



## Executive Master of Natural Resources (XMNR) – Class of 2023

KATHY NGUYEN



KATHY NGUYEN is a certified Project Management Professional with nearly a decade of experience working as a consultant in the public and nonprofit sectors. She holds a B.S. in Environmental Science, a B.S. in Information Systems and Operations Management, and a graduate certificate in Data Analytics from George Mason University. Kathy currently serves as a Business Process Specialist at The Nature Conservancy, where she strives to improve the organization's conservation outcomes by aligning the strategies, people, processes, information, and technology necessary to deliver those outcomes. In her free time, Kathy enjoys playing volleyball, hiking, camping, traveling, and trying new foods.

BRIAN KAYE



BRIAN KAYE has led projects and programs that address strategic risks and safeguard critical business operations for over 20 years. Most recently, he served as Senior Director for Cyber Governance, Risk, and Compliance at Capital One. Before that, he led Business Resilience consulting for the Americas region at international business risk consultancy Control Risks. Brian began his career as an Economist at the Central Intelligence Agency. He holds a master's degree in International Affairs from Johns Hopkins and an MBA from Shenandoah University. Brian enjoys spending time outdoors on his bike exploring the historic gravel backroads of nearby Loudoun County, Virginia.

YAZMEEN  
RODRIGUES



YAZMEEN RODRIGUES holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a minor in Environmental and Sustainability Studies from the College of Charleston. Led from her desire to impact people, communities, and Mother Earth - Yazmeen decided early on to influence regenerative systems through business. She currently works alongside a dynamic team of scientists, farmers and entrepreneurs at a company improving the health of soils. In her role as Partner Program Coordinator, she applies her passion by streamlining communication with new partners and assisting in marketing efforts. Her ideal day includes a long stroll through nature with pit stops for plant-based food, live music, and animal love.

MARY  
JOHNSON



MARY T. JOHNSON has traveled to, lived, and worked on five continents and the seas separating them. Her B.S. from American University (International Business) led to work in the Federal government and non- and for-profit sectors. Her M.S. in interspecies biological, chemical, and neurological links stimulated her interest in species' linkages with their physical environments. Travel underscored how proximity to natural resources influences the evolutionary trajectories of individuals and societies (i.e., potable water determining girls' access to education). She will serve the global community by developing adaptive, sustainable solutions to environmental threats and challenges. Her research interests include blue-green infrastructure, food supply security, zoonotic diseases, hydrogen-derived fuels, and decarbonized circular supply chains.

KAITLYN (KATY)  
RILEY



KAITLYN (KATY) RILEY graduated with a B.S. in Hospitality Management and two minors in General Business and Music Industry from James Madison University. Since graduating, she has obtained five years of experience in event and project management, with a particular focus on live music event production. She is eager to learn how to best merge her passion for community engagement through live music event production with sustainability systems thinking during her time in the XMNR program. In her free time, Katy enjoys running, hiking, experiencing live music, and spending time with her dog, Rosie, and her cat, Cosmo.



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CHANTÉ  
JIMÉNEZ



CHANTÉ JIMÉNEZ is a licensed educator with over 10 years' teaching experience. Currently, she serves as an Assistant Dean of Teacher Education, supervising and training future K-12 educators. Chanté is a lifelong learner with a passion for environmental education. The XMNR will be Chanté's second graduate degree. As an advocate for education and environmental sustainability, she is looking forward to a career change working with communities to develop and implement environmentally sustainable initiatives. Chanté enjoys outdoor adventures with her two dogs. She resides in Salt Lake City, Utah, where she has easy access to mountains and many national parks.

DARRYL  
CAMPBELL



DARRYL CAMPBELL is a detail-oriented, organized, and decisive professional, skilled in cultivating and deepening productive relationships with clients and peers. Darryl has a BS in Psychology from Virginia Tech and has completed graduate coursework in project management at Wake Forest University. Working in negotiations, preparing documents and contracts, and finalizing agreements to meet the needs of all clients are at the forefront of his mind.

ELISE HAAN



ELISE HAAN is a passionate nonprofit professional with three years of experience in the environmental field. She received her undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies and Sociology from St. Lawrence University. Elise has worked for two environmental nonprofits and has gained knowledge and expertise around climate policy and regulation, volunteer management, stakeholder engagement, event planning, and relationship building. She is committed to working on issues at the intersection of environmental and social justice issues. Elise currently works for an education nonprofit but aspires to transition back into the environmental sector. Elise hopes to gain leadership skills and more specialized knowledge from the XMNR program to advance her career potential in the environmental field.

DAVID  
VALENTINE



DAVID VALENTINE is an experienced Environmental Scientist with a history of working in the field performing stormwater monitoring, BMP inspections, technical reporting, and ecological restoration projects. David earned a BS in Environmental Science from Virginia Tech. Skilled in leadership, coaching, collaboration, and public speaking, David is passionate about utilizing natural systems to mitigate climate change, restoring ecosystem services, and connecting with people to positively impact the world.

KAYCIE LASSITER



KAYCIE LASSITER is a graduate from Virginia Tech and received her B.A. in International Studies and French. Outside of class work she was involved in an array of multicultural organizations because of her passions for expanding her worldview and knowledge of diversity amongst people. In addition to her desire to learn about people, she also has a passion for learning about the environment. During her studies she focused much of her class research projects on international climate policies and solutions, which led her to become an aspiring professional in environmental affairs. Her goal for the XMNR program is to learn more about environmental functions while building her career network so she can confidently begin a career that will aid in creating a more sustainable future, especially in areas concerning food and fashion waste management.



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DANNA  
FLAHERTY



DANNA FLAHERTY graduated from Miami University where she majored in Accounting, and subsequently received her Certified Public Accountant license in Virginia. Danna worked as an auditor and controller for companies including WalMart, LandAmerica, and Apple Hospitality REIT, all in the Richmond area. She took a hiatus from the for-profit world while raising her two sons, who are now teenagers. During this period, she served on nonprofit boards, for her homeowners association and a private school. Currently, she is on the board at the James River Association, where she is also the treasurer. JRA is the primary advocate for the protection of the James River and its more than 15,000 miles of tributaries. Danna's goal is to develop the necessary skills through the XMNR program to allow her to begin a second career in advocacy for clean alternative energy. Her hobbies include kayaking, skiing, and playing racquet sports.

CALLE BILES



CALLE BILES is a graduate from the Virginia Military Institute and is currently working as a Regional Natural Resources Specialist for the Navy. Calle's work focuses on invasive species control, species surveys, climate resilience, and habitat restoration throughout the East Coast. Her projects are aligned to support the mission of the Navy while protecting nearby ecosystems. She is the environmental liaison for NAVFACs Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program, which works alongside local conservation groups to preserve land compatible with the Navy mission. In her free time Calle enjoys swimming and going on walks with her two dogs.

ZEBADIAH (ZEB)  
STRICKLAND



ZEBADIAH (ZEB) STRICKLAND is currently the sole member of Forest and Water Solutions, LLC that primarily focuses on invasive species management and land care consultation. Prior to this role, he was a Natural Area Steward at Cornell Botanic Gardens for over 10 years, taking the lead in hemlock woolly adelgid control and assisting in land stewardship of over 4,000 acres. He has over 20 years of experience, including habitat restoration, wildlife monitoring, and watershed and natural areas management, working for nonprofit, private, and public organizations. He received a B.S. degree from SUNY-Environmental Science and Forestry with a major in forest biology and minor in wildlife management. His ambitions are to gain valuable insight on global sustainability and natural resource management in order to advance as a leader in solving our conservation and climate issues. In his spare time he enjoys spending time with his spouse and two children adventuring in the outdoors.

RYAN  
WESTPFAHL



RYAN WESTPFAHL is a Special Projects Assistant with the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center (VAQ) and Assistant Field Hockey Coach for Virginia Wesleyan University (VWU). She graduated from VWU's Batten Honors College with a bachelor's degree in Earth and Environmental Sciences with a Marine Science minor. She began at VAQ as a Batten Fellow and now works with the science education and community engagement teams. In her nearly two years with VAQ and while performing various volunteer roles with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Ryan found her passion inspiring conservation throughout her community. As a coach and self-proclaimed naturalist, she is excited for the XMNR program to expand her opportunities as an environmental professional and community leader.





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MANDI GILLS



MANDI GILLS is a graduate of Radford University, where she obtained her B.S. in Environmental Biology and Geospatial Science. During her undergraduate time, she interned with the Office for Sustainability at Radford and obtained a certificate in Environmental Studies and Sustainability. She is currently working as a pre-kindergarten teacher for Primrose Schools but hopes to join the environmental field soon. Through the XMNR program, she hopes to strengthen her leadership skills while learning more about what career opportunities and passions lie ahead. During her free time, Mandi enjoys shopping and exploring her new city with her dog.

MCCASLIN GILES



MCCASLIN GILES holds a B.S. in Finance and Economics from West Chester University of Pennsylvania. After gaining four years of experience in the financial services industry with an emphasis on back-office operations and risk management, he has decided to use his professional skills to help build a more sustainable planet for future generations. McCaslin is looking forward to a career change that allows him to have a more direct influence on solving the issues of climate change and natural resource management. While working for his family's appliance company, he plans on applying what he learns from the XMNR program to implement greener business practices. From there, he intends on further harnessing his leadership abilities to promote sustainability solutions on a larger scale.

MORGAN  
FOSTER



MORGAN FOSTER is a graduate from the University of Virginia, where she earned her B.S. in Environmental Sciences with a double minor in politics and in English. While in undergrad, she wrote a senior thesis about coastal erosion and climate justice, two topics in which she is very interested. Morgan currently works at The Nature Conservancy as a coordinator, working in the world of sustainable investments, carbon markets, and corporate engagements. In her free time, she is learning to draw and she enjoys spending time outside, reading, and cooking.

JENNIFER  
HALSTEAD



JENNIFER HALSTEAD graduated from Virginia Tech with a Sociology degree and spent the last 22 years working in various capacities for missions in the nonprofit and public sectors. She brings a well-rounded professional experience in fundraising, marketing, and talent acquisition. She is passionate about environmental sustainability and wants to pivot her career to focus on learning large-scale solutions to solve issues within organizations. She looks forward to learning from a variety of professionals in this cohort, the faculty, and staff on how she can chart a new career to learn more about finding solutions for us all.

BRENDA VAN  
GELDER



BRENDA VAN GELDER is an information technology professional with over 30 years of experience in higher education. A member of the Chief Information Officer's Senior Leadership Team, she is the Executive Director of IT Policy and Strategic Engagement. She is the founding Director of Virginia Tech's eCorridors Program, facilitating broadband strategies for economic development and quality of life in underserved communities across the Commonwealth. Always curious and a lifelong learner capable of moving initiatives smoothly from conception to completion, Brenda enjoys trail running and spending time with her family and grandchildren. Brenda has a bachelor's and a master's degree in business administration.





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BRUNA BRITO



BRUNA BRITO received a bachelor's degree in Geography from the State University of Goiás in Brazil. During this time she authored her thesis, "Assessment of the Environmental Vulnerability of the Córrego Raizama Hydrographic Sub-basin, Formosa-GO," to investigate the effects of land use and cover of the Raizama stream sub-basin. She also attended the Technological Institute of Goiás and received a certificate in Geographic Information Analysis, gaining skills in preparing cartographic maps using the software QGIS. Bruna is looking forward to learning from the XMNR program and exchanging experiences with the faculty and cohort members.

SAMUEL (SAM)  
CLARK



SAMUEL (SAM) CLARK has a B.S. in Biology with a minor in related sciences. Originally from Alabama, his family and life experiences helped inspire a love for education and our environment. Achieving the ability to work for a nonprofit zoo and within the veterinary field has solidified his need to create a positive impact on society. Recent job experiences have further developed his time management and research skills, but seemingly continuous setbacks against enacting sustainable practices made a career pivot seem imperative. His interests are in the areas of agro-ecological farming, green infrastructure, and climate policy. In his free time Sam enjoys learning new recipes, being outdoors, and spending time with family and pets.

ANN RANDOLPH  
WHITLOW



ANN RANDOLPH WHITLOW is a purpose-driven communication advocate with over two decades of business management and leadership experience. Following her 2018 departure from the hospitality industry, she discovered her passion for education, research, communication, and sustainability. In 2020, Ann Randolph returned to Virginia Tech to complete her B.A. in Communication Science and Social Inquiry, with a concentration in Plant and Environmental Business Strategies. She is now focused on the practical application of the knowledge and skills she has acquired, and her career goals are centered on equality; putting people and society above equity and ROI, and ultimately finding solutions to the systemic issues at the root of today's social and environmental challenges.

ALYSSA  
WILKINSON



ALYSSA WILKINSON received a B.S. in Biology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a minor in Psychology. While at UMass, she worked in an Organismic and Evolutionary Biology lab where she became acquainted with the threats to wildlife posed by climate change. This sparked her drive to protect and seek justice for animals and their natural habitats. During this time, she also worked as a Pharmacy Technician at CVS Pharmacy, where she navigated the demands of fragile global supply chains and various endemic health disparities. Post-graduation, she spent four months living in a minivan, experiencing the "ultimate freedom" as she traveled across the continental United States to submerge herself in nature. The experience was both a privilege and a sacrifice, and it ultimately reminded her of what matters most: protecting the earth and all of its wonders for generations to come.

TRISH SAVAGE



TRISH SAVAGE is an executive and strategic leader with progressive experience spanning engineering, manufacturing, and technology. She specializes in business operations, technical project management, and developing teams. As a part of the team to develop the first American-built hybrid garbage trucks, she looks forward to continuing to promote sustainable technology solutions. As a lifelong learner, Trish holds a BS in Engineering from the University of Michigan, has completed post-graduate Master Certificates in Project Management from Villanova University and Stanford University, and looks forward to continuing her education through the XMNR program at Virginia Tech. In her spare time she enjoys running, sailing, and exploring the roads less traveled.



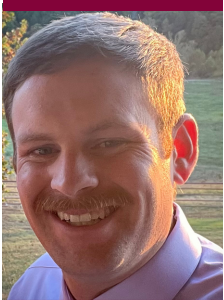
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CÉLINE DAMIDE



CÉLINE DAMIDE is the Clean Energy Data Analyst for Brightcore Energy, a developer of clean energy and energy efficiency projects in the Northeast. Her responsibilities include evaluating the feasibility of renewable energy resources for urban buildings, with a strong focus on geothermal energy, to decarbonize building operations. She also has extensive experience with internal sustainability policies and governance from previously working at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). She is dedicated to facilitating a healthy relationship with people and the environment by holding her B.S. from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and volunteering at elementary schools for environmental education during her college career. In her free time, she loves to bike around Brooklyn neighborhoods, regularly composts, and is an avid reader, reading 50 books in 2022.

BEN GAGER



BEN GAGER graduated from the University of Montana with a B.S. in Resource Conservation and a minor in Fire Sciences and Management. He currently works as a Consulting Utility Forester, assessing vegetation management and work planning for CN Utility Consulting. He has worked as a Wildland Firefighter, Structure Firefighter, Forestry Technician, and Forestry Project Manager. His experience in fuels and fire management extends from defensible space projects to landscape scale fuels mitigation projects, as well as the creation of a mitigation leadership training program currently in use in Colorado. Through the XMNR program, he hopes to help create meaningful, equitable, environmentally-sound and effective policies for the future management of fuels and forests.

MEG KINNEY



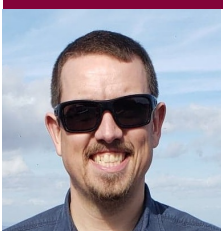
MEG KINNEY's career has been guided by a simple ethos: every business problem is a human problem. Applying the tools of social science, she helps businesses create brand strategy and new market opportunities by providing them with the consumer insight and cultural context necessary to give life and meaning to hard data. If you get the people wrong, you get the market wrong. She has been an executive leader in advertising and cannabis. Today, she runs Bad Babysitter, a research and consulting boutique specializing in video ethnography. Her clients are Fortune 500 brands as well as startups across a wide range of categories. She is drawn to the complex communication challenges of emerging markets like plant-medicine, synthetic biology, and climate tech.

GINNY  
JOHNSON



GINNY JOHNSON graduated from Washington and Lee University with a double major in Environmental Studies and Geology. While she was an undergraduate, she did research on how climate change and other anthropogenic factors affect the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef in Belize. She now works for Boxerwood Education Association, a local environmental nonprofit in Rockbridge County, Virginia. She is both a coordinator of a carbon offset initiative and an educator. She teaches elementary-age classes about the wonders of the natural world in an outdoor, hands-on setting, as well as organizing carbon offsetting projects.

KENNETH EYE



KENNETH EYE earned his undergraduate degree in Criminology from Virginia Tech. He went on to work at Randolph-Macon Academy as an Advancement Coordinator in their Alumni Department. After the academy he worked as a Forestry Technician for the U.S. Forest Service at the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, primarily serving as a wildland firefighter. Since his time with the Forest Service, he has spent time volunteering with the invasive species crew at Shenandoah National Park, working for The Nature Conservancy in Kentucky as a Stewardship Assistant, and volunteering at the Virginia State Arboretum.