

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### THE NORTH CAROLINA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION AND NORTH CAROLINA FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA ASSOCIATION PARTNER TO CREATE NC'S FIRST FORESTRY COURSE WITH AN INDUSTRY-ALIGNED CREDENTIAL FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

*The new curriculum, available this fall, aims to foster the next generation of forest workers in NC*

**RALEIGH, NC (APRIL 25, 2024)** – The North Carolina Forestry Association (NCFA) has teamed up with the North Carolina Future Farmers of America Association (NC FFA) to create North Carolina's first-ever high school forestry course with an industry-aligned credential: AN53 Natural Resources II-Forestry. Both organizations have collaborated with ForestryWorks® to create the course, which will be implemented in high schools for the 2024-2025 school year.

In North Carolina, there is a steady need for skilled forestry professionals due to ongoing forest management needs, forest products manufacturing, and conservation efforts. However, recent statistics show us that the overall forest workforce in the U.S. is aging, with 59% of the total forestry and logging labor force between the ages of 35-64 and only 12% between the ages of 16-24 ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023](#)).

“When it comes to selecting a career path, students have many options before them,” said Jessica Ireland, Director of Education Programs, NCFA. “We know it’s important to foster interests at an early age, and many students do not know about forestry, the forest products industry, and the wide range of career pathways within the industry. We saw an opportunity to bring this education to the forefront.”

The labor data within the forestry industry tells us that we will soon need to create a new generation of skilled workers. The good news is the demand for these workers exists within a variety of areas from the forest industry to state and federal forestry agencies to municipalities, to consulting firms, to universities, and more.

“When the NCFA came to us with the idea to create a brand-new forestry course, we knew we had to get involved,” said Joshua Bledsoe, State Agricultural Education Leader and State FFA Advisor, North Carolina State University. “NC FFA is excited to partner with NCFA to support workforce development efforts through this course and credential. The future of our state’s workforce starts with our youth and giving them the tools they need to succeed.”

The course itself is one of the first of its kind, a product of direct input and feedback from various members of the NC forestry industry. “We strongly believe that [this course] will be of great value to students, setting the standard for how new courses will be approached and introduced into curriculums in the future,” said Bledsoe.

AN53 Natural Resources II-Forestry is a semester-long course that is available to high schools with an agricultural education program offering the Natural Resources pathway. The course includes a designated Forest Worker Credential that was approved by the NC Department of Public Instruction

earlier this year. The credential, issued to students who pass the exam with a 70% or higher, is recognized by the NC forest industry.

“I am honored to be among the first teachers to offer this forestry class in its pilot year,” said Heather Whitmire McNeely, Agriculture Teacher, Rosman High School. “It’s important to offer our students the full picture of the agriculture industry, and that includes forestry. I can’t wait to include this course in my curriculum and for my students to learn about a sustainable industry that is a huge contributor to their daily lives.”

The development and implementation of this course is funded through the U.S. Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration grant program, a State and Private Forestry competitive grant program that promotes collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes and furthers priorities identified in State Forest Action plans or equivalent restoration strategies.

To learn more about the course, visit our website: <https://www.ncforestry.org/forestry-course-and-credential>

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**ABOUT THE NORTH CAROLINA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION**

The North Carolina Forestry Association (NCFA) is a private, non-profit partnership of approximately 4,000 forest managers, landowners, mill operators, loggers, furniture manufacturers, educators, and others concerned about the long-term health and productivity of the state’s forest resources and the industries they support. Established in 1911, the NCFA is the state’s oldest forest conservation organization, with a mission to ensure healthy, productive, and sustainable forests. Learn more: [www.ncforestry.org](http://www.ncforestry.org)

**ABOUT THE NORTH CAROLINA FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA ASSOCIATION**

Future Farmers of America (FFA) is a dynamic youth organization that changes lives and prepares its members for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. FFA develops members’ potential and helps them discover their talent through hands-on experiences, which give members the tools to achieve real-world success.

The North Carolina FFA is a state association comprised of local chapters and functions within the constitution of the National FFA Organization, creating individual leadership structures, awards, programs, and competitions. North Carolina Agricultural Education and the North Carolina FFA Association work hand in hand to provide the very best experience for the agriculture students and teachers of North Carolina. Learn more: <https://ncffa.org/>

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