



Image by VMN-Rivanna Chapter.

## **All Aboard! Recertifying Trees for the VA Big Tree Registry**

*Eric Wiseman, Coordinator for Virginia's Big Tree Program, sends the following details. If you are interested in helping but need measurement tools or guidance on measurement techniques, [contact Eric](#) directly.*

Friends of Virginia Big Tree Program:

The purpose of this email is to share information about recertifying trees in the [Virginia Big Tree Register](#). The time is upon us to complete 10-year recertification for trees that were last measured in 2008 or prior. Below I describe key points that will facilitate tree recertification. Assisting me with the Big Tree Program this summer is Virginia Tech graduate student Peter Stewart. He and I will be reaching out to some of you on an individual basis to ask about certain trees and plan field trips to recertify trees. As always, I greatly appreciate your contributions to keeping the register up-to-date with accurate information. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions or suggestions.

1. **Trees In Need of Recertification.** As of today, there are 212 living trees that are outdated in the register. There are 115 trees last measured in 2007 or earlier (I call these Relic Trees because they are past their decade anniversary). There are 97 trees last measured in 2008 alone. Below are two Google spreadsheets where you can view these

two groups of trees:

[List of Living Relic Trees](#)

[List of Living 2008 Trees](#)

Each spreadsheet comprises information about the name, location, and rank of each tree, along with a web link to each tree's entry on the big tree website where you can view a photo and other details.

I have given each tree a **priority rating** to help prioritize recertification work:

Priority 1: National champs and state champs of common native species

Priority 2: State champs of all other species

Priority 3: State rank of #2 or #3

Priority 4: State rank of #4 or lower

Recall that we are scaling back the register to only include **the three highest-ranking trees of each species** (allowing up to three additional trees if they tie with the #3 tree). Trees ranked #4 or lower are now termed "Legacy Trees" and will be "sunsetted" from the register on their decade anniversary unless attrition in higher-ranked trees moves them up the rankings. It's possible that trees ranked #4 or lower have had a growth spurt in the last 10 years and now outrank other trees, so don't discount them.

I have also categorized the **tree locations as either wild or domestic**.

Domestic trees are those that are found in yards, parks, cemeteries, arboreta, etc. For every domestic tree, I have attempted to verify that it is still living by reviewing aerial and streetview imagery in Google. I have already eliminated a number of dead domestic trees with this technique.

I have also created a Google Map that displays both the Relic Trees and the 2008 Trees, and they are color-coded based on the priority ratings described above. Note that the map coordinates may be inaccurate for some trees due to landowner privacy concerns or incomplete archive information. Therefore, always read over the website entry for individual trees and don't assume that the coordinates will take you directly to the tree.

[Map of Living Relic Trees and Living 2008 Trees](#)

2. **Claim Your Trees For Recertification.** Once you have reviewed the spreadsheets and/or map, [please send me a note](#) to let me know which trees you are willing to recertify. I will keep the spreadsheets updated with this information. **Please don't go after a tree without letting me know.** That way we don't duplicate the effort of yourself or others. Also, please try to contact property owners ahead of time to let them know you are coming. If you have to make a cold-call, please try to make contact with the property owner immediately upon your arrival.
3. **Collect Recertification Information.** Most of you have now had experience with our online reporting system and know that it requires certain items to complete the report. Please be sure to obtain GPS coordinates and photos of the trees. A run-down on information requirements is [available on the web under how to recertify a big tree](#)

4. **Special Note about National Champs.** If you plan to recertify a national champ or you think a tree might elevate to national champ upon remeasurement, please check with me to ensure that you collect the photos and information that American Forests requires.
5. **Special Note about Multi-Stem Trees.** In an effort to align with American Forests measurement guidelines, I would like to avoid "basal tape wraps" for measuring the trunks on multi-stem trees. Instead, I would like to move toward calculating a "functional circumference" based on individual stem measurements at standard height (4.5'). The purpose of this is to ensure a "level playing field" within a species. This is not a black-and-white rule. For some species that typically exhibit a multi-stem form, then a basal tape wrap may be appropriate. Most of our trees have photos on our website, and I will gladly consult with you on an appropriate measurement technique before you head to the field.

Thank you,

[P. Eric Wiseman, Ph.D.](#)

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