A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Since its founding in 1900, our School has been at the forefront of environmental and forest science and scholarship, training generations of leaders who have tackled the challenges of their time. Today we continue to build on this rich legacy by providing research, teaching, and public engagement aimed at creating a more sustainable world.

On July 1, 2020, we changed our name from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies to the Yale School of the Environment. At the same time, we established the Forest School at the Yale School of the Environment in recognition of our founding mission and the continued importance of forestry.

This is a historic time for our School and, I believe, a vitally important one. Our faculty, students, and alumni are working on a wide scope of urgent and important issues—including climate change, clean energy policy, ecosystem science and biogeochemistry, hydrology, urban science, green chemistry, and environmental justice, among many others. Our alumni—5,300 and counting—are tackling the increasingly complex environmental, social, and economic challenges of the twenty-first century in all corners of the world. They work in NGOs, government, business, academia, law, public health, and communications. They also maintain vital connections to the School; our alumni network provides valuable mentorship and support to our students as they prepare for their own professional challenges. As the Yale School of the Environment (YSE), we will be accurately communicating the breadth and depth of our scholarship, research, impact, and mission.

At the same time, it was extremely important to me that we reaffirm our commitment to forest science and global ecosystem management. The teaching and study of forestry remain a core strength of our School. We will continue to teach all of our students the principles of natural resource management through the innovative research and sustainable practice occurring at our nearly 11,000 acres of actively managed forests, and to provide them opportunities to study these forests and those around the world. As Professor Mark Ashton, who serves as the first senior associate dean of forests, wrote, our forestry program is strong now and will only get stronger.

We also launch this new era in our School’s history with new faculty members. In 2019 Gerald Torres, an acclaimed global scholar of environmental law, critical race theory, and federal Indian law, was appointed full professor of environmental justice. In 2020 Dorceta Taylor ’85 M.F.S., ’91 Ph.D., joined our faculty as professor of environmental justice—a truly momentous occasion for our School. You simply cannot find more qualified experts in the field of environmental justice than Professors Taylor and Torres. Yuan Yao also joined the faculty as an assistant professor of industrial ecology and sustainable systems. In addition to her research examining the environmental and economic impacts of emerging technologies and industrial processes, she is dedicated to developing online educational materials to engage with diverse student populations and enhance the public literacy of sustainability. In 2021 two new professors joined the YSE faculty: Assistant Professor Luke Sanford, whose research examines environmental stewardship from a political science perspective, and Associate Professor Nyeema Harris, a wildlife ecologist.

There are many other signs of our hard work and forward momentum, including hosting our first New Horizons in Conservation conference, founded by Professor Taylor and organized by Yale’s Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Sustainability Initiative.

A $100 million gift to Yale from FedEx is helping to support a new Center for Natural Carbon Capture, which will focus on developing natural solutions for reducing atmospheric carbon. The FedEx funding will help support the creation of two new professorships, as well as doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships at YSE.

Since its founding, this School has demonstrated the willingness and strength to adapt to the evolving challenges facing our world. I have never felt more confident about how well poised we are to fulfill our mission of providing knowledge and leadership for a sustainable future. The work that we do here is vital to meeting the many global environmental challenges we are currently facing and will face in the future.

Our vision statement says it all: we aim to provide knowledge and leadership for a sustainable future. We invite you to be a part of this work.

Ingrid C. “Indy” Burke
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