

# RENEW

COLLEGE OF FOREST RESOURCES  
ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

**2023**



**MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™**  
COLLEGE OF FOREST RESOURCES

# RENEW

## COLLEGE OF FOREST RESOURCES ALUMNI NEWSLETTER 2023

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The College of Forest Resources is a unit in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine at Mississippi State University.

The mission of the College of Forest Resources is to promote, support, and enable the management, conservation, and utilization of forest and other natural resources to benefit the stakeholders of Mississippi, the nation, and the world.



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**ON THE COVER:** Frank Ong'ondo, wildlife, fisheries and aquaculture doctoral student, looks for quail as part of his research program. Learn more about Ong'ondo on page 28. (Photo by David Ammon)

## FROM THE DEAN

**GREETINGS FROM THE COLLEGE OF FOREST RESOURCES (CFR) AT** Mississippi State. It's an exciting time in the CFR as enrollments climb, faculty research excels, and we have made notable improvements to our facilities. This issue of *Renew* covers 2022 and 2023. Moving forward, we plan to release in September of each year.

Our enrollment climbed slightly from 602 students in fall 2022 to 607 students in fall 2023. Considering we graduated 148 students in 2022-23, our ability to maintain a consistent enrollment is gratifying.

We also were able to add to our research faculty, and, for the first time since 2010, the Forest and Wildlife Research Center is fully staffed. To help these young faculty, we have initiated a New Faculty Mentoring program and offer training through the MSU Center for Teaching and Learning. I have also initiated a faculty advising award, and we host a faculty advisor appreciation event each spring.

We also are making significant paths to improve diversity among our faculty, staff, and students. With private donations we were able to create and fill two new positions. Morgan Alexander is now student engagement and success coordinator and Dr. T.J. Walker is now director of student recruitment and inclusive excellence. Morgan and T.J. have been working for over a year and have already held numerous events to introduce underrepresented students to natural resource fields. Read more about our efforts to create opportunity, inclusiveness, and access on page 18.

We completed the Blackjack Research Facility with a new forestry greenhouse and Avian Science Center. We also made repairs to the Dorman Lake spillway and levee, adding a new boat ramp and kayak launch, new teaching pier, and boardwalk. We are most excited about a new property near Bay St. Louis that we have acquired. The Wolf River Coastal Forest Research and Education Center will be a showcase for longleaf pine management, coastal water quality, and more. Working with our partners at Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Mississippi Forestry Commission and The Nature Conservancy, we will acquire the 14,000-acre property with grants from the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Gulf Environmental Benefits Fund. New pollinator gardens and seating in front of Thompson Hall give students more spaces to gather. These are just a few of the things happening at your alma mater.



In this newsletter, we highlight the success of so many of our alumni. A new section in the magazine features Leaders in Natural Resources. In this issue, our leaders include Jimmy Taylor, assistant director of the National Wildlife Research Center, the research unit of the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services program; Misty Booth, former MSU school forester, now urban and community forestry coordinator for the Mississippi Forestry Commission; and Colin McCown, executive vice president of the American Wood Protection Association.

There are alumni features on Preston Rushing, project inspector for the Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horse and Burro program; Emily Loden-Jones, program director of forest technology at Itawamba Community College; Blake Hamilton and Emily Courtney, alumni who have created one of the largest equity companies in recreational land; and Pascal Theberge, research scientists at Huber Engineering Woods.

I would be remiss to not mention the great losses we experienced in our college over the last two years. The passing of Drs. Ian Munn, Bruce Leopold, Darrel Nicholas, Mike Barnes, Terry Amburgey, Fred Taylor, Scott Roberts, and Jim Miller, left a void in our collective spirits. They were all giants in their fields, and we were so fortunate to have known them, as students, colleagues, and friends.

I am sure you will enjoy reading about your fellow alumni in this issue of *Renew*. I am honored to work with you all for the betterment of the CFR. Your support means so much to me and our faculty, staff, and students. Thank you for all you do. I look forward to seeing you soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Wes Burger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

**L. Wes Burger**  
Dean



LEADERS IN

# NATURAL RESOURCES

*CFR alumni protect resources,  
help communities thrive*

BY VANESSA BEESON AND MEG HENDERSON

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**A**S THE COLLEGE OF FOREST RESOURCES grows the natural resource leaders of tomorrow, we look back at the cadre of leaders whose roots run deep in our college. This year's Leaders in Conservation includes a military veteran who addresses human-wildlife conflicts, a forester who has created one of the largest private equity companies in recreational land, and an executive who helps preserve our forest products—a \$13.12 billion dollar industry in Mississippi alone.

## RESOLVING CONFLICT

**FROM LEADING** soldiers in combat to managing wildlife damage nationally, **Dr. Jimmy Taylor**, '92 Bachelor of Science in forest management, '96 Master of Science in wildlife and fisheries, and '01 Doctor of Philosophy in forest resources, has spent a lifetime protecting and serving.

The three-time CFR graduate and U.S. veteran was deployed during Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom and retired from the U.S. Army as lieutenant colonel. Now, he is assistant director of the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), the research unit of the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services program.

"Our program is unique because we're directed by Congress to address human-wildlife conflicts. Through our research and management activities, we're protecting American agriculture, natural resources, property, and human health and safety," Taylor said.

He supervises nine research project leaders in the areas of aquaculture protection, avian safety and risk management, chronic wasting disease, feral swine, food safety and wildlife pathogens, predator ecology, rabies, rodent management, and wildlife diseases. He also coordinates with the NWRC director to create and administer goals, policies, and strategic plans of APHIS programs.

As part of a team of approximately 130, he's most excited when the whole team succeeds.

"I enjoy seeing our staff be successful in the things they do, when staff are recognized for an award, accomplishment, patent, or leading change in some way," Taylor said. "Accomplishments we can claim as a team effort are some of my memorable moments."

Taylor had about 20 years' experience in both natural resources and the military before moving into his current role in March 2022. He's been with Wildlife Services since 2004 beginning as a research wildlife biologist in Starkville. From there, he became a supervisory research wildlife biologist and field station leader in Olympia, Washington, from 2006 to 2010 and Corvallis, Oregon, from 2010 to 2022.

"Those roles prepared me for my present job. It's exciting, in my capacity, to help enable the research leaders to manage their projects well," he said.

Taylor served in the Army National Guard and National Reserve from 1987 to 2010. During that time, he earned three degrees from Mississippi State. As a commissioned armor officer, he served in increasing levels of leadership responsibility, including tank platoon leader, tank company commander, cavalry troop leader, and battalion commander. He also served in roles as an operations officer from battalion through division levels. He managed multi-million-dollar budgets and the training and deployment of soldiers while building and maintaining multinational relationships.

"From my first leadership assignment in the military, I was thrust into a position where I was in charge of millions of dollars of equipment and the safety of soldiers who were reporting to me, ranging



from my age to significantly older than me," he said. "While you learn a lot from training, you learn a lot more from mentors. The set of skills and lifetime of learning through that environment and being in high-stakes situations that are sometimes threatening and challenging certainly helped me develop a lot of leadership qualities and core competencies."

Taylor grew up in Amory, and the rural upbringing led him to pursue a career in wildlife.

"I spent a lot of time outdoors growing up. I enjoyed hunting, fishing, and spending time with my dad. The idea of being able to work outdoors and with wildlife was something I was really interested in," he said.

When it came time to pick a school for his bachelor's, he said MSU's College of Forest Resources was a natural fit.

"After I finished a year of junior college and decided I wanted to be a wildlife biologist, it was an easy choice. I was interested in what Mississippi State had to offer," he said.

While his military background informed his career, he said his time at MSU has also served him well.

"I am proud of the university's wildlife program, which has a big focus on wildlife management, while many other colleges have gone toward a wildlife conservation approach. I appreciate what I learned at MSU and what they continue to teach young professionals about the importance of management. It's really impacted me and the positions I've had with Wildlife Services where we focus on wildlife damage management. The foundational knowledge I gained at MSU was important in building those learning blocks for me to be able to do what I do now," he said.

## HOMEGROWN CONSERVATION

**A**S NATURE'S EYE celebrates a decade of service, its President and Founder **Blake Hamilton**, '10 Bachelor of Science in forestry, CFR alumnus, reflects on the company's roots and his vision for the future.

Hamilton took a leap of faith when founding Nature's Eye in 2013. The Theodore, Alabama, native cultivated a passion for the outdoors throughout his childhood. As a young adult he was driven to learn more and pursue education in this field. He quickly realized this would take him beyond his hometown. The culture and reputation of the CFR at Mississippi State drew him from Mobile to Starkville. As a student he took an internship opportunity to work in the outdoor and hunting industry in West Point. After graduating, he grew in this position and served for numerous years, focused on the conservation efforts within the company. Formal education combined with years of hands-on experience in the field sparked a deeper passion and understanding for conservation. In 2013 he made the decision to move to Texas and begin Nature's Eye.

"Texas was new territory for me, but it was a territory of opportunity to impact conservation on a large scale," Hamilton said. "CFR wasn't biased toward one state or zip code, and neither is conservation. CFR set me up for success to go beyond my comfort zone."

Nature's Eye, headquartered in Lufkin, Texas, has evolved from a habitat consulting firm into a real estate investment and development company. The Nature's Eye ecosystem includes a consulting firm, media department, real estate brokerage, land development department, and an investment company known as Natural Resource Investments (NRI).

"In 2017, we noticed a growing demand for families to own recreational land, and an abundance of available inventory from institutional landholders. Our mission was to help make the connection between the two, which led to the formation of Nature's Eye Natural Resources Investments in 2018. NRI's focus is to deploy capital into land acquisitions, create substantial value through development, and ultimately leave the land better than we found it. Our niche system based on environmental, social, and corporate governance principles guides us to consider sustainability and ethics in each transaction. Simply put, we buy land and make it better," he said.

Nature's Eye has grown into one of the largest private equity companies in recreational land. While most of the assets under

management are in the Southeast, they're expanding west beginning with their most recent acquisition in Telluride, Colorado. NRI holds several distinct properties focused on conservation and recreation. Their featured project is an existing property known as Cottonwood, which merged with the recent acquisition of Bluebird Farm, creating approximately 6,000 acres within 15 miles of downtown Dallas.

"The additional acreage makes Cottonwood one of the largest outdoor recreation destinations of its kind this close to a major metroplex in the U.S. It's a destination where people can connect with nature and one another," Hamilton said.

The company's brand manager is also a CFR graduate. **Emily Courtney**, '09 Bachelor of Science in forestry and '11 Master of Science in agribusiness, a Clinton, Mississippi native, has known Hamilton since their days at MSU and she worked with him in West Point prior to Nature's Eye. She's been with Nature's Eye since its inception. She discussed how her and Hamilton's experiences in CFR helped contribute to their success.

"Our success is a reflection of our education and experience at MSU. We want CFR students to know that there is real potential to make a big impact on conservation and be successful in natural resources, forestry, and wildlife," she said.

Courtney said the company makes a point to provide opportunities to the next generation of natural resource leaders.

"We made the conscious decision to hire interns every summer. They work in the field and in the office, on a variety of tasks from pruning and planting trees to learning about real estate. We felt like we had a responsibility to continue investing in the next generation of natural resource leaders because of the people who invested in us," she said.

Hamilton echoed the sentiment, encouraging others to pursue a career in conservation. He said the education and mentorship he received from CFR helped him achieve professional and personal success.

"From communication skills and business strategy to experience in the field, CFR equipped us for where we are now. I get to do something I love every day that's rewarding and creates jobs now and in the future," Hamilton said. "I want to inspire those considering natural resource careers. CFR is truly the foundation that set us up for success in conscious capitalism." ♦



TOP LEFT: Blake Hamilton. BOTTOM RIGHT: Emily Courtney. (Photos submitted)



## PRESERVING FOREST PRODUCTS

**THE U.S. FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY** produces over \$200 billion in products each year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. **Colin McCown**, '07 Master of Forest Products alumnus, has a passion for maximizing the life of those wood products and promoting the responsible use of forest resources as executive vice president of the American Wood Protection Association (AWPA).

The AWP establishes the standards that improve the performance of wood products used outdoors. In everything from utility poles to outdoor decking, their work helps increase the life of wood products. For instance, the life of a utility pole might only last a few years untreated but can endure 50 years or longer if treated properly.

"Adherence to these standards ensures the responsible use of our forest resources," McCown said.

AWPA provides education on how to conserve natural resources through meetings and conferences, as well as one-on-one technical discussions with specifiers and end-users of wood products.

"I'm responsible for oversight and execution of all AWP functions. This includes managing AWP's ANSI-accredited standards development process, running two conferences each year, providing support to users of AWP standards, educating members and the public, editing two large books per year, and handling all general administrative functions," said McCown, who has been in the role almost 20 years.

He said his favorite part of the job is the people.

"I enjoy the opportunity to serve others and help them understand the proper uses of preservative treated wood. This can take the form of working with architects in the development of specifications, helping engineers with construction methods that can increase the service life of a structure, or educating builders and consumers on how to prolong the life of wood used outdoors. Within the membership of AWP, I very much enjoy assisting and working with our Technical Committee members in developing proposals to create or revise standards which will improve the performance of wood products," he said.

Prior to AWP, McCown spent 12 years at the Thomasson

Company, first in research and development. He was given additional responsibilities and ultimately served as the company's vice president of legal affairs and technical services. He said his time at MSU inspired him to pursue a career in wood products.

The Los Angeles native moved to Mississippi and his dad—a two-time MSU alumnus and electrical engineering faculty member—encouraged him to attend MSU. McCown first learned about wood preservation in the Forest Products Lab as a student worker.

"Much of my education was self-funded, and one job I held during my undergraduate studies was formulating preservative solutions and treating wood samples with those solutions under the direction of Dr. Darrel Nicholas in the Department of Forest Products," he said.

Nicholas informed him about career opportunities in the forest products sector and offered a graduate research assistantship in the department.

"I enjoyed working with the technicians and professors at the laboratory, and the concept of using preservatives and other technologies to conserve our forest resources appealed to me. Later, I discussed the opportunity with one of my mentors, Hugh Thomasson of Thomasson Company in Philadelphia, Mississippi. He strongly encouraged me to pursue a career in forest products, so I quickly accepted the offer and began my graduate studies," he said.

McCown remembers his time at MSU fondly, noting that his education set him up for success.

"The education I received at MSU provided the basic information I need to thrive in the field. However, what sets MSU apart, and, specifically, the forest products (now sustainable bioproducts) department, is the practical application of that information in the real world. I cannot think of a single professor in the department that didn't have a keen interest in the success of their students. We were taught to think critically when developing new products or finding solutions to problems. For me, it wasn't just the knowledge I gained that shaped my career, it was the thoughtful guidance and wisdom imparted by my professors," he said. ♣





# HOME ON THE RANGE

*CFR alumnus roams the West to ensure animal health and welfare*

BY MEG HENDERSON

**A**S THE SUN peeks over a mountain range in bursts of orange and pink and casts purple shadows over the grass-carpeted valley, **Preston Rushing**, '20 Bachelor of Science in forestry, sets out to roam these fields. This is his office, at least for the day. However, rather than just soaking in the beauty of the Western landscape, his eyes are set on the health of the land and the animals who call it home.

As a project inspector for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Wild Horse and Burro program, Rushing is based in Norman, Oklahoma, but spends about 120 days of the year traveling to Bureau properties and inspecting land and equine health. The Bureau takes responsibility for these free-roaming equines living on federal properties. Because overpopulation threatens the wellbeing of these animals, BLM aims to tame and adopt them, while overseeing their health and nutritional needs in the meantime. Rushing is responsible for the health and wellbeing of wild horses and burros—donkeys—living on 26.9 million acres of public lands across 10 Western states. He covers much of that territory, regularly inspecting 16 sites in Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska.

At site inspections, he drives around the property and physically inspects the horses, giving them a body condition score ranging from 1 (extremely malnourished) to 9 (obese). He also inspects the range and monitors the quality of the land, since the horses require extra attention during drought conditions. Winter inspections require even greater efforts at keeping the animals nourished and healthy.

"In the spring through fall, I can only get a general idea of conditions since the horses are spread out, grazing the land," Rushing said. "During the four months of winter, I'll coordinate with veterinarians to get a hard count and body condition check on the animals, since they are lined up on the feed. Winters are especially hard on elderly and ill horses."

Growing up in Cherokee, Alabama, a small town in the northwest corner of the state, he often traveled westward with his family each summer to camp and hike in national parks.

"I wasn't thinking about the future back then, but I knew that I would like to have a job doing something outdoors," he said.

Rushing studied for two semesters at Northeast Mississippi Community College but feeling drawn more to the outdoors than to the classroom, he packed his bags and left for a job at Yellowstone National Park. After his parents urged him to return to school, he began taking classes at Itawamba Community College, and it was there that he discovered his passion for forestry.

"A professor first drew my interest when she told me I didn't have to do math in forestry," he said with a laugh. "Even though that turned out not to be true, I felt like this was a really good fit for me. I enjoyed the science and the balance between peaceful solitude spending time in the outdoors and the camaraderie of my classmates."

After finishing his associate degree at Itawamba, Rushing transferred to Mississippi State to complete his bachelor's degree in forestry with a concentration in environmental conservation. Following graduation, Rushing once more made his way west to work—this time for the Bureau of Land Management. He took a post-graduate internship at the Bureau's Oklahoma field office as a trainee in the Biological Science/Natural Resources program, which led to a fulltime position with BLM.

"Even though what I do today doesn't directly relate to forestry, courses in my concentration like Game Conservation and Terrestrial Ecology gave me a solid background for parts of the work I do as a project inspector," he said.

Starting out on the job, however, Rushing realized that he still had a lot to learn about the grassy pasture ecosystems that he would be inspecting.

"Getting over that learning curve was tough, but I've always been hardworking, and if you have that, you can learn whatever you need to learn," he said. "I'm also a lot more open to constructive criticism than I used to be. It helps to have an open mind and be open to suggestions from your team."

Rushing also credits his success to the mentors who have helped him learn on the job.

"Our team has a great sense of camaraderie," he said. "Early on, I was working with the New Mexico team two or three weekends a month, and I learned a lot from their experience and expertise. At adoption events, they showed me how to halter the horses



and sort them in pens. I also learned how to work with the horses up close, trimming hooves and administering vaccines.”

Quickly approaching three years with the bureau, Rushing still relishes the traveling and diversity of his job, which includes not only site inspections but also assisting the New Mexico adoption team, which tries to place the animals into private care.

“I love the traveling. I’m always getting to see a lot of new country and visit places I never would otherwise go. This week, I’m going to an adoption event in Mercedes, Texas, which is right on the Mexican border.”

Rushing also assists with the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program, which formalizes standard operating procedures, establishes training programs for BLM staff and contractors, and conducts internal and external assessments for all activities

undertaken in the Wild Horse and Burro Program. This project has taken him to Nevada, Colorado, California, and Wyoming in the past year alone.

“As much as the travel itself is a reward, what really pays off is seeing that the work you’re doing helps animals. Since I’ve worked with the bureau, we have adopted over 5,000 animals. It feels good to be a part of that effort,” he said.

Although Rushing’s career path has led him from the forest to the open range, he credits the diversity of MSU’s forestry program to leading him down this unexpected but rewarding route.

“There are so many career possibilities with a forestry degree, especially if you want to make your office in the outdoors,” Rushing said. “I’ve been lucky to have so many of the right doors open for me, but it was my education in forestry that prepared me to walk through them.” ♣



# RETURNING TO HER ROOTS

*CFR alumna teaches forestry in her hometown*

BY LILY GRADO

**G**ROWING UP on a cattle farm in southwest Itawamba county, **Emily Loden-Jones** was always interested in the outdoors. “I love being in nature and enjoy the natural sciences. That’s how I became interested in forestry in the first place,” Loden-Jones said.

Although raised by two educators—her father a principal and her mother a special education teacher for 30 years, she never envisioned that she would eventually become the program director of forestry technology at Itawamba Community College (ICC).

After attending ICC in 1996, Loden-Jones transferred to MSU in January of 1998, looking to attend the only accredited forestry school in Mississippi. As a forestry undergraduate student at Mississippi State University, Loden-Jones was an active member of the Mississippi State Forestry Club and the university’s chapter of the Society of American Foresters. After finding an interest in forest economics, she began a graduate program focused on the economic impacts of saltwater fishing along the Mississippi Gulf Coast under the direction of Dr. Stephen Grado.

“Obtaining a master’s degree from the College of Forest Resources focusing in forest economics is the major catalyst that afforded me the opportunity to teach at Itawamba Community College,” said Loden-Jones. “Being responsible for teaching broad forestry subject areas, economics is where all areas come together. Dr. Bulard, Dr. Grebner, and Dr. Munn piqued my interest in this area and Dr. Grado lit the fire. To these individuals I am very grateful.”

After finishing her master’s in forestry and a short stint working in the college, Loden accepted a position at Weyerhaeuser as a professional development candidate, which focused on exposing new hires to all aspects of forest management within the company. She went on to work for the company as a mid-rotation forester. While she enjoyed the time and experience with the company, a new opportunity was found elsewhere—a teaching position at ICC.

“I didn’t know if I would like teaching,” Loden-Jones admitted. “However, given my last name’s reputation in Itawamba County, there was a good chance I would end up in education anyway.”

The opportunity to move and work back home was a big selling point for Loden-Jones in taking the position in 2005. ICC is

a two-year program that offers associate of arts and associate of applied science degrees. Loden-Jones began teaching nine different forestry classes dealing with forest technology.

“The relationships I had with my professors at MSU molded me into the educator I am today,” Loden-Jones said. “I had to take quite a few pages out of their books on how to stay engaging, relevant, and personable with my students.”

Loden-Jones began working hard to create a healthy learning environment for her students, making sure they thrived after graduating as much as they did while they were there.

“About half of my students choose to transfer to Mississippi State,” Loden-Jones commented. “We have an articulation agreement with MSU where our students can transfer into all three departments in the College of Forest Resources.”

Loden-Jones emphasized her appreciation of being able to “give back” to the ICC community that helped cultivate her own education, by helping students enter the workforce or continue their education elsewhere, like at Mississippi State.

Her job allows her to help students who obtain an Associate of Applied Science in forest technology at ICC find jobs, or pursue more education.

Several of the students who end up with a degree from ICC end up working as forest technicians for forestry commissions in Mississippi and Alabama.

“We also started working with the federal government with two-year degree students specializing in work along the Natchez Trace,” said Loden-Jones. “There is also opportunity in private industry, while many students choose to continue on at Mississippi State.”

Looking for new opportunities for the foresters in Mississippi is important to Loden-Jones, who values her relationship with MSU’s College of Forest Resources.

“We always look for opportunities to work together and expand our relationship with the College of Forest Resources. It’s beneficial for my students who transfer to MSU,” said Loden-Jones. ♦

Emily Loden-Jones with students. (Photo by Nina Strother)





# WOOD SCIENTIST PAYS IT FORWARD

*Alumnus shares passion for research and mentoring*

BY TREY BARRETT

**W**HILE GROWING UP in Quebec City, Canada, **Pascal Theberge**, '95 Master of Science in forest products, developed a passion for wood, raw materials, and research.

"I was always fascinated with materials in general," Theberge said. "I enjoyed the idea of taking materials and making them better and more useful for society in woodworking or building."

Theberge's passions gradually developed over time before truly emerging in 1989 when he started his undergraduate career as a wood science major at Université Laval in his hometown.

"I really liked the science and engineering aspect of studying, but through my studies and the laboratories we would do, I became more fascinated with the hands-on aspect of the major," Theberge said.

One of the first experiments Theberge recalled was making phenol formaldehyde resin and creating composites, such as plywood and oriented strand board (OSB), from it.

"Being able to participate in the experiment from the front end to the finished product was neat," Theberge said.

After conducting similar experiments throughout his undergraduate career, the experience sparked a desire to do more with engineered wood.

Theberge became interested in pursuing a master's degree after he completed his bachelor's in 1993. He realized the only way to continue the research he enjoyed was to pursue graduate studies.

"I was interested in research from a young age, and I think that research studies open up doors for new opportunities," Theberge said.

As Theberge searched for programs to continue his studies, one of his professors, who had connections to MSU faculty members, recommended Mississippi State.

"I got to know some of the faculty, learn about the wood science and technology industry in the area, and become oriented in the research at MSU," Theberge said.

Theberge began his graduate career at MSU in 1993 with a major in wood sciences and technology and a minor in statistics. He said the transition to Mississippi from Canada was smooth, thank, in part, to Southern hospitality.

"It was a big change for me, coming from Canada to the United States, because I was going to a different region, country, and

language," Theberge said. "However, the friendliness of Starkville residents really helped integrate me into the surrounding community and the university."

He said that the program involved a lot of opportunities to work on unique research projects, such as one that involved raw material substitution.

"We took resins or various raw materials and changed their compositions to improve properties and make the raw materials more friendly for processing as OSB," Theberge said.

After two years in the program, Theberge graduated with his master's, and relationships with fellow alumni and faculty members that have endured.

Soon after, he began working at Georgia-Pacific, a leading international tissue, pulp, packaging, and building products company based in Atlanta, Georgia, where he stayed for 11 years. While there, he served as a quality control technician, technologist, associate chemist, and chemist.

Since 2006, Theberge has been as a research scientist at Huber Engineering Woods. Based in Commerce, Georgia, he works with raw materials for the improvement of OSB and other construction materials. He said that while he enjoys the scientific nature of the work, the collaborative atmosphere is what he loves most about the job.

"Working with other like-minded people and in a stimulating environment is beneficial. I am constantly learning and can even bring some of that knowledge into the industry to spark positive changes," Theberge said.

Theberge said his love for research led him to the position, and his affinity for industrial applications has helped him move up in the company.

And while he has been out of the academic environment for a while, Theberge said his love for teaching knowledge to others is still strong.

"I enjoy mentoring younger people coming into the industry by helping them navigate through it. I want to help them reach their full potential," Theberge said. "I have received help and had mentors myself. I just want to pay that forward." ♦





# DEVELOPMENT

## INCREASING ACCESS, AWARENESS, AND AFFORDABILITY

*New staff aims to increase diversity in CFR*

BY VANESSA BEESON

**F**ORESTER. Environmental specialist. Lumber mill manager. For minority and female prospective students these career choices aren't always top-of-mind when considering a college major. Mississippi State's College of Forest Resources aims to change that.

A gift from The Dick Molpus Foundation and a grant from the Woodward Hines Education Foundation funds two new professional staff positions aimed at increasing access, opportunity, and enhancing student success in the College of Forest Resources.

**Dr. T.J. Walker** is the director of student recruitment and inclusive excellence. Walker, formerly district dean of student services for Northwest Mississippi Community College, is leading programs designed to foster the recruitment, retention, graduation, and employment of students in natural resources.

"This initiative seeks to increase awareness, access, and affordability for underrepresented students, including minorities, women, and first generation college students," Walker said.

The team, which includes **Morgan Alexander** as the student engagement and success coordinator, is creating a multi-tiered approach to develop resources, activities, and outreach efforts aimed to increase the recruitment, retention, and advancement of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty and staff from historically underrepresented populations. Immediate action items include campus and community outreach, marketing efforts aimed at rising high school juniors and seniors, and establishing a diversity engagement council. The initiative's goal is to have CFR undergraduates reflect the demographics of Mississippi's graduating high school seniors by 2030. While Mississippi's overall population is currently 38.8% Black, according to the U.S. Census, the current CFR student body is 7% Black.

Walker has a long record of empowering students. The MSU alumnus received his bachelor's in education at MSU, before earning a master's from Belhaven and Doctor of Education from the University of Mississippi. He began his career at Mississippi

State as an admissions counselor focused on Jackson Public Schools and Mississippi Delta public and private schools before moving on to Woodward Hines Education Foundation as the director of the North Mississippi branch of Get2College, a nonprofit that helps families navigate college. After that, he served as district dean of student services for Northwest Mississippi Community College, overseeing a large umbrella of programs including student life, conduct, success, housing, counseling services, events, and more.

"My experience helps me understand the hurdles students face and the issues their families deal with when they're trying to make decisions about college," Walker said. "We want to be that face they recognize and know they can come to. We want to counsel them and be that ear or shoulder for them, as they're going through their coursework. We'll also work with faculty and staff as they engage with our students, giving them tools to better support our students."

Walker said returning to Starkville where he began his academic journey is meaningful.

"It's full circle for me to continue my path in higher education in the place where higher ed began for me. Starkville feels like home, and I'm excited to be serving students in a new way," he said.

Walker noted increasing access, opportunity, and success is a team effort that requires support from students, parents, faculty, staff, and alumni alike.

"Access, opportunity, and success programs, especially, need support. We need the buy in. Support is going to determine how successful we can be. I appeal to our alumni to support us and to our prospective students and their parents to give us a chance to show how natural resource fields are worth exploring," he said.

He notes that underrepresented youth aren't always exposed to the many opportunities available in natural resources. The Prentiss, Mississippi, native said conversations about natural resource careers may happen less in Black and first-generation-college families.

"I know in the small town I grew up in, conservation and natural





resources in terms of professions weren't discussed. Our daily lives, however, were surrounded by it. We hunt, fish, and farm, and my parents and neighbors have land, but it wasn't discussed as a viable career."

Alexander, a 2020 CFR graduate, echoed the sentiment. "There are misconceptions about what a forester does or even what they look like. When I tell people about my degree, people do not expect a Black person and especially not a Black woman to even be in this space. And many don't even know what this space is—what exactly we do," she said.

Alexander said the team aims to break past those barriers with prospective students and families alike.

"We need to let people know natural resource careers and majors provide career opportunities. If a student is good in math and science, they're told to be a doctor or an engineer. If they like debating, they're told to be a lawyer; education, a teacher; if you like animals, a veterinarian. I don't have to be a vet to help animals. I don't have to be a lawyer to impact policy and legislation. That's what we want everybody to understand, but especially underrepresented groups of students from marginalized backgrounds. They are expected by their families, communities, and society to go in certain fields and programs, and that's a barrier," she said.

Alexander, who also previously worked as an admission counselor for MSU, has been a champion of equity in conservation. The Jackson native founded and cohosts a podcast and runs an Instagram page called Culture and Conservation, aimed at conservation and wildlife education and promoting women and people

of color in natural resource professions. She also served as co-director of SPARK (Students Paving a Road to Knowledge), an MSU leadership conference that helps underrepresented rising high school seniors plan their future. She said interning as a William A. Demmer Scholar for the USDA Forest Service in Washington, D.C., helped ignite her passion toward the intersection of equity, education, and the environment.

"That's when I realized how important and impactful education was to conservation. It helped dispel the myth that if I didn't go to grad school and pursue research, I wouldn't have a prestigious career," said Alexander, who is pursuing a master's in conservation education.

Alexander reiterated how increasing knowledge of conservation among underrepresented students will open doors to careers many may have never considered.

"You don't have to have a background in hunting and fishing to go into natural resources. All you need to be successful in the College of Forest Resources is an open mind, an interest, and the willingness to do the work. It doesn't matter where you come from as long as you have the interest and passion for the work," she said.

For Alexander, coming home to CFR feels full circle.

"I was a CFR ambassador and on the Dean's Council. Now I am a professional in this college, and my professors are now my colleagues. I get to combine things I love that are very important to me by combining access, opportunity, and success in the space around conservation. There is a Zora Neale Hurston quote that says, 'There are years that ask questions and years that answer.' This is the year that answers for me," she said. ♣



# FOREST TO FIELD

## *Bulldog Forest gift grows student-athlete development program*

BY MEG HENDERSON

**I**N MISSISSIPPI, nearly 90% of land is privately owned, with many smaller properties often passed down through families. The decision to sell family land may be a difficult one, leaving owners wondering what will happen to the place intertwined in their memories. But maintaining the land involves work, time, and money. There is another option, thanks to a program at Mississippi State University.

Almost a century ago, the idea of gifting land for the university to manage was planted. During the Depression of the 1930s, a federal government grant provided MSU 8,500 acres of timberland close to the university along Highway 25. The property was used unsuccessfully as a dairy in its first decade and then came under the management of a small group of forestry faculty in the 1940s. Led by John W. Starr, the group transformed the ill-fated property into productive timberland, now known as the Starr Memorial Forest.

In the following decades, a few private lands were gifted to the university. However, no concerted efforts were made to solicit donations until 2007, when George Hopper, then dean of the College of Forest Resources, saw these land donations as a means to enhance student scholarship. He quickly reached out to the MSU Foundation to make the idea a reality.

“The Bulldog Forest program was initially designed to benefit the College of Forest Resources, providing extra funding and serving as outdoor classrooms for students and faculty,” said **Jeff Little**, senior director of development for the Bulldog Forest. “As it grew in popularity, alumni from other colleges and departments wanted to donate, and, today, it is a university-wide program.”

In this unique gift agreement, the university agrees to manage the land and appropriate annual revenue from its resources, after subtracting management costs, to the designated university department. The College of Forest Resources manages the land and may also continue to use it as learning and research space for CFR students and faculty, and the university agrees not to sell the property.

“In Mississippi, a lot of the wealth is tied to the land, but owners often have emotional ties as well,” said Little. “It’s been in their family for generations, and they don’t want to see it sold and developed.”

While Mississippi State Athletics has received support from other Foundation programs, student-athletes will benefit from the Bulldog Forest program for the first time, thanks to a recent donation from alumnus **Bruce Thornton**.

Thornton graduated from MSU in 1970 and was a member of one of the first graduating classes of the newly established landscape architecture program. He was also the first in his family to earn a college degree—perhaps establishing a tradition, as his two daughters later graduated from MSU.

“We were not a wealthy family by any means; we ate what we grew and lived off of the land,” Thornton said. “My father never spoke of money, but I know that he paid my college tuition entirely from revenue generated from the family property, part of which I’m now gifting to the Bulldog Forest.”

The donation is, appropriately, dedicated to his father, Robert Bruce Thornton, Sr. When Thornton’s grandfather passed away in his 80s, his father and a few of his father’s siblings remained on the Jasper County farm, near Heidelberg, to help their mother work the farm and manage the finances. Over time, the land has been divided among family members, so the 80-acre gift is a part of the original 160-acre farm. However, to Thornton, its value extends far beyond the land and its natural resources.

“To me, that land represents the hard work and sacrifices my father made for his family over the years,” he said. “Without that land and my father’s dedication, I would not have been able to go to Mississippi State.”

Although he was not a student-athlete—he had injured his knee playing high school football—Thornton has been a devoted fan of MSU Athletics, still traveling to campus from his home in Mobile, Alabama, for most sporting events. Thornton has called Mobile home since he took a job with the Army Corps of Engineers in 1974 to design recreation facilities along the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. He retired in 2004.

“Student-athletes have the dual pressures of performing their best in class and on the field, so they need some additional support to balance those demands and to prepare for life after college. That’s why I want my donation to support the student-athlete development fund,” Thornton said.

The student-athlete development fund enhances professional and personal development, community engagement, and life skills to support athletes as students and to prepare them for a career and life after college.

**Alvin Franklin**, associate athletic director for development, serves as a liaison between MSU Athletics and the MSU Foundation. When he, Little and Thornton met to discuss the benefits of

Andrews Forestry and Wildlife Laboratory, a property in the MSU Bulldog Forest. (Photo by Robby Lozano)



making a donation, Thornton expressed a desire for his investment to support student-athletes for years to come rather than fund a one-time capital project.

“I thought this program would be a great fit for him,” Franklin said. “Our unit wants to invest in student-athletes today and tomorrow and give them the resources to be 100% successful on and off the field. We are striving to be one of the best student-athlete units in the country.”

The program had been in place for a while, but the fund was only recently established in the fall of 2021. Since that time, Franklin has seen the unit grow, adding programs such as career planning and networking and a program to support international athletes and help those who may want to stay and work in the U.S. after

graduation.

“We’ve had a very positive response from donors, and many make repeat donations after seeing the impact the program is having on our student-athletes,” he said. “It also allows our sports fans to see the human side of their favorite athletes and further motivates them to support our program.”

The Bulldog Forest ensures preservation of Mississippi’s land and wildlife while simultaneously promoting education and, in many cases, generating revenue for university programs. In these ways, the land that has supported past generations of Mississippians can keep working to sustain present and future generations of MSU Bulldogs. ♣



# COLLEGE NEWS

## FORESTRY



### TREE CANOPIES PROVIDE MORE THAN SHADE FOR HOMEOWNERS

**MSU FOREST ECONOMISTS** find that tree canopies provide “a little green” for big city and small-town residents alike. **Drs. Donald Grebner** and **Stephen Grado**, both forestry professors, have found the global trend of tree canopies increasing home prices in urban areas also holds true in smaller communities. The team—which included **Eric Bridges**, a doctoral student and former city forester for Lakeland, Tennessee—recently led a study of single-family residential properties in the small, middle-class community outside of Memphis. They examined the relationship between canopy cover and property values using the Hedonic

Pricing Method, a tool widely used in urban forestry valuations. The team examined neighborhoods with varying characteristics, from modern subdivisions with no canopy to those with older homes and mature trees. The team found that property values increased whether or not additional trees were present on the individual’s lot itself. Even close proximity to trees raised the values of all properties in a subdivision. The results suggest that there are alternative approaches to maximizing the impact of canopy cover on property values besides planting trees on individual lots.

### MISSISSIPPI STATE’S PHI KAPPA PHI RECEIVES NATIONAL SERVICE PROJECT AWARD

**MISSISSIPPI STATE’S** chapter of Phi Kappa Phi was recognized in 2022 with the organization’s national Service Project Award for fall 2021 work in building a garden of native woody and herbaceous plants around Thompson Hall. MSU’s chapter of PKP is the Division I award recipient for work by 26 students and four faculty members who planted native shrubs and perennial plants around Thompson Hall, home of the College of Forest Resources.



PKP students and faculty at Mississippi State, along with those in partnering campus organizations, installed plantings around Thompson Hall and learned how to properly identify plants and choose proper planting sites as part of the nationally recognized service project. (Photo by Dominique Belcher)



# MSU FORESTRY STUDENTS ACCEPTED INTO NATIONAL DIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

**TWO FORESTRY GRADUATE STUDENTS** have been accepted into the Society of American Foresters Diversity Scholar Program. **Damilola Taiwo**, a forestry master's student from Nigeria earned bachelor's and master's degrees in environmental biology from Nigeria's Ladoke Akintola University and the University of Ibadan, respectively. **Segun Adeyemo**, a forestry doctoral student also from Nigeria, earned a master's in forest science from the University of Padova in Italy. The competitive program operated by the national organization advances sustainable forest management.



Damilola Taiwo, left, and Segun Adeyemo have been accepted into the competitive Society of American Foresters Diversity Scholar Program. (Photo by David Ammon)

## NOTABLE FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

**DR. STEVE GRADO** received the 2022 Regions Bank-MSU Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine Superior Faculty Teaching Award.

**DR. JOSH GRANGER** received the 2022 College of Forest Resources/ Forest and Wildlife Research Center Service Award and the 2023 Regions Bank-MSU Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinarian Medicine Superior Faculty award in the Service Category.

**DR. HEIDI RENNINGER** received the CFR/FWRC Service Award.

**DR. CURTIS VANDERSCHAAP** received the CFR/FWRC Extension/Outreach Award.

## STUDENT AWARDS

**SUCHANA ARYAL** placed third in master's student oral presentation at the 2023 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**ELIZABETH ESSER** placed first in the master's student poster presentation at the 2023 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**T.J. GATLIN** placed third in the master's student oral presentation at the 2023 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**MACY GOSSELAAR** placed second in master's students oral and poster presentations at the 2023 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**KELECHI IBEH** placed first in the Ph.D. student poster presentation at the 2023 Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**CASEY IWAMOTO** placed third in Ph.D. poster presentation at the 2023 Graduate Student Research Symposium. She also received the 2023 Phi Kappa Phi Love of Learning award and received the Moehring Outstanding Graduate Student Award-Ph.D. level from the Department of Forestry.

**GABRIEL NYEN** placed third in master's student oral presentation at the spring and fall 2023 Graduate Student Research Symposium. He also received the People's Choice award in the MSU Three Minute Thesis competition.

**NASIR QADIR** placed first in master's student oral presentation for master's students at the 2023 MSU Graduate Research Symposium.

**MATEUS SANQUETTA** placed second in master's student oral presentations at the 2023 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**MAXWELL SCHRIMPF** placed third for his poster in the forestry master's student category at the MSU Graduate Student 2022 Research Symposium.

**EMILY WHITE** and **MARIA TIMBERLAKE** were chosen to attend the 2023 Forest Policy Institute. Timberlake also received the Phi Kappa Phi Pioneer Award.

## SUSTAINABLE BIOPRODUCTS

### BRAZILIAN SCIENTISTS THRIVE PROFESSIONALLY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FPL AND MSU

**THE FOREST PRODUCTS LABORATORY** (FPL), in cooperation with Mississippi State University, has developed a strong graduate education and research program over the past several years that has attracted outstanding scholars from South America. Many have completed graduate degrees and are now providing leadership in academic, research, and industry programs, both here in the United States and abroad.

“I’m very proud of the strong partnership between FPL and MSU,” said Rubin Shmulsky, professor and head of the Department of Sustainable Bioproducts at Mississippi State University. “It’s humbling for me to be a part of this team’s efforts to attract and train the next generation of diverse professionals and leaders in support of sustainable forest products research and development.”

Two Brazilian scientists are excellent examples of how effective this relationship is.

The latest graduate, **Laurice Spinelli Correa**, a post-doctoral research associate at MSU, is currently stationed at FPL through a program that has been funded through the USDA Agricultural Research Service, Forest Service Research and Development, State and Private Forestry, and Mississippi State University.

Correa completed her undergraduate studies in Brazil and moved to Mississippi to pursue her master’s and Ph.D. at the Mississippi State University sustainable bioproducts department. While working at MSU, she gained experience in wood mechanical testing, connection systems, and engineered wood products.

At FPL, Correa has been involved in the nondestructive evaluation of wood.

“Being able to work at the Forest Products Laboratory and learn from the most



LEFT: Laurice Spinelli Correa. RIGHT: Brunela Pollastrelli Rodrigues. (Photos submitted)

prestigious scientists in the U.S. is a privilege to me,” Correa said. “It’s exciting to go to work every day with a smile on my face, knowing that we’re making a difference in our society.”

Another collaborator in this program is **Brunela Pollastrelli Rodrigues**, who completed her Ph.D. in Brazil, and, after a couple of years as a professor in her home country, decided to work as a postdoctoral associate at MSU.

“As a wood scientist, this has been an outstanding opportunity for me to be involved in crucial research and in the mentoring of students in the forest products area.”

Rodrigues’ past research has focused on projects related to wood quality from forest plantations in Brazil. While at MSU, she worked to create and promote a reliable database to deter illegal logging and improve the wood trade internationally.

“A lot of students go through graduate programs, work in one area and come out very knowledgeable on that one piece of work,” observed Bob Ross, project leader and research professor at FPL, who has worked extensively with both scholars. “But

the way FPL and MSU do this, graduates come out as fully functional professionals—they know what they’re doing, and more importantly, they know why they’re doing it. Something like that doesn’t always happen. I wish I could hire every one of them! The graduates are in great demand, and they’re doing well. And I believe they’re very satisfied with what they’re learning from FPL, too.”

William (Andy) Martin, assistant director for wood products research at FPL, agrees.

“I’m impressed with the quality and professionalism of the scientists we’re able to work with out of MSU,” Martin said. “I certainly look forward to continuing the great partnership that has been established between FPL and MSU.”

*Published by the USDA Forest Products Laboratory in Lab Notes. Edited for brevity.*





## MSU ASSISTANT PROFESSOR REPRESENTS WOMEN IN WOOD SCIENCE

**DR. TÂMARA FRANÇA**, assistant professor in Mississippi State's Department of Sustainable Bioproducts in the College of Forest Resources, has been selected as a woman ambassador of wood science.

In 2021, the Society of Wood Science and Technology (SWST) sought calls for nominations for "Women Ambassadors Creating the Future of Wood Science." França was nominated and then selected by the SWST committee as one of 16 women from around the world to celebrate women in wood science. França's story is part of a traveling SWST-sponsored exhibition that traverses the globe encouraging women and young girls to pursue a career in wood science and technology.

"I'm humbled by and grateful for such a big honor. My message to women and girls interested in wood science is to be persistent,

persevere, and open to the opportunities that life gives to you and be passionate in everything you do," she said.

França serves as a director on the executive board of the SWST, mid-south regional board member of the Forest Products Society and advisor of the MSU FPS/SWST Student Chapter. Her research areas include durability and protection of wood and physical and mechanical properties of wood.

França earned her doctoral degree in forest resources with a sustainable bioproducts concentration from Mississippi State, her master's degree in forest science from Federal University of Espírito Santo, her bachelor's degree in technology in agribusiness—wood from the State University of Para, and a bachelor's in business administration from the Metropolitana College of Marabá.

## STUDENT AWARDS

**RIDWAN AYINLA** placed second in the Ph.D. oral presentation at the 2023 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**MIA CRAIG** won the Outstanding Graduate Student Award at the Master's Level.

**EDWARD ENTSMINGER** won first place at the 2022 Graduate Research Symposium Ph.D. Poster Contest.

**MADELINE GNANN** won the Sophomore Academic Achievement Award.

**MATTHEW JERNIGAN** won the Mississippi Lumber Manufacturers Association endowed scholarship.

**ADAM WADE** won the Outstanding Graduate Student Award at the Ph.D. level.



Sustainable bioproducts professor emeritus Moon Kim released "**Adhesives and Finishes for Wood: For Practitioners and Students**." Kim retired from Mississippi State in 2014 with 26 years of service. Kim's expertise centered on composites and resins. During his tenure, he founded Mississippi Pacific Resins Inc. based on a patent he received for thermosetting carbamate-formaldehyde resin technology.



## WILDLIFE, FISHERIES & AQUACULTURE



### DEMARAIS NAMED MSU'S 2022 SEC FACULTY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER

**DR. STEVE DEMARAIS** was honored as the university's 2022 Southeastern Conference Faculty Achievement Award recipient. Recipients are SEC professors recognized for their outstanding teaching accomplishments and nationally or internationally recognized scholarship. Award winners receive a \$5,000 honorarium. A Fellow of the Wildlife Society, Demarais' research involves white-tailed deer ecology and effects of land management decisions in the forested and agricultural landscapes where they live. A previous associate editor for two international journals, he also was senior author on two seminal technical scientific reviews that helped shape public policy. Demarais has amassed over \$8.1 million in grants during his career, published 155 peer-reviewed journal articles, and overseen 45 College of Forest Resources master's and doctoral graduate students.

### RETIRED MSU PROFESSOR RELEASES NEW BOOK ON FISHING AND HUNTING

**DR. DONALD JACKSON'S** "A Sportsman's Journey," published by the University Press of Mississippi, is his fourth book and explores the connections between man and his environment. The new book by the Mississippi State wildlife, fisheries, and aquaculture professor emeritus recollects hunting and fishing in the South. Jackson, who continues teaching Principles of Fisheries Management in the College of Forest Resources, said he hopes readers garner a visceral experience of life in the great outdoors. Jackson's career in teaching, research, and wildlife left a beloved legacy and reputation with the MSU community. Distinguished specifically for his post-Hurricane Katrina



restoration efforts in the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Jackson led teams to restore fisheries and collected funds for research. He was honored for his leadership in the American Fisheries Society Hurricane Disaster Relief Program. Throughout his career, he traveled to every continent, except Antarctica, and provided best management practices for fisheries, small bodies of water, and coastal communities.

### MSU RECOGNIZED NATIONALLY FOR CONSERVATION WORK

**MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY** accepted national awards for its partnership in a large-scale sustainability project. **Dr. Kristine Evans**, assistant professor in the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture, led a team of MSU faculty and partnering agencies in a multiyear Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units project titled "Strategic Conservation Assessment of Gulf Coast Landscapes." The work was the 2022 winner of the CESU Network Award and the 2023 US Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Regional Director's Award in Conservation.



The \$1.7 million project, one of the first funded by the federal Restore Council to address spending of Deepwater Horizon funds on restoration efforts, created a web tool to determine where and how to best spend funding to restore and

enhance healthy coastal ecosystems. Evans applied her knowledge toward work with the Tombigbee Forest Bird Partnership, working with other MSU researchers, the American Bird Conservancy, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the Sustainable Forest Initiative, International Paper, Weyerhaeuser, the Westervelt Company, C.A. Barge Timberlands LC, McShan Lumber, Wildlife Mississippi, Quail Forever, and the Alabama Forestry Association to find ways to improve working forests for avian conservation. Evans has done extensive work with landbird conservation efforts and recently was recognized as one of three avian conservationists in the Western Hemisphere to receive the annual Partners in Flight Award, given by a network of more than 150 landbird conservation organizations.

# MSU DOCTORAL STUDENT TACKLES FERAL SWINE ACROSS THE SOUTHEAST AS USFWS DIRECTORATE FELLOW

**TYLER EVANS**, a wildlife, fisheries, and aquaculture doctoral student, was selected as a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Directorate Fellow in summer 2022 to develop a prioritization tool for feral swine control across the Southeast's 108 national wildlife refuges. The Salem, Ohio, native has spent the past three years studying feral swine at the Sam. D. Hamilton Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge in Noxubee, Oktibbeha, and Winston counties. Although wild pigs have only been present on the refuge since approximately 2014, they appear to be becoming more prominent with respect to numbers observed and associated damage to the landscape. He assessed other criteria specific to each refuge, such as the impact of feral swine on each refuge's primary purpose and any vulnerable species, among other factors. He then built a Simple Multi-Attribute Rating Tool (SMART) to gauge how feral swine might impact each location.



## NOTABLE FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

**DR. JIMMY AVERY** received the Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award from the United States Aquaculture Society.

**DR. BETH BAKER** was selected to attend LEAD21, a national program developing leaders at land-grant universities.

**DR. LESLIE BURGER** received the CFR/FWRC Faculty Excellence in Advising award.

**DR. SANDRA CORREA** is an invited member of the U.N. Environment Programme Multidisciplinary Expert Scientific Advisory Group.

**DR. STEVE DEMARAIS** received the 2022 Joe Hamilton Life Achievement Award from the National Deer Association.

**DR. DANA MORIN** received the CFR/FWRC Teaching Award.

**DR. ANDY KOUBA** received the Seven Seals Award by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, recognizing meritorious leadership and initiative in support of the men and women who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.

**DR. GARRETT STREET** received the CFR/FWRC Research Award.

## STUDENT AWARDS

**REBECCA BRACKEN** received the 2022 Phi Kappa Phi Love of Learning award.

**VANDANA DHARAN** placed second in Ph.D. oral presentation at the 2022 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**BRANDON GERHARD** placed second in master's oral presentation at the 2022 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**CARSON MCFATRIDGE** participated in the William A. Demmer Scholars Program.

**NATASHA MURPHY** placed second in Ph.D. poster presentation at the 2022 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**GRANT PETERSON**, senior undergraduate, was named a Udall Scholar.

**RILEY PORTER** placed first in master's poster presentation at the 2022 MSU Graduate Research Symposium.

**EMMA SCHULTZ** placed first in the Ph.D. oral presentation at the 2023 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

**JONATHAN SMITH** placed second in the master's student category for his poster at the 2022 MSU Graduate Student Research Symposium.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN NATURE AND HUMANITY

*Wildlife doctoral student has a passion for birds and nature*

BY TREY BARRETT

**E**VER SINCE FRANK ONG'ONDO was a young child, he has enjoyed nature. In his hometown of Oyugis, Kenya, they lived close to wildlife habitats where he interacted with diverse wildlife species, including hyenas, lions, and leopards, among others.

Following a grocery visit, Ong'ondo was waiting at a stop sign near his grandparents' home when he noticed a pair of common bulbuls with their chick, gracefully training the young one to fly. Witnessing this event sparked his passion for wildlife and human coexistence.

"While I was standing near a crosswalk admiring these birds, an oncoming speeding vehicle hit the chick as it was trying to cross," Ong'ondo said. "All I saw were stains on the road, and I was only in the sixth grade when it happened. It really touched me."

Ong'ondo's passions initially led him to pursue veterinary medicine at the University of Nairobi. However, his interests changed to wildlife management and conservation, during his freshman year.

"I realized veterinary medicine was not my path because it focused on treating and diagnosing animals," Ong'ondo said. "I wanted something that would allow me to interact with nature and wildlife more directly."

During his second year as an undergraduate at the University of Nairobi, Ong'ondo served as a volunteer for the National Museums of Kenya's Department of Ornithology as a community ecologist. There, he learned about bird banding and data entry, collection, and collation. In his fourth year, he was hired by the museum as a field technician to undertake different field roles. This led to him challenging several researchers and collaborators scientifically which sparked his interest in pursuing a master's degree.

Ong'ondo graduated with a Bachelor of Science in wildlife management and conservation in 2017. He came to the United States in 2019 to earn his master's degree in natural resources as a wildlife major at Humboldt State University. He said he wanted to further his education, not only to "exercise and utilize" it but to fulfill a lifelong goal.

"I come from a family of eight siblings, but I'm the only one in the United States. I am also the first to earn a Bachelor of Science, a master's degree, and get to the doctorate level," Ong'ondo said. "I also wanted to change my family's history because it pained me that no one had gone to college even though my older brothers had a high school education. I wanted to change that narrative by getting to the top of the academic ladder and inspire the next generation that it can be done."

Before deciding on Mississippi State University for his doctoral program, Ong'ondo received offers from various schools across the United States. He ultimately decided to attend MSU after meeting with **Dr. Mark McConnell**, assistant professor in wildlife, fisheries and aquaculture.

"When I was looking to continue my education, I wanted an advisor whose area of research fell in line with my career goals, someone I could work peacefully with and a relatively young, energetic professor. I got all these from Mark McConnell," Ong'ondo said. "He's an undeniably incredible professor and the smartest, sharpest, and wisest professor I have ever met. I know I will learn a lot and come out of my program as someone valuable in society."

Additionally, Ong'ondo was attracted to McConnell's research program and the opportunities it provided.

"My research examines the landscape-scale effect on northern bobwhite quail distribution and abundance to identify landscape keystone elements that sustain high bird diversity in Mississippi," Ong'ondo said.

Ong'ondo said that after finishing his research and doctoral degree, he plans to become an assistant professor because of his love for research, training, teaching, and mentoring others in his field of interest.

"There's nothing that I enjoy more than being a role model, mentoring, exchanging ideas, being challenged, and motivating everyone around me," Ong'ondo said. "It melts my heart to have the opportunity to transfer the knowledge and skills I have accumulated over the years to the future generation through teaching, training, and mentoring." ♣



Frank Ong’ondo. (Photo by David Ammon)





# 2022 GRADUATES



**SPRING 2022 GRADUATING CLASS:** Brianna Andrews, Elizabeth Baach, Noah Babik, Amanda Peres Vieira Bedette, Richard Bowers, Renee Collini, Laurice Mara Spinelli Correa, Richard Courtney, Mia Craig, Alexandra Firth, Justin Gibson, Shraddha Hegde, Laura Horowitz, Alison McGee, Ryo Ogawa, Brittney Palode, Alan Sherrington, Roger Snow, Sujun Subedi, Holly Todaro, Charles Treadwell, Kyle Watkins, Spencer VanderBloemen, and Lon Yeary



**SUMMER/FALL 2022 GRADUATING CLASS:** Tamara Abram, Caleb Aldridge, Amber Barrow, Casey Beam, Laura Bertagnolli, Katelyn Blaylock, Zachary Chandler, Manuel Coffill-Rivera, Darcey Collins, Cade Corley, Spencer Daniels, Amanda Daulong, Carson Dewberry, Nicholas Dickinson, Olivia Douell, Edward Entsminger, Nicky Fauchaux, Hayden Flynt, Jesse Fuller, Brandon Gerhart, Noah Gibbons, Camille Green, Ichu Ichu Godwill, Stephen Goodfellow, Caitlin Hines, Andrew Hood, Maustafa Kaya, James Kelly, Sophie Kline, Thu Ya Kyaw, Jacobi Lindsey, Liston Long, Christopher Martin, Charles McAlpine, Lukas Murphy, Joshua Neary, Ramon Oliveira, Ira Parsons, Devin Raburn, Nitant Rai, Malia Rasberry, Madison Ray, Bradley Resch, Gabrielle Ripa, Jonathan Stoll, Robert Taylor, Amie Triplett, Marly Carmona Uzcategui, Abby Vaughn, Adam Wade, Will Weisman, Kyle Wiggington, George Williams, Thomas Williamson, and Tyler Willingham



# 2023 GRADUATES



**SPRING 2023 GRADUATING CLASS:** Andrew Allen, Andrew Arko, Suchana Aryal, India Austin, Leslie Azwell, Jordon Besson, Nellie Biddle, Quentin Boccaleri, Rebecca Bracken, Stephen Brady, Nichole Brewer, Jordan Brown, Michael Brown, Brent Cade, Julie Campbell, Chandler Carr, James Comer, Karold Coronado Franco, Caroline Crawford, Jake Crosson, Emma Davenport, Taylor Davis, Jacob Dennis, Jonathan Dollar, Brooke Dominici, Baylor Doughty, Lucas Evanko, Parker Evans, Jack Fair, Madison Finnilla, Oliver Fleming, Sidney Freeman, Justin Gleason, Molly Graham, William Granger, Nathan Gray, Harris Groberg, MaKeriah Hampton, Garrett Hendrix, Hadley Henry, Vanessa Hoffman, Eliot Jones, Tharindu Karunaratne, Joseph Kauppi, Douglas Kelly, Trevor Keough, Kevin Kosewick, Brandon Kugle, Joseph Langford, Elaina Langston, Olivia Lappin, Jacob Leitzsey, Hunter Lister, Lauren Littrell, Lindsay Maloan, Jared Mathis, Darryl McDonal, Jacob Moreland, Madaline Morris, Sakar Nepal, Tommy Odom, Kimberlyn Pace, Zackary Palm, Catherine Paul, Peyton Pierce, Allison Purdue, Franklin Quin, Erik Richards, Alexandra Ricketts, Mason Roberts, Christopher Robison, Abbie Rodgers, Thomas Rovey, William Ruff, Andrew Sasser, Ganesh Sedhain, Mary Simon, Andie Stanovich, Adam Steen, Alyson Strom, Mason Thomas, Bradly Thornton, Prakash Tiwari, Benjamin Toney, Madison Upton, Davis Vinson, Hunter Wallace, Travis Watson, Logan White, Patrick Whittington, Kira Williams, Kaleb Wilson, and William Wright



**SUMMER/FALL 2023 GRADUATING CLASS:** Surya Adhikari, Okikiola Alegbeleye, Paul Asmuth, Swagat Attreya, Samuel Ayanleye, Breelyn Bigbee, Brittany Blackford, Reilley Calder, Devin Chen, William Cheney, Paden Chrisman, Brenton Colson, Austin Cook, Caroline Crawford, Gracie Dodd, Kyle Dues, Madison Eisenhuth, Andrew Ekema, Tyler Evans, Julia Foster, Jackson French, Connor Fung-A-Fat, Macy Gosselaar, Mattie Graham, Mason Hartley, James Helfferich, Bradia Henfield, Mark Hill, Rebecca Holmes, Jessica Humphreys, Ian Hurst, Tanaya Johnson, Roberto Kimura, Andrew Latham, Vanya Lowry, Natasha Murphy, Htet Lin Naing, Adrian Naveda Rodriguez, Thomas Norman, Mercy Ogunraku, Adam Phillips, Oshani Rathnayaka Mudiyansele, Darius Reed, Luke Resop, Chandler Reverts, Amanda Rigsby, Kameryn Roberts, Maxwell Schrimpf, Abigail Shaw, Ashley Smith, Jennifer Sublett, Damilola Taiwo, Mahesh Tiwari, Kaelin Turner, Ethan Turo, William Waits, Michael Warren, Logan White, and Samuel Williamson



# CHANGING OF THE GUARD

## NEW FACULTY



**DR. MELANIE BOUDREAU** has become an assistant research professor in the [Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture](#). She earned a bachelor's and master's degree in biology at the University of New Brunswick and Mount Allison University, respectively. She earned her doctorate in environmental and life sciences at Trent University. Her research focuses on movement ecology, species distributions, animal behavior, population dynamics, wildlife damage mitigation, and wildlife conservation.



**DR. MICHAEL SANDEL** joined the [Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture](#) as an assistant professor. He earned his bachelor's and doctorate in biological sciences at Ohio State University and the University of Alabama, respectively. His research focuses on freshwater biodiversity conservation and One Health. Using genetic tools, he studies the health of endangered species and the transmission of infectious diseases including zoonotic pathogens that can infect humans.



**DR. ESTEBAN GALEANO GOMEZ** joined the [Department of Forestry](#) as an assistant professor. He earned his bachelor's in forestry at the National University of Colombia and his doctorate in plant cell and molecular biology at the University of São Paulo. His research focuses on forest genetics. He is working on selection and breeding of elite genotypes so the demand for wood products can be met quicker while taking care of and maintaining the genetic diversity of the different populations.



**DR. CHRISTINE FORTUIN** joined the [Department of Forestry](#) as an assistant professor. She earned her bachelor's in anthropology at the College of Wooster, her master's in environmental science at Florida International University, and her doctorate in forestry and natural resources at the University of Georgia. Her research focuses on the effects of forest disturbances and forest management practices on beneficial invertebrate communities.



**DR. YUN YANG** joined the [Department of Forestry](#) as an assistant professor. She received her bachelor's degree in geography from Beijing Normal University and her master's and doctorate in environmental sciences from University of Massachusetts. Her research goal is to improve society's resilience and sustainability under climate change. Several of her projects are focused on how irrigation scheduling, forest restoration, and forest disturbance impact the world's ecosystem.



**DR. MOSTAFA MOHAMMADABADI** joined the **Department of Sustainable Bioproducts** as an assistant professor. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering from Shahrood University of Technology and the University of Tehran, respectively. He earned his doctorate in material science and engineering from Washington State University. His research focuses on composite materials, engineered wood products, and the finite element model.



**DR. LAYA KHADEMIBAMI** joined the **Department of Sustainable Bioproducts** as an assistant research professor. She earned her bachelor's in natural resources at the University of Tehran, her master's in natural resources engineering at Tarbiat Modares University, and her doctorate in forest resources at Mississippi State University. Her research includes the evaluation and standards of lumber and forest products, wood mechanics and products, and wood deterioration and protection.



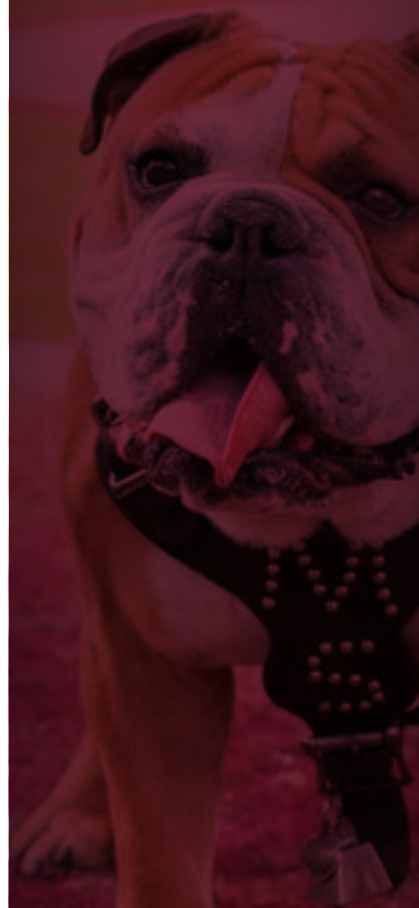
**DR. ADRIANA CARVALHO COSTA** joined the **Department of Sustainable Bioproducts** as an assistant professor. She earned her bachelor's in biological sciences, her master's in wood science and technology, and her doctorate in botany from the University of São Paulo. Her research focuses on forensic wood anatomy and identification using both conventional and innovative methods including DNA and computer vision.



**DR. KEVIN RAGON** joined the **Department of Sustainable Bioproducts** as an assistant professor. He earned his associate degree in forestry from Northwest Mississippi Community College, his bachelor's in environmental science and chemistry from Delta State University, and his master's and doctorate in forest resources with a sustainable bioproducts concentration from Mississippi State University. His research includes wood protection, wood testing, wood bridges, and the durability of wood composites.

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# ALUMNI NEWS



## 2022 ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

*Curtis R. Hopkins*

**C**URTIS R. HOPKINS OF FLORA IS A TWO-TIME MSU graduate, earning a 1971 bachelor's degree in forestry and a 1973 master's degree in wildlife ecology. He also holds a Ph.D. in wildlife sciences from Texas A&M. Hopkins began his career as an assistant ranger and wildlife biologist for the U.S. Forest Service and later joined Ducks Unlimited, where he held progressive leadership roles. He served as director of the 13 state southern region from 2007 until his retirement in 2013. From 2014 until this March, Hopkins was executive secretary for the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies where he worked with 15 state fish and wildlife agencies, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to promote wildlife and fish conservation. His achievements garnered many awards during his career, including the Mississippi Wildlife Federation's Conservationist of the Year.

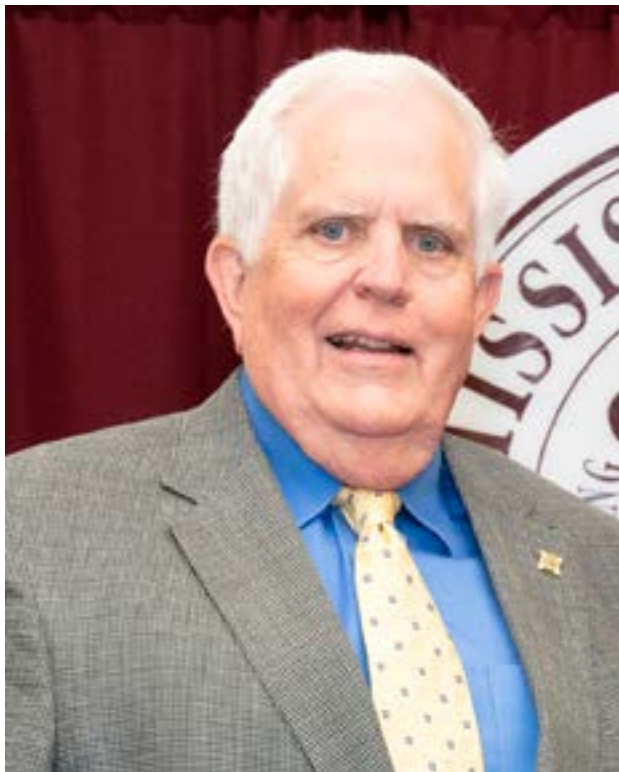


## 2022 ALUMNI FELLOW

*Zack Parisa*

**Z**ACK PARISA OF PIEDMONT, CALIFORNIA, GRADUATED from MSU with a bachelor's in forestry in 2006. He then went to graduate school at Yale University and earned a master's degree in forest science in 2009. The following year, he co-founded National Capital Exchange, a California data-driven carbon market company, where he serves as CEO. Over the last decade, Parisa has developed and pioneered precision forestry tools that have revolutionized the way forests are measured, valued, and managed. NCX also has worked with other large companies including Microsoft, to create Basemap—the first high resolution forest inventory in the U.S. It created a map of over 92 billion trees that now underpins the NCX market. In 2021, NCX created the largest forest carbon project in the contiguous U.S. landing on the 2021 Environment and Energy Leader 100 list. Parisa was a candidate for the Pritzker Emerging Environmental Genius award from the University of California Institute of the Environment and Sustainability.





## 2023 ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

*Lee Temple, Jr.*

**L**EE TEMPLE EARNED A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN FORESTRY in 1972 and retired from a 44-year career with Georgia Pacific as regional general manager of fiber, responsible for all fiber purchases and sales at the region's paper mills, sawmills, and manufactured board operations. A native of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Temple first learned about the forestry profession from a book in his high school library. When he enrolled at Mississippi State in 1968, ROTC was required. Temple was commissioned 2nd lieutenant U.S. Army Branch Infantry upon graduation. He was hired by Georgia Pacific as a procurement forester at the then-newly built sawmill in Columbia in 1972 but was first required to fulfill his military commitment. He graduated from the Army's Infantry Officers School in 1973 and served the remainder of his obligation in the Reserve forces, ending his career as company commander of a mechanized infantry unit.



## 2023 ALUMNI FELLOW

*Jim Inglis*

**J**IM INGLIS OF UPPER SANDUSKY, OHIO, EARNED A BACHELOR'S degree from the College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University and his master's from Mississippi State. Inglis is the director of government affairs for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever. A committed, 22-year veteran of Quail Forever, also known as "The Habitat Organization," he amplifies the group's state and national advocacy endeavors. His diverse roles, ranging from chapter volunteer to government affairs representative, have poised him for success in his current leadership capacity. Inglis's commitment to wildlife and habitat conservation reverberates outside his primary role. Notably, he was recently inducted as a professional member of the prestigious Boone and Crockett Club. He also serves on the American Wildlife Conservation Partners steering committee, elected by his peers and illustrating his industry-wide respect.

# IN MEMORIAM

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*Celebrating those who have lived life well, who mentored countless students while conducting research and service that made an impact in natural resources. Gone, but not forgotten.*





**JAMES E. 'JIM' MILLER**  
(Wildlife, Fisheries, and  
Aquaculture Emeritus  
Professor)

Miller (80) of Starkville, Mississippi, died January 24, 2022. He is survived by his wife of 59 years,

Doris Brooks Miller, sons James Kelly Miller and John Michael Miller (Christine), grandson Brooks T. Miller, sisters Ann Miller Russell and Donna Miller Duke.

Miller graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science in forestry in 1965 and accepted a position with Auburn University on an experiment station in Fayette, Alabama. In 1966, he went back to Florida to work on a Master of Science in forestry and graduated in 1967. He later accepted a position with the University of Arkansas Extension Service in Little Rock. He worked there for 11 years before moving his family to Fairfax, Virginia, where he worked as a program leader for wildlife and fisheries in extension in the agriculture department. In 2001, he retired from that position and joined Mississippi State University, before retiring again in 2005, becoming a professor emeritus.

After his retirement, Miller's passion for working with and mentoring young leaders led him to hold workshops for Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow across the country. He served as president of the National Wildlife Society, and he was on the board of the National Wild Turkey Federation. He received numerous awards throughout his career, including a prestigious Aldo Leopold Memorial Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from California Vertebrate Pest Management. A collection of his stories was released posthumously.



**TERRY L. AMBURGEY**  
(Sustainable Bioproducts  
Emeritus Professor)

Amburgey (81) died April 1, 2022, in Columbus, Mississippi. The Trenton, New Jersey, native was a longtime pro-

fessor at MSU and known for his work in wood protection. Prior to his tenure at MSU, Amburgey earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and his doctoral degree at North Carolina State University.

Amburgey was a professor for 30 years in the College of Forest Resources at MSU. He received Awards of Merit from both the American Wood Protection Association and the Railway Tie Association and was elected as a Fellow of the International Academy of Wood Science. While at MSU, he was given the title of Giles Distinguished Professor and received several awards for his teaching by the then Department of Forest Products, the College of Forest Resources, and the Mississippi State University Alumni Association. His professorship at Mississippi State was preceded by 10 years with the USDA Forest Service in Gulfport, Mississippi, as a research wood decay specialist.

His career in wood protection spanned more than 50 years, and he has contributed to railway tie industry improvements because of his research. He helped increase the lifespan of railway cross-ties to more than 25 years and discovered that treating cross-ties with borates during the air drying process protected the wood from pests.

He is survived by his daughter Lauren Shurden and husband Donald of Oak Grove, Mississippi, and his sister Narice Moore. One of his greatest joys was being "PopPop" to his grandson Joshua Ryan Shurden. He was preceded in death by his daughter Danielle Marie Parker, his parents, and his brother Bart Amburgey.



**FRED W. TAYLOR**  
(Sustainable  
Bioproducts Emeritus  
Professor)

Taylor (90) died April 7, 2022, in Starkville, Mississippi. The Spring Creek, West

Virginia, native received his bachelor's degree from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and his master's and doctorate from North Carolina State University. In 1965, he moved to Starkville to start his career as a professor and assistant director of the Mississippi Forest Products Utilization Laboratory at MSU.

Taylor was a woodworker and craftsman, and he enjoyed making furniture and other items for his home, family members, and friends. He also enjoyed traveling, camping in his camper, hunting, playing tennis, working in his backyard workshop, and MSU women's basketball.

He was a dedicated Christian and was a member of the Starkville Church of Christ where he served as a deacon for many years. He worked with World Bible School, traveling to Zimbabwe to encourage some of those with whom he studied. He also was a great supporter of Family Life Missions and made several trips to Por Los Niños Children's Home in Honduras, where he put his skills as a carpenter and general handyman to use.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Taylor; sons Rick Taylor and John Taylor; daughters Jean Davis and Tacy Bonner (Richard); grandchildren Ty Davis (Whitney), Gill Bonner (Amber), Parker Davis, Ian Manning (Julie), Shelby Gentry (Jay), Kendall Bonner and Tessa Taylor; and great-grandchildren Lincoln Davis, Tucker Davis, and Connor Manning.



## IN MEMORIAM (cont.)



**DARREL NICHOLAS**  
(Sustainable  
Bioproducts Emeritus  
Professor)

Nicholas (90) died July 19, 2022, in Starkville, Mississippi. The South Dakota

native grew up in a family of farmers, which moved to Springfield, Oregon, in the early 1930s after a few tough years. While in Oregon, Nicholas' passions for farming grew as he and his family participated in the normal chores associated with farming.

Nicholas graduated from Springfield High School in 1949, and attended Southern Oregon College of Education until the Korean War broke out. He then enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, where he was transferred to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and began working as a dental technician. He achieved a rank of staff sergeant and was discharged and returned to his studies after almost four years in the war.

He transferred to Oregon State University and earned a Bachelor of Science in forest products. He then accepted a job with J. Neils Lumber Co. in Libby, Montana, gaining first-hand experience in the wood preserving industry, and was a plant manager for the company's wood treating plant. He returned to OSU a few years later and earned his Master of Science in forest products.

He obtained an assistantship at North Carolina State University in the wood science department and completed his doctoral degree in 1966. He then accepted a position as technical director for Honolulu Wood Treating Co. in Honolulu, Hawaii. In 1976, he became the senior research scientist at the Institute of Wood Science, Michigan Tech. University in Houghton, Michigan. In 1981, he was offered a position at the Mississippi Forest Products Lab in Starkville. He retired in 2022, after a 41 year career serving as a professor and administrator.



**BRUCE D. LEOPOLD**  
(Wildlife, Fisheries,  
and Aquaculture  
Emeritus Professor,  
Forestry 1979)

Leopold (66) died September 22, 2022, in Starkville, Mississippi.

The Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, native was an avid lover of wildlife and wildlife management from a young age. In 1977, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in forest science with a wildlife management focus from Pennsylvania State University. He later received a master's degree in forestry from Mississippi State University in 1979, and a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from the University of Arizona in 1984.

In 1987, Bruce returned to Starkville to pursue a career with Mississippi State University. He started as an assistant professor of wildlife ecology that year. In 2000, he was selected as head of the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture until 2013. He retired as executive director of the Center for Resolving Human-Wildlife Conflicts in 2015 and was recognized as a professor emeritus in 2019.

Leopold authored or co-authored 174 peer-reviewed papers, 13 book chapters, and four books. He advised or co-advised 29 master's students and 11 Ph.D. students in addition to serving on numerous other student committees. His former students now serve in research, administrative, academic, and management roles throughout the world.

Bruce is survived by his sister, Sandra Jane Leopold; sister-in-law, Deborah Neeson; cousins, Larry Griffiths, Linda Cook, and Greta Leopold; close friends, Laura Andrews and Angela Hill; and five beloved dogs.



**JACK H. CROWELL**  
(Forestry 2007, 2008)

Crowell (37) died December 4, 2022, in Natchitoches, Louisiana. The Selma, Alabama, native graduated from

Natchitoches Central High School in 2003 and was a standout placekicker for its football team. He earned All-State, All-Area, All-District, and All-Parish honors over the span of two seasons, and his interests continued into his college career. He enrolled at MSU and played football for Jackie Sherrill, while he worked on completing his undergraduate degree in 2007 and graduate degree in 2008. Even after he graduated, Crowell was an avid Bulldog fan.

Crowell was deeply committed to the forestry and engineered wood products profession, growing trees, and making forest products that improve lives in fundamental ways. He worked with Weyerhaeuser for 14 years, with his most recent position being the north Louisiana area raw materials manager. The outdoorsman loved hunting, fishing, golf, wakeboarding, and skiing.

He was preceded in death by his paternal grandparents, Huelin and Edna Crowell; his maternal grandparents, Jack and Ellete Sherer; and his infant brother Andrew Alford Crowell.

He is survived by his wife Alex Clay Crowell, his son Jackson Crowell; his daughter Elizabeth Crowell, his parents Huelin and Cindy Crowell, his sister Holly Crowell Shaw (Lee), his father and mother-in-law Dennis and Betsy Clay, and his brother-in-law Dennis Clay Jr. (Kirby).

**HASSELL FRANKLIN***(CFR Friend)*

Franklin (87) died January 22, 2023, in Tupelo, Mississippi. He was a leader in the furniture industry, involved in the economic devel-

opment in Northeast Mississippi, and a lifelong supporter of higher education. He established a \$1 million endowment at MSU to help build the Franklin Furniture Institute, a research and training center for the furniture industry. He served in the Mississippi National Guard and the United States Army retiring with the rank of captain.

After attending Itawamba Community College, Hassell enrolled in MSU, where he received a bachelor's degree in industrial management in 1959. He later was named the 1993 MSU Alumnus of the Year. In 2021, Hassell received an honorary Doctor of Public Service degree for lifetime achievements and for his longtime support of Mississippi State University programs.

In February 1970, Franklin founded Franklin Corporation and built it into one of the largest, privately owned furniture manufacturers in the nation.

Hassell's passion for the improvement of the furniture industry kept him involved at both the state and national level. He served on numerous boards and was president of the American Furniture Manufacturers Association. For his tireless efforts, he was inducted into the 2003 Mississippi Business Hall of Fame. Franklin was recognized internationally with the 2004 Tozzoli International Leadership Award.

Hassell is survived by his sister, Virginia Miller; his children Hank Franklin (Michele), Mark Franklin (Mary Beth), and Laurie Franklin; his grandchildren Camon Franklin, Rob Franklin (Rachael), Baxter Price, Trey Franklin, and Ollie Franklin; his great grandchildren Henry Franklin and Isabel Franklin; and numerous nieces and nephews.

**SCOTT DAVID****ROBERTS** *(Forestry Professor Emeritus)*

Roberts (65) died April 27, 2023, in Ogden, Utah. Roberts was born October 22, 1957, in Long Beach,

California, to Gerald and Jean (Harris) Roberts. He received his undergraduate, master's, and Ph.D. all from Utah State University. On June 7, 1986, he married Jodi Beesley in Twin Falls, Idaho, and they raised three daughters, Lindsay, Courtney, and Kelsey.

A lifelong learner and educator, Roberts taught at the College of Forest Resources at Mississippi State University for 23 years where he was a beloved mentor to countless students. In 2018, Scott retired as a professor emeritus, and he and Jodi moved to Ogden, Utah to be reunited with the mountains. In 2019, Roberts became the editor of Forest Science journal, a role he served in until his death.

Scott will be remembered for his love of Hawaiian shirts, his never-ending quest to find all the brew pubs in the country, and his big laugh. He loved to ski, camp, and take his dogs Dublin and Porter on adventures. His family is comforted knowing that he died a hero.

Scott was preceded in death by his father, Gerald; his daughter, Courtney; and his brother, Harry. He leaves behind his lifelong sweetheart Jodi; his two daughters, Lindsay and Kelsey, and their husbands. He also leaves behind five grandchildren, Tyler, Conner, Chloe, Owen, and Evelyn; as well as his mother, Jean; and younger brother, Jack.

**IAN A. MUNN***(Forestry Professor Emeritus, Former Associate Dean)*

Munn (70) died October 20, 2023, after a two-year battle with cancer. Munn was

born October 30, 1953, to Mary and John Munn in Cleveland, Ohio. After going to a two-room elementary school in rural Ontario, his education led him southward. He attended high school in Indiana and completed undergrad at North Carolina State University, before working as a forester for 10 years and receiving a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina. Munn then found a faculty position he liked and a biology professor he loved at Mississippi State University and served as faculty and administrator for 29 years before retiring in 2021.

Munn met Giselle Thibadeau at MSU, and they married in May 1998. Throughout their 25-year marriage, they remained ridiculously in love and had two daughters, Savannah and Mary Katherine. His wife and daughters could not have had a more devoted, proud, and loving husband and father.

Munn was a good friend to people from all walks of life. There were few people he couldn't relate to, from the duck blinds of Mississippi and across the world, to the halls of academia. He loved traveling with his wife, duck hunting, photography, spending time with his dogs, and listening to his two daughter's latest rants.

Munn was predeceased by his parents. He is survived by his siblings Charlotte and Duncan, his wife Giselle Munn, and his two daughters. He will be missed tremendously.

Donations in honor of Ian can be made to the MSU Foundation-Dr. Ian Munn Memorial Scholarship fund to support graduate students and/or waterfowl habitat research.



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