

# Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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## Pennsylvania's Premier Forest Landowner Event for 2013 Is Taking Shape

### ...And you can help!

By Blaine Aikin '10

There's someplace you need to be on May 3 and 4 in 2013. That's when the first ever statewide Pennsylvania Private Forest Landowners Conference will be held at the Blair County Convention Center in Altoona.

The 2013 Conference carries the theme "The Future of Penn's Woods" and will offer over ninety information-packed sessions focused on promoting the vitality, productivity and enjoyment of Pennsylvania's nearly 12 million acres of private forests. The one and a half days long event is for the full spectrum of people who have a stake in promoting healthy forests – backyard woodlot owners, conservation-minded outdoors enthusiasts, those who view their woodlands as business ventures, families whose forest property is central to their family legacy, and others who have their own special reasons for preserving the future of Penn's Woods.

The event is being planned and will be orchestrated by the Center for Private Forests at Penn State with the assistance of Pennsylvania Forest Stewards Program participants and members of other forest-focused organizations. Dr. James Finley, Iberson Chair and Professor of Forest Resources at Penn State University

initiated the idea for the statewide conference. Dr. Finley explained that: *"The vision for an annual conference is to bring together Pennsylvania's private forest landowners at an apex event that provides resources to help them better tend their lands and the opportunity to share their deep caring for their woods and network among people who share a common commitment to sustainable forests. The event complements and unifies the ongoing efforts of the woodland owners associations and other forest-focused organizations which are the mainstay of sustainable forestry education and support."*

### A wealth of opportunities for learning and interaction

Conference presentations will be delivered by regionally and nationally recognized experts and will be organized by both areas of interest (e.g., woods wildlife, water quality and management, trees and timber management, alternative energy opportunities, etc.) and attendee knowledge level (novice to experienced). Forest, wildlife, land and water specialist exhibitors with informational and resource displays and demonstrations will be on hand to showcase tools and services available to help all landowners tackle their forest projects more effectively.

Exhibitors will be on hand to offer the products and services forest landowners need. The program and meal schedule will provide ample opportunity to see what is available and

to interact with those who make their living providing the specialized tools and skills forest owners rely upon.

The Conference officially begins on Friday, May 3, at 1:00 p.m. with a general session involving a nationally recognized speaker (yet to be announced). Concurrent sessions will follow for the remainder of the afternoon. Friday will culminate with an optional banquet, keynote address, and silent auction. Saturday, the program will run from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. with more general and concurrent sessions. All meals and breaks are included in the registration fee. Pre-conference field tours in the area of the Convention Center also will be available on Friday morning.

For those who are not familiar with the Blair County Convention Center, you are in for a treat. It is a first class conference, meeting and special event facility situated in a beautiful setting. The layout will provide easy access to all Conference activities for the 1,000+ attendees expected for the landowners' event. The Center is also easily accessible from major highways and is readily drivable from all parts of Pennsylvania.

### What you can do to help

First and foremost, attend the event. Mark May 3 and 4, 2013 on your calendar today to make sure you will be there for the first statewide assembly of Pennsylvania's private forest landowners. There are more than 700,000 forest landowners in Pennsylvania. The Blair County Convention Cen-



ter accommodates more than 1,000 people and the objective is to fill the place to capacity. You should be one of those in attendance.

Second, if you have special skills or knowledge in forestry related areas and are a capable presenter, submit a proposal to speak at the Conference. The Conference Planning Committee is currently soliciting presentation proposals from faculty, students, educators, agency personnel, and others who have important information to share that is likely to benefit private forest landowners. Please contact Allyson Muth via email ([abm173@psu.edu](mailto:abm173@psu.edu)) or by phone (814-865-3208) if you match that description.

Third, if you own a forestry-related business or are a leader in an organization that is involved in issues impacting Penn's Woods, consider exhibiting at the Conference or providing financial sponsorship support. There are opportunities for sponsors to receive recognition in the Conference brochure, on banners displayed at the Conference and in other ways, as well as opportunities to secure exhibitor space for your organization. You can express your interest in exhibiting or sponsorship by completing the form provided at <http://www.cvent.com/d/6cqqdn> or find out more information by contacting Allyson Muth as described above.

Finally, encourage a fellow forest landowner or potential forest enthusiast to attend the Conference. The future of Penn's Woods will only be bright if more people understand how important healthy forests are to the ecosystem that sustains all life and are inspired to promote sustainable forestry practices as they enjoy their woods.

## 2012 Annual Meeting Update

On a lovely sunny day on July 28, one hundred thirty participants gathered at Canterwood, Dave and Judy Twining's Tree Farm outside Carlisle, for the 2012 PA Forest Stewards An-

nual Meeting. There, attendees got the latest updates on what's going on with our volunteer program, the new Center for Private Forests at Penn State, and the upcoming statewide landowner conference. In addition to presentations on forest insects, therapeutic riding, and the geology of Pennsylvania, tours on various topics such as forest invasives, NRCS programs, early successional wildlife habitat, detecting wildlife, unique tree ID, tree planting, recovering from high grades, and forest birds went off. The weather cooperated and summer storms held off until we'd sent everyone on their way. The silent auction, hats, and donations contributed over \$1,800 to the endowment fund. All in all, it was a great day.

Huge thanks go to Dave and Judy Twining for all their hard work and for welcoming us to their wooded home!

## Cooperating with the Forest

*By Bob Slagter '08*

We continually see that parcelization of ownership and fragmentation of forestland is reducing the size of private woodlots and consequently changing the face of Pennsylvania's wild spaces. There is one thing that every landowner should consider doing to help stop the loss of larger areas: working with one of many local land trusts whose primary purpose is to conserve whole properties intact and in perpetuity.

I have had the good fortune to work on some friends' property in Potter County over the last four to five years. It is a beautiful little ecosystem of one hundred forty acres that juts into a large Game Land north of Coudersport, PA. After doing some necessary and gratifying improvement projects on the property for the past four years, this year we began looking at the long-term preservation of the land. One of the camp members passed away this year and another is not feeling well, so the other two are faced with buying out those members;

however the property will remain vulnerable to subdivision, either now or in the future.

I recommended they consider the newly formed Foundation for Sustainable Forests. I espoused this organization because of the unique forest management principles they employ. While some foundations just retard land development and parcelization, this organization is committed to: protecting forested land and ecosystems and supporting rural communities through working forests; raising awareness of the importance of preserving intact forested ecosystems; and highlighting sustainable forestry and practices for the benefit of the land.

These people follow management principles that are enviable, namely:

1) BE reactive rather than proactive. Let conditions recommend the management rather than dictating conditions through management. In other words, as Foundation President Troy Firth explains, cooperate with the land, continually observe its growth and changes; and then use appropriate practices to maximize benefits.

2) MAXIMIZE OPTIONS. To accommodate future variables, management should create diversity and opportunity. Again, observe what the forest offers, then look toward using the best practices to improve the future of the land.

3) EMPHASIZE art, not just science. Our scientific understanding is limited to a single generation of trees. Therefore, personal experience and intuition must play a role. Much the same as we observe when we cruise woods with our own Jim Finley (who sits on the board of this foundation, by the way), it is the art of seeing what this woodlot has gone through, past, present, and future, that dictates action.

These folks are working foresters who practice restorative forestry, harvesting unhealthy low-potential trees,

mimicking nature to the best of their ability, and minimizing disturbances with practices such as skidding logs with horses. These practices enhance the potential of the Foundation's forestland and improve forest ecosystems while adding to the local communities by creating jobs and by selling locally produced wood and non-timber forest products.

As with any land trust, there are several methods to help protect property:

1) Donation. This provides for the highest level of conservation and protection and the highest level of tax benefits.

2) Donation with Life Tenancy. Known as a remainder interest donation, this provides some tax benefits yet allows the donor use of the property during their lifetime.

3) Bargain Sale. Involves selling the property to the Foundation at below market value, providing some income and tax benefits.

4) Donation of a Conservation Easement and Timber Rights. Provides for some property protection and tax benefits.

The foundation is currently looking at parcels of land in Northwestern PA and Southwestern NY but will consider appropriate property outside this area.

Please consider acting now (as I have) to work with a Foundation to preserve your forest lands. If you are interested in The Foundation for Sustainable Forests, they can be found at [www.FoundationForSustainableForests.org](http://www.FoundationForSustainableForests.org) or by calling 814-654-2435.

## **Food Plots in the Forest**

*By Scott Weikert, Extension Educator*

Many forest landowners have thought about establishing food plots to benefit wildlife. As a person who enjoys his forest very much, I decided to embark on the journey of establishing food plots three years ago and

want to share my experiences with other landowners.

The first step to consider is what is the goal of the food plot? Is it to increase deer herd health or simply to increase wildlife sightings? What species should the food plot attract? If the goal is to provide food throughout the year including winter, it must be large to provide adequate forage. In my experience, deer will quickly devour what you plant on small plots and may not provide the full benefit you hoped. In my case, the goal was to simply increase wildlife sightings during my favorite time of the year - October through December - so I established two food plots that total about 1.5 acres.

Finding the best location for establishing food plots is the next step. Existing fields or open areas in the forest are the best places to start looking. My land was 100% forested, which created a lot more work to develop the food plots. Finding the best soils is important to locating food plots as well. I used <http://soilmap.psu.edu/> to locate the best soils on my property. I quickly discovered I have very few locations suitable for any kind of ag-related activities; fortunately one of the locations was an old log landing established during a prior timber harvest. The location was also very close to an area that provides thick bedding cover for deer and is close to a watering area as well. I began there.

The log landing wasn't large enough for the food plot I wanted, so we brought in a dozer and pushed out trees. Pushing out the trees reduced the amount of roots I had to deal with while preparing the site. The trees were cut for firewood and the tops created three very large brush piles for wildlife.

The next step is to do a soil test. I want to emphasize how valuable a soil test is when establishing a food plot. The soil test provides both lime and fertilizer recommendations to maximize crop production. I was not planning to sell an oat crop at the end

of the season; however, it is important to make sure the soil can grow the crop chosen for the site. The soil test results for my food plot revealed I had a soil pH of 4.7 and I needed to apply 9000 lbs/acre of lime to raise the pH to grow turnips or clover. Had I not done the soil test I would have been left frustrated, not knowing why my clover and turnips did not grow.

After lime and fertilizer were applied, the area was plowed, disked, and the larger rocks and roots were removed. Finally, it was time to plant.

There are several key points to remember if you are thinking about taking on this kind of project. First, it can get expensive if you have to pay somebody to remove trees for you. You will also need other equipment that does not come cheap, such as a plow and/or disk, tractor or ATV to pull the disk, lime, fertilizer, sprayer for herbicides, etc. All of these costs add up in a hurry. Second, it takes a lot more time than a person realizes to care for a food plot. As an absentee landowner time on my property is always too short.

It may sound as if I regret the decision to establish these food plots. That is certainly not the case. While deer were the main target, other wildlife have benefited. Now, I regularly see rabbits in the food plots. Turkey use the areas extensively and fox are often seen hunting mice as well. Of course, deer absolutely love the food plots. I have hundreds of pictures of these animals on my trail camera. And yes, there have been several deer harvested while they grazed there as well.

## Regional Foci for PA Forest Stewards News – North Central, You're Up!

Just a gentle reminder for those of you in the north-central region of Pennsylvania... Your region is responsible for an article in the September/October issue of the PA Forest Stewards News. Walt and Marie Petrick ([mariepetrick@hotmail.com](mailto:mariepetrick@hotmail.com)) and Linda Finley ([lfinley@gmail.com](mailto:lfinley@gmail.com)) are taking the lead in compiling the region's piece. Please contact them if you have items of interest to share.

And heads-up to the Northeast region! You're on tap for the November/December newsletter. Please contact Carol Hartley ([hartmait.carol@gmail.com](mailto:hartmait.carol@gmail.com)), Nancy Baker ([bakerij@epix.net](mailto:bakerij@epix.net)), or Monroe Cressley ([busybeez@ptd.net](mailto:busybeez@ptd.net)) with your items for that future newsletter.

We're looking forward to hearing from you all!

## Dates for Your 2012 (and 2013) Calendar

**September 21-23 and October 5-7, 2012** - PA Forest Stewards Basic Training, Camp Krislund, Madisonburg.

**October 5, 2012** - PA Forest Stewards In-service Training, Forest Soils, Camp Krislund, Madisonburg.

**November 3, 2012** - Best Practices for Woodland Owners Associations Conference: Pennsylvania forest owner survey update, board development, marketing strategies, and organizational governance. Walk away from this conference with an action plan to grow and strengthen your WOA. Attendance limited to 4 representatives per WOA. Location TBD. **Please spread the word!**

**May 3-4, 2013** – 2013 Private Forest Landowners Conference: the Future of Penn's Woods, Blair County Convention Center, Altoona.

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