

## **White Paper on SB 92: Preservation of Stadium Woods Property January 7, 2014**

### **Background**

The area known as Stadium Woods is an old-growth forest located on the southeast edge of Virginia Tech's main campus in Blacksburg, Virginia. The forest understory is measured to include 11.79 acres, with an approximately 13.75 acre canopy. The Stadium Woods are used by the campus community for academic teaching and research, active and passive recreation, and by the Corps of Cadets for field training and maneuvers. The bill proposed by Senator Edwards seeks to prohibit the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors from transferring, building on, or otherwise disposing of the property known as Stadium Woods. Virginia Tech opposes this bill.

### **Negative Impacts, Consequences and Concerns Related to the Proposed Legislation**

- This proposed action preempts the responsibility and authority of the university's gubernatorial-appointed governing board and would establish a precedent of managing land use decisions by special interest groups.
- There are existing utility easements within the Stadium Woods that are not controlled by Virginia Tech. Various authorities already own these easements and the proposed legislation would impact the ability of the authorities to service and maintain the existing easements.
- The university is responsible for maintaining custodial responsibilities within the Stadium Woods, in addition to providing for the general safety and welfare of the campus population. The proposed legislation would hinder the university's ability to perform maintenance, improve public safety, and to maintain the integrity of the woods.
- The proposed legislation assumes the best use of this parcel for future generations without the benefit of knowing future demands on university space and infrastructure or the understanding of future construction technologies.
- The proposed legislation establishes a new precedent of micromanagement that has not been imposed on other institutions of higher education and is contrary to the Higher Education Restructuring legislation whereby the General Assembly made a policy decision that institutions should have the authority to make such decisions. The university has demonstrated that it is effective at decentralized decision making, as well as demonstrated its commitment to the Stadium Woods as outlined in the next section.

### **Virginia Tech's Demonstrated Commitment to Stadium Woods and Tree Preservation**

- Based upon the recommendation of the Athletic Practice Facility Site Evaluation Committee's report (an internal committee appointed by President Steger with university-wide representation), the university made the decision not to place the proposed practice facility on the Stadium Woods site. Furthermore, at the September 2013 meeting of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, an alternate site (outside of the Stadium Woods) was approved for the practice facility.
- The university has initiated a Forest Management Plan to determine best practices in stewardship of the Stadium Woods. The ad-hoc Forest Management Committee includes numerous university natural resource experts who have been instrumental in formulating the conservation and stewardship findings and recommendations.