

# ‘Leave It Better Than

## Chuck Daniels Reflects on What Landownership Means to Him


By Amanda Murphy,  
director of communications

I’ve known Chuck since I started working with the NCFA back in September 2020. I met him early on because he is a member who shows up, offers to volunteer, and carries things when your hands are full. Since then, if there is an NCFA event — from educational opportunities to the NC State Fair to board meetings — Chuck will be there. Chuck Daniels works for member company Domtar Paper Company, LLC as a procurement forester. He volunteers on the NC SFI SIC Committee, and is an active volunteer for the NCFA Education Committee.



Check out the NCFA's YouTube page to see Chuck Daniels as part of a video series on environmental sustainability.



 Clockwise from top: Chuck Daniels standing beside machinery used by generations of his family on this land. Chuck volunteering with NCFA staff at the NC State Fair in 2022. Chuck presenting to teachers as part of SFTE. Videographer Tres Bruce films Chuck Daniels for an NCFA video series.

# You Found It'

**Q:** Tell me about yourself. Our records show you've been an NCFA member since 1992.


**A:** Rita and I have been married 34 years with two children, Marshall and Maggie. We are going into the empty-nest phase of our lives, as our daughter just married in June this year. I love spending time on the farm, spending time with my retriever, spending time with family and friends.

In high school, I played sports, football and baseball. I loved football and my dad was my biggest fan. He loved watching me play full back and middle linebacker. After that, I went to Chowan University for two years and transferred to North Carolina State University, graduating with a Bachelor of Applied Science (B.A.Sc.) in Forestry in 1984.

After college, I worked for Union Camp in Florida as a land management forester, then came home to North Carolina and worked for a local consultant until 1991. My first procurement experience was with Coastal Lumber Company in Weldon, and then I was hired to do procurement by Weyerhaeuser Wood Products in Plymouth for five-and-a-half years. I wanted to broaden my horizons and work in hardwood procurement, so I went to Georgia Pacific in Enfield until 2003, when they sold the mill to Alleghany Wood Products. I am so glad I worked there because I got to see some of the most beautiful hardwoods in eastern North Carolina.

I was offered a position in 2007 in West Virginia when the mill shut down, but I did not want to leave my farm. I guess you could call it divine timing, because there was an opening at Domtar in Plymouth at the same time Alleghany Wood Products closed the Enfield location. In 2007, the Weyerhaeuser paper mill was in the process of being purchased by Domtar and converted to a fluff pulp mill. I have been with Domtar Plymouth since 2008 — 15 years.



 One bald cypress tree on Chuck Daniels' land is at least 700-800 years old based on his and other professionals' calculations.

**Q:** What was your original reason for joining the NCFA?

**A:** I joined because I had friends in the business involved in the NCFA. I watched what they were doing and decided if they were busy and felt it important to donate their time, this must be an important organization. Once I got involved with outreach that involved school kids and teachers, I realized how much I enjoy spending time talking about forestry to teachers and students and seeing the lightbulb come on for them where they understand our industry.

**Q:** What is the history of your forestland and why do you own it?

**A:** The reason I own my land is not for investment — it's for love of my family, ancestry, heritage, love of the land, and love of the practice of forest management. I'm only limited by my imagination in what I get to do with my land.

In 1797, my ancestor purchased the farm. He was a cooper by trade and made whiskey barrels, some for tar and pitch for naval stores conscripted by the British military. After the American Revolution, he continued his trade. The location of

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the farm close to Cashoke Creek, which was the gateway to Roanoke River and Albemarle Sound, was and still is excellent for trade. My maternal grandfather, James Norman Phelps, was a WWI veteran and grew up plowing behind a mule. He logged in the wintertime and farmed in the summertime with the same mules. I know he would be proud of what I'm doing today.

**Q: How do you manage your land for future generations?**

**A:** It's important to me to "Leave it better than you found it." The farm was not in bad shape to begin with, but I do want to improve what I leave my kids and grandkids.

I have objectives for the farm, and I make those clear to my kids. For example, I invested in a duck impoundment on my property for the recreation objective and now I get to enjoy duck hunting with friends and family. I wish I'd done more on the land with my kids, but they did help me plant trees and carry out some controlled burning from time to time. I believe getting their hands dirty goes a long way to teach kids that they can have different goals and objectives. You can grow for timber while at the same time helping wildlife, soil, air, and water. All of these things benefit from forest management planning.

I also invested in the Working Lands Trust conservation easement on a portion of the farm, an agreement that you make to keep lands in forestry and agriculture in perpetuity.

**Q: Are there economic reasons for taking these measures?**

**A:** For me, the financial benefit is not the main advantage. If I manage and improve upon the farm and receive revenue on that, I can turn it around and reinvest it in the farm. If push comes to shove, and there was an emergency, I could use it for that also.

**Q: How does your work with managed forests support wildlife, water, air, soil, recreation, and carbon sequestration?**

**A:** To me, anything shy of conversion of the land to another use creates diversity. With any management activity — clearcutting, shelter woodcutting, thinning, controlled burning — you are causing new growth to occur, creating variety and diversity. Young trees filter air and water better than old growth trees.

New growth stands at different stages of life are beneficial for wildlife that gets different types of food from new growth stands. When the sunlight hits the ground, it creates new food for wildlife.

But wildlife cannot live on just that, so it is important to have diversity: the old growth near the new growth, transition zones, undisturbed areas, they need it all. Wildlife thrives from shade, open areas, open water, different age classes, and composition of trees.

**Q: What does sustainable forestry mean to you?**

**A:** Sustainability is keeping trees in trees. Once you convert it, you have lost it. Timber management is the friend of sustainability. As long as it's managed and stays in trees, you will have trees, and you will have the benefit to all living things. You do not have the habitat for living things on asphalt. Give landowners incentives to keep their land in timber. For example, strong markets for a landowner's wood are an incentive.

**Q: How do you support the local community?**

**A:** I am involved in the American Legion because I was a member of the Army National Guard for more than two decades and retired in 2010. I also enjoy being involved with my church.

One group that is important for me to support is the Children's Miracle Network in Greenville, NC. Log-A-Load for Kids started about 35 years ago and got the name from a group of loggers who came together to say they would donate the value of a load of logs to the local children's hospital. After that, they planned annual events to tour the hospital, brought the media to gain attention and raise funds. Eventually this evolved into Clays for Kids with a sporting clay shoot. Large numbers attended. They have shooters from Raleigh, Charlotte, Virginia, South Carolina, and beyond along with large corporate donations. Earlier this year, Log-A-Load for Kids hosted the 26th Annual Colony Tire & Pinnacle Trailer Sales Sporting Clays Miracle Shoot at Hunters' Pointe Sporting Clays in Washington, NC, and raised more than \$120,000. Since its inception, they have raised more than \$2 million.

I am fortunate that Domtar supports my participation in forestry outreach with Tree Farm, NCFA, Carolina Loggers Association, and landowner groups in both Northampton and Bertie counties. ■



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