

West Virginia Division Helps WVU Faculty “Meet and Greet” Local Foresters

Thanks to an education grant provided by the West Virginia Division of the Society of American Foresters, faculty from West Virginia University’s (WVU) Division of Forestry and Natural Resources recently took to the road to conduct a series of 3 seminars designed to encourage greater collaboration and networking between the state’s researchers and forestry practitioners.

“We wanted the foresters in the state to know what services we can offer as a university and to connect with them—the practitioners—to find out what kind of relevant research we could get involved in,” said David W. McGill, forest resources extension specialist at WVU who facilitated the seminars.

The 3-hour evening sessions, which were held in Beckley, Elkins, and Glenville throughout April, began with 10–15-minute presentations by each faculty member and closed with an hour of informal conversation and discussion.

All SAF members and foresters registered in the state of West Virginia were invited to attend one of the scheduled meetings, and each session was assigned 2 Category 1 continuing education credits.

In all, the WVU faculty spoke to more than 50 foresters.

According to McGill, the WVU faculty members were interested in speaking to foresters—both SAF members and nonmembers—to show them what the university, as well as organizations such as SAF, can do for them.

“The West Virginia State Society is in a phase where we need to continually examine our relevance,” he said. “We need to ask ourselves, ‘What is SAF providing to both SAF members and nonmembers within the state?’”

To that end, the seminars were a worthwhile experience for both the foresters and the WVU faculty, McGill said.

“Most people stuck around for at least an hour and talked to a faculty member about their research. Clearly there was exchange of ideas, and a lot of our faculty were invited into the field to take a look at a particular project, so it was successful for us in terms presenting us with opportunities to see what’s going on in the field.”

WVU faculty members Kathryn Arano (forest economics), John Brooks, (forest biometrics), Eric Heitzman (silviculture), Ray Hicks (forest ecology),



SAF member and West Virginia University professor of forest economics Kathryn Arno discusses her research interests with West Virginia foresters during one of West Virginia University’s “Meet the Faculty” Seminars.

Dave McGill (forestry extension), Stuart Moss (forest business), Kate Piatek (forest management and soils), Jim Rentch (forest ecology), Ben Spong (forest operations extension), Tony Tomkowski (forest hydrology), and Jingxin Wang (forest operations) took part in the seminar series. Of these 11 faculty members, 9 have been at WVU for less than 6 years.

In addition to McGill, Arano, Brooks, Heitzman, Rentch, and Wang are all members of SAF.

Although the seminars were primarily conducted to let West Virginia’s foresters know what WVU’s forestry faculty had to offer, John Brooks, professor of forest biometrics and coordinator of WVU’s Forest Resource Management Program, said that the presenters got as much out of the events as their audiences.

“This has been an opportunity for the faculty as a group to get out and meet with practicing foresters, share some of our current research interests, and hear what research and operations needs our foresters are confronting,” he said.

McGill agreed and said the faculty should have held the seminars much earlier.

“It was worthwhile for researchers and forestry practitioners to get together and exchange ideas, so my sense was that the seminars were appreciated by both sides. If I had to identify one comment I repeatedly heard about the seminars, it would have to be ‘this was really good,’” he said. “We should have done this a while ago.”

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