The Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center

A Keystone of Forestry & Wildlife Student Education

Written By Katie Marberry

A few hours from the oak trees and picturesque brick buildings of The Plains lies the School of Forestry and Wildlife Science’s best kept secret—The Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center (SDFEC). The Dixon Center was created by a gift from Solon and Martha Dixon to Auburn University in 1978. The donation, which included 5,350 acres of land and a $500,000 monetary contribution for the purpose of building the educational facilities, was at that point in time, the largest gift in Auburn University history. As a graduate of the Auburn University’s class of 1926, Solon Dixon aspired to promote excellence in forestry education by providing students with a hands-on laboratory to develop and practice responsible forest management.

Today, the Dixon Center is considered one of the finest educational facilities of its type in the nation. The facility is home to the 6,500-square-foot Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation Learning Center, which houses a state-of-the-art auditorium, classroom and conference room; two large bunkhouses, five semi-private dormitory buildings, a rec center, administrative building, classroom and computer lab building, maintenance shop, and cafeteria. The original Dixon family home is also found on the property, which is preserved as a museum and historic landmark.

Dixon’s vision is carried out every summer as School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences (SFWS) students travel to the SDFEC for summer practicum courses. Forestry majors attend between their sophomore and junior years, as a comprehensive introduction to the forester’s craft, before beginning courses in their major. Wildlife Ecology and Management students attend just before their senior year, as one of the final, unifying pieces of their education.

For all SFWS students, the summer camp experience is crucial for career preparation. Tom Gallagher, associate professor of forest operations, remarked that one of the greatest takeaways for students is “an understanding of what it takes to work in the woods,” as the summer can be “an eye-opening first experience.” During summer practicum, forestry students learn many skills and techniques that form the building blocks of their education. Marcus Williford, a junior in forestry, shared, “Some stuff you can only learn from experience, not from books. Doing it early in your career gives...”

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Hello all,

We hope that you are enjoying the summer and its festivities with your friends and family! At the SFWS, the summer is a time to refresh and refocus as we prepare for the future. The 2016–2017 academic year promises to bring new faces, with many new faculty joining our ranks, new students who grace our halls for the first time, and new challenges that require us to be strategic in how we grow and employ our resources to assure our continued success in serving our diverse constituencies.

Auburn’s Provost Office has adopted a new budget model that, along with other schools/colleges across campus, will require the SFWS to grow its undergraduate and graduate enrollment, increase credit hours, improve retention and graduation rates, and expand its research and extension footprint.

To achieve these goals, we have hired a dedicated student recruiter, created a new Geospatial and Environmental Informatics degree program to encourage enrollment that was approved by the Board of Trustees in June, hired new faculty as part of Auburn’s cluster hire initiatives to expand our research capabilities, and launched our recruitment efforts to hire an assistant professor and extension specialist in Forest Systems Management.

This summer our faculty and administrative staff will gather for a retreat to further identify ways/means to promote our core programs. We will focus our attention on developing recruitment and marketing strategies, methods to strengthen core programs. We will focus our attention on developing recruitment and marketing strategies, methods to strengthen core programs.

We have many strengths to capitalize on and several opportunities to explore. With the participation of our Advisory Council, stakeholders, faculty, staff, and Auburn administration, I am confident that the SFWS will move forward stronger and bigger than ever before! As our alumni and friends, we invite you to share your thoughts with us. Be involved. Together we are the future of SFWS!

All the best,

Janaki R.R. Alavalapati, PhD.
SAF Re-Accreditation Visit

In April the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences completed its 10-year Society of American Foresters (SAF) on-site re-accreditation visit. This 3-day visit by Jim Zaczek, Chair and Professor, Department of Forestry, Southern Illinois; Mark Mead, principal MCM Consulting; and Bill Oates, Associate Director, Texas A&M Forest Service, concluded a 6-month process that included a self-study that was completed by all the faculty involved in the forestry undergraduate degree program. The self-study included mapping the forestry curriculum, updating all course syllabi, and aligning of all course topics into SAF-required areas of study.

During the 3-day on-site visit, the SAF met with the majority of the forestry faculty to discuss their area of interest. They also met with undergraduate students, student leaders, members of the SFWS Advisory Council, and employers of our forestry graduates. In addition to gathering feedback from these various stakeholders, the site-visit team toured SFWS facilities and met with the Provost’s office in Samford Hall. The team’s exit interview at the close of the site visit was positive and the SFWS awaits SAF’s final decision for re-accreditation later this year.

SFWS Advisory Board Meeting Held in March

The Advisory Council gathered for its annual meeting in March. Business included an overview and discussion of administrative changes and campus-wide programs impacting the school. SFWS faculty and staff provided updates for members concerning academic, research, extension, development, finance, and communications and marketing activities. During the council’s closing dinner at the Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center, past chairman Darren Miller was presented the Service Appreciation Award by Michelle Eisenberg, incoming Chairperson, and Dean Alavalapati.

New Degree Approved by Auburn Board of Trustees

The proposed Geospatial and Environmental Informatics (GSEI) degree program was approved by the Auburn Board of Trustees in June. The addition of the new degree will expand the School’s undergraduate platform, complement its existing curriculum, and will increase enrollment of transfer students. The GSEI degree will prepare students for forestry, wildlife, and natural resources management careers that utilize computer-based information science which includes geographic information, remote sensing, statistical analysis, database management, knowledge integration, and decision making. Pending approval by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), students currently enrolled in required courses may apply their credit toward the degree beginning in the fall of 2017.
This is Research: Student Symposium – 3rd Place Award to Matt George

SFWS wildlife undergraduate Matt George received 3rd place for his oral presentation, “Effects of door width on wild pig entrance into traps,” at the Auburn University This is Research: Student Symposium held on April 13. George was presented the award in his absence during the symposium award ceremony. His research advisor (shown pictured to the right of George) is Associate Professor Mark Smith.

Many SFWS students gave 12-minute oral presentations on their research, for which they were judged by more than 200 faculty, post-doctoral, and doctoral students. Student presentations were judged on quality of content, conclusions, visual material, presentation style, and responses to questions and comments.

Graduate Students Present Research During Class Poster Session

As part of the class curriculum, members of the spring semester Graduate Seminar Class presented their research during a poster session held April 20. The posters were judged by SFWS faculty, postdocs and other scientists from the U.S. Forest Service. Students who presented were Mary Bennett, Shrijana Duwadi, Taylor Graham, Angelina Haines, Michael Heneghan, Lacy Kamber, John Lancaster, Sarah Lessard, Brandon Loomis, John Mensah, Jagdish Poudel, Cameron Poyner, Susan Pruitt, Chris Seals, Sarah Wilson, and Jingwei Wu.

The student who won best presentation was Angelina Haines. The judges were Lori Eckhardt, Art Chappelka, Susan Pan, Gary Hepp, Sarah Zohdy, Rajan Parajuli, Emily Carter, and John Klepac.
Volunteers Catalog Nearly Two Hundred Species During BioBlitz

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System and Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, in cooperation with the College of Sciences and Mathematics’ Department of Biological Sciences, hosted a “BioBlitz,” on Saturday, April 23, at the Mary Olive Thomas Demonstration Forest located in Auburn.

A bioblitz is a hands-on event where participants have the opportunity to learn about local biodiversity while working alongside scientists to survey plants, birds, fish, insects, and other wildlife in an attempt to record all the living species found within an area during a specified period.

Becky Barlow, an Alabama Extension forestry specialist and coordinator of the bioblitz, said that the event, which was attended by nearly 300 members of the community, was a great opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students to interact with the public.

“One cool thing about the event is the public was able to work right beside scientists collecting real data,” said Barlow. “Graduate and undergraduate students took part in the event and even took the lead on some of the topics. This was a great opportunity for them to take things they have learned in the classroom and apply them when interacting with the public.”

Barlow and forestry graduate student Seth Hunt had long considered the possibility of a bioblitz at the Mary Olive Thomas Demonstration Forest, both for its academic value and as an educational tool for the general public.

Hunt’s impending graduation and the substantial interest from other Auburn scientists across campus indicated the timing was right for the event. Stated Hunt, “It was great to get the level of involvement from professors, graduate, and undergraduate students from multiple schools within the university to help with the BioBlitz.”

“I had great fun helping lead the tree and understory events and I think that the public, students, and even myself benefited from the experience. I was genuinely humbled by the turnout and hope to make the BioBlitz something that continues to take place,” said Hunt.

During the daylong event, preliminary results indicated the group was able to catalog nearly 200 species, including at least 24 types of trees, 39 plants, 40 birds, 26 insects, 18 types of reptiles and amphibians, 10 fish, 12 aquatic invertebrate, 12 mammals, 10 fungi, two crayfish, and two varieties of butterflies.

School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences wildlife graduate student Mary Bennett appreciated the opportunity to interact with other research professionals from Auburn. “We collected a lot of great data for MOT and it was exciting to share in everyone’s enthusiasm for the event.”

Throughout the day, hands-on activities were offered for children to learn about Alabama’s rich biodiversity. The Auburn University Museum of Natural History provided “fossil bags” for children to identify prehistoric insects. Other “BioBlitz Junior” activities included creating casts of animal tracks and building bird houses provided by the Home Depot.

The Louise Kreher Forest Ecology Preserve was also on hand to provide live animal encounters of native species of reptiles and amphibians. The “Critter Caravan,” designed to be a traveling educational program offered for schools and private groups, featured such animals as the corn snake, box turtle, and the lesser known, legless lizard.

Jennifer Lolley, outreach administrator of the Louise Kreher Forest Ecology Preserve, commented, “Anytime you get 300 people out for a first-time science event, it is a big success!” Lolley expressed how valuable it is to have a species inventory, particularly for an educational facility; noting that they hoped to have a bioblitz event at the preserve in the spring of 2017.

A final tally of the species found on the property will be available in the coming months. The 2016 BioBlitz was sponsored in part by Home Depot, Publix, Kroger, and Sam’s Club.

CESURI Engages Local Children During Outreach Day

The Center for Environmental Studies at the Urban-Rural Interface (CESURI) hosted nearly 150 children from Tallassee Elementary for its annual Outreach Day.

Auburn scientists and educators from across campus, as well as many Alabama Cooperative Extension specialists, led hands-on learning activities that focused on the intersection of society and nature.

Through these exercises, children learned about wildlife management, urban forestry, wetland functions, water quality and stream health, enviroscape, canine eco-detection, and other natural resources related issues impacting human health including mosquito and tick-borne illnesses.
Schwarzauer Family Establishes Howard B. Harmon Endowed Scholarship

This permanent endowment is established in the Auburn University Foundation by Gerald (’78) and Lynne (’76) Schwarzauer (shown in photo from left to right) for the purpose of providing scholarships for students in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. Having met at Auburn in 1973, the Schwarzauers felt a scholarship for Auburn students was a fitting way to honor Lynne’s grandfather Howard B. Harmon.

Harmon was born in Gainesville, GA, on June 4, 1893. He served in World War I from 1917-19 and married his sweetheart Margaret Fredonia Field in 1920. Harmon attended the University of Georgia. He was employed by Retail Credit Company, now known as Equifax, located in Atlanta, where he served in the role of vice president until his death on January 7, 1964.

Howard and his wife Margaret had two children, Margaret H. Welden and Howard B. Harmon, Jr. Several of Mr. Harmon’s grandchildren and great-grandchildren have attended Auburn University. Of their endowment, Jerry states, “Lynne and I have three beautiful children and one precious granddaughter. Because of the blessings we have received, we would like to share that; it is a privilege to give back to the university we love.”

Scholarship Created to Honor SFWS Friend Bob Lee

The Alabama forestry community lost one of its most enthusiastic advocates when Robert E. (Bob) Lee, III, passed away on January 18. Bob came to Alabama in 1974 as Woodlands Manager for Union Camp Corporation in Prattville. He was involved in a wide range of professional and civic activities. One activity he was particularly proud of was his involvement in elevating Auburn University’s forestry program from department to school status. The Alabama Forestry Association had always been a strong supporter of Auburn Forestry and advocated for its change to school status. But, there had not been a real coordinated effort until Bob became President of the association in 1982. Along with AFA Executive Director Hilton Watson, Bob made an appointment with the President of Auburn University and members of the University’s Board of Trustees to present his position on the importance of a separate school with its own dean. Following these visits and some internal discussions within the University, Bob received feedback that the University had decided to include a School of Forestry in its next budget. The school evolved and, in 1999, the University’s wildlife program was merged with forestry and the program was renamed as the “School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.”

As an avid turkey hunter, Bob approved of this development. With Bob’s efforts, forestry became an official school of Auburn University. To honor him, a number of the SFWS alumni and friends felt it would be appropriate to recognize Bob’s efforts by establishing a scholarship at Auburn in his memory. Contributions totaling approximately 30% of the $25,000 minimum needed to establish an endowed scholarship in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences have already been received. For information about this scholarship, or to make a contribution, contact Heather Crozier, SFWS director of development, at 334-844-2791 or vannhea@auburn.edu.

SFWS Launches Compass Circle, a Young Alumni Society

The SFWS Office of Development recently launched the Compass Circle (CC), a young alumni giving society, as an opportunity for graduates to become more involved with and support their alma mater in their first 15 years after graduation.

A charter membership in the society positions these young alumni to be leaders in annual and philanthropic giving among fellow Forestry and Wildlife Sciences graduates. Those joining the giving society may choose from one of three Compass Circle membership levels that offer benefits which progress with donation size, such as recognition opportunities and invitation to the Dean’s Tailgate and other exclusive activities. In the future, members may become eligible to participate in mentorship programs that will help guide current students and new graduates in their careers.

States charter member, Russell Miller, “My wife Carolyn and I joined the Compass Circle because we want to support the scholarships and unparalleled education within the school. As a forester, I feel it is vital to support the future generations of our natural resource professionals. With three levels of giving and monthly payment options, there are opportunities for all young alumni to give back.”

For more information or to become a member, contact Sharon Tatum, development coordinator, at 334-844-1983 or via email at sfswdevelopment@auburn.edu.
SFWS Celebrates Diversity with New Scholarships

The SFWS honored its first African-American graduate, Ernest Boyd ’76, at a luncheon held April 7. The occasion also marked the anniversary of the school’s 40-year history of student diversity. In celebration of the unique milestone among Southeastern universities, many SFWS African-American alumni, including first female African-American graduate, Dana Yvette McReynolds Stone ’94, and guests of honor, Dana Little ’79, and Kenneth Day ’81. Day and Little, both forestry graduates, recently spearheaded the school’s first African-American Alumni Scholarship Endowment in the SFWS along with 11 others who contributed to the effort. The scholarship was created to encourage enrollment of deserving African Americans or underrepresented groups in forestry who reside in Alabama’s Black Belt counties. Other companies and individuals have identified Auburn University’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences as a partner in cultivating diversity among forestry professionals. Retired Vice President of Resource Management Service (RMS) Phillip Woods was present on behalf of Craig Blair, current president, to announce the establishment of the Resource Management Service Annual Scholarship. To learn more about contributing to the African-American Alumni Scholarship Endowment, contact Heather Crozier, SFWS director of development, at 334-844-2791 or via email at sfwsdev@auburn.edu.

Auburn University administration, faculty, and staff gathered with guests to honor Boyd and reflect on the cultural history of the school and the importance of cultivating diversity and equal opportunity within the Auburn community. Among the friends and family of Boyd in attendance, were Special guests shown with Dean Janaki Alavalapati (center right) were (left to right) Kenneth Day ’81, Ernest Boyd ’76, Dana Little ’79, and Phillip Woods of Resource Management Service (RMS).

SFWS Represented at 10th Annual Women’s Leadership Conference

The School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences recently sponsored a table at the 10th Annual Women’s Leadership Conference – Resilient Women at The Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center. Dr. Lori Eckhardt and Dr. Sarah Zohdy accompanied a group of graduate students from the school (pictured above: front row [L to R] Shrijana Duwadi, Dr. Lori Eckhardt, Pratima Devkota, Mary Bennett; back row [L to R] Micaela Finney, Dr. Sarah Zohdy, Carolyn Moore, Andrea Cole, Susan Pruitt, Emily Nichols).

They attended workshop sessions and joined in a luncheon where Elizabeth Huntly, Auburn alumna, attorney, Board of Trustees member and author, was the Keynote Speaker. “It is an outstanding opportunity for women to come together and learn about the various ways that women are leaders in society,” said Dr. Eckhardt.

Tian Receives SEC Award

Hanqin Tian, SFWS Solon Dixon Professor, was selected to receive the SEC’s Auburn University Faculty Achievement Award for 2016. Each recipient of the SEC Faculty Achievement Award must be a full professor at an SEC university, have a performance history of extraordinary teaching, and a record of scholarship that is recognized nationally or internationally.

“We appreciate Dr. Tian’s commitment to scholarly research and academic excellence on issues with broad economic, environmental, and health implications,” said Jay Gogue, president of Auburn University and past president of the Southeastern Conference. Dr. Tian will receive a $5,000 honorarium from the SEC and will become Auburn’s nominee for the SEC Professor of the Year, who will be selected from 14 nominees representing SEC universities.
Working with Nature for Society’s Well Being

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Upcoming Events

Summer Graduation Reception - Aug 6
Welcome Week - Aug 17
Fall Icebreaker - Aug 31
Scholarship Awards Ceremony - Aug 27
Fall Family Weekend Open House - Sept 30

Homecoming BBQ - Oct 1
Fall Family Fun Day, KPNC – Oct 8
Dean’s Tailgate – Oct 22
Career Fair – Nov 30

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