

FALL 2026

MSU FORESTER

Connections



Department of Forestry
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

content

3

A NOTE FROM THE DEPT. CHAIR

Richard K. Kobe provides details about the department

4

ALUM UPDATES

Forestry alums share where they are now

5

TWO FORESTRY FACULTY RECEIVE GLOBAL FULBRIGHT SCHOLARSHIPS

Andrew Finley and Mojgan Nejad receive Fulbright scholarships

6

FROM VAN LIFE TO FOREST LIFE

One student's journey into the field of forestry

8

NEW FACES IN THE DEPARTMENT

See how the department is expanding in exciting ways

9

FROM INSPIRATION TO IMPACT

The story behind the new endowment established by forestry alum Richard (Dick) Cooper

10

UPDATE FROM THE FAA PRESIDENT

Hear the latest from Heidi Frei, FAA President

11

TAILGATE 2026

Details about the upcoming FAA tailgate

11

NEW ONLINE APPAREL STORE

Online now: MSU forestry has launched an on-demand apparel store

FROM THE department chair



Dear MSU Forestry Alumni and Friends,

Having served as Department Chairperson for 15 years, one thing that I really appreciate about MSU Forestry is the people connections – both within and across generations. Perhaps it is not surprising that the culture of a leading forestry program takes a long-term view, because every day many of you are managing forests for goals that will be realized in a future generation.

The story on Dick Cooper's donation to establish the Dr. Bob Marty Endowed Scholarship beautifully illustrates these cross-generation connections (p. 9). When Dick was a student, he took a course from Dr. Bob Marty – also an MSU Forestry alum – who was an important influence throughout Dick's successful career. Meanwhile, current student Rachel Adams wrote a piece for the summer 2025 issue of the MSU Forester about her experience at MSU that inspired Dick to establish the Dr. Bob Marty Scholarship. Three generations of MSU Foresters connected across time and with future generations – a continuity worth celebrating and taking pride in.

Perhaps because MSU Forestry has been here for 124 years, and we plan to be here for at least another 124, there is a timelessness to these connections. While every year new students enter our programs and other students graduate and new faculty and staff are hired and others retire, we maintain a culture of people connections – we always support and look out for each other.

This support is apparent in our alumni updates (p. 4) and the frequent recognition of a strong foundation from MSU Forestry; and it is wonderful to read about the accomplishments of alumni from across the U.S. (CA,

WA, MT, NC, CO, TX, IA, and MI) and spanning 60 years of graduating classes! I am sure that the alums sending updates would enjoy connecting with classmates.

I also am delighted at the achievements of our current students, as demonstrated by Christin Toney (p. 6), who is enthusiastically pursuing a research project on the history of a ~300 year stand of white oak at Russ Forest's Newton Woods and connections of the people who managed these forests across centuries.

Receiving four Fulbright awards within a span of two years illustrates the caliber of our world-class faculty and their international connections and reputations (p. 5). Mojgan Nejad and Andy Finley have fellowships in the current academic year and Dave MacFarlane and Sandra Lupien just recently returned from Fulbright experiences. I also am thrilled that since Fall 2024, we added 8 new faculty members (some of whom are featured on p. 8).

Alumni are an important part of the MSU Forestry Community, and we want to stay connected with you and our alums to stay connected with each other. Our annual tailgate on 10th October is a perfect opportunity for both and we hope to see you there (see FAA President update on p. 10 and tailgate notice on p. 11). If you feel that MSU Forestry provided you with a strong foundation and connections, and you are interested in paying it forward to support our mission and future generations, please contact me. We really appreciate your support!

My best,

Rich

IN MEMORIAM

SARAH MCCARTHY NEUMANN, ALUM & ADJUNCT ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

February 5, 1977 – August 14, 2026

Sarah Elizabeth McCarthy Neumann, age 49, of Clarksville, Tennessee, passed away Friday, August 14, 2026. Sarah was active in her university community, was an avid reader, ruthless at all card games, and loved travel, puzzles, and anything chocolate. We, who are left, will miss her beautiful smile, smart wit, kindness, and love. We will honor always by living the legacy she has given us, holding onto the values, traditions, and memories she has given us.



LOUIS GILDEMEISTER | BS '65

I graduated with a degree in Forest Management. After graduation I worked for the State of Montana Forestry Dept., Western Fire equipment and Perimeter Solutions. Perimeter produces fire retardant worldwide and foam products. I have been with Perimeter Solutions for 46 years and turned 88 years old in June, 2026.

RON HUMPHREY | BS '65, MS '68

I graduated with Honors, March 1965, and began my 33 year Forest Service career as a Multiple-Use Forester on the Rapid River Ranger District, Hiawatha National Forest. I returned to MSU to receive a MS in Resource Development with Honors in 1968. I then went on to an assignment in the Jobs Corps in MI, followed by assignment in WA, OR, MT, NV and AK. I had two District Ranger jobs in MT and OR, Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Toiyabe NF, Forest Supervisor on the Tongass NF and on the Olympic NF. I retired in 1999 to Ennis MT and then on to Lacey WA in 2023. It's been a great run with a great start at MSU Forestry and the MSU Honors College, with leadership training in the MSU Residence Halls. I also spent six years in the US Army Reserves.

J. KEITH GILLESS | BS '78

After stepping down as Dean of Berkeley's Rausser College and retiring in 2000, I struggled through the pandemic running California's Board of Forestry and Fire Protection from my home office, and thought that I'd be fully retired from academia and public service in 2025 when I stepped down from that position. To my complete surprise, the campus talked me into coming back as the Interim Director of the University and Jepson Herbaria. I'd be happy to give a tour to any plant geeks who stop by, it's easy to find me – there is a T-Rex skeleton just outside my door. We are searching for a permanent Director now, and I'll have a second go at retirement next summer (hopefully), and try to spend more time under the redwoods.

JOSEPH COLWELL | MS '79

After reading about the Old Growth Forest Network and MSU's participation in it in a recent edition of MSU Forester, I liked the idea and applied. My 40 acres of ancient Utah juniper forest was accepted and it is the first private forest in the Old Growth Network in Colorado. I am currently working with their regional representative to try and get more public forests in this area into the network. You can read about my thoughts about a Sense of Place in this ancient forest ecosystem in my latest book Flight of the Raven. It is the 8th book I have published since my retirement 28 years ago from the Forest Service.

BRIAN OSWALD | BS '79

I retired from Stephen F. Austin State University in August 2026 after 30 years on the forestry faculty. My professional journey took me to Arizona (MS at NAU, 5 years teaching at a Junior College on the Navajo Reservation), Idaho, (Ph.D. At University of Idaho), and Alabama (faculty at Alabama A&M University) before landing here at SFA. Working with 47 graduate students and numerous undergraduates over the years has been extremely rewarding, and I will miss those interactions. While recognition is not why I have done anything in forestry, I have been fortunate to receive the Carl Schenck Award from SAF (2002), entered the University of Idaho Alumni Hall of Fame (2016), and was named the Dwight Patterson Alumnus of the year by NAU (2021). At SFA I was the Joe C. Denman Distinguished Professor, named a Regents Professor, received the SFASU Foundation Distinguished Professor and the SFA Alumni Association Distinguished Professor. I was active for decades with the Biennial Southern Silviculture Research Conferences here in the south, and was a long-time Board member of served as President of the Association for Fire Ecology. As far as I am concerned, none of this would have occurred without the incredible education and experiences I had at MSU. GO GREEN.

STEVEN BABCOCK | BS '82, MBA '86

Steven is currently the Vice President of Supply Chain at Columbus McKinnon Corp in Charlotte, North Carolina. Steven would love to hear from fellow alums at stevenbb304@gmail.com.

ERIC MCCUMBER | BS '87

I enrolled at MSU in 1980, but after 2 years, I ran out of money and ambition. I completed a tour in the army and returned to MSU, where I finished my BS in 1987. I started my career in the panhandle of Florida, doing forestry under a CRP grant, followed by a move back to Michigan to serve as a County Forester. In 1990, I was hired by the Michigan Department of Agriculture as a field inspector doing nursery and agriculture inspections. I stayed with the department for 33 years, retiring in 2023 as a field supervisor in the pesticide section. I enjoy running, biking, hunting, and snowboarding. My wife Keri and I live in Traverse City and enjoy traveling.

ANNA DUNNEBACKE | BS '25

Anna started an MS program this fall at Iowa State University majoring in Wildlife Ecology with Dr. Landon Jones as her major advisor. Her masters project will be on modeling toucan movement and fruit tree seed dispersal patterns.

Two Forestry Faculty Receive Global Fulbright Scholarships

Dr. Mojgan Nejad and Dr. Andrew Finley have both received Fulbright Scholar Awards for the 2026-2027 academic year. Fulbright U.S. Scholars are faculty, researchers, administrators, and established professionals teaching or conducting research in affiliation with institutes abroad. Fulbright Scholars engage in cutting-edge research and expand their professional networks, often continuing research collaborations started abroad and laying the

ANDREW FINLEY – VIENNA, AUSTRIA

"I've been working with colleagues and students at BOKU University in Vienna for several years, but almost all of that collaboration has been remote. The Fulbright Program felt like a chance to take a productive partnership and make it more meaningful. Getting to be there in person, working side-by-side and getting to know the students and faculty, will allow us to build something together.

Fulbright is not just about doing research somewhere else. It's about exchange. I'll bring my experience in forest statistics and modeling, but I'll also be learning from Austria's long history and strong traditions in forestry. I think that kind of back and forth is where the best ideas often come from."

groundwork for forging future partnerships between institutions.

Upon returning to their home countries, institutions, labs, and classrooms, they share their stories and often become active supporters of international exchange, inviting foreign scholars to campus and encouraging colleagues and students to go abroad.

MOJGAN NEJAD – STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

"I had been to Sweden once before, it's such a beautiful country. But, it's different when you are living here. It's an amazing experience, the culture and people.

One of the things my lab does, we always focus on commercially available lignins. We'll use that to fully replace petrochemicals like phenol, used for epoxy and adhesives and coatings. KTH is doing similar work, using different lignins. I feel like I'm in heaven; every day I am connected to more experts in lignin. Both sides, I learn from them and they learn from my expertise. We have in depth conversations about collaborations – students, postdocs, professors, how we can continue to collaborate."





From Van Life to Forest Life



Forestry undergraduate student Christin Toney took to the woods of Michigan during a time where the world was filled with uncertainty. In 2020, she had been touring the country for 10 years in her van, selling minerals at music festivals and trade shows. When the Covid-19 pandemic shut down these events, she decided to hunker down in Michigan. This is when she realized that her true passion was not found out on the road, but instead, in the woods. She decided to shift her career away from sales and instead poured her focus into forestry, with dendrochronology, ecology, and GIS being her main interests.

Within two weeks of beginning the forestry program, Christin was hired onto Professor David Rothstein's team, assisting him and graduate student Joe Young with various research projects. "I'm glad Dr. Rothstein put his trust and faith in me to do this work. It is an absolute delight working with David. Not only is he an amazing person, he's a great person to have in my corner. Both him and Joe are encyclopedias of knowledge, and they both have given their extra time to share some of that knowledge with me. I couldn't ask for a better outcome, coming to MSU and jumping right into this team," said Christin.

During the summer of 2025, David presented a special opportunity for Christin to take on her own

research project at Newton Woods of MSU's Fred Russ Experimental Forest in Decatur, MI. Christin felt as if this was the perfect project for her, as it gave her the opportunity to expand her knowledge and field experience using dendrochronology, forest measurements, GIS, and field ecology as tools to better understand Newton Woods as a whole. "When I took on the Newton Woods project, I was incredibly excited because it gave me the opportunity to leave a legacy behind in a place that means so much to me. I grew up in Southwest Michigan, have spent countless hours hiking and foraging in Berrien and Cass counties, and most of my family lives here. I fell in love with the forest here, so it feels deeply personal for me to be able to do research here and contribute something more to this community," said Christin.

Until 2024, Newton Woods was dominated by large white oaks, including one that they were able to use dendrochronological analysis on to determine that it had established in 1716, making it over 300 years old. Unfortunately in 2024, over 95% of the large white oaks perished for some unknown reason. One of MSU's forest pathologists, Pratima Devkota, suspected it was due to Armillaria fungus, but when her, David, and Christin went to Newton Woods to investigate this prediction, they weren't able to find conclusive evidence.

The white oaks that perished were salvaged, and samples were taken from the stumps, where they were processed in the forestry woodshop to determine their age and growing conditions. Additionally, standing dead white oaks, wind thrown maples and black oaks, and living red and white oaks were cored. The dendrochronological data, coupled with historical records of the Indigenous peoples of the area, and of the Newton family, as well as soil and ground flora data were used to more clearly understand the history of Newton Woods.

Finally, they searched for physical evidence of that history by looking for fire scars in old trees. While they haven't found definitive fire scar evidence yet, the abundance of mature white oaks strongly suggests the landscape was influenced by Indigenous stewardship.

Across Michigan, many oak forests historically existed as oak savannas, and were actively managed and shaped by Indigenous peoples using repetitive burning, sometimes on a yearly basis. Oaks are fire resistant species because of their thick, fire resistant bark. Additionally, fire reduced competition from shade tolerant species and exposed mineral soil for successful acorn

germination, and reduced forest floor litter, making it ideal habitat for deer and other species. That Newton Woods was once dominated by white oaks, as well as historical field observations taken by general land office surveyors, suggests that it was once oak savanna.

What also points towards this landscape being oak savanna are historical documents that Christin and team found that told the story of Chief Weesaw. Weesaw and his band inhabited land just north of Newton Woods, and included villages, gardens, ceremonial and burial grounds. Additionally, there was a foot travel path that went along the Dowagiac River through Newton Woods. Chief Weesaw used the area just west of Newton Woods for sugar maple production, and Christin's team suspects he managed Newton Woods as oak savanna so that it could be used for hunting.

"One of the biggest takeaways from the project is that Newton Woods tells a much richer history than simply being an 'old-growth' forest. Currently, it is registered as a National Landmark and 'one of Michigan's last remaining old growth forests'. To be old growth, the forest would have had to have been untouched by people, but our research shows the landscape has experienced centuries of human interaction – from Indigenous stewardship and resource management to later settlement, harvesting, and land use. Rather than diminishing its significance, understanding that history paints a much deeper, more meaningful, and more real



picture of Newton Woods," said Christin.

Christin hopes to publish her research findings, install interpretive signage, and create a story map for Newton Woods, so that the broader community may have access to this information. Additionally, she hopes that this project will inspire others to do similar research moving forward. "I hope this work helps people appreciate the incredible ecological and cultural history of Newton Woods, and allows them to think about forests in a different way when entering them."



New Faces in the Department



HAISHUN DU

Assistant Professor, Lignocellulosic Materials and Bioprocessing

Haishun's research focuses on advancing sustainable manufacturing and circular bioeconomy solutions by transforming lignocellulosic biomass (e.g., wood, forest residues, agricultural wastes) into multifunctional materials, platform chemicals, and renewable fuels. Integrating biomass chemistry, green chemical engineering, and materials science, his work encompasses lignocellulose fractionation and valorization, sustainable production of lignocellulosic nanomaterials, and roll-to-roll manufacturing of lignocellulosic films and fibers.



KURT KIPFMUELLER

1855 Professor, Indigenous Natural Resource Mgt, Tree-Ring Analysis, Fire Ecology

Kurt Kipfmueeller is 1855 Professor of Tribal and Indigenous Natural Resources Management. Kurt's work uses the information encoded in the annual rings of trees to help tell the stories of landscape and cultural change. Kurt has expertise in reconstructing past disturbances—particularly fire—and to develop tree growth chronologies that reflect climate variability.



TIM SHIVELY

Assistant Professor, Forest Pathology

Tim is an Assistant Professor of Forest Pathology with a split appointment shared by Plant, Soil, & Microbial Sciences. He has extensive experience diagnosing tree diseases and working through forest health problems in the field with foresters, land managers, and woodlot owners. His research focuses on applied management of forest pathogens, developing bioherbicides to suppress invasive plants, and the ecological impacts of forest health issues.



WILLIAM (BILL) HAMMOND

Assistant Professor, Plant Ecophysiology (starting August 2027)

An internationally recognized plant ecophysiolgist, Hammond's research incorporates fundamental plant biology, global change ecology, and imaging sensors to measure plant resilience in a changing climate. Hammond helped pioneer the emerging field of spectral ecophysiology, which joins plant physiology, ecology, and the development of remote tools to detect plant dysfunction and mortality, even before visible symptoms appear.



DREW HILL

Assistant to the Chair and Department

Drew is a true Spartan and lifelong Michigander. He has worked as a professional audio engineer for over 15 years and is a two-time NATAS Emmy award winner. Drew is a proud husband and father, passionate musician, and motorcycle enthusiast. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Media and Information from Michigan State University, and since 2014, Drew has been enriching campus with his sheer will, commitment to excellence, and dedication to solving complex problems.

From Inspiration to Impact



By Alex Dardas

Richard (Dick) Cooper still can't believe his luck. A 1968 MSU Department of Forestry graduate, Cooper continues to be amazed that for more than four decades, he was paid good money to walk around the woods and talk to people about trees.

From his early career managing forests in Idaho to establishing his own consulting forestry practice, Cooper credits his experience at MSU for helping him find his way. "I've been fortunate to build a successful career and truly feel that I found my calling."

Now, he's using that good fortune to help others find theirs. Inspired by a student essay written by forestry undergraduate Rachel Adams for the Summer 2025 issue of the MSU Forester Alumni Magazine, Cooper established the Dr. Bob Marty Endowed Fund for Forestry Education.

Named in honor of a forestry professor who played a foundational role in his success, the fund creates pathways for current students to discover their own passion for the field.

After reading Adams' story in the MSU Forester, Cooper recognized striking parallels to his own path. Though separated by decades, the description of her journey closely echoed his own experience. "Rachel's story of how she discovered forestry was almost the same as mine," he said.

But Adams' article reached beyond nostalgia. It inspired action. A few weeks after Forester was published, the department received a handwritten letter from Cooper expressing his desire to create a scholarship for forestry students in need of financial support.

Established to strengthen opportunities for the next generation of students, Cooper dedicated the fund to an influential figure from his past: Dr. Robert (Bob) Marty. A



distinguished professor of forest economics, Dr. Marty taught at MSU from 1967 to 1991.

Mentoring scores of graduate and undergraduate students, Cooper credits the practical skills he learned from Dr. Marty for setting him up for success in the forestry industry. "The most impactful course I ever took was taught by Dr. Marty."

Creating the scholarship was Cooper's way of expressing his gratitude—both to a mentor who shaped his path and for the good fortune that's defined his life in forestry. "I just wanted to give something back for my good luck."

Remembered for his expertise and engaging personality, Dr. Marty established himself as a leading figure in the department. Graduating in 1954 with a degree in forestry from Michigan State College, Dr. Marty went on to earn graduate degrees from Duke University, Harvard and Yale. He served in the U.S. Army in Japan and Korea before returning to East Lansing in 1967 to start his teaching career.

He was deeply committed to international scholarship and regularly hosted graduate students from around the world. In 1973, he was a contributor to the Nixon Administration's Presidential Advisory Panel on Timber and the Environment.

You can support the Marty Endowed Fund for Forestry Education by making a gift online at for.msu.edu/marty. Or, checks can be mailed to University Advancement, 535 Chestnut Road, Room 300, East Lansing, MI 48824. Make check payable to "Michigan State University" and include Dr. Bob Marty Endowed Fund for Forestry Education on the memo line of your check.

A full version of this article was originally published on the CANR website. Scan for full article:



Greetings MSU Foresters!

Though surely many of us are in the midst of an incredibly busy field season (I know I am!), I hope this message finds you with a familiar sense of excitement and optimism for the fall! I add optimism because it is important to recognize that, while budgets, funding and staffing levels may have changed, every day presents a new opportunity to work towards improving and solving the problems of tomorrow. In the words of Jimmy Hendrix, “Hooray, I awake from yesterday.”

I’m not sure if anyone would expect a Jimmy Hendrix quote in a forestry publication! But, why not? As our challenges multiply and change, we must seek new ways to inspire and engage in creative leadership and problem solving to help keep pace with growing workloads. And I’ll tell you, forest health is a space that can really get you down.

Through partnerships, inclusion and incorporating new technologies – plus a lot of creativity – we can find ways to work smarter and more efficiently. I’m proud that, as a woman and Mexican American, I’ve collaborated with others to lead on the use of UAS in early detection of diseases and pests – like oak wilt, stressed hemlocks and beech leaf

disease – within threatened forest and dune systems in Michigan for the last two years. I look forward to moving further ahead in this space and finding new partners and creative uses of technology to help advance our mission (see photo of new friends in the Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences & Dept. of Forestry).

Our field is far-reaching and the connections are limitless; I truly hope you will be able to connect with us at the Forestry Department Tailgate this fall! MSU Forestry Alumni Association will be welcoming alumni, students and our friends with the Discovering Forestry Podcast for a special LIVE broadcast featuring the role of forestry in the guitar and music industry!

So, for the Jimmy fans out there, stay inspired and Go Green!

Heidi Frei
MSU FAA President
BS '02; MS '07
Forest Health Specialist
Michigan DNR, Parks and Recreation Division



DNR Parks and Recreation Division staff demonstrate new approaches to forest health surveillance using UAV systems at Warren Dunes State Park (Berrien Co.). Pictured are Joel Collinson DNR Forest Health Tech, Heidi Frei (pilot), Ethan Wachendorf, Graduate Student in Plant Pathology and Tim Shively, Assistant Professor in Dept. of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences & Dept. of Forestry

FAA Tailgate | Oct 10

Please join us Saturday, Oct 10, three hours before kickoff (TBA) for delicious food and connecting with the MSU Forestry community. We welcome all alumni, faculty, staff, students, friends, and family to join us.

Thanks to sponsors Arborjet and Weyerhaeuser we are providing the tailgate free of charge again this year.

Please RSVP at for.msu.edu/tailgate26 at your earliest convenience, whether you will be attending the tailgate, game, or both!

If you have any questions, please contact the department at 517-355-0097, or email Drew Hill at hildrew@msu.edu.



MSU FORESTRY apparel store

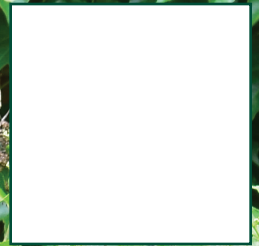


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