

ADAPTING IN A TIME OF CRISIS

MSU FORESTER



Department of Forestry
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SUMMER 2020

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IN MEMORIAM

JAMES A. BURNS | BS '63, MS '68
MARCH 15, 2020

Inside left: A student at work in the wood shop
Back cover: PhD candidate Katie Minnix's eastern white pine transplants at the Tree Research Center



Dear MSU Forestry Alumni and Friends,

As we all know, our world changed dramatically in March due to the novel coronavirus. With a few hours' notice, MSU switched from in-person to remote teaching and learning over the internet. Shortly thereafter, non-essential research projects were put on hold. Travel stopped. Face-to-face meetings moved to Zoom. Our usual social interactions and community events came to a halt. For students, late night study sessions, field work, hanging out in the Polar Bear Room, Shindig and bonfires at the Tree Research Center suddenly vanished.

And then the simmering crisis of long-standing racial inequities and law enforcement's treatment of people of color emerged to the forefront, layered on top of the global pandemic.

There are no handbooks on how an academic department that prides itself on personal hands-on learning navigates a global pandemic. Nor is there a manual on resolving racism and inequities. In times of crisis like this, I think that it is critical that we go back to our core values to provide guidance.

MSU Forestry has long been committed to the values of community and quality. As a smaller department at a large university, we know each other and interact regularly – we are a community. The norm in our community is to treat everyone with respect and to value everyone's perspective, experiences and contributions. We are very proud of how everyone in the Department of Forestry patiently, compassionately and empathetically made coronavirus-compelled transitions.

Our community has been building and strengthening well before coronavirus. In fact, we have been deliberately working towards becoming more welcoming, inclusive and supportive for everyone, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, background and experiences. A forestry education and career can be an amazing, life-enriching experience that should be available to all. Our efforts have resulted in a doubling of total student numbers, with increases in all demographic groups since 2012. We are moving towards more balanced numbers of female and male incoming students and our graduate program is now comprised of more than one third students of color.

Quality is a core value that goes hand-in-hand with community. As Spartans, we dedicate ourselves to achieving excellence in everything that we do. With challenging circumstances, we innovate and do things in a different way. For example, how do you conduct field camp online? As you will read about later, students chose a forest close to their home and with equipment we mailed, conducted field camp activities through the careful guidance of our professors. It is easier to meet challenges to achieve excellence and high quality when we have a strong community where people trust one another, communicate openly, value different perspectives and are moving in the same direction. High quality in our teaching, research and extension depend on a strong community.



Richard Kobe,
Professor & Chairperson

Many alumni have asked me how they can help MSU Forestry during these challenging times. I offer two tangible suggestions and am open to others. First, send talented students our way. If you come across prospective students with an interest in forestry, natural resources, the outdoors, or environmental science and sustainability, please let them know about MSU Forestry and encourage them to apply. Second, like many organizations, the next few years will be financially challenging due to increased needs as well as tighter budgets. If you are in a position to give back through a donation, we would appreciate your support.

Thanks to the many of you who have reached out. While the last few months have been challenging, seeing our students, faculty, staff and alumni come together makes me very proud to be part of MSU Forestry. Our community in action gives me great confidence that MSU Forestry's excellence and high quality will endure.

Go Green!

Rich

RODNEY RUGG | BS '54

After graduation, Rodney was hired by the Michigan Department of Conservation and started in Newberry working on FIA plots, then was transferred to Onaway and the Black River State Forest working with Andy Braidwood. He then worked in the Alpena State Forest with Bob Borak, before eventually becoming the area forester for the Chippewa River State Forest in Paris, Michigan. He retired from a couple of positions in the Cadillac office in 1984. After retirement, he was the Osceola County Gypsy Moth Coordinator for a couple of years. After living in Reed City for 55 years, his son Raymond (BS '81, see update on page 5) moved him out to Eagar, Arizona last year. He turned 93 this spring.

FRED R KUESTER | BS '57

I have had interesting careers since retiring from the U.S. Forest Service. Since I passed the age of 80, I have been writing books. Foresters can be more or less literate when the stars are properly aligned. Titles are as follows: *Adam and Eve for Atheists*, which my mother regarded as a must read for anyone with scriptural concerns; *Railroad Thinking*, which has nothing to do with railroads but which my elderly sister, Arlene, highly recommends to all whose brain sometimes get off of the iron tracks; *Poems, Lyrics and Short Takes*, much of which has been set to professional music and which is widely acclaimed by several of my cousins; and everybody's favorite: *Slow Reindeer Kicking up Snow*, which is a children's book that I and many others who are familiar with the genre agree can be a sterling gift for children and for kind-hearted people who know children. These books are available online, from the publishers and at progressive bookstores.

BOB GOODMAN | BS '58

My present project involves gathering soils from a wide range of Nevada's playas, placing them in 10 gallon fish tanks, adding water, then photographing the life forms that appear from these seemingly lifeless landscapes. Last year's initial project from the Black Rock Desert playa produced two species of fairy shrimp, water fleas, round worms and a variety of algae. This year's soils are from central Nevada, and far eastern Nevada, in addition to those from the Black Rock in northern Nevada.

STEVE R PLEVEL | BS '60

As are many people, we are staying pretty close to home. Go out for groceries, prescriptions and a few face-to-face doctor visits. I sneak to the local hardware

store when I don't have the stuff I need for a project. My daughter and I have tried for one motorcycle ride a week, usually about 200 miles – ideal PPE and social distancing. Our only grandchild, a young woman, is a Deputy Sheriff and lives in a 5th wheel trailer about two hours away. Needless to say, her father and I are her fix-it team.

As far as professionally, I try to keep up on forest and wildfire management through the web, publications and attending the local SAF meetings. I haven't done much consulting for the last two years. I do get to see Mike and Drew Moore when they are in Tucson during the winter. It is hard to believe that we have lived in Tucson since 1974; two thirds of my Forest Service career and all my retirement have been here! We must like the place. It may have something to do with children and grandchild being close.

BOB WESTFALL | BS '67, PHD '72

I have been a biostatistician with the U.S.F.S. Pacific Southwest Research Station for the past 35 years. My long-time colleague, Connie Millar, and I have spent our summers in the Eastern Sierra and Great Basin studying high-elevation five-needle pines (mainly limber and whitebark), rock glaciers and the American pika. Together, we have about 20 publications; I have about 10 more with others, plus a book chapter on establishing seed zones. Connie and I and our technician, Diane Delany, will be retiring (in name only!) at the end of this year.

On a personal level, my wife of 51 years, Sandy, died of colon cancer last November. She was director of Campus Recreation at UC Davis and retired in 2005. She was also an MSU grad, with a Bachelor's in social work and Master's in student personnel administration. Though we are childless, we have nieces and nephews on both sides of the family devoted to us (though living out-of-state).

RANDY SWICK | BS '77, MS '79

I retired from the U.S. Forest Service in 2015 after 37 years serving on nine different National Forests in five different regions. Most of my career was spent serving as a District Ranger (nearly 24 years) in the west, including my last three years as the Area Manager for the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. My wife Sandra and I retired back to Coeur d'Alene, ID. We are blessed to have three daughters, two son-in-laws and four grandchildren, scattered from Florida to Cambodia.

Our youngest serves as a missionary and we have been blessed to lead a couple mission teams to support her work in Cambodia. I also assist our church's senior help program and get called back periodically by the Forest Service for large fire support. In my spare time, I do a little backyard forestry on a couple woodlots my wife inherited. My best to my peers and those I was blessed to advise while in grad school.

RAYMOND RUGG | BS '81

After I graduated in '81, I worked a couple of seasonal forestry jobs, then joined the Peace Corps. I served in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia. After a seasonal position as a Forest Pest Scout for MI DNR, I was hired by the Southern Forest Research Station, Southern Forest Survey, working on FIA plots in Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee and Alabama. I then transferred to the Apache-Sitgreaves NF in Arizona where I worked several positions on the Alpine and Springerville RD's. I retired at the end of 2017 after 32 years. I had the opportunity to work in Forestry in 10 states and two states in a foreign country. I learned a lot of tree species.

CHRISTOPHER GIBBONS | BS '03

I'm happy to say that I've worked in the forestry industry since graduating in 2003. I started out in the Michigan Department of Agriculture, then went on to the Rainforest Alliance, and finally found my passion in FSC Chain-of-Custody certification consulting.

In September, I'm looking forward to celebrating my company's 10th anniversary. I started American Green Consulting Group a decade ago, with the goal of bringing together some of the best FSC consultants to create the most efficient path to FSC certification. I'm thankful to celebrate this milestone with such a great team.

Also in September, my wife Beth and I will celebrate the first birthday of our son Ciarán. We live in view of the Rocky Mountains in Windsor, CO.



Before I get into the update, I would like to send out a huge thank you to the MSU Forestry Alumni Association past president, Lee Mueller! Over the last few years, Lee helped guide and rejuvenate our Alumni Association and has done so with excellence and professionalism. I am profoundly grateful for Lee's work and look forward to building upon the great foundation he helped build. Lee continues to serve on the FAA board and is a critical part of the team. Thanks Lee!

To say the least, the last few months have been challenging. Personally, I have gone on a work hiatus to stay home with my family; my little ones 2 and 4 years old. I cannot say that it has been all bad, pushing my work schedule off and playing hooky with the kids. But after each executive order comes in, my summer schedule becomes increasingly hectic and less clear on what will actually get accomplished. The first couple weeks of the quarantine, I admit, were terribly difficult. My typical schedule has weeks, if not months of planned work. Now we are barely able to keep up with the hour-by-hour information that seems to continually change around Covid-19.

One thing I have learned since becoming a business owner and a new parent, is that one MUST adapt to thrive. I am adapting to changing timber market conditions, client demands or my field work getting cut short in order to tend to my youngest and her fever. Part of that is just life but, the last few months have been exceptionally difficult for all of us.

The adaptive skills I, and I am sure you have as well, have witnessed over the last few months is amazing. Once you look beyond the doom-and-gloom of the crisis, you begin to see how graceful folks can be and how great leaders can truly shine. In my eyes, the Forestry Department has done an exceptional job keeping up with a rapidly changing environment. The Department has worked with students to complete required fieldwork while keeping safety an utmost priority as well as built upon existing infrastructure to enhance on-line learning. The forward-thinking attitude of the Department has put its current and future students in a great position to excel and stand apart from the crowd. I am extremely excited to see what the future holds for the Forestry Department here at MSU.

The long-term impacts of the current crisis, known and unknown, will continue to shape our lives for years to come. For now, business will slowly resume as it can and my appreciation for this family of Foresters will carry on well past the grasp of the crisis.

Your friend in conservation,

Jason Darling, BS 2008
President, MSU Forestry Alumni Association
Owner – Darling Forestry, LLC
Jason@DarlingForestry.com

AN INITIAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Beginning on April 10, the department began hosting a weekly virtual forestry happy hour where students, staff and faculty could attend to share any concerns, frustrations, or just to talk in general. We will always do everything within our power to listen to and support our forestry community, no matter how challenging the circumstances. For example, with the pivot to online teaching, a majority of faculty members are taking intensive online workshops focused on effective online teaching. Here are some students' responses from when we checked in with them in April.

One of my classes had a lab that we were doing projects for and the first week we were able to go in and get our projects and either take them home or finish them quickly in the lab, if possible. Now we can no longer do that. If we can't finish the projects at home we have to switch to writing a paper for the project points.



I know for sure that I will be more particular on what classes I take online. There are just some topics I need to be in person for in order to ask questions and have that professor student relationship where they know when I'm confused and not asking questions.

The hardest part has been technology. I don't have great internet at my place and it crashed during an exam. I had to get my teacher to extend my time for the exam because by the time my internet came back, the time slot was over. Trying to keep up with all the assignments and work all on the computer has turned into a balancing act of screen time spread throughout the day because of my migraines, but I am thankful I have the ability to work from home still with my job.



One of my classes was an easy transition but two of them have been more difficult. One didn't have zoom calls at the start and was just turn in the assignment at the end of the week and post on this online meeting spot as attendance points. The other changed the length of the lecture to an hour instead of the hour and twenty minutes it was originally. The zoom calls can be rushed to get through all the material and that has made it more difficult.

This experience has taught me that I really value the in-person classroom. Having that interaction with other students and professors is a huge part of the college experience, and I miss having that. I've learned to respond instead of react to situations I can't control and to focus on one day at a time instead of weeks/months at a time.

AN INITIAL GRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

These are scary times to be living in. This change in plans and change in operations has affected the security of my summer research. I was waiting on a specific meeting that I needed to have in order to conduct summer research, and that meeting has been postponed to a later, unknown, date.



A big thing that I am thinking of utilizing are the online mental health resources that the university and various programs that I am in have offered.

When we made the switch to online classes, two of my three classes went really smoothly. The professors discussed with the class what was best for us to continue the semester and a lot of our end of semester projects were altered to accommodate not only being home, but also reduced to help with added pressures.

One class has not gone so smoothly and I definitely feel the overwhelming weight of that class with projects, papers and work that still needs to be done. The biggest obstacle for me has definitely been dealing with my anxiety. As soon as we went to online classes I made the decision to return home to be with family because I knew that it would get bad and that my anxiety would be impossible to handle alone. And even being home it has been tough.



FORESTRY FACULTY ENSURED FIELD STUDIES COURSE CONTINUED DESPITE LIMITATIONS



David Rothstein



Dave MacFarlane

Professors David Rothstein and Dave MacFarlane took extra measures to ensure students were able to complete the Forestry Field Studies course this summer during the governor's "stay home, stay safe" order.

Since a field-based course would have been a challenge to implement through solely online modules, Rothstein and MacFarlane had to get creative. Field kits were mailed to students, containing DBH tape, cruz-all, measuring tape, chaining pins, a soil pH test kit, Don Dickmann's Forest Communities of Michigan book and a wildflower field guide.

Instructions were delivered via D2L, Desire 2 Learn, which is a cloud-based online learning management system available to all MSU students and faculty. The video conferencing system Zoom was also utilized for meetings, presentations, online lectures and discussions.

One student found the online portions "surprisingly very effective" and shared that both Rothstein and MacFarlane were available and prompt to respond to questions. Though understandably disappointed to not be able to experience the field tour physically, students did feel they were able to learn key points and expand on their existing knowledge of ecological interpretation.

Students selected a local forest stand for their individual project that they were able to access easily and safely. Students enjoyed this project, with one commenting, "I found it quite fun collecting and analyzing my own data for a forest of my choosing."

Another was able to recruit family members as assistants as she navigated and collected samples for analysis.

Since students were on their own in their local forests, one student mentioned, "going out on my own and collecting the data we needed I feel was a great simulation of a project that you would work on in your career as a professional forester."

One issue with this method of instruction one student pointed out, was the sheer volume of work that varied week by week. One week alone included creating maps, 20 plot points, and collecting and analyzing 20 soil samples, among many other things. It was a challenge analyzing all of the samples on their own, when perhaps they would have been able to collect and analyze samples as a group with an in-person class.

Though the course was a success and students did seem to enjoy it, some level of disappointment was inevitable. One student shared, "the forestry community is that, a community and over the course of our undergraduate career we have all become close and everybody was looking forward to not only the aspect of learning but the social aspect of this course, one last MSU forestry hoorah, and unfortunately we were unable to have that experience."

In a time filled with great uncertainty, providing the best student experience remains MSU Forestry's number one priority. We will continue to work on ways to make the best of this situation and ensure the best possible education for future spartan alumni.

GENEROUS GIFT FROM DAVID & DELORES BAUMGARTNER



The Baumgartner Brothers' (Bud, Dick and David) Professional Forester Development Fund is intended to encourage Forestry students to attend professional forestry meetings such as the National and/or Michigan Society of American Foresters (SAF) or others that are relevant to applied forestry in Michigan, which will help the students achieve their educational and professional goals. Up to \$500 per year can be awarded.

David and Delores Baumgartner's goal is to support MSU forestry students and promote their professional development through attendance to forestry meetings such as SAF, while memorializing the three Baumgartner brothers who studied forestry at MSU.

Over almost a twenty-two year period, there was at least one of the Baumgartner brothers studying forestry at MSU.

CATLIN, MWANGI & LEEFERS REUNION



Carter Catlin Jr. (PhD 1992), Alma Catlin, Becky Leefers, Larry Leefers (MS 1978, PhD 1981) and Albert Mwangi (PhD 1992) are pictured here at the Karen Blixen Museum (former home of *Out of*

Africa author) in Nairobi in July 2019. Dr. Catlin is the Associate Dean for Research, College of Agriculture at Tennessee State University, and Dr. Mwangi is a Senior Lecturer, Department of Natural Resources at Katarina University (north of Nairobi). Albert and Carter were graduate students and friends; this was their first reunion since graduating. Both studied forest economics with Dr. Leefers. The couples, including Albert's wife Margaret, toured sites in Nairobi as part of the Catlins' and Leefers' Kenya-Tanzania-Zanzibar trip. The trip included three stops in Nairobi, safaris to Masai Mara, Serengeti, Ngorongoro, and Amboseli national parks and visits to various natural areas in Zanzibar. The Catlins and Leefers reunited in Nashville before the 2019 SAF National Convention.



KJ KETTLER

KJ Kettler, Forester and Manager of the W.K. Kellogg Experimental Forest, has a unique perspective for this chaotic time and offered some of his experiences and reflections in April.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST OBSTACLE SWITCHING TO REMOTE WORKING OR SOCIAL DISTANCING?

A: Since I live on the property, I have continued to report to my office which is about 100 feet east of my home...the commute is horrible! I have not really had much of an obstacle regarding remote work personally.

Social distancing has been a challenge. Closing the parking lot and a portion of the forest to mitigate the potential of exposure to, from and among the public has been the biggest challenge. Many people were not taking the situation seriously, and I still have folks throughout the week who disregard signs/posted areas. People are getting stir crazy and a nice sunny day brings a lot of frustrated people looking for a place to recreate and some are not always as responsible as they should be. Many other non-profits have closed their trails completely and the City of Kalamazoo has just closed all parks which puts more load on those locations still allowing some form of recreation. For the most part, people are being responsible now and have become more responsible as the situation worsened. Another challenge is not being able to easily obtain materials to complete planned projects. There are a lot of non-essential operations and projects that could be completed if I could run to the hardware store as we normally would. So, making do with what we have on site has been a challenge.

“ I HAVE HAD TO UNDERTAKE THE RESPONSIBILITIES MY STAFF WOULD NORMALLY HANDLE FOR THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS AND IT HAS FOSTERED A DEEPER APPRECIATION FOR ALL THAT THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THIS FACILITY. ”

HOW HAS THIS CHANGED THE WAY YOU WORK?

A: I am currently the only person working at Kellogg Forest and the minimum basic operations are a lot to undertake at a facility like this for one staff member. We have had a lot of rain/storms recently which has made outdoor responsibilities challenging. Next week, Mickey Trimner will be reporting to work so we can adequately meet those basic minimum operations as spring progresses and general landscaping, maintenance needs, etc. increase. It will also enable us to safely operate equipment and chainsaws which is something that was usually not possible during the past few weeks unless my wife was available to be there in case an incident did occur.

DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE STILL ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY WORK WITH FACULTY AND STUDENTS REMOTELY?

A: With the necessary restrictions placed on research/educational programming by the university, I have not had a real need to work with faculty or students during this short period of time. Being at an outlying property, I typically work with students and faculty remotely on a regular basis, so not much has changed in that regard. No funny/inappropriate Zoom stories to report at this time!

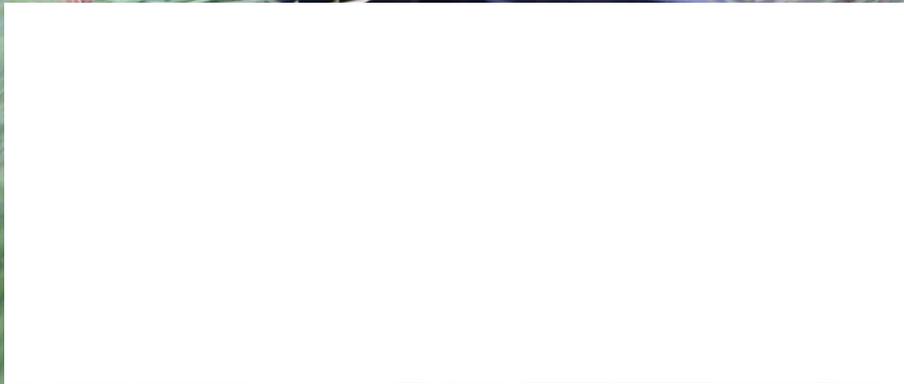
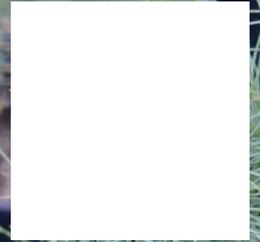
DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER VALUABLE INSIGHTS OR EXPERIENCES YOU COULD SHARE?

A: Something like this really puts everything into perspective and makes you appreciate the lives we are able to lead in this country and how little we actually need. My upbringing and experiences throughout life have always made me recognize the importance of team work and respect that everyone brings something of value to the situation. I have had to undertake the responsibilities my staff would normally handle for the past couple of weeks and it has fostered a deeper appreciation for all that they contribute to this facility.

Lastly...make sure you always have a month supply of beer or your choice vice on hand!



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