

CATS Membership Meeting via Zoom, September 27, 2023, 9:30-11:00 am

Attendance: 63

Speaker: Erica Smithwick, Distinguished Professor of Geography at Pennsylvania State University, is a landscape and ecosystem ecologist and Director of the Earth and Environmental Systems Institute (EESI) at Penn State who has received research awards from the NSF, NASA, DOE, NPS, the USGS (and more) for her work on inter/trans-disciplinary teamwork to address complex environmental challenges.

Professor Smithwick studies the science of forest succession and management practices. She is also concerned about translating science into action. Without making both intellectual and emotional sense to the people who will ultimately carry out and benefit from the work, the data do little good. In her work with the Menominee in Wisconsin, approximately 95 percent of the land is presently managed for timber. The area is ecologically diverse, as a “tension zone,” where two regions meet (i.e., the uppermost part of a southern zone and the southernmost part of a northern zone). The Menominee have made a living from timber for much of their recent history using ecologically sustainable practices. But will those practices continue to be sustainable into the future as the climate changes?

Using sophisticated modelling software fueled by immense amounts of data, Professor Smithwick and her team can simulate how the forests of this area would react under dozens of scenarios by changing various factors. They can grow or kill different species of tree under different climate conditions and various forestry practices. But how do their modelling results make sense to a population who has had its own long-term successful practices?

By using virtual reality to visually simulate how their data actually looks to forest managers, Professor Smithwick’s data comes alive. Students of Professor Smithwick have conducted studies demonstrating that visualization is, indeed, an enhanced learning tool. The VR tool, crucially, also incorporates Menominee values and traditions, vastly increasing its relevancy for the users. Relevancy, coupled with the power to manipulate custom scenarios using enormous data sets, increases users’ options and control; this enables the ability and motivation to formulate plans for the future. As Professor Smithwick says, she and her team are learning to lead through human-focused values.

Business Meeting:

***The motion was made, seconded and passed to approve the minutes from the July membership meeting.**

President’s Announcements: JoAnn Dalley

JoAnn reminded the membership to collect and deliver acorns to the Virginia Department of Forestry by October 16.

JoAnn commented on how interesting the American Chestnut walk guided by Tom Wild at Lesesne Park had been. She urged members who have not been there to contact her for directions to the park.

She announced that an *ad hoc* group is forming to study the issue of herbicide application training. This group will convene after the current training class ends. Any member interested in participating should contact JoAnn.

At the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont, the Shanks Branch restoration project has begun. JoAnn noted that anyone interested in this project should consult the Charlottesville City website. She added that CATS has already replanted many native specimens taken from the area of the project.

Incoming President's Report: Gregg Korbon

Gregg announced that the recording secretary and president elect positions are open and asked people to consider volunteering.

He reported that his new project involving having elementary school students plant and care for trees under the supervision of Tree Stewards (and later, high school aged junior tree stewards) has been greeted enthusiastically by the staff and administration at Tandem Friends School.

Gregg and other volunteers plan to do some stump grinding with rented equipment at VDoF. He asked for more volunteers to help.

Past President's Report: Robin Hanes

Robin reminded members that she and Jake VanYahres are featured in a film about the Earlysville Oak playing at UVA through November. One can also view it through a link that will be provided in the October membership email blast.

She announced that there will be a work day at the CATS Grove on September 30.

Treasurer's Report: JoAnn Dalley for Michelle Cormier

Any member interested in CATS's current financial situation should contact JoAnn and request copies of the most recent financial reports provided to the Board by the Treasurer.

Projects Committee: Kathy Nepote

Kathy reported that Allen Ingling passed the test to become a certified pesticide applicator in Virginia. At this time, only Allen is allowed to actually handle pesticides/herbicides; no other CATS member may do so on public land.

The work day at Walnut Creek went very well. 12 CATS volunteers and 20-some UVA forestry club members showed up.

Similarly, Kathy reported that the Day of Caring event at VDoF on September 20 was very successful.

Projects while the training class is in session are fewer because of Saturday class commitments, but some of the opportunities coming up include:

October 15th at Northeast Park

October 19th at Barracks Road

October 28th at Jackson Burley elementary school

October 27 and 28 tree walks at Darden Towe

Kathy reminded everyone that projects are added, cancelled, and rescheduled frequently so stay tuned to TIF.

Education Committee: Barbara Monfort

Barbara reported that the 2023 training class is at its halfway point and going well. The committee will soon review each trainee's status to make sure they are staying current.

The tree ID class scheduled for last Saturday has been rescheduled to the 30th at VDoF.

Classes to be offered in November include planting and winter invasives.

Tree walks at Phil Stokes' property are happening September 29 and 30.

Emily's fall Tree ID walk is scheduled for September 21.

Emily's program training new tree walk leaders has been very successful. She wants to now line up some new walks with the new walk leaders.

The Notable Trees project has met with the Tree Measurement people. They plan to develop training workshops.

As Gregg reported, Tandem is very enthusiastic about incorporating his tree project into their science curriculum.

Projects is holding meetings at different times in an effort to see what works for people so that there can be more opportunities for involvement.

Communications Committee: Mary Spear

Mary reported that Penny has taken over membership coordination from Libby. Mary thanked Libby for all of her years of work.

The annual tee-shirt survey will be sent soon.

Anne Benham is considering having an open house at the CATS library to introduce it to members who are not aware of it currently.

Mary is recruiting for someone to take over the membership email blast starting at the beginning of 2024. She thanked Helen for doing it temporarily, and for doing a wonderful job.

The CATS Facebook page has 934 followers; Eventbrite has 171; and Instagram has 322. The CATS email list is now approximately 1,400.

Many community partners are publicizing the CATS fall tree sale.

Tree Commission Report: Jean Umiker-Sebeok

Jean reported that the Tree Commission has submitted its final recommendations to the City Council Code Development Committee. The Tree Commission is urging Charlottesville to consider trees as essential infrastructure.

Members may read Jean's entire report by asking JoAnn to forward it.

Continuing and additional business:

JoAnn mentioned that *Outside* magazine named Charlottesville as one of the 15 happiest places to live!

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Brill