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**Nina Payne Honored with Public Service Award for Excellence in Forestry by
the Association of Consulting Foresters of America, Inc.**

[Lynchburg, VA] — [The Association of Consulting Foresters of America, Inc.](#) (ACF) is proud to announce that Nina Dowling Payne, Research Associate and Course Instructor with the Southern Forest Nursery Management Cooperative at Auburn University, has been named the 2026 recipient of the ACF Public Service Award for Excellence in Forestry. ACF is a national organization committed to serving independent consulting foresters who manage forests and market forest products for private woodland owners. The award recognizes public-sector professionals whose leadership and dedication have significantly benefited the forestry community and the consulting forestry profession.

“Nina has made an extraordinary contribution to the future of consulting forestry,” said ACF President Gerald H. Grossman, ACF. “Her leadership in developing opportunities for students to learn about and engage with the profession has already had a lasting impact. She has built strong connections between Auburn University, ACF members, and future forestry professionals, and we are proud to recognize her with this award.”

Payne currently serves as a Research Associate and Course Instructor at Auburn University’s College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment and has been a longtime supporter of ACF and the consulting forestry profession. A former ACF Full Member who chose to stay actively engaged in the profession and association as a Member-Inactive after moving into academia, she continues to work closely with the Alabama Chapter and consulting foresters throughout the region to strengthen forestry education and professional development opportunities for students.

Among her many contributions, Payne led the development of Auburn University’s Consulting Forestry course, building the program from the ground up and serving as its instructor. Through the course, she coordinates participation from numerous Alabama Chapter ACF members who provide students with practical, real-world perspectives on consulting forestry. She also works closely with students to connect them with continuing education opportunities, certifications, professional networking, and ACF events, helping prepare them for successful careers in the profession.

Thomas R. Clark, Jr., ACF, who nominated Payne for the award, noted that her commitment extends far beyond the classroom. “For the students in her program, Nina goes well above the call of duty to help them gain real-world experience and develop professional skills,” Clark wrote in his nomination.

“The positive impact of her work with these students will both sustain and benefit our profession for years.”

“It is truly an honor to receive this recognition from ACF,” said Payne. “Consulting foresters play a vital role in serving landowners and stewarding our forest resources. Helping students understand the opportunities within the profession and connecting them with practicing foresters has been incredibly rewarding, and I’m grateful for the partnerships and support of ACF members along the way.”

“Nina exemplifies the spirit of this award,” said Shannon McCabe, CAE, Executive Director of ACF. “Her commitment to education, mentorship, and professional development is helping ensure a strong future for consulting forestry. Through her work, she has created meaningful connections between students, universities, and practicing foresters that will benefit the profession for years to come.”

Payne was honored during the 2026 ACF National Conference in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

ACF provides professional development, networking opportunities, exclusive communications, tools, and resources to consulting foresters. ACF members are the gold standard of forestry consultants because they meet rigorous educational, experience, and reference requirements as well as adhere to a Code of Ethics ensuring loyalty to landowners and their land. The Public Service Award for Excellence in Forestry is a new honor introduced by ACF to celebrate individuals in the public sector who demonstrate leadership, innovation, and a strong partnership with the consulting forestry profession.

For more information about ACF, visit www.acf-foresters.org.

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About the Association of Consulting Foresters of America, Inc. (ACF):

Founded in 1948, the Association of Consulting Foresters of America, Inc. (ACF) is a professional organization dedicated to advancing the practice of professional consulting forestry and promoting the highest standards of professionalism and ethics among its members. ACF members can benefit forest landowners by enhancing property value, optimizing timber growth through sustainable harvests, maximizing the value of timber, enhancing wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities, and protecting family forest legacy. Visit www.acf-foresters.org to learn more.

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