

Theme Music ([00:01](#)):

Please listen carefully.

Taylor Pardue ([00:07](#)):

Welcome to the NC State Philanthropy Podcast, telling the world how we Think and Do through the support of our friends, alumni and more. I'm your host, Taylor Pardue.

([00:17](#)):

On this episode, we're joined by Sam Cook, the executive director of forest assets for the College of Natural Resources, to discuss how philanthropy helps make these special areas possible.

([00:30](#)):

Thanks so much for joining us today, Sam. To kick things off, just tell listeners a little bit about yourself and what first brought you to NC State.

Sam Cook ([00:51](#)):

So, for me, I think my interests became after leaving Tuskegee University where I was enrolled in forestry school there and decided that I needed to go to an accredited university to get a forestry degree. NC State was the chosen one, and I decided that why not, and showed up here, and my first visit to NC State as being an enrolled student was at Slocum Camp.

Taylor Pardue ([01:18](#)):

OK, wow.

Sam Cook ([01:19](#)):

Yeah. Never made it to campus.

Taylor Pardue ([01:23](#)):

So, you're currently the executive director of forest assets here for the College of Natural Resources, as well as the vice president of NC State Natural Resources Foundation.

Sam Cook ([01:32](#)):

For the college.

Taylor Pardue ([01:34](#)):

For the college. What all is involved with those roles, exactly?

Sam Cook ([01:38](#)):

So, I answer to the dean, and I'm the liaison between the chancellor and the dean. As for the college, because we oversee 11 properties scattered across 12 counties with three ownership structures — one being the University Endowment, the other is the Natural Resources Foundation, and the third is the state ownership that was provided to us for education and research — we monetize all the properties. We make sure that the properties are available for education and research, but most importantly, it's the learning lab that brings money and resources to the dean for him to use at his discretion to support the college.

[\(02:21\)](#):

Me and my team, we work heavily with just department heads and others to provide scholarships and funding opportunities for the students. My draw to NC State in the job that I do as the vice president of the Natural Resources Foundation is, I usually go around and tell people I have a tagline: "I make money, and I ask people for money." So, in my VP role, the work that I do in the forestry side, in my career, I've known a lot of people, and I know a lot of people, so I can spend time referring donors or asking donors to support our efforts.

Taylor Pardue [\(02:59\)](#):

What brought you back to campus in this role, or these roles?

Sam Cook [\(03:02\)](#):

Well, I did not come back until 2016. Prior to that, I worked for Duke Energy, which was out of Durham, North Carolina, and put about nine years in with them and 17 years with International Paper Company. Then, about 2007 or so, I opened up my own business, went to work in doing other special projects for different groups, and NC State invited me to come back to the College of Natural Resources Board, and I joined that board. Then I turned around and was asked to apply for this position, and hence, here I am.

Taylor Pardue [\(03:45\)](#):

Sounds great. So, you've mentioned Slocum, you mentioned Hofmann. What are these particular forest assets, if listeners don't already know?

Sam Cook [\(03:53\)](#):

Hofmann was turned over to the endowment. So, the endowment is the owner, i.e., for the Hofmann Forest, and we in the college are responsible for the management aspects of it. All the proceeds come back to the college, or it is invested in the endowment fund. Slocum is a let's say a 2,600-acre tract of land with about 37 facilities, and we use it as our summer learning lab for our forestry and wildlife students. We, in turn, also lease it out to other organizations that are looking to do what we call conservation- or nature-based education, but clearly, we want to spend more time bringing more younger people to camp; getting them invested in understanding what the career paths are in this natural resource profession.

Taylor Pardue [\(04:51\)](#):

I was, actually, when I was here as an undergraduate, I was a wildlife biology student and spent some time at Slocum Camp. Tell us a little bit about what all is involved in that process, those hands-on experiential learning.

Sam Cook [\(05:02\)](#):

So, it's hands-on experimental learning. Kids get to learn about how trees grow, how to manage trees. We use the term "silviculture." We teach kids how to set fire, put out fire, manage fire. We do a lot when it comes down to measuring trees for inventory, project how much volume is growing out there, but what's really crucial to summer camp is the team-building aspect that goes along with it. The networking of individuals that show up, whether they've been to camp or their first time out on the camp site, but the kids that walk away, they have the ability to have friends for life. They may end up working for some of these individuals long-term, or they may go out and have a job in the summer and

spend time with them that way. But we bring other senior classmates that have participated in summer camp back to camp every year. They get to interact with the students. They're also the first employee that the students get to touch because now they get to see how the kids are acting at camp. They get to spend time talking to them. I call it the mini interview, and it allows them to determine if this is a fit between the two parties.

Taylor Pardue ([06:22](#)):

There's a long, rich history with Slocum Camp I know, but it's changed a lot in the last few years. Tell listeners a little bit about how this came to be, not even just how NC State became involved, but the history of the camp and then what philanthropy has enabled us to do pretty recently with it.

Sam Cook ([06:38](#)):

Yeah. I would say back in 2016 when I showed up and we were considering what's the next step for Slocum Camp, there were several options on the table — either close it or figure out a way to raise more money to improve it. I sort of put my philanthropic hat on to say, I think we can make more money, generate an interest and figure out a business plan to keep camp alive. First thing we did was went out and assessed every piece of equipment that was out there, including the actual facilities, and created a priority list — one through four — that said, here are the things we need that are urgent versus what can wait, and we start building out budgets to ensure that we have the money and the resources to take care of it, but making sure that every year that we can open up camp for the summer to teach summer camp.

Taylor Pardue ([07:33](#)):

If I remember right, some of those buildings date back to at least ...

Sam Cook ([07:37](#)):

Early '30s.

Taylor Pardue ([07:38](#)):

Early '30s. I knew some of them ...

Sam Cook ([07:39](#)):

The old CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps).

Taylor Pardue ([07:41](#)):

And some of them were used as World War II barracks, if I remember right.

Sam Cook ([07:43](#)):

I want to say they may have been because that would've been during the same time.

Taylor Pardue ([07:48](#)):

So, one building in particular: the lodge. I know it's sort of the heart, I feel like, of the camp. Talk a little bit about it historically, but also what some fundraising has enabled us to do with that recently, too.

Sam Cook ([08:00](#)):

So, our lodge is sort of the staple of Slocum Camp. It was there when I was there, but it was used to house and educate our wildlife students during that time. But on the weekend it was our, what I call party house that all the students that stayed over on the weekend, it was our place to go and kind of hang out, shoot pool. I think we had a pool hall there, but just a place for all of us that was there, and we didn't have anywhere else to go and no money to go anywhere. That was our bar. And I'll say, the money that we've earned over the past few years and what we're projecting to invest or raise, it's going to help us to make it a retreat center where people can actually come out and stay, have meetings or events and have the still historic look without changing the complexity of what it looks like today. Yeah.

Taylor Pardue ([09:02](#)):

If listeners have never seen this, this is just a beautiful, not log cabin, but log structure.

Sam Cook ([09:07](#)):

Well, it's a log cabin that was created from the trees that grew up, that was grown on Slocum Camp ...

Taylor Pardue ([09:13](#)):

Oh wow.

Sam Cook ([09:13](#)):

... which was Hill Forest, and this was built back in 19, I think, '33 ...

Taylor Pardue ([09:18](#)):

So, it was one of ...

Sam Cook ([09:19](#)):

... or somewhere in that area. And so, we have three log cabins on site built at the same time, all made out of the same material. The lodge just happened to be the largest structure, two stories high.

Taylor Pardue ([09:30](#)):

Like you said, it's just a really focal point of camaraderie for people who have been there on camp. If anyone listening to this was a student or a faculty member.

Sam Cook ([09:41](#)):

Faculty,

Taylor Pardue ([09:42](#)):

Yeah. If anyone has ever spent time there at camp ...

Sam Cook ([09:44](#)):

Or guests that's come through and never knew that it existed, because we have a lot of people that will rent out the facility, and they bring others that's never been through summer camp, didn't know it existed, and they see it as a pretty good place for them to get out and get some time on their hand to relax, but also as a good event place to hold and house people beyond just the lodge. We have the

cabins, we have a dining hall, maintenance shed, caretaker's lodge, lots of places that you can invest in, lots of facilities, lots of opportunity.

Taylor Pardue ([10:21](#)):

You mentioned having a lot of different philanthropy connections and in the broader scheme of things, how does philanthropy help you through your job and just really help the College of Natural Resources as a whole?

Sam Cook ([10:32](#)):

It's really a funny story because when I came to interview for the position back in 2016 and I was standing up giving my spiel and doing the Q&A with the college, most important thing that came out of my mouth, I think, to others is, "Everyone that's hired in the college should be a fundraiser, because at the end of the day, if we don't have money, we can't operate." And so, a lot of people don't like to put the fundraising hat on, but there's, not everything is about the ask. It's sometimes your connection. It's typically about who you know that may be referred to someone else that's willing to make the ask. But the critical piece of it is knowing that it takes money to make money, and it takes money to do things, and if we're going to run our business, we need money and resources, and we can't just depend on advancement and development to be that sole fundraiser.

Taylor Pardue ([11:27](#)):

What do you see as, really, the future of Slocum Camp, but just these forest assets in general? Where do we go from here, and how do we continue to — we talked about experiential-learning. How do we keep using these tools for our students betterment?

Sam Cook ([11:41](#)):

So for me, and I think for my whole team, our entire goal is to get camp where it's a year-round use. Not that we have to educate our college students there year-round, but we need to have it available for other sources of people that would like to use it. Long-term goal, I would love to put an education center that allows the students to come back and forth, not just in the summer, but throughout the year, be available for others who need that type of event space; who are willing to live uncomfortable but have needed space.

Taylor Pardue ([12:14](#)):

Yeah, it's a great way of having very nice facilities out there, but they're also somewhat rustic. It's a "forest" asset. Yeah, it very much is that great tie between some classroom settings and everything, but yeah, you really feel the rustic-ness of it.

Sam Cook ([12:29](#)):

And we want to make it a destination that where other surrounding counties that know that it exists treat it like a park, but also respect what we're doing there, but be willing to educate the people, especially our students, who are coming in and out of there.

Taylor Pardue ([12:46](#)):

So, in addition to the lodge, we've mentioned several of these. There's actually a very, I think, a very nice tribute to you that they have made there on campus. Talk about Cook Cabin, this namesake cabin that has been named in your honor. Not to put you on the spot.

Sam Cook ([13:00](#)):

Oh yeah.

Taylor Pardue ([13:00](#)):

But to kind of put you on the spot.

Sam Cook ([13:01](#)):

So, a few years back, especially when I showed up, the "Cook's" Cabin was just sitting there for the cooks, and we had two other caretakers when I came on board after we finished summer camp, and the caretakers typically take on a position and were housed at Slocum, but be there to help manage the properties under our portfolio.

([13:29](#)):

So, the two ladies, when they agreed to be caretakers, I said, you can have the house, I'll take the cabin. A friend of mine was a strong colleague, retired now, but we worked together for a while. I think he came to the investment group and said, "I would like to do something for," I think he said for me, and [it] may have been [College of Natural Resources Director of Development and College Relations Jennifer] Viets agreed that here's an opportunity. So, he took it upon himself to say, "Let's create a fund to put the named cabin in your name, and can you give me a list of the people who you may want to invite to participate?" I said, "I can just list out a lot of people and you take it from there." And we did. So, I was very impressed and proud of the fact that someone took it upon themselves to do it, but to also follow through and raise the funds to make it worthwhile.

Taylor Pardue ([14:22](#)):

There's a lot, we won't go into the whole list, but I know there's several naming ...

Sam Cook ([14:26](#)):

Opportunities.

Taylor Pardue ([14:26](#)):

Well, naming already not possibilities, but have already come to fruition. But yeah, still several naming opportunities as well.

Sam Cook ([14:34](#)):

Yeah, we still have a few left, but I'm very proud of the ones that have already agreed to name and put the money where it's worth it.

Taylor Pardue ([14:41](#)):

Again, that sense of camaraderie and everything. I know there's several that are named in honor of, or in memory, some of them.

Sam Cook ([14:46](#)):

Some with family.

Taylor Pardue ([14:48](#)):

Family.

Sam Cook ([14:48](#)):

Some with friends that have shown up. Classmates have agreed to come together and decide to put their names on it as a whole. So, I think there's many ways we can look at this and think about ways we can strategize to get others interested.

Taylor Pardue ([15:03](#)):

If listeners want to find out more information about these different giving opportunities, where would you point them back to?

Sam Cook ([15:08](#)):

Website would be the key in connecting with someone either on my team or with the advancement and development team. Sounds great.

Taylor Pardue ([15:15](#)):

We will include those links in show notes and point people back that way.

Sam Cook ([15:20](#)):

And future questions, anything we can do to support it, just let me know. We have a strong team willing to go and do anything, to go the extra mile, and they all have a desire to make camp successful, and I feel confident that Slocum will be a destination for the future.

Taylor Pardue ([15:37](#)):

Well, thank you so much for your time today, but also for this invaluable work because it really is — forest assets in general are incredible, and it goes to that land-grant mission of really putting hands-on experience in the students' hands to go out into their careers, but Slocum Camp, especially, is very special to the university.

Sam Cook ([15:55](#)):

Yeah. Very proud of the fact that we, one, have the resource and the ability to train our students, but also to be able to support students during the fall and summer through work-study scholarships and all that's contributed for the land that we own and manage.

Taylor Pardue ([16:14](#)):

Thanks again so much, Sam.

Sam Cook ([16:15](#)):

Thank you.

Taylor Pardue ([16:20](#)):

For more information on how you can support Slocum Camp and the College of Natural Resources, please visit cnr.ncsu.edu/giving. To hear even more stories of Wolfpack success, please subscribe to the NC State Philanthropy Podcast today through Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Podbean or Stitcher. Be sure to leave a comment and rating as well to let us know how we're doing. Thanks for listening, and as always, go Pack.