



# Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News

A bi-monthly newsletter of the Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program

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## Topographical Preview to Bear's Head Fly Fishing in the Southeast Pocono Region

By Eugene Dougherty

*This article, originally printed in the Standard-Speaker, is now the foreword for Eugene's new book. He was willing to share his writings with us here.*

The passage of time in the last two drought years and the slow resurgence of wetlands to full prominence was as if Eden returned anew.

Sparkling water once more welled up from parched spring holes out of Bear's Head Mountain. Lofty Creek bubbled and gurgled as it tumbled off stones, again becoming an inviting environment to brook trout soon to return.

Inactive puddles looking more like the pools that once supported populations of insects, amphibians, reptiles and native trout would soon reverberate with their joyful sounds of nature.

In retrospect, we'll return to when the dry cycle began. If you are an outdoors person you may have witnessed the demise of the snowless winters and rain-free summers. This was in the late 1960s.

Migrating squirrels by the hundreds demonstrated lawless behavior while searching for acorns, then panicked and fled noisily through the tinder-dry forest to nearby rock piles as leaves crunched loudest under the boots of deer hunters a half-mile away.

Startled whitetails lying passively quiet throughout these tedious hours rose from their beds on the ground and quickly vanished over the ridge of conglomerate glacial rock to the safety of rhododendron and laurel thickets below.

Here in northeast Schuylkill County, Interstate 81 construction crews moved up to Laurel Junction's mountainous terrain laboring feverishly, preparing bore holes to eventually fill them with blasting powder. Delano Township then rocked with the rumble of each detonation.

These crews unearthed pits of venomous snakes and sent wild turkeys and their broods scurrying out of their cover,

and then even stopped to help some of these confused wild animals out of harm's way.

Many local people who knew the oasis that Pine Creek was in those hard times wondered if two huge soil-ant hills were in the direct path of the roadmakers.



One looked at these hills in awe, each standing 6 feet high and spanning a room's width next to each other. Teaming with red ants of the *Formicæ* family, the critters came and went doing the work nature meant them to do. So were the ant hills spared?

Yes, they were, but after 26 years their mounds were discovered flattened and partially covered with the mossy growth of time. The highway passed within 100 feet of the insect condominiums that may have withstood the tests of time for hundreds of years.

But the quake-like vibrations and the dryness of this era were too much. The columned galleries beneath the ant mounds crumbled.

These frequent dry periods became more noticeable in the early 1970s as the gypsy moth defoliated and threatened to finally exterminate all the ravaged, degraded forests in Delano Township.

Kept promises of man's own intervention with his biotechnology slowed caterpillar invasions. Nature itself then pitched in and some late cold spells stopped the insect in its tracks for the time being. A tree's life rings will show the lean years in accurate records.

The insect invasions that seemed to have plague proportions such as the appearance of the 17-year locust, and the presence of the gypsy moth in the same forests in that decade became an important catalyst for insect-eating species like skunks, opossums, and our state bird, the ruffed grouse.

We can all remember when the population explosion and, sadly, the numerous road kills were the telltale signs

that nature was once again trying to balance the ecosystem. The drought years seemed to have justifiable ends.

An untimely Thanksgiving Day snow, a blanket more than 2 feet deep, greeted first-day deer hunters trying to hunt over the bear oak flats around the Bear's Head fire tower.

At best the big game season was over before it even started. Smart hunters wore snowshoes to get around, and they scored with a little patience. This was a typical scenario!

The deer herds yarded early into the deep woods or stayed close to farm fields where they could go out and scrape around corn stubble for a meal. What mast crop left lying on the ground was hardly available at the time.

The situation had officers like Thomas Steward of Delano's Bear's Head Sportsmen's Association and others in regional sports clubs putting their resources together, initiating a massive feeding program for the beleaguered animals.

It seemed a futile effort until a follow-up ice storm bowed trees to the ground, bringing down much needed browse that the herd used to survive. As harsh as it seemed, the ice storm had its good points.

The wood duck is a prolific breeder that likes to nest in trees. Acorns and beechnuts are the favorite food of this fast bird that moves through the trees like a woodcock in flight.

Because wooded habitat and decoying make it easy to hunt them, it was found that their numbers were decreasing. Protective laws with adjusted bag limits had to be made or the species faced possible extinction.

Thoughtful conservationists lead by Ray Ripko in the Little Schuylkill Conservation Club and Air Products Cooperative Management have helped keep the bird on their wildlife preserve in Rush Township.

It is here, a gateway to other migratory birds into forested watersheds, that maybe a mockingbird or a blue jay might give voice and beckon with nature's call the urge for "woody" to take wing into his natural habitat along with them and rediscover the food staple they all share together and settle in.

## PA Forests Web Seminar Center

With the cost of travel and the value of time what it is, many folks would rather just stay home than go to meetings and workshops to learn new information. Now, thanks to Penn State, they can sit it in the comfort of their own home or office and attend high quality educational programs for free!

Penn State Natural Resources Extension is rolling out a new monthly on-line seminar series for forest landowners and natural resources professionals alike. The PA Forests Web Seminar Center will offer one-hour online, live presentations by experts in a variety of fields related to the stewardship and issues of Pennsylvania's forest resources. The online seminars offer a chance for landowners, extension educators, and natural resources professionals to learn and gain resources to enhance their own practices.

Live seminars are scheduled for the second Tuesday of every month at noon and 7 p.m., skipping July and August. Future topics include: oil, gas, and mineral leasing; harvesting; timber sales and markets; wildlife habitat; invasive insects; succession planning; invasive plants; forest management and regeneration; and water resources on your forestland.

Each session will be recorded and loaded onto the Web Seminar Center along with a copy of the presentation and any handouts. So, if you are unable to participate in the "live" session, a recording of it will be available for you to view at your convenience. Of course, none of the interactive elements will be available when watching the recording.

To participate in the live seminars you must register and have a "Friend of Penn State" userID. The "Register Now" page on the website will walk you through this process.

The seminars will be viewed online at what is referred to as a meeting area. It is simply a web page, with a unique web address, that allows you to view, listen to, and interact with a live seminar. At the on-line meeting area you can view and hear the presentation and ask questions using the chat feature. Presentations will usually last about an hour, though sometimes questions can run long.

To view live and previously recorded seminars you will need a high-speed Internet connection and sound. Participation in the web seminar does not require any special software.

To view the upcoming seminars schedule and to register to take part in the live seminars, visit

<http://rnrext.cas.psu.edu/PAForestWeb/>

We look forward to having you join these discussions and learning experiences. "See" you there on December 9.

## Time to Order Seedlings from DCNR's Penn Nursery

Tree seedlings are available through DCNR for a limited time. Landowners can purchase locally grown tree seedlings for very reasonable prices. These are high quality, native species of softwoods and hardwood trees that are available in lots of 100 to 500 seedlings. Order your seedlings as soon as possible because there is a limited supply. The seedlings will arrive sometime in March depending on the date of thaw. A list of the trees available and the order forms for them can be found at: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/nursery/index.aspx>.

## Forest Funnies By Barry Poglein



*Agnes never agreed to have the lower forty acres timbered*

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**NEXT DEADLINE:**  
March 15, 2009

Your ideas and contributions are encouraged. Send submissions to:  
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