

2014 Annual Internship Report

Virginia Big Tree Program

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A note from the Virginia Big Tree Program Coordinator, Eric Wiseman...

In this report prepared by 2014 Intern Michelle Dowling, you will find an overview of Michelle’s accomplishments with the Big Tree Program over the past year. The Big Tree Internship is a paid, part-time position in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Tech. Financial support for the internship is provided by Trees Virginia – The Virginia Urban Forest Council. These funds pay for the intern’s wages, travel costs, and field supplies. The internship is a great opportunity for students to hone a variety of technical and soft skills, including tree identification, evaluation, and measurement, data entry and management, and public relations.

Each year, an intern is recruited from the undergraduate student body in the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech. The intern assists me with a variety of tasks to keep the Virginia Big Tree Register accurate, complete, and up-to-date. Much of this work entails recertification of trees, which must be re-measured at least once every 10 years to remain eligible for the register.

Michelle was a very good intern and made many positive contributions to the program. I hope this report provides some insight on her internship experience and the critical role that the intern plays in the program. Any questions about the contents of this report or the Virginia Big Tree Program may be addressed to me by email (pwiseman@vt.edu) or by phone (540.231.5148).

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I. Summary

In 2014, I was employed as the Intern for the [Virginia Big Tree Program](#) (VBTP). My primary task was updating the online [VBTP Register](#), which is a searchable database of the largest trees in Virginia. A tree's entry in the register is valid for up to ten years. When that time expires, the tree must be recertified. This involves visiting the tree, checking its health status, re-measuring it, and updating any other information (such as the owner's name, etc.). If a tree is found to be dead, it is removed from the active register and a smaller living tree is promoted to the active register. The VBTP is affiliated with the [National Register of Big Trees](#) coordinated by [American Forests](#). We have about 69 national champion trees in Virginia, so we also have to recertify those trees periodically and send the information to American Forests.

I also worked on several other tasks in addition to updating the VBTP register. These were primarily clerical tasks such as reviewing and sorting our hardcopy records, auditing new nominations for accuracy and completeness, and relaying information to American Forests about our national champion trees. I also worked with big tree owners and volunteers to answer their questions about the program and to assist them with submitting their nominations and updates to register.

The work I completed last summer could not have been done without support from VBT coordinator Dr. Eric Wiseman, and the Virginia Tech staff members, John Peterson and Tracey Sherman, along with several big tree volunteers and owners. I developed great professional relationships through interning for the VBTP and I'm grateful for the educational opportunities I have received from people I have encountered during my internship.

II. Updates to the VBTP Register

My work last summer primarily focused on maintaining the online register, recertifying trees, and processing newly-nominated trees. According to American Forests, "A tree must be re-measured at least every 10 years to maintain its champion status", so these trees were a priority for me.

The VBTP Register lists the top-5 trees for each species, number 1 being the state, and sometimes, the national champion. I focused on recertifying national and state champs for the most part, but also collected information on other top-5 trees if they were convenient stops during my field trips.

I personally worked with 16 trees during my internship. I recertified 10 trees and nominated 6 new trees. Sometimes I was assisted by a big tree volunteer. Of course, this is only a small subset of the trees that were recertified and newly nominated last year. The majority were provided by tree owners and big tree volunteers. My focus was on trees that were difficult to access or could not be measured by a tree owner or big tree volunteer.

In the tables below, the number following the common name of each specimen denotes the identification number assigned to it in the online register, which is part of the URL for the specimen's website entry. The URL for each specimen is: http://bigtree.cnre.vt.edu/bigtree_detail.cfm?AutofieldforPrimaryKey=XXXX where "XXXX" is replaced by the identification number.

A. Recertified Trees

Common Name and ID number	Latin Name	City/County Location	Total Points
Veitch fir 859	<i>Abies veitchii</i>	Amherst	233
Hican 609	<i>Carya illinoensis x ovata</i>	City of Roanoke	262
Eastern redbud 771	<i>Cercis Canadensis</i>	Loudon	177
Cornelian cherry dogwood 1334	<i>Cornus mas</i>	Amherst	82
Winterberry holly 915	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	Orange	39
Amur honeysuckle 1382	<i>Lonicera maackii</i>	Amherst	130
Oriental arborvitae 578	<i>Platycladus orientalis</i>	Rockbridge	139
Sweet crabapple 1235	<i>Malus coronaria</i>	Albemarle	100
Pussy willow 1331	<i>Salix discolor</i>	Amherst	91
English oak 634	<i>Quercus robur</i>	Orange	284

B. Newly Nominated Trees

Common Name and ID number	Latin Name	City/County Location	Total Points
Atlas cedar 2219	<i>Cedrus atlantica</i>	City of Salem	295
Sawara cedar 2227	<i>Chamaecyparis pisifera</i>	City of Roanoke	148
Douglas-fir 2218	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	City of Roanoke	161
Pacific yew 2217	<i>Taxus brevifolia</i>	City of Roanoke	176
Eastern hemlock 2287	<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	Montgomery	221
Siberian elm 2214	<i>Ulmus pumila</i>	City of Roanoke	266

II. Collaboration and Outreach

A. Big Tree Volunteers

At the beginning of the year, I compiled a list of all trees that needed recertification in 2014 and distributed this list to our volunteers located around the state. The following big tree volunteers were contacted by email for assistance with recertification in 2014:

Kelli Armes
Carrie Blair
Byron Carmean
Dana Malone

Jon Rockett
Joneen Sargent
Rod Simmons
Robert Vickers

Gary Williamson
Christina Woodson
Jerry Wyatt
Greg Zell

Based on feedback from the volunteers, we decided which trees the volunteers would recertify and which trees I would recertify. Further contact in regards to recertification and updating photographs was made with the following volunteers:

Gary Williamson – Gary is working with Byron Carmean to recertify some decadal trees for me in Southeast Virginia. They found the [silky camellia 614](#) was dead and notified me of its status.

Harry and Melanie Van Guilder – Harry and Melanie recertified the [hican 609](#) in Roanoke and sent me all information/photographs. They also accompanied Dr. Wiseman, several Roanoke Tree stewards, and me to nominate all of the City of Roanoke and City of Salem trees listed above.

Jon Rockett – Jon recertified and sent new photographs of the [sweet crabapple 1235](#) located in Albemarle.

Greg Zell- Greg sent me new photographs of the [garden plum 1786](#) located in Fauquier.

Some of the volunteers also provided me with information I used to update the Virginia and National registers. Four of the trees on my list were found to be dead. We also determined that three of our trees were new national champions and that two had been dethroned as national champions.

B. Big Tree Owners

Before visiting each tree that I recertified, I made sure to email or telephone all available contacts listed on each database entry. I was successful in contacting most of the big tree owners, and often measured the trees with the owner's help. At that time, I would answer any questions they had about their tree or the big tree program and provide them with basic advice on how to care for their tree. Specific contacts are listed in the work log on file with the VBTP Coordinator.

IV. Other Accomplishments

A large portion of my VBT internship was spent organizing our big tree records and database. Over the past 40+ years, the VBTP has amassed information on over 1,300 specimens from around the state. With all of these trees, it can be difficult to keep up with paper and database files. One of my goals last summer was to look at all of our current national champion trees recognized by American Forests to ensure that our in-office files matched what we had in our online register and vice versa. I examined each national champ file (69 trees) and made sure that all information was correct, complete, and up to date. Each file was organized and made synonymous with the online database. For the website, we worked hard to obtain a photograph and create a web map of every champion tree. Many of our website visitors enjoy seeing our largest, most impressive trees, which are commonly national champions. Thus it is important to have complete, accurate information about these specimens to ensure viewers can get the most out of their Big Tree experience. I also compiled "most wanted" lists for species found in Virginia that do not currently have a national champion and for common Virginia natives for which we do not have a full complement of top-5 trees in the register. We will distribute these lists in 2015 to guide big tree volunteers and enthusiasts on their treks to discover big trees.

Public outreach was another important task I undertook last summer. After speaking with Dr. Wiseman, we decided I should spend a portion of my internship designing a brochure for the VBTP to publicize the program and educate people about big trees. After several edits, the brochure was printed out and has been distributed to several volunteers and at several venues around the state. More brochures will be passed out as events occur across the state. We will also post it on our website so that volunteers can print and share it with others. We hope this brochure will help get the word out about this great program and encourage people to get involved.

V. Reflection on Internship Experience

I'm incredibly grateful to have worked for the Virginia Big Tree Program. The coordinator, staff, volunteers, and tree owners have been so warm and willing to teach me what they know about the urban forest. This has been a great way for me to apply my knowledge from the classroom and interact with fellow tree lovers.