Welcome to new SFRC Director Terrell T. “Red” Baker

As I sit down to write my first letter for the SFRC newsletter, I reflect on how privileged I am to be here, and to have the opportunity to serve in this important capacity for the SFRC. It is humbling to be part of such an incredible group of faculty, staff, stakeholders and partners as we team up to serve the state of Florida.

What better place to start my first full day on the job than Austin Cary Forest, where we recognized a great group of SFRC friends who had the vision, persistence, and resources to create the A. Chester Skinner, Jr. Family Turpentine Education Site. This professionally designed, restored, and constructed facility stands as a symbol of what people can achieve when they work together to serve a common purpose – in this case, advancing the education mission of the ACF and SFRC.

Please see the list of SFRC friends who made this project possible on the final page of this newsletter.

That same afternoon, as part of the SFRC’s annual Spring Celebration, we recognized the many achievements of faculty, staff, and students over the last year.

It was inspiring to see the great work being done to help solve real-world problems not only across Florida, but also around the world. It was heartwarming to see so many family members and friends participate in this celebration.

During my first few weeks here, I have enjoyed visiting with many students, undergraduate and graduate, who were preparing to graduate, and reflecting on the positive experiences they have had during their time in our program. The constructive influence the SFRC has had on these exceptional people shined through during our conversations.

It was a testimony of the diligence of our faculty and staff who labored to provide them with a meaningful, well-rounded college experience.

While it is difficult to see these members of our family move on, we are proud of their accomplishments, and look forward to watching them succeed in their professional endeavors.

It is worth noting that these students will carry with them the reputation of the SFRC, proof positive of why the program was recently recognized as one of the top educational programs in the country by USA Today’s publication “Green Living”.

SFRC Awards Round-Up

Damian Adams–FOR
UF Term Professorship

Rob Ahren–FAS
UF Term Professorship

Kai Lorenzen–FAS
UF Research Foundation Professor

Bryan Matthias
UF/IFAS Award of Excellence for Graduate Research– Ph.D.

Lori Nicholson–PLT
2017 National Project Learning Tree Outstanding Educator

The School of Forest Resources & Conservation Newsletter is published to inform alumni and friends. Have info to share? Contact Communications Specialist Ellison Langford at 352-846-0100 or elangford@ufl.edu
An insect no bigger than a grain of rice is threatening coffee worldwide, but a team of University of Florida researchers is using some unconventional thinking to stop it in its tracks.

The team’s collaboration with locals led to the early identification of the world’s most damaging coffee pest in Papua New Guinea – one of only two coffee-producing countries free of it, before now.

Capable of decimating 80 percent of a coffee crop, the coffee berry borer is notorious in places like Hawaii and Brazil.

In February, careful inspection by the UF-trained Coffee Industry Corporation in Papua New Guinea led to its discovery.

The proactive training will likely save coffee in Papua New Guinea, which is the backbone of its economy, said Jiri Hulcr, a forest entomologist with UF’s School of Forest Resources and Conservation, part of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

“We’re being proactive by looking at agricultural pests abroad and at home, and informing our government as well as developing nations about potential threats,” Hulcr said.

Hulcr and his team spent the last two years preparing New Guineans for what to do if they encountered the beetle.

“The trouble is they have lots and lots of local species that look like it, but the native beetles don’t cause any damage,” Hulcr said. “It requires training to identify the real pest among many imposters.”

Training drills gave way to the real sighting when local inspectors examined a specimen under the microscope. Realizing it was the invasive pest, they sent a photo to Hulcr’s lab for confirmation.

Now that the beetle has been found, inspectors will visit the farm of origin, examine plants for signs of the insect, and destroy any that might be infested.

SFRC senior Karolina Weclawska has received a Fulbright Research Scholarship to create an index of mosses in her native Poland. Her project begins September 2017.

“I almost brought down the foundation of my house jumping around and screaming,” Weclawska said about getting the award.

She said forest mosses are an understudied area of biodiversity. Mosses provide habitats for microscopic organisms, in turn creating miniature ecosystems. As Weclawska described it, a patch of moss is basically a tiny forest.

Poland is home to Bialowieża Forest, which was named a UNESCO World Heritage Centre for its biodiversity. It is one of the last primeval forests in the world.

However, most of the woodlands in Poland belong to the government, and are used for industry. Because of this, many of the plant species they house have gone unresearched.

As there is no complete index of moss species in Poland, part of Weclawska’s proposal involves expanding the list of known species. She has a background in nature photography and plans to use her findings to create a booklet for moss identification.

“I really want to try to capture photos of these mosses that show nonscientific people how beautiful they are,” she said.

The project will culminate with Weclawska giving talks about her research to scientific and lay audiences.
Spring Celebration 2017 dedicates turpentine education site

After more than a decade of effort, the A. Chester Skinner Jr., Family Turpentine Education Site has been officially dedicated at Austin Cary Forest.

The project began in the early 2000s when the Skinner family agreed to help fund the establishment of a turpentine still education site at Austin Cary Forest.

Former SFRC Director Wayne Smith and late professor Jake Huffman collaborated with the family of SFRC alumnus William Harrell to move an antique turpentine still from their property in Georgia to Gainesville. The still was used by the Harrells to commercially produce turpentine, until it was retired in the 1950s.

The still as it stands at Austin Cary Forest is “authentic to the period.” The Harrells contributed a large copper kettle, condensing coil and brickworks to the School. Remaining elements are on permanent loan from the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village and new construction.

The project was prolonged by the late-2000s Great Recession, and the need to replace the Learning Center after it was destroyed by a fire.

The turpentine education site is the first of project of its kind undertaken by a major research-focused university.

Florida was a world leader of turpentine production. Turpentine has been used in the production of adhesives, solvents, varnishes and the naval industry.
Appreciation For Our Supporters

Without the support of friends, we could not maintain our academic excellence.


Thank you to Anheuser-Busch, Inc. for supporting Dr. Tom Frazer’s research. Thank you to the following for supporting Dr. David W. Gibson Endowment for Geomatics: James (‘88) & Mary Leonhardt, Bon & Monica Dewitt, Florida Surveying and Mapping Society – Chipola Area Society, Brown & Phillips, Inc. Timothy White & Mary Louise Durusea, Florida Surveying & Mapping Society, Inc. North Central Florida Chapter of Florida Surveying & Mapping Society, Inc. and Russell Trpp.

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