



## Private Lands Leadership Academy 2025

### MODULE 3 PRESENTER INFORMATION

#### **Nick Goforth, Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator**

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Nick Goforth began working for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission in 2023 as the Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator. His primary responsibilities are coordinating the revision and implementation of the Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan, the issuance and management of Arkansas's State Wildlife Grants, serving as the taxa lead for insects and other invertebrates, and consulting on and assisting with issues pertaining to the conservation and restoration of Arkansas's wildlife diversity and native habitats.

Nick received his Bachelor of Science degree in Ecology and Organismal Biology from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2012 and his Master of Science degree in Wildlife, Aquatic, and Wildlands Science and Management from Texas Tech University in 2015. The focus of his thesis work was researching the short-term impacts of large wildfires on bats in the Valles Caldera National Preserve, New Mexico. He then began working for the Arkansas Department of the Military at Camp Robinson in 2019 as the statewide environmental compliance inspector for a short period before transitioning to the Natural Resources Manager for Camp Robinson. In this role, he oversaw the natural resources, prescribed fire, and pest management programs.

#### **Jennifer Ogle, Herbarium Manager, University of Arkansas**

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Jennifer Ogle is a botanist serving as the collections manager of the University of Arkansas Herbarium and teaching botany courses in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Arkansas. She holds an M.S. in biology from the University of Arkansas and regularly conducts outreach to the university community and the public on the conservation of native plants and their habitats, invasive plant species issues, and the importance of using genetically appropriate native plants for habitat restoration. Ms. Ogle is co-editor of the 2013 publication *Atlas of the Vascular Plants of Arkansas* and co-author of the 2020 field guide *Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines of Arkansas*. She has served on the board of the Arkansas Native Plant Society for the past 11 years and is a partner of the Arkansas Native Seed Program.



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#### **Austin Klais, Conservation Delivery Coordinator, Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture**

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Austin serves as the West Gulf Coastal Plain and Ouachita Delivery Coordinator for the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture. He primarily works with partner staff to deliver our \$5.9 million dollar RCPP project in Arkansas and Louisiana. Austin earned a BS in Wildlife & Fisheries Management from Arkansas Tech University with several technician opportunities along the way including work with Ouachita streams, invasive species, and prairies. Austin brings experience in forestry, wetland, and upland conservation with partners across Arkansas and Louisiana.

He began his professional career as a private consultant with FTN Associates working with wetlands, water quality, and T&E species. He then became a Farm Bill Biologist with Quail Forever in 2017 based in southeast Arkansas until he moved to Monroe in 2020 as a Coordinating Wildlife Biologist. Through his work with PFQF, he gained 5 1/2 years of experience with conservation delivery through USDA Farm Bill programs. He also helped facilitate the Morehouse Family Forest Initiative, a 4-year NFWF project which broke new ground and led the way for our current "Open Pine Restoration" RCPP project. He loves to work with partners to facilitate landscape scale ecosystem restoration for priority species, prescribed burns, and outdoors education to help people connect with the habitats that wildlife depend on. Austin currently resides in North Louisiana with his wife and two boys.

#### **Jeff Powelson, Conservation Delivery Coordinator, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture**

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Jeff Powelson has been the Conservation Delivery Coordinator for the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture with the American Bird Conservancy. For the past two years and works over a 8 state region. Jeff is originally from the show-me state of Missouri, where he spent 27 years with the Missouri Department of Conservation, with 5 years as a wildlife biologist and the remaining 22 years as a Private Land Conservationist in northwest Missouri. Prior to ABC he worked one year for Stantec Consulting as their ecosystem restoration ecologist, working across the Great Plains region on native vegetation establishment and management. Jeff holds a BS from the University of Missouri – Columbia. He has worked on multiple bird and mammal species projects throughout his career including: bobwhite quail, greater prairie chicken, rough grouse, least terns, song birds, brown headed nuthatch, wild turkey, elk restoration and a 5 year detailed white tailed deer project. As a PLC, he provided natural resource technical advice to private landowners and communities thru community conservation efforts that provided long term benefits to soil, water, fish, forest, wildlife, and natural communities. He has experience with native vegetation both prairie and woodland and worked with various projects such as: prairie chicken re-introduction, elk restoration, white tailed deer survival, feral hog, and other high profile resource projects. Jeff leaves a legacy in the St. Joseph community by helping establish a 26-acre prairie on the Missouri Western State University campus. Jeff loves the outdoors in all aspects from camping and hiking with family, trapping, archery elk hunting, wildlife photography and has a life goal of visiting all the National Parks!



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#### **Dr. Victor L. “Vic” Ford**

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Dr. Ford was born in Johnson City, Tennessee. His parents grew up in the Great Depression on subsistence farms with tobacco being the major cash crop. He was shaped by their values of service to God and man, hard work, frugality, family, and conservation. Hunting and fishing were a way of life and addition to the dinner table. He went into forestry to get away from hay, cows, and tobacco which was the way to make spending money. Working nights in a factory convinced him that working for one of the several factories of the area was not a career he wanted to follow. Science, Scouting, and sports were the loves of his youth which developed into ham radio, coaching, and fly fishing in college. Vic graduated in 1977 with a Bachelor of Forestry – Natural Resource Management Option from the University of Tennessee, in 1978 with a Master of Science from the University of Tennessee, and in 1982 Doctor of Philosophy in Forestry and Forest Products from Virginia Tech.

Dr. Ford started his professional career for the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service at the Southwest Research and Extension Center in 1983. He was the first faculty hired at the new center. His responsibilities were in marketing and regeneration education for landowners but developed into several other areas such as forest taxes, microcomputers, econometric models, Shiitake production, allelopathy, silvopastures, and forest health.

Dr. Ford started working for Westvaco in 1988 as a Scientist in competition control, soils, water, and land classification. Spending ten years in western Kentucky, southern Illinois, the Bootheel of Missouri, and western Tennessee allowed him to develop skills in GIS as an early adopter to find analyzed spatial data to assist in research and operational recommendations. Opportunity was given to Dr. Ford to transfer to West Virginia in 1998 and continue work started in the previous position as a Senior Research Scientist. This position allowed him to lead the Westvaco research effort in site preparation, land classification, and hardwood management. He eventually took over administrative responsibility of both research centers in Appomattox, VA and Rupert, WV. In 2004, Dr. Ford took a transfer to Alabama to work for MeadWestvaco as a Senior Principal Researcher. His work focused on pine management including nutrition and managing a loblolly pine seed orchard near Dawson, GA and a sand pine seed orchard near Buena Vista, GA. In 2008, Vic accepted the position of Director at the University of Arkansas Southwest Research and Extension Center. The areas of research were beef cattle, horticulture, plant pathology, and forestry. He led a team of scientist and support staff in research and education missions. On the side, Dr. Ford served as a Wetlands Consultant for several projects. In 2016, Dr. Ford was assigned to be the Associate Director and later Associate Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. Dr. Ford has over 80 publications and presentations and is a wetlands consultant. He is in demand for presentations on silviculture, mushrooms, ethics in forestry, forest health, and the role of policy in agriculture.

Dr. Ford has been active in the Society of American Foresters for over 40 years with service locally and nationally and served three years on the Board of Directors (2022-2024). He has been awarded Educator of the Year and Distinguished Service Award by the Ouachita Society of American Foresters. He has been recognized nationally by being named Fellow in 2014. He was awarded the Gifford Pinchot Medal in 2023 for distinguished service to the practice of forestry and to the Society of American Foresters. This is the highest honor the Society gives to its members and only about 35 members have been awarded this honor.



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Dr. Ford and his wife, Cindy, share five children and six grandchildren. They enjoy church activities, sports, traveling, music, and cooking. Vic enjoys hunting and fishing, especially fly fishing and is an Amateur radio operator. He is also a Justice of the Peace for the Hempstead County Quorum Court.

#### **Ryan Parker, Arkansas State Coordinator, Quail Forever**

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Ryan Parker started his work with Quail Forever in Arkansas as a Grasslands Coordinating Wildlife Biologist in July 2020 and now as the Arkansas State Coordinator since May 2023, both in collaboration with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Prior to his roles in Arkansas, Ryan worked as a Private Lands Wildlife Biologist at Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in Colorado from October 2018 to June 2020, also in partnership with the USDA. Ryan has also worked as a Wildlife Technician with the U.S. Forest Service on the Thunder Basin National Grassland in Wyoming from May 2014 to June 2018. Educational qualifications include a Masters degree in Biology with a focus on Short-grass prairie wildlife ecology from the University of Colorado Denver, earned in 2019, and a dual Bachelor's degree in Wildlife & Fisheries Biology & Management and Environment & Natural Resources from the University of Wyoming, completed in 2015. Ryan has dedicated his early career to helping private landowners improve ecological function on their property for plants and wildlife while promoting a 'working lands' landscape, and helping fellow early-career biologists to achieve private lands success.

#### **Theo Witsell, Co-Founder and Chief Conservation Officer, Southeastern Grasslands Initiative**

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Theo Witsell works to explore our native grasslands and gathers and synthesizes data on their ecological and historical significance, providing scientific direction and ecological context for the program. He is regarded as one of the most experienced field botanists in the Southeast, and he has some of the sharpest eyes in the business. Theo has worked as senior botanist and ecologist for the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission since 2000 and in 2013 was invited to serve as a research associate with BRIT. He publishes regularly and has authored or co-authored more than 30 scientific publications and book chapters, including the description of new species. In addition to his scientific expertise, Theo is intimately familiar with practical on-the-ground management of natural areas and conservation strategies and brings unique expertise in this area.