specialize in Forest Ecosystem Management and Conservation (FEMC), Urban and Community Forestry (UCF), or Park & Protected Area Management (PPAM). The first two tracks satisfy accreditation standards for forestry and urban forestry, respectively, by the Society of American Foresters. It remains the only four-year accredited program in the state of Minnesota.

Over the past several decades, we have offered majors in forest resources, urban and community forestry, and recreation resource management. The new name change came after considerable informal and formal discussion among the faculty, with students (especially new students), and stakeholders in the region. It is part of our efforts to increase the visibility and enrollment in the program.

Given these changes, we are pleased to report improved recognition and interest in the FNRM major and its tracks within the College and among freshman and transfer students. In particular, our sense is that the new major naming improves the communication of the true breadth and depth of our offerings. This is only the first semester with the new name, but the initial response has been great.

Much of the coursework remains the same, and the program retained its focus, breath, depth, and the field sessions at Cloquet. In fact, an additional field session is being added to the PPAM track. The complete curricula guides are available on our website at z.umn.edu/curricula. Take a look and you will see they are among the most complete and detailed of any such curricula in the country. No wonder we are ranked among the very top forestry and natural resource programs nationally.

The new name does not change the heart and strengths of our program but simply helps us connect with potential students. We hope to see the FNRM program continue to grow and to provide the starting point for many more natural resource professionals in the future.

The New FNRM Video

Along with updating our curriculum, we wanted to find a new way to share the Forest and Natural Resource Management major with interested students. Many students are interested in the environment and natural resources but don’t know about career opportunities or what majors to pursue. To share our story and get the word out, we decided a video was in store and are happy to share the final product with you!

The video features Professor Rebecca Montgomery and five of our students (Lauren Stufft, Luke Midura, Cole Van Beusekom, Emmie Peters, and Matt Suzukida). We thank them for their involvement and for all the kind words about our program, department, and campus. We are grateful to be part of such a great community with engaged faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

Watch the video at z.umn.edu/FNRMvid. If you can relate to the message and enjoyed being part of our program, we ask you to share it with people you know. Because in the end, our students and alumni are the best representatives of our program. You know from experience what it is like to learn from our faculty, go to class on the St. Paul campus and at Cloquet, take interesting courses, and be part of the great community of people.

Watch the video at z.umn.edu/FNRMvid and share it!
Student Spotlight: Sawyer Scherer

One of the best parts of working at the University is seeing students find the right fit within our department and finding their passion in our program. This was the case with Forest and Natural Resource Management senior Sawyer Scherer.

Growing up hunting, fishing, and camping, Sawyer had an early interest in the outdoors and decided to pursue a career in natural. He found forestry and thought it sounded interesting but wasn’t sure exactly what it was about. He dove in as a freshman and liked it from the beginning. “It seemed like I could have a larger impact on the landscape with forestry,” he says. “As I started taking courses, it really proved to be true. I think it’s probably the best major as far as really impacting conservation on the land and hands-on implementation.”

Sawyer did browse different careers, schools, and programs but decided on the University of Minnesota (UMN) because the forestry program had a strong reputation and a long history. “My expectations were actually blown away,” he says. “It opened up a whole new world where I realized you could take classes you enjoy. I had no idea that people were doing the sort of work that they are doing here.”

Since starting in the program, Sawyer has been making the most of his time. He has had an internship each summer to build up his resume and gain experience; he worked for Three Rivers Park District in the horticulture department, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as a forestry area intern, and on a red pine project with the UMN and the U.S. Forest Service as a research technician.

Sawyer has also been keeping himself busy on campus. He has been the president of the Society of American Foresters – UMN Chapter for two years and has worked to create beneficial events, networking opportunities, and field experiences for members. He has also taken advantage of the UMN’s Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) to design a research project of his own on climate change management.

A senior this year, Sawyer is applying to graduate schools. “I’ve thought a little bit about teaching as an end goal,” he says. “Otherwise, I think I’d want to stay in the state working for an agency as an upper level forester or silviculturist.” We have been pleased to be part of Sawyer’s journey this far and look forward to seeing the work he does in the future.

Recent Graduates: Where Are U Now?

Emma Schultz, 2009, Operations Forester with LandVest in Clayton Lake, Maine

I am one of three foresters managing a 500,000 acre parcel in northern Maine. In addition to prescribing, laying out, and overseeing harvest units, I also tackle special projects such as pre-commercial thinning, early commercial thinning, long-term operational planning, and road building.

Q: What is the biggest misconception about the field of forestry?
A: Perhaps that forest management is easy or gets easier with time. It takes guts to stand up to a contractor or to implement your first clearcut.

Cole Van Beusekom, 2013, Park Ranger with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in North Pole, Alaska

I enforce the rules and regulations of the Chena River Recreation Area, assist recreational visitors, and consult with ranger staff to expand and evaluate safety and security programs. I also go on backcountry patrols either on foot, snow machine, or atv to make sure that the recreation area maintains a safe atmosphere.

Q: What did you learn while at the U of MN that has been most helpful to you in your career?
A: The most helpful thing that I learned was how forested ecosystems, wildlife and recreational lands play an important role in the publics’ involvement for managing these locations.

Liam McClannahan, 2009, Arborist with Branch & Bough Tree Service & Landscape Care in St. Paul, MN

I get to practice all aspects of tree care: rope and saddle climbing (pruning, cabling, technical removals, structural/health canopy inspections), tree planting, Plant Health Care (PHC, chemical applications, pesticide/fertilizer), stump grinding, shrub maintenance, and structural pruning of young trees.

Q: What is something people don’t know about this occupation?
A: We see client education as part of our job. We don’t just tell them what maintenance we will do but how and, most importantly, why we are prescribing this maintenance. The more people understand about how their trees and what value they provide, the more people are interested in protecting and preserving them.
This fall, the Department of Forest Resources hosted a 50-year reunion for the classes of 1962, 1963, and 1964. The weekend started on Saint Paul Campus on Friday, September 6th. This was the first time back on campus for many in the group, and they found campus much changed since the 60’s. Some buildings have been added (Skok Hall) while some have been removed (Brewster and Meredith Halls). The next day, reunion members regrouped at the Cloquet Forestry Center for more socializing, talks, a wagon ride through the forest to view research plots, a BBQ dinner, and a bonfire at night. It was a wonderful weekend with great people. Thank you to everyone who attended especially to those who traveled great distances to attend. Also, thanks to the planning committee for their input and work to spread the word; we couldn’t have done it without you and your enthusiasm!

We continue to be amazed by the support of our alumni community, and the reunion weekend was no exception. The class members of 1962-64 are currently working to develop an all-class scholarship as an opportunity for alumni to help support our students. Darrel Kenops (1963 graduate, past Forestry Club president, and essential part of the 50-year reunion planning) said, “My University of Minnesota education launched me on a career pathway which was challenging, fun and impactful for my family and I. This scholarship is just one way we can give back for an excellent education and career.”

This scholarship will directly support undergraduate students studying toward a degree in Forest and Natural Resource Management. Recipients will be students who show promise, motivation, and interest in natural resource management; those with significant financial need; and with consideration given to veterans of active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces or the Peace Corps. Recipients will be selected by the department head in consultation with the Department Scholarship Committee.

If you would like to be part of building this support for undergraduate students, gifts for the Forestry Alumni Scholarship Fund can be made online or sent to Janelle Schnadt, University of Minnesota, Department of Forest Resources, Room 115 Green Hall, 1530 Cleveland Avenue North, St. Paul, MN 55108. Please make out the check to University of Minnesota Foundation and write the fund name in the memo section. More information will also be available on the Department website. Thank you for your continued support of our students and our programs.
Stay in touch, develop your professional network, and volunteer. Here's how:

If you graduated within the last 10 years and are interested in developing a network for recent grads, join us! An alumni group is working to create a network that will support the social and professional networking needs of recent graduates! If you're interested, email Masha at mfinn@umn.edu for more information.

Volunteer to be a Mentor to a CFANS student. As a graduate you have a lot to share with current students! Learn more at z.umn.edu/cfansmentor.

Join the CFANS Alumni Society/U of M Alumni Association to take advantage of the many discounts on travel, events, financial services, career resources, Gopher apparel and more. Learn more about membership at z.umn.edu/dos.

Get social, stay connected!

LinkedIn: Build your professional network with other alumni through the CFANS group on LinkedIn.

Twitter: Follow @UMNForestRes, @CFANS, and @CFANSAlumni on Twitter for updates on people, research and happenings.

Facebook: Find the Department of Forest Resources and CFANS Alumni and Friends on Facebook! Stay connected to campus and share your stories and photos, too!