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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14

Offered January 8, 2014

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Commending the Virginia Department of Forestry on 100 years of service to the Commonwealth.

Patron—Edmunds

WHEREAS, in 1914, the Virginia General Assembly created the Office of the State Forester, under the State Geological Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Office's original charge was to " . . . ascertain the best methods of reforestation cut-over and denuded lands, foresting waste land, preventing the destruction of forests by fire, the administering of forests on forestry principles, the instruction and encouragement of private owners in preserving and growing timber for commercial and manufacturing purposes, and the general conservation of forest tracts around the headwaters on the watersheds of all water courses of the state"; and

WHEREAS, on March 1, 1915, the Geological Commission officially appointed Chapin Jones as the first State Forester; and

WHEREAS, from March 1 through the fall, Chapin Jones was the one and only member of the Virginia Forest Service. Through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service and two private companies, several "patrolmen and watchmen" were hired in the fall to warn residents of Smyth, Grayson, and Washington Counties of fire danger and to fight all fires they found; and

WHEREAS, the first tree nursery was established in December 1916, with the first seed sown in spring 1917. Loblolly pine, shortleaf pine, white pine, and Norway spruce were the first species grown, with an inventory of 20,000 one-year seedlings; and

WHEREAS, today, the two Department of Forestry (DOF) nurseries grow nearly 50 species of trees and sell 24 million seedlings annually; and

WHEREAS, in the last 10 years, Department of Forestry nurseries have produced approximately 293 million tree seedlings, providing enough trees to plant more than one-half million acres of forests for the future; and

WHEREAS, the first fire tower was constructed on Little Stone Mountain near Big Stone Gap in 1917; that year, 1,460 forest fires burned 305,000 acres in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the number one cause of fire that year was the same as it is today—burning of brush; and

WHEREAS, from 1917 to the present, DOF has battled more than 140,000 wildfires that together have burned more than 3.4 million acres of land (13 percent of the state's land base); and

WHEREAS, in 1917, along with the tracking of fires, DOF began providing assistance to landowners; that year, 52 landowners with an average holding of 200 acres received assistance. Today, DOF provides assistance to over 5,000 landowners; and

WHEREAS, the first state forest, the Gallion State Forest (now Prince Edward/Gallion State Forest) was acquired under the will of the late Emmett D. Gallion in 1919. The current state forest system now numbers 23, totaling 67,920 acres across the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, in the 1960s, the forest industry and the Department of Forestry recognized that harvesting of forests was exceeding the rate of replenishment of the Commonwealth's new forests. As a result, the forest products industry agreed to a self-imposed tax and the legislature agreed to match every dollar of forest products tax collected with a 1:1 match from the Commonwealth's general fund; and

WHEREAS, the combination of industry tax and general funds would become the source for the Reforestation of Timberlands (RT) program; and

WHEREAS, the RT program became the earliest state-sponsored private landowner incentive program to encourage the reforestation of commercial forest seedlings. Since the first incentive payments to private landowners, the Department of Forestry has provided over \$45 million in incentives to landowners, covering more than 1.5 million acres of land; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Forestry developed its initial set of Best Management Practices for water quality in the 1970s and began its timber harvest inspection program in the mid-1980s. In FY13, Department of Forestry field personnel inspected 5,658 timber harvest sites on 233,714 acres; and

WHEREAS, in order to ensure there is a sufficient number of working forests to meet the needs of forest industry and the public, the Department of Forestry launched its Forestland Conservation Division in 2007. It now holds 90 conservation easements on 27,221 acres of forestland; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's forest resources generate an economic impact of more than \$17 billion each year in Virginia, plus 103,800 jobs and \$8.8 billion in value-added products; and

WHEREAS, annually, the Department of Forestry fights an average of 1,100 fires on approximately

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59 12,000 acres; the Department of Forestry's efforts protect more than 1,100 homes and structures worth a
60 total of \$121 million; and

61 WHEREAS, Virginia has 15.9 million acres of forest land or 62 percent in forest cover, of which
62 approximately 80 percent is owned and managed by private forest landowners; now, therefore, be it

63 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
64 commend the Virginia Department of Forestry on 100 years of service to the Commonwealth; and, be it

65 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution
66 for presentation to the State Forester as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation for the
67 Department of Forestry's effective stewardship of Virginia's forest resources by protecting and
68 developing healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians.