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Images: https://www.flickr.com/gp/vdof_photos/eSTk83

Expanded Story: <https://myvaforest.org/2021/02/16/native-ecosystem-restoration-expanded-in-southeastern-virginia/>

NATIVE ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION EXPANDED IN SOUTHEASTERN VIRGINIA

(Sussex County, VA) The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOP) and the Meadowview Biological Research Station (MBRS) recently acquired land that expands an existing conservation easement on the Joseph Pines Preserve in Sussex County. The 196-acre purchase by MBRS increases the preserve property to nearly 428 acres. The easement, donated to VDOP by MBRS, includes the entire preserve.

“This partnership exemplifies the positive impact of multiple agencies and nonprofit organizations working together with a shared vision,” said **Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring**. “As a result of this conservation project we are seeing the restoration of a rare forest community with public access.”

The property is managed to restore the native longleaf pine ecosystem that was historically present in Sussex County. “Five centuries ago, longleaf pine was arguably the most common tree species in upland southeast Virginia,” said **Virginia State Forester Rob Farrell**. “VDOP and many of our partners have long recognized the importance of longleaf restoration to environmental and economic health, and we are excited to strengthen our efforts through the expansion of this easement.”

VDOP has held an easement on the preserve’s original 232 acres since 2012. The recent purchase of the additional acreage was made possible by grant funding from the Virginia Land Conservation Fund, the Cameron Foundation, a third anonymous foundation, a loan guarantee from Atlantic Union Bank, and a loan from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund. MBRS' goal is to eventually expand the preserve to 2,000 acres in Sussex County, by adding property and amending the easement over time.

With its collective land holdings, MBRS has one of the largest sources of native Virginia longleaf pine seed. MBRS has been a pioneer of longleaf conservation and research and plans to support their conservation efforts by harvesting an existing loblolly pine plantation on the property and converting it to native Virginia longleaf pine.

“Our organization has a long history of working closely with VDOF, especially on activities to restore longleaf pine. Our work together ultimately culminated with acquiring land to meet our research and preservation goals,” says **Dr. Phil Sheridan, Director of MBRS**.

Longleaf pine forests are fire-dependent and host a number of other rare species in Virginia, including red cockaded woodpeckers and two species of pitcher plants – a primary conservation focus for MBRS. Preserve managers have reintroduced fire to the landscape and will continue work to restore the native ecosystem through the reintroduction of at least 18 rare plant species and three rare animal species. “Preserving this habitat means we’re preventing extinction and conserving biodiversity,” says **Dr. Sheridan**.

Restoring longleaf pine to the landscape is important for many reasons. In addition to supporting critical habitat and sources of freshwater, longleaf can be a commercially valuable tree. Their potential resistance to forest pests means they contribute to the overall health of Virginia’s forests. “Identifying forestland with significant conservation value is an essential part of VDOF’s land conservation programs,” said **VDOF Forestland Conservation Specialist Amanda Scheps**. “The Joseph Pines Preserve is an outstanding example of land that contains important habitat and supports important research to restore a diminished species.”

About MBRS

Meadowview Biological Research Station is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to preserving and restoring rare wetland plants, habitats and associated ecosystems on the coastal plain of Maryland and Virginia. Land acquisition and management is made possible through the generous support of donors, state, federal, and private foundations, and volunteers. To learn more about how you can help, visit: www.pitcherplant.org

About the Virginia Department of Forestry

The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 108,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide an overall economic output of more than \$21 Billion annually.

Headquartered in Charlottesville, the Agency has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide citizen service and public safety protection across the Commonwealth, which it’s been doing now for more than 100 years. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.