



Executive Master of Natural Resources (XMNR) – Class of 2024

BRANDON
HERNDON



BRANDON HERNDON is director of the Center for Geospatial Information Technology at Virginia Tech. He graduated from VT with a bachelor’s degree in Aerospace Engineering and holds a master’s in Mechanical Engineering. He served 10 years in the United States Air Force as an acquisitions officer advancing wind-tunnel, weapons and space systems testing with one overseas deployment. He is interested in leveraging GIS applications to better inform decision making with regards to sustainability and resource optimization in a changing environment. He owns a small farm in Blacksburg and enjoys running on trails, biking, and spending time with family and friends.

SARAH DOWNER



SARAH DOWNER, with over 10 years of experience in logistics and event coordination at Virginia Tech, presently serves as the student program coordinator for the Hume Center within the Virginia Tech National Security Institute. Holding an undergraduate degree in Creative Technologies from Virginia Tech, Sarah combines her professional and lived experiences with storytelling and visual communication and aspires to leverage her skills for positive impact in natural resources management within rural Appalachian communities. With a passion for preserving the environment, generational traditions, and stories of her childhood home in Appalachia, and a commitment to community development, Sarah is dedicated to bridging the gap between technology and sustainable solutions for the benefit of these unique environments.

CHRIS HERRERA



CHRIS HERRERA is a graduate from Baylor University and received his B.A. in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Natural Resources Management and is an experienced environmental scientist with a history of field work, technical reporting, permitting, and field inspections. Currently, he works as the Stormwater and Floodplain Coordinator for the City of Springdale, Arkansas. Chris is passionate about water quality and restoring our waterways to their natural state. Through the XMNR program, Chris hopes to connect with the community and lead transformative initiatives in the field of water resources management.

PHARRA SOLIA
HYPPOLITE



PHARRA SOLIA HYPPOLITE is a dedicated professional with a decade of experience in the non-profit and humanitarian sectors. She is a New York City housing preservation and development project manager. She holds a B.S. in Biology from Eastern Connecticut State University and a B.S. in Humanitarian Emergency Administration from the University of Connecticut. She is enthusiastic about gaining new tools and skills through the XMNR program to make a positive and impactful difference in her organization and communities, specifically specializing in sustainable, low-budget urban planning and affordable housing for socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. In her free time, she is an avid reader and watches Star Trek.

CHRIS KENNY



CHRIS KENNY is an executive creative director and strategic leader with 20+ years experience in marketing and advertising serving B2C and B2B clients across a variety of industries, including: CPG, healthcare, finance, food and beverage, outdoor recreation, and biological and climate technologies. Chris is the co-founder and chief creative officer of Storious, a creative consultancy focused on helping early-stage, biology-led clients who are innovating and revolutionizing industries that foster climate change. Chris holds a B.A. in International Relations from the University of Puget Sound. A native of Portland, Oregon, Chris is an avid traveler, skier, cyclist, amateur baker, and lives in Los Angeles with his wife Josie, blue heeler, Stella Blue and cat, Lucinda.



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SCOTT GRAHAM



SCOTT GRAHAM is a self-employed executive leadership coach. Previously, he served in the American Red Cross as a senior leader during numerous large-scale disasters. He also served for twenty-three years in the United States Marine Corps. As the executive officer of the Marine Corps CBIRF, he led the unit's response to anthrax and ricin attacks at the Capitol and the World Trade Center. He is an active volunteer with several NGOs focused on sustainability and environmental protection. He is a graduate of the University of Kansas and holds leadership coaching certificates from Georgetown University and the University of Georgia.

BRITTANY
CULLEN



BRITTANY CULLEN is a certified scrum master who has worked in the financial technology space for 7+ years, and holds a bachelor's degree from Bentley University in Computer Information Systems. She is skilled at project and program management, as well as forming and leading international teams. Brittany is looking forward to making a career change to the sustainability space, and utilizing her skills to make positive change for our planet. Brittany lives in Boston, Massachusetts with her husband and Portuguese Water Dog named Leia. She loves to travel, cook, and eat great vegan food.

JAVIER
CHACON



JAVIER CHACON is a UNC-Chapel Hill graduate with a B.S. in Business Administration and a Micro-Master's in Analytics from Georgia Tech. He has previously worked in the renewable energy space at a solar finance company and currently works as a business process specialist at The Nature Conservancy, where he strives to improve the organization's conservation outcomes by aligning the strategies, people, processes, information, and technology necessary to deliver those outcomes. Javier has a passion for nature, community, culture, art, fitness, and finding ways to create and improve systems to work for both people and the natural world.

MARIBETH
DIGGLE



MARIBETH DIGGLE completed extensive vocal studies from the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, the Musik Hochschule Luzern, the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, and finished her master's degree in opera with cum laude from the Dutch National Opera Academy. She is currently a PhD student at the RICTS School of Arts in Brussels researching the concept of Breath Art. Her interest lies in how breath can act as a force for social change, as well as its ability to expose environmental vulnerabilities. She remains an active performing artist and director, and looks forward to gaining specialized knowledge from the XMNR program to advance her career potential in environmental advocacy.

BRADEN MCNEIL



BRADEN MCNEIL graduated from Pacific Lutheran University after studying biology and political science. During his time in Washington, he enjoyed the opportunity to aid in 'murder-hornet' research using GIS, spent time in the microbiology lab, and connected public policy with climate research. His college time outside the classroom was spent playing lacrosse for the Lutes. Growing up in Las Vegas, the Hoover Dam and water management were consistently piquing his interest, eventually leading him to Virginia Tech. Now through the XMNR program, Braden is looking forward to a future of research and creating policies to manage water and energy for the next generation. In his free time, he loves to coach youth lacrosse, go to concerts, and explore new places.



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FRANCISCO
NAVARRO



FRANCISCO NAVARRO holds a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Tampa and has dedicated his last two years writing in the environmental nonprofit space. Francisco currently serves as a donor communications coordinator at The Nature Conservancy (TNC), where he manages the acknowledgement letter process for major donors and edits donor materials highlighting TNC's work. Before that, he worked as an immigration paralegal translating for Asylum and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status cases. Francisco is passionate about building trusting relationships with local communities and advancing wildlife conservation. In his free time, he is exploring the outdoors, listening to 80s music, cooking Puerto Rican recipes and spending time with family.

STEPHANIE
SLOCUM



STEPHANIE SLOCUM holds a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Sciences with a focus on Community Leadership and Development from Virginia Tech, and minored in Leadership and Social Change. She has worked at Virginia Tech for almost a decade, and currently serves as an educational support specialist in the Academic Programs office in Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). In this role she serves as the admissions coordinator for Agricultural Technology (Virginia Tech's only two-year associate degree program), and as the CALs commencement coordinator. Stephanie also serves as fiscal technician for three organizations in CALs.

EVAN
MCWALTERS



EVAN MCWALTERS currently serves as Legislative Assistant to U.S. Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) in Washington, D.C., where Evan is assigned a policy portfolio of issues related to the environment, energy, agriculture, Tribal affairs, transportation, and infrastructure. Evan has over a decade experience as a proud public servant to Virginia and the nation. He holds a B.A. in Humanities, Science and the Environment from Virginia Tech. In his spare time, he enjoys going to concerts, rooting on the Hokies, and exploring public lands in Virginia and elsewhere.

VICTORIA
LECCE



VICTORIA LECCE is a proud 2023 graduate of Virginia Tech with a B.S. in Wildlife Conservation. She brings an abundance of hands-on experience in environmental stewardship through her work in Utah and the Pacific Southwest as an AmeriCorps member and two internships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She offers experience with trail construction, habitat protection, and wildlife management, and expertise in Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. She is passionate about preserving the natural world, and excited to become a leader in sustainability and learning from the valuable experiences that classmates will bring to the program.

SEAN
DONNELLY



SEAN DONNELLY holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Policy and Planning from Virginia Tech. Shaped by a passion for the outdoors, Sean chose a career path in the field of sustainability. He has 4+ years of experience in the field of environmental consulting. Sean began his career as an environmental analyst working with residential developers in Denver, Colorado, ensuring their projects remained in compliance with applicable stormwater regulations. He later moved into a role as an environmental project manager conducting Phase I Environmental Site Assessments and HUD environmental reviews for HUD-funded residential properties. Sean enjoys spending time outdoors and playing music in his free time.



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MATT KYPER



MATT KYPER is a project and program manager with experience managing sustainability-focused industrial greenfield development, environmental projects, and various commercial developments. Currently, he serves as a senior project manager at WSP consulting on projects in the mining and energy sectors. Matt also serves on the board of directors for Engineers for a Sustainable World. He holds a bachelor's degree in Risk Management from Penn State, a master's degree in Geological Engineering from Missouri S&T, and an MBA from Villanova. His passion is his family and he loves spending time outdoors with his wife and two sons.

JULIET DADRAS



JULIET DADRAS holds a B.S. in Nursing from Radford University and has been a registered nurse for over 20 years. She serves as the occupational health nurse for Virginia Tech and was presented the President's Award for Excellence in 2021 for establishing and supervising the employee Covid 19 Case Management Team. She plans on applying what she learns from the XMNR program to enhance her leadership platform and bridge the gap in localities that are underserved with health care resources both locally and internationally.

SUSHANTH
GUPTA



SUSHANTH GUPTA is a graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park with a B.S. in Agricultural and Resource Economics and a minor in Spanish Literature, Linguistics, and Culture. After graduating he served in the Chesapeake Conservation Corps, placed with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and currently works at the Chesapeake Research Consortium as one of two Environmental Management Development Program staffers supporting the Chesapeake Bay Program's Water Quality Goal Implementation Team. Growing up in Maryland, Sushanth spent countless hours exploring, appreciating, and giving back to the Bay watershed. He enjoys reading, learning more about the world, spending time outdoors, and hosting.

LAUREN SEALS



LAUREN SEALS, a Virginia Tech graduate with a B.A. in Political Science and a minor in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics, is a passionate advocate for global change and sustainability. Focused on expanding her worldview and embracing diversity, Lauren is determined to revolutionize policy writing by prioritizing long-term consequences over short-term gratification. Known for being detail-oriented, enthusiastic, and having a positive attitude, Lauren seeks meaningful connections and envisions a more equitable and environmentally friendly global system. In her free time, she engages in arts, outdoor activities, and marathon training. Lauren's recent research centers on solar e-waste recycling and recommendations for Virginia Tech's solar procurement process, alongside an exploration of the Seventh Generation principle's incorporation into decision-making, policy, and government institutions.

JAMES LOOPER



JAMES LOOPER is an outdoor recreation planner for the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail (U.S. National Park Service). He graduated from Washington College where he double majored in Environmental Studies and Cultural Anthropology, with a minor in Chesapeake Regional Studies. He has a background in environmental education, public interpretation, partnership development, and event planning. He has worked with the Chesapeake Bay Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the National Aquarium. Through the XMNR program he hopes to continue to develop his leadership and management skills while pursuing his interests in climate policy and alternative energy.