

HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND ENVIRONMENTAL
RESOURCES AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY, 1979-2008

I. INTRODUCTION

This history of the Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources¹ (henceforth "Department") begins where Dr. William D. (Ted) Miller's history from 1929 to 1979 leaves off². Although there is necessarily some overlap, the two histories deal with periods that are not only different in time but also vastly different in almost every influence, both internal and external, on the Department. The first 50 years of the Department's growth reflect the rise of forestry in the South and the development of close working relationships between public and private forestry on the one hand and universities on the other. In the same way, the most recent 25 years show the effect of the dramatic changes that took place during that time in public attitudes toward forestry, in efforts to make forestry a more diversified profession, and in sweeping changes in the structure and operation of both public and private forestry in the South and nation.

The story must, unfortunately, begin on a sad note with the tragic death during Thanksgiving 1979 of the Department's head, Dr. John W. "Bill" Johnson. His death occurred as the result of a heart attack suffered during a cross-country event in which he was running. Dean of the School of Forest Resources³, the University home of the Department, Eric L. Ellwood immediately appointed Arthur W. Cooper, the Assistant Department Head, as Johnson's successor. The suddenness of this event is underscored by the fact that students and faculty left for Thanksgiving vacation with Johnson as Department head and returned on the following Monday to find Johnson's funeral over and Cooper as head. Johnson and Cooper had very different backgrounds. Johnson was a professional silviculturist who had worked as an industrial forester and had strong ties to many southern forest industries. Cooper, on the other hand, was a trained ecologist who had strong ties with North

¹ In 1980, the Department was the Department of Forestry. It retained that name until 2004 when its name was changed to the Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources to reflect its rapidly-evolving broader mission. The term Department used in this history refers either to Forestry or Forestry and Environmental Resources depending on the time context of the discussion.

² Dr. Miller's history appears as a chapter entitled "Department of Forestry (1929-1979)" in "A History of the School of Forest Resources 1929-1979" published at the time of the School's 50th anniversary in 1979.

³ The University "home" of the Department of Forestry has had 3 different names between 1980 and the present. In 1979-80 it was the School of Forest Resources. In 1987, as a result of a wholesale change of names throughout the University instituted by Chancellor Bruce Poulton, the name was changed to College of Forest Resources. During the 2002-2003 academic year the name was changed to College of Natural Resources to reflect the unit's changing mission. Throughout this history the name used is that in effect when the matter under discussion occurred.

Carolina's nascent environmental community, and had also served from mid-1971 to mid-1976 in a political job as Assistant Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Economic Resources. Whether these differences in background had any effect on the subsequent history of the Department is an open question. It can reasonably be argued, however, that external events such as the rise of public dissatisfaction with forestry and the dramatic restructuring of the southern forest industry were of such magnitude that they would have overridden any differences that might have existed in the backgrounds of the two men.

The history of the Department's most recent 25 years begins with an established Department with many strengths, some unique. Its undergraduate program had, since its inception, turned out students with excellent training in field forestry including a summer of required field training at summer camp. The graduate program was firmly established and growing. One of the Department's truly unique features in 1979, its Industry-University Research Cooperatives, with units in tree improvement, hardwood genetics and management, forest nutrition, and forest engineering, were without equal in any U. S. forestry school. A number of long-standing, best-known and best-loved faculty, including Ralph C. Bryant, John W. Duffield, Joseph O. Lammi, T. Ewald Maki, and Richard J. Preston (who had returned to teaching after stepping down as Dean) had recently retired. Finally, the Department had just undergone a period of explosive growth in undergraduate enrollment in the mid-1970s that reflected a rapidly rising national interest in natural resource management programs. This growth had been acknowledged by the University with added academic positions that, together with positions vacated by the recent retirements, were used to hire several faculty, including Art Cooper (who transferred from the Department of Botany following his return from State government), Douglas J. Frederick, James W. Gregory, Awatif E. Hassan, Bill Johnson, Jan G. Laarman, and Richard A. Lancia. The picture is, then, one of a Department with established strengths and traditions but with many new faces replacing old, familiar ones.

In some ways, the name of the Department and the larger unit within which it existed then and now is a microcosmic example of the changes that took place in forestry education during the last quarter of the 20th century. As Miller pointed out in his history of the first 50 years of the forestry program at NC State, the program began in 1929 as the Department of Forestry in the School of Agriculture. In 1931 the program became the Division of Forestry and remained so until 1950 when it became the School of Forestry. At that time the forestry and wood and paper products programs were, for the first time, separately identified with the forestry program becoming the Forest Management curriculum and later the Department of Forest Management. To reflect the growing range of interests in the School in 1968 it was renamed the School of Forest Resources with the forestry program renamed the Department of Forestry. This remained the name of the department until 2004 when, several years after the College changed its name to College of Natural Resources, the department acknowledged the

increasing breadth of its programs and faculty by renaming itself as the Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources. These names accurately reflect the events of the last 30 years that have seen forestry programs nationally become the homes for increasingly broad programs integrating forestry with other related natural resource disciplines.

VERSION 1.0