

In Memory of Harold Burkhart



On October 20th, 2022, the forestry community unexpectedly lost one of its preeminent scholars in Dr. Harold Burkhart. Dr. Burkhart grew up on a farm in the southern plains of Oklahoma where he later attended Oklahoma State University earning a B.S. in Forestry. Following his undergraduate education, he attended the University of Georgia where he completed his M.S. and Ph.D. under the direction of the late Jerome Clutter. Dr. Burkhart arrived at Virginia Tech (then Virginia Polytechnic Institute, or VPI) in 1969 where he eventually achieved the rank of University Distinguished Professor in 1999. Dr. Burkhart remained highly active in the department until the day of his passing.

Throughout his over 50 years of service, Dr. Burkhart established himself as one of the leading global scientists in applying quantitative methods to solve forestry problems. His body of work was immense, and his impact will never be fully quantified. Despite having one of the most renowned scientific careers in forestry, his biggest impact was the positive influence he had on so many people's lives. During his time at Virginia Tech, he served as advisor for almost 80 graduate degrees and postdoctoral fellowships. Many of these individuals went on to highly successful careers in academia, industry, and beyond. In addition to his students, Dr. Burkhart served as a mentor for countless other individuals and served on hundreds of graduate committees. His devotion to the profession extended beyond Virginia Tech through his work with organizations such as the Society of American Foresters, the Forest Landowners Association, and the Virginia Academy of Science. To those who knew him, Dr. Burkhart was a thoughtful, kind person who always made time for those seeking advice or just wanting to talk. In 1979, Dr. Burkhart established the Loblolly Pine Growth and Yield Research Cooperative. While the name later changed to the Forest Modeling Research Cooperative, his vision and drive remained the same. Over its 40+ years of existence, the FMRC established itself as a leading research center for developing and applying high-quality quantitative tools for better managing forests.