

Alabama A&M University Paint Rock Forest Dynamics (PRFD) Project Team



Dr Dawn Lemke
Assistant Professor/
Principal Investigator



Patience E. Knight
Field Coordinator



Helen A. Czech
Dendrologist



Loretta Lynne
Weninegar
Botanist

The PRFD team is a dynamic group whose skills complement the project and each other. Patience and Helen collaborate to make sure the daily running of the project is seamless; working to train field crews, maintaining data quality, and keeping everyone safe in the field, while opportunistically mentoring the field crew on various forestry topics. This is supported by Lynne, with over 30 years experience as a botanist in North Alabama. Coordinating the research is Dr Dawn Lemke, whose focus on education, and integrative experience for all students in applied learning combined with research interest in spatial temporal ecological patterns, drives her focus to make this a successful long-term project.

Dr. Dawn Lemke

Dawn conducts applied research with a focus on broadening the available knowledge-base for an increased understanding of ecosystems and the impact we as humans have on them. She believes our ecosystems, both natural and managed, are multidimensional systems that require an integrative and collaborative research approach. Her diverse academic background in the areas of ecology, hydrology, limnology, ecological modeling, and spatial analysis combined with her strengths in technical problem solving and facilitating cross-discipline collaborations, lend themselves to multidisciplinary research. During the past few years, most of her research has focused on species distribution modeling, invasive ecology, ecohydrology and biomass assessment. Beyond research, one of her endeavors is to educate, share knowledge and build a community of people that are connected to their environment and have a fundamental understanding of science and its application to large-scale social issues.

Patience E. Knight - Field Coordinator

Patience earned an M.S. in Plant and Soil Science from Alabama A&M University (AAMU) in 2017 and a dual B.S. in Wildlife Management and Range Management from Texas Tech University in 2010. She started her career at AAMU in 2011 as a field technician, collecting data on the distribution and population dynamics of small and medium-sized mammals in the William B. Bankhead National Forest. While conducting field work, she observed the destructive behaviors of introduced wild pigs, which led to her a novel M.S. research study on how wild pig habitat use was affected by forest management practices such as prescribed burning. While working toward her graduate degree, she also regularly assisted with field data collection for

research on the resilience of forested terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems across northern Alabama, and acted as a mentor, tutor, and guide for many AAMU undergraduate and graduate students. She currently works as a Wildlife Research Technician under Drs. William E. Stone and Heather B. Howell, and in 2019 she joined the Paint Rock Forest Dynamics Project as the Field Coordinator under Dr. Dawn Lemke. Patience brings immense skills to the project, including an unequalled aptitude for mentoring and leadership, an incredible work ethic, and an appreciation for the beauty of the outdoors and ecological complexity.

Helen A. Czech –Dendrologist

Helen has more than 20 years of field research experience working in a myriad of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems across the eastern United States, from longleaf pine-wiregrass savanna to wild cranberry bogs. She earned a B.A. in Zoology from the State University of New York College at Oswego, where she was introduced to hands-on field research as a freshman and learned its importance in inspiring future scientists. After graduating, she worked as a field technician in New York, Massachusetts, Alabama, and Georgia, collecting data on reptile, amphibian, bird, aquatic invertebrate, and small mammal communities. She currently works as a Wildlife Research Associate under Drs. William E. Stone and Heather B. Howell, on a variety of terrestrial and aquatic projects, and she joined the PRFD Project in 2020 as the Dendrologist. Her experience in conducting field research in north Alabama has allowed her to become an expert on the forests of the Southern Cumberland Plateau, and she has authored and coauthored several papers on local biodiversity. As a field biologist, much of her career has focused on improving our understanding of the biodiversity and resilience of the rich terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems found in North Alabama with the goal of translating these scientific insights about the natural world to the community and future scientists in ways that will empower them to make positive, sustainable decisions about the management and stewardship of our natural resources.

Loretta Lynne Weninegar – Botanist

Lynne is the Paint Rock Project Botany Coordinator and curator of the AAMU Forestry Herbarium. She conducts field research with Alabama A&M University in the Forestry, Ecology, and Wildlife Program. Lynne holds B.S. degrees in Biology and Secondary Education, a M.S. Degree in Secondary Education and a M.S. Degree in Botany (A Vascular Flora of Choccolocco Creek, Calhoun, Cleburne, and Talladega Counties, AL). She served on the Little River Field School staff while at Jacksonville State University (JSU) and as adjunct instructor in the department of Biological Sciences. She served eight years as assistant project director of Alabama Science in Motion (AAMU), and has served as adjunct biology instructor at Calhoun Community College, AL. Her research focuses on vascular plants of Alabama, non-native invasive plants of the SE United States; human impact on ephemeral plant species along constructed hiking trails, edge effects after prescribed burns in mixed-deciduous forest stands of Bankhead National Forest, AL and ground layer richness and diversity in loblolly pine stands. Lynne has conducted biotic surveys of creeks in northeast Alabama and has taught citizen science for over 30 years.