

SUMMER 2025

# MSU FORESTER

*taking a leap*

Student Voice: Rachel Adams  
Pg. 6



Department of Forestry  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



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## FROM THE department chair



Dear MSU Forestry Alumni and Friends,

As a profession, forestry adheres to the core principles of making a difference in people's lives and caring for the natural environment. These values inspire our students and alumni, who go on to do meaningful, impactful work. It's these values that draw many to the profession.

Nested within these professional values, the work of MSU Forestry goes even deeper. We aspire to provide transformational experiences for our students and equip them with the skills for meaningful, rewarding careers. We're inspired by the many alumni who speak to the lasting impact of their time at MSU Forestry. You can read through alum updates in this issue for a small sampling (page 4).

Moreover, current student Rachel Adams (page 6) tells a compelling story about how her decision to pursue a B.S. in Forestry at MSU has completely changed the direction of her life in the best ways imaginable. And Dave Skole's (page 7) reflections on teaching – preparing students with the skills to take on meaningful work, immersing them in field experiences, and connecting classroom concepts to real issues – demonstrate the transformative nature of good teaching. Rachel Adams' and Dave Skole's words illustrate how MSU Forestry makes a difference in people's lives at a very personal level. We also strive to advance forestry knowledge that makes a difference in caring for forests and all the ecosystem services that they provide.

There are many facets to creating an environment that supports transformative learning, research, and outreach. I'd like to highlight just a few: outstanding faculty, effective administrative staff, and a strong sense of community. Our faculty are exceptional – intellectual leaders in their fields, positively impacting

the practice of forestry and at the same time deeply dedicated to educating the next generation of forestry professionals. Raju Pokharel (page 5) embodies this spirit, demonstrated by his recent award from the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources: CANR Early Career Researcher Award and Global Scholar in Research. Our top-notch administrative team is unmatched, as shown by CANR's recognition of Katie James (Research and Graduate Program Administrator) through the CANR Excellence in Research Performance and Support Award (page 5).

A strong sense of community has long characterized MSU Forestry – a tradition that continues today. For example, student-to-student learning and friendships formed through Forestry Club are an important part of our Department and the student experience. Recently, the Club participated in the Michigan SAF meeting, followed by a mini-conclave with students from Michigan Tech, and then participation in a timbersports demonstration at the Jack Pine Lumberjack Show in Mackinaw City (page 8). These shared experiences help strengthen the bonds that define our community.

Please reach out and share your story on how MSU Forestry has impacted your life. We love hearing from our alumni and value staying connected as a community. Communication with alumni and friends is critically important to MSU Forestry's ability to continue our impactful work. Thanks for your continued support!

Go Green!

Rich



# Alum Updates

## MILLER ROSS | BS '61

After receiving my BS in Forestry in 1961, I worked briefly with a pulpwood operation in upper MI. The USFS finally came through and stationed me in Wyoming. I spent 37 years in timber management in Wyoming, Colorado, and finally in Alaska. I retired in 2000 after the environmentalists had effectively converted the Tongass National Forest into a national park.

I've continued to live in Alaska spending most of my time at my cabin in the bush. Extensive bark beetle kill and overmature birch stands provide plenty of raw material for my sawmill, woodworking projects, plus firewood for the stove.

My MSU degree and USFS employment enabled me to have a satisfying career applying and supervising most aspects of forest management. At the same time being able to enjoy outdoor experiences many of my friends are only able to dream about.

## STEVE SLOAN | 'BS '65

Enjoying a long retirement from the rigors of New York State Government. Fishing, hunting, shooting and family keep me active. Must say I look back on the MSU Forestry days as such a formative time in my life.

## TERRY RAETTIG | MS '73

Retired from USFS in 2001, then taught geography at South Puget Sound Community college for 10 years.

## BRIAN STACEY | BS '90

After beginning my career with Oregon State University's Research Forests, my mother got sick and I had to move back to Michigan to help with things. As things turned out, I never made it back out west. I am fortunate for the position I am in (Owner-President of Progress Chemical) and still love to fascinate my wife and kids with my Dendrology knowledge no matter where we happen to be.

## ERIC STAFNE | BS '93

I've been at Mississippi State University for 14 years now. In 2023 I was named Outstanding Extension Educator by the American Society for Horticultural Science. This year (July, 2025), I will be named a Fellow of the American Society for Horticultural Science at the annual conference in New Orleans. But, more importantly, I also recently celebrated my 25th Wedding anniversary with my wife Richelle.

## MARGARET MILLER | BS '11

I'm the Forest Landowner Program Manager at the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, where I create practical, engaging resources to help landowners care for their forests. I work closely with other state agencies, universities, and forestry organizations to host workshops, tours, and develop tools on topics like wildfire resilience, forest health, sustainable harvesting and habitat. I love connecting people with knowledge that supports both their land and our shared landscape. Becoming a new mom this year has made my work feel even more meaningful, knowing I'm helping people manage their lands for future generations.

## EMILIE HEBENSTREIT | BS '25

I am continuing my internship at Michigan DNR in the Lansing office working on timber sale proposal review.

I have also signed my offer letter to pursue an M.S. in Forest Economics with the MSU Department of Forestry.

# James and Pokharel receive 2025 CANR Faculty and Staff Awards



Katie James and Raju Pokharel have both received 2025 CANR Faculty and Staff Awards; the Excellence in Research Performance and Support Award and the Early Career Researcher Award, respectively.

The CANR Excellence in Research Performance and Support Award recognizes a support staff member for their outstanding performance at a teaching and research center, in a laboratory, field-based research or a research administrative support role.

Katie James, a research administrator in the Department of Forestry since 2015, has been instrumental in supporting the department's teaching and research initiatives. Her role involves coordinating research activities, managing administrative tasks and ensuring smooth operations within the department.

For one nominator, "It cannot be understated how much our faculty rely upon and value Katie's assistance. What sets her apart is not only her proficiency but also her approach; she tackles these tasks with kindness, grace, empathy and efficiency."

The CANR Excellence in Research Award program recognizes the outstanding contributions of CANR researchers to the research mission of Michigan State University (MSU). In particular, the awards focus on the impact that their achievements have had on academic and/or external stakeholder communities.

Raju Pokharel, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of Forest Resource Economics in the Department of Forestry. His research focuses on forest product supply chains, market models, feedstock availability, resource utilization and forest carbon. His current work includes evaluating market opportunities for mass timber, bioenergy and biochar, and assessing the economic tradeoffs of timber products under carbon management strategies. Pokharel is known for his mentorship, with many of his students excelling in internships and industry roles, reflecting his commitment to developing the next generation of forest economists and researchers.

# SAVE THE DATE

## Forestry Alumni Association Tailgate 2025

# OCTOBER 11

More details to follow!





**RACHEL  
ADAMS**

“*There is so much good in the world, and so many good people, all trying their best. I’ve already met so many wonderful, kind people who care about the world in ways I thought most people had given up on.*”

This time last year, I was working in a factory as a machine operator, in a concrete building with no windows, doing twelve-hour shifts with absurd amounts of overtime. During the winter I was lucky to see the sunset or sunrise, and most days I didn’t see the sun at all. I can’t even really say the money was worth the stress it put on me and my mental health.

The good thing that did come out of it, however, was my desperate desire to look for a new job. The State of Michigan job website was one of the first places I looked, and I saw so many listings there that required a Bachelor of Forestry. “You can get a degree in forests?” I thought. How beautiful. I had no idea that Forestry was a degree that I could get. Less than week later I was digging up my old community college transcripts and applying to Michigan State University.

Growing up, we didn’t really go places. We couldn’t afford to. I stayed inside a lot, and read a lot of books, and the public library was where I spent most of my time. I was never really exposed to the outdoors until I was an adult and could take myself anywhere I wanted. I didn’t know how much I was missing until I was suddenly working a job that made me miserable and craving as much time outside as I possibly could get. Waiting to start school again gave me a reason to get back outside more, go to parks, really look at trees and admire their structure. The beginning of starting to fall in love with the world and all our ecosystems again.

Deciding to go back to college at 30 was hard for me. I was so scared about not being able to afford housing, not being able to afford food, my car payment, or any of my bills. Growing up paycheck to paycheck takes its toll on you and makes you very aware of how fragile your living situation can be sometimes.

I had never thought that going to somewhere like Michigan State University was an option for me, even when I was in high school. I had had a job since I was 15, and even then, the only way I had been able to afford to go to even community college was through the Pell Grant. I was so

surprised and grateful to see all the help and funding that was available to me if I just reached out to people. The power to change my whole life was right there, and there were people who wanted to help me do it.

There is so much good in the world, and so many good people, all trying their best. I’ve already met so many wonderful, kind people who care about the world in ways I thought most people had given up on. Being around all these passionate, dedicated people has given me so much hope for the future and truly has revitalized my passion for life and the environment. I had nearly given up on the hope for anything better for myself, for a job that would make me happy to go to work every day, around people who care so much about doing the right thing.

Looking back, I can’t believe it’s only been a year. How quickly things can change when you set your mind to it and have a couple helping hands. The world is beautiful again, and I have so many options in front of me. I am still scared of doing the wrong thing, and making the wrong choices, but I know I have so much support around me from everyone here. All those real-world things that I was scared of are still there, housing and food and bills. But I’m still here, doing it, learning about forests and how beautiful they really are and what I can do to help them stay that way. Even with that uncertainty, the payoff of being in this line of work is already proving to be so worth it. Becoming more connected with the world again, and more rooted in all the things that really matter.

It’s okay to take a leap, because there’s a whole crowd of people to catch you. Your life can change for the better, like mine did. It sounds cheesy, but writing this made me emotional, thinking about where I was then and where I am now. It truly has been a revelation, and I can’t say enough about how grateful I am to have this opportunity in my hands.

**My name is Rachel Adams, and I am proud to call myself a student of Forestry at Michigan State University.**



**DAVID  
SKOLE**

“*MSU was the right place to work on international forestry-related climate change and carbon cycle questions. And this is true now more than ever.*”

## What inspired your interest in teaching in forestry at MSU?

My work at the global change research Institute at the University of New Hampshire was incredibly rewarding and exciting, and for 15 years in the 1980s and early 1990s nearly all climate change research was heavily focused on general circulation models and the global carbon cycle, which was done by a very small, tight-knit international cadre of scientists who all knew each other – and I was lucky to have a front row seat to the show. The research team on which I worked collaborated with great scientists at Woods Hole, Oak Ridge, Goddard Space Flight Center, key European modeling centers and others. We helped set up the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program, the initial international arm of global change research, and then contributed to the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. But, a few years after my PhD there I felt the need to move. The field was growing and by 1998 the world had fully engaged in climate change research and policy. So, when the premier land grant university reached out to me with an offer to help build a program and faculty that would focus on earth observations, land cover change and climate change, it was exactly the right thing for me at that moment. MSU was the right place to work on international forestry-related climate change and carbon cycle questions. And this is true now more than ever.

## What has been one of your best experiences teaching so far?

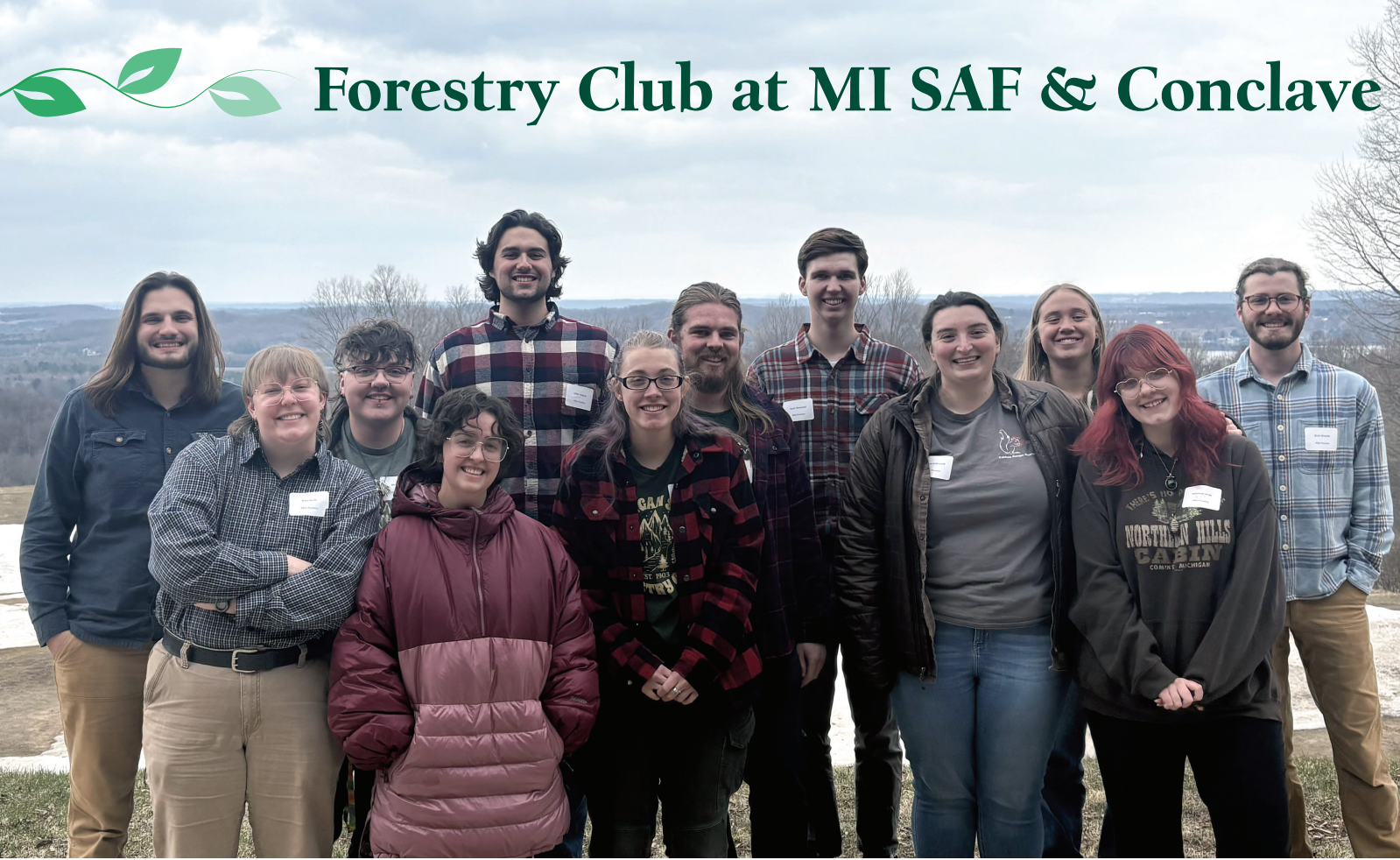
Actually, there are three best experiences. First, I was asked a few years ago to develop an undergraduate course on climate change and forests. I have been extremely excited to see so many students enrolling in the course, increasing enrollment from 26 in the first year to 250 four years later. Students are eager to know more about climate change. They know that it’s a real thing and they are curious and concerned. I am excited to help them understand how forests and other ecosystems are important to the story. And, while students want to understand the problem of climate change, they keenly want to know about the solutions even more. This experience reinforces my awareness about our role in guiding students to become well-informed and active citizens. I strive to teach around the

concept of natural climate solutions, which centers on how forests and their management can reduce significant emissions and the only significant way we can remove excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Second, the teaching experience has made it clear to me that there is a “hidden curriculum” outside the classroom. By observing how we manage the university campus we indirectly educate our students in profound ways, for better or worse – from how we produce and use energy, to the use of land and landscaping, to the production of waste and recycling. Lastly, MSU and Forestry provide great international perspectives and experiences for our students, both in courses and through study abroad opportunities. For more than a decade I have taught a study abroad course in the tropical forests of Costa Rica. It is amazing to see how students completely absorb these into-the-forest experiential learning opportunities. One day as my class was crossing a bridge over a river a large group of Howler monkeys were also crossing with us using the overhanging tree branches above us. Visually, these amazing, very social forest primates can put on a good show, including acrobatic mothers with babies on their backs. The immersive experience brought both intellectual and emotional tears to one student’s eyes. I didn’t need to give her an exam to know she got the material.

## Any thoughts or advice for current students?

There was a time after receiving my master’s degree, I was working for a professor at a research institute in New Hampshire. I came to a point in where I thought I needed something more, and I told him that I was quitting to trek through Southeast Asia. His advice to me was straightforward, “David, the last thing the world needs is another American backpacking through Southeast Asia. But what ever you do from here on, be sure to make a contribution”. I thought about that a lot and decided instead to take a short vacation and return to the research projects. I started my PhD while working full time in the institute. Today I have been to Southeast Asia many times, all over the region from the forests of Borneo to the mangroves of the Mekong Delta. My advice: whatever you do, do it well and make a contribution, whether big or small, real contributions will matter. **Spartans will.**





# Forestry Club at MI SAF & Conclave

Our forestry club had the great privilege of attending another Michigan Society of American Foresters conference this past April and this conference's discussions were exciting! The conference was originally meant to be held in Gaylord, but with the ice storm that had passed through a little over a week prior, SAF was swiftly moved to Bellaire.

Due to the movement of the conference, this was the first year our forestry club stayed at an Airbnb and not at the hotel! This allowed for some club bonding with chatting, card games, and an opportunity to explore a bit of the local wilderness. However, with the storms in mind, the stage was set for this spring's SAF to highlight the damage ensued in Gaylord. It was a real-time lesson in the unpredictability of mother nature and how that can affect the value of privately owned forest land. Many were urged to support the citizens of Gaylord where they could and awareness was made to the susceptibility of damaged stands of trees to diseases and pests.

This year's dinner and happy hour featured a get-to-know-you bingo to allow the experienced foresters to meet and interact with students. As per usual, there was a raffle with some amazing prizes! Although it may not be a competition, our club members won an outstanding amount of prizes which was one of the highlights of the night! As well, the forestry club had the opportunity to fundraise for our

graduating seniors' gifts and it was amazing to see the willingness of present foresters to help make something so special happen for future foresters.

With the help of the Michigan Society of American Foresters attendees and the MSU alumni we were able to purchase personalized hatchets for our graduating seniors as their graduation gift! It was another great SAF and we can't wait for next year!

The forestry club also participated in this semester's forester's conclave at Jack Pine Lumberjack Shows in Mackinaw City. We competed with the students from Michigan Tech in axe throwing, cross cut saw, species identification, and a few other timber sports events. Our club members even camped overnight at the competition site and it was the first camping experience for many students! This proved to be very cold for all involved as it was held in the cold of April. We received mentorship from big names in the timbersports world and had the opportunity to participate in new events such as speed climbing. We ended up winning two out of three of the judged events, playing the MSU fight song proud! We continued our comradery with Michigan Tech and one another as we cooked hotdogs over a fire and demonstrated timbersports for a real crowd. We look forward to continuing the timbersports traditions!



## The world needs more foresters

When I was a student, I used to say that you could solve any problem by planting more trees. While that might be oversimplified, whether it be to counter the impacts of a changing climate, ensure better health outcomes for communities or provide sustainable materials for innovative building design, I bet we can agree that the world needs more foresters.

After attending SAF spring meeting and interacting with students from MSU Forestry Club, I feel confident knowing students today are growing to meet these challenges. Forestry students are bright, eager, ready to gain experience and to learn! Through support from MSU Forestry Alumni Association, they've been connected with mentors, provided networking opportunities and conference attendance and gifted support for graduating Seniors.

As professionals, it's easy to see the benefit from the student vantage. Based on my experience at Michigan SAF, interacting with these budding foresters has benefits for those of us that've been here a while, too! They are creative, fun and bring new perspectives (and vocabulary)! Never stop learning – that's who we are as Spartans!

With that, I hope you are able to join us – students and alumni – for tailgate this fall! If you can't make it to campus, join us in supporting MSU Forestry students via donating funds or sharing your time! I would like to challenge our Forestry graduates to think about our role in fostering this next generation of foresters. Giving time, funding or expertise to Forestry Alumni Association helps us continue to connect and support Forestry students. This includes support for Conclave, the annual tailgate, Shindig, conferences and networking. Our communities, economies and natural areas will rely on our students to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Hope to see ya outside and Go Green!

Heidi Frei  
MSU FAA President  
BS '02; MS '07  
Michigan DNR,  
Parks and Recreation Division  
State Park Forest Health Specialist





# New Faces & Roles



## **ARIEL COOPER**

Assistant to the Chair & Department

Ariel holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Society and Environment from the University of California, Berkeley. After working in the private sector for a number of years, Ariel was looking for a way to move into more meaningful and impactful employment. Ariel has a strong background in administrative support, event coordination, data management, and team leadership, and has already made a very positive impact on the program with her contagious optimism, upbeat personality, and strong work ethic.



## **INGRID AGUAYO FUENTEALBA**

Undergraduate Academic Advisor

Dr. Ingrid Aguayo Fuentealba is a forest engineer born and raised in Concepción, Chile. After obtaining her Master's in Forest Science from Universidad de Concepción, she pursued a Ph.D. in Forestry at the University of Toronto in Canada. Ingrid's forest entomology expertise focuses on insect behavior and chemical ecology. Despite her shift from insects and forests to community work and humans, Dr. Aguayo Fuentealba's dedication to her profession remains unwavering. Ingrid is excited to continue being involved in education in her role as academic advisor, specifically forestry.



## **SHIVAN GC**

Assistant Professor, Forest Economics and Environmental Policy

Though not new to the department, Dr. Shivan Gc is a new faculty member in the area of Forest Economics and Environmental Policy. Her research lies at the intersection of environmental policy, landowner behavior, and natural resource economics, with the goal of informing sustainable forest management. She investigates forest landowners' management decisions, the implications of forestry taxation, and the role of biomass and bioenergy in forest-based economies. Her work also explores supply chain dynamics in the forest products industry and conducts economic contribution and impact analyses to support evidence-based forest policy and investment.

## **CHAD PAPA**

Director, Forest Carbon & Climate Program

Also not new to the department, Chad Papa is the new director of the Forest Carbon and Climate Program (FCCP). Dr. Papa brings wealth of knowledge related to forest ecology, carbon accounting, harvested wood products, and science-based education and communication to the FCCP. His research focuses on the role of forest management and policy in support of greenhouse gas emission reductions and removals using a variety of ecosystem models and mixed-methods research. His work is meant to better inform forest management practices, stewardship, and policy and to help quantify the contributions of climate-smart forestry to both societal and ecological goals.



## **ANNIE SMITH**

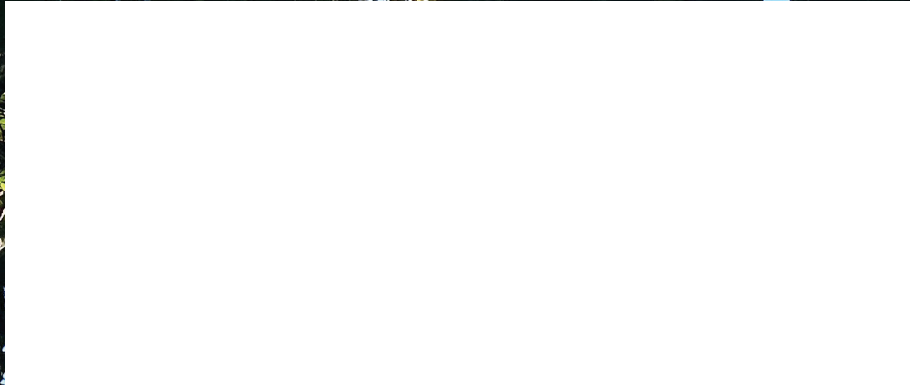
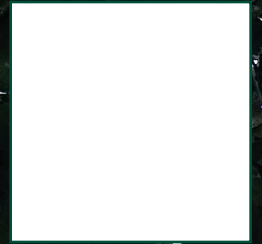
Academic Program Coordinator

Annie is no stranger to the forestry department, but is now officially a permanent member of the support staff team in the role of Academic Program Coordinator. In this role, she coordinates forestry online programs in general, including the Graduate Certificate in Forest Carbon Science, Policy, and Management and online professional education. Annie received her Bachelor of Science in Family & Community Services from Michigan State University. She has been instrumental in supporting the Hybrid Online MS Program and has contributed greatly to its early success.





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