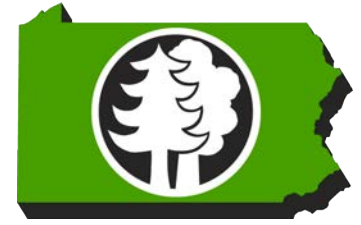


Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



VOLUME 28, NUMBER 6

MAY / JUNE 2022

Chairman's Column

By Bob Slagter, PA Forest Stewards Steering Committee Chair, '08

It's Not Always about Winning

"What I try for is a change in trajectory."
- Rachel Reyna, 2022

I often tell people about a conversation Jim Finley and I once had about what we were doing for forests both within the PA Forest Stewards program and on our own. Like so many sessions with The Man, it got very deep into his philosophies on trees or water or air or invasives. He especially liked discussing the best direction we should be heading in to increase sustainability. That is what he was all about: preservation and productivity of forests for future generations. And, as we all know, he was the best at putting the philosophies of the great outdoor minds (like Aldo Leopold) into form and substance that we could use today.

This particular talk stood out from all the others because something occurred to me while we were talking about threats to the forest, especially diameter limit cuts and similar practices. What came to the front of my mind was, "Wait a minute! If there are that many people out there using bad practices, how do we defend against them all?" So I asked Jim straight out, "Is there any way we can win this thing?" And his straight out answer was ... "No."

Here is The Man—a person known globally for best practices, stewardship, and sustainability—saying, at least to some degree, that his entire life had been spent chasing a dream that cannot come true. It's a great dream, worthy of our devotion and our concentration, but to admit, at least to some degree, it is a pipe dream, was a real show-stopper for me.

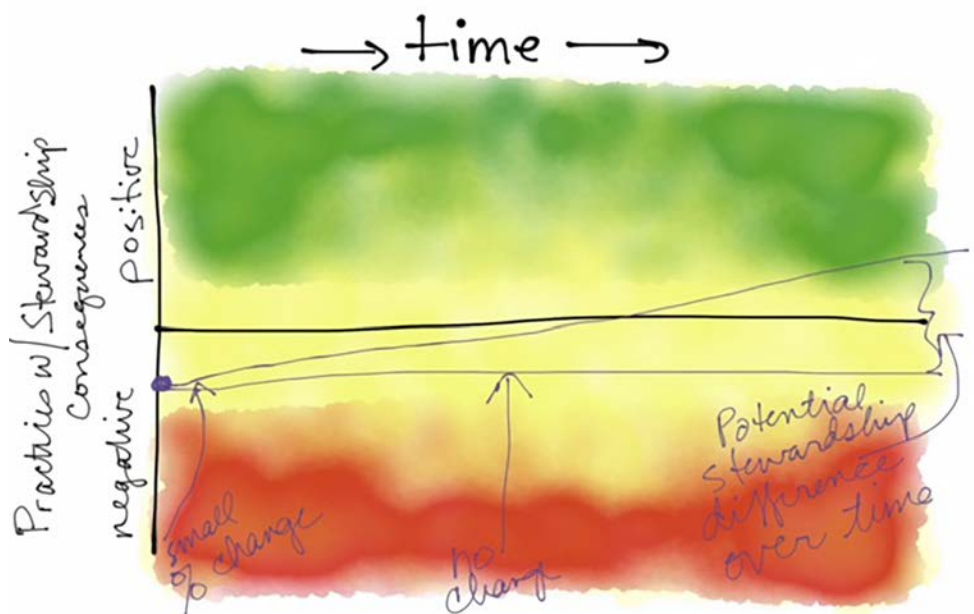
Well, I repeated this quote from Jim at the last James C. Finley Center for Private Forests Council meeting, but this time I got called on it by the person sitting next to me, Rachel Reyna with the DCNR Bureau of Forestry. When it came time for her report out, she started by saying what I stated in the quote above: "Is there any way we can win this thing?" ... "No." She went on to explain that it may not be necessary to "WIN," but that she feels good when she changes the trajectory—if even by just a few degrees—

from what people are doing or thinking or practicing. What gives her hope is that this change in trajectory, when added to other changes, can move the needle just enough for new practices to take place.

So Rachel has it figured out. Keep fighting the good fight, dreaming the pipe dream, being a good steward and showing others how to do the same as what Jim did. It's what Rachel does, and when Jim said "no" to the question of winning, he meant you may not always win but you sure can move the trajectory to shoot a little higher. Thank you, Ms. Reyna, for clearing that up for me both mentally and in a real sense when I talk to other landowners.

So it is with new clarity that I approach the subject of sustainability and forest best practices because I know that, while I may not be winning them all, I can move the needle and change the trajectory a little bit.

Stay well and be safe.

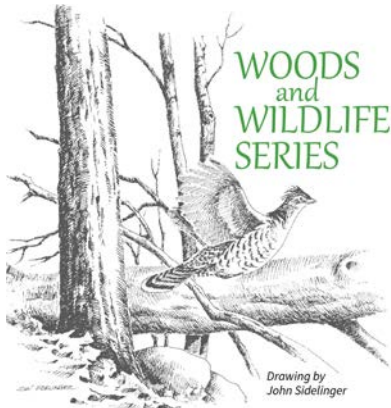


Rachel Reyna's sketch shows what can happen over time when a forest landowner makes just a small positive change in how they steward their land. By changing the trajectory even just a few degrees in what people are thinking, doing, and practicing, a forest, over time, can move from being unsustainable to having a healthier, sustainable future. And that is why we keep doing what we do!



Songs of the Season: Spring

By Mike and Laura Jackson, PA Forest Stewards, Class of '00



This article is part of a series exploring animals and their dependency on forests. Each article blends personal experiences with factual information and will challenge you to look closely in your woodlot for evidence that you are a habitat provider for the species.

Since bears are unpredictable visitors to our backyard, we put our bird feeders away each evening—except in the winter when bears hibernate. It’s a chore best performed at dusk since some birds feed late in the day. Dusk comes earlier to those of us who live above Black Valley, on the eastern slope of Tussey Mountain. The sun sets a good hour earlier than on the western side of the mountain.

On some evenings, this nightly chore becomes transformed into a magical experience. Perhaps a Barred Owl starts to call its distinctive, “Who cooks for you, who cooks for you-all?”, or a Field Sparrow sings one last trill, sounding like a ping pong ball bouncing on a table. Since it’s hard to see at dusk, it’s a time to anticipate wildlife visitors with heightened senses other than vision.

The evening of June 1, 2019 was one such memorable night. It was warm enough for fireflies (you might call them lightning bugs, but they are really beetles) to be about, lighting the darkening skies with their warm glow. The shrill chorus of spring peepers near our house was tempered by the deeper trills of the Eastern treefrogs in the trees around us. On Tussey Mountain behind our house came the distant song of a whip-poor-will and floating on top of that sharp punctuation was the eerie drawn-out howl of a single coyote. It was an unexpected symphony of independent

musicians that somehow merged to form an amazing collection of harmonious melodies.

True, we couldn’t hear the male fireflies (*Photuris spp.*) as they flashed their mating signals to the females waiting near the ground, but recently, researchers discovered that fireflies produce strong ultrasonic sounds. Ironically, the fireflies can’t hear these sounds, but bats, one of their many predators, can hear them. It’s hypothesized that these sounds keep bats away from the toxic fireflies, giving fireflies a type of “musical armor” that protects them from being eaten by bats. It isn’t known if all fireflies produce these ultrasonic signals, but the idea of a musical battle between prey and predators will likely spark more research.¹

The main musicians that night were the tiny spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) carrying the pattern of a cross on their back (“crucifer” means cross-bearing). Although they breed in the small pond and vernal pools near our house, they also explore our yard and flower beds, so we never know when we’ll see or hear one. They are impossible to spot at dusk unless we stalk them with flashlights. The chorus wasn’t as intense this night in June as it was in early spring—thank goodness.

Only male spring peepers call—either an “advertisement call” to a female which is very shrill, or a “warning call” to a male to stay away. During early spring,

the calls are so loud and shrill that it’s ear-splitting to get close to the breeding pools.²

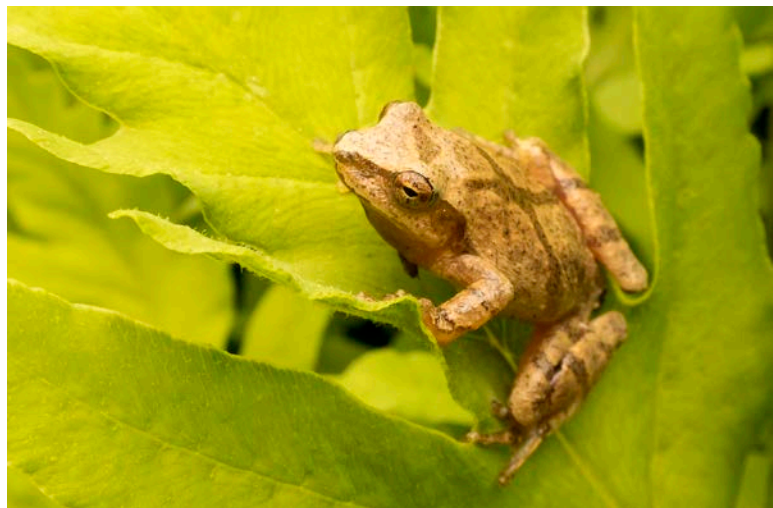
Although tied to water during breeding season in the spring, the tiny spring peeper is very much a denizen of forests. Spring peepers spend most of the day hiding in leaf litter on the forest floor—they don’t climb high into trees. Like the spring peeper, the Eastern gray treefrog (*Hyla versicolor versicolor*), is also a forest species found in all Pennsylvania counties, but they spend more time high in trees.

We don’t have as many treefrogs as spring peepers, so an individual’s musical trills are more pronounced. Their songs are also deeper and more melodious. They breed in the same pools as the spring peepers, but they breed later in spring after the chorus of spring peepers softens.

We sometimes hear males calling during the day, especially during or just after a summer rainstorm. One summer a male treefrog took up residence on our side porch for a few evenings, just below our bedroom window. What a deafening lullaby!—but not nearly as loud as another nocturnal forest creature: the Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*).

On that first night of June, the whip-poor-will was calling higher on the mountain. Its loud three-part call carried

Spring, continued on page 3



Article photos by Mike and Laura Jackson

Spring peepers: These tiny treefrogs are only a paper clip in length and they just weigh about 0.18 ounces. Their loud voice makes up for their diminutive size.



Eastern gray treefrogs are perfectly camouflaged on tree bark. No wonder we rarely see them. The yellow pattern is only seen on the male.

for about a half-mile and reminded me of a distant piccolo accenting the shorter notes of the spring peepers and the softer trills of the Eastern gray treefrogs. Sometimes we surprise a whip-poor-will at dusk when we take in the bird feeders. We've seen the male hover in place with his body nearly vertical, so the white markings on its tail seem to glow, but most people see these birds when they sit along rural roads at night in spring and summer.

A friend called us one time, asking about birds with glowing red eyes that they saw along Black Valley Road when they drove the 26 miles from Everett to Chaneyville one night in early summer. The birds' eyes glowed red in their headlights. Whip-poor-wills have a reflective layer in the back of the retina called the tapetum, which amplifies small amounts of light by bouncing them back through the retina a second time. Our friends were astounded when they learned that they saw over 30 whip-poor-wills in Black Valley, below Tussey Mountain.

Fortunately, Tussey Mountain forests (where we live) sustain whip-poor-wills. This forest block of about 9,000 acres was hit hard by spongy moth caterpillars (new name for gypsy moths) back in the early 1980s, so there are areas of young forest mixed with older trees, creat-

ing a mosaic of age classes that benefit this bird. Except for the ridge and valley portion of Pennsylvania, whip-poor-wills show a steep decline due to forest fragmentation or development. Whip-poor-wills need forests with open ground for foraging, dense growth for nesting, and a steady supply of large moths—their favorite food.³

Whip-poor-wills get closer to our house and call more frequently as June proceeds, but the nights of a full moon are truly an epic whip-poor-will symphony—and we are the captive audience! Normally we hear them calling at dusk and dawn, but there's something about the full moon that inspires them to call almost all night. One bird might call for an hour or more right outside our open bedroom window (which usually gets shut after the first 15 minutes), followed by repeat sessions. If the bird is close, we can even hear soft knocking sounds, as if a rubber band is being wound, before it calls—almost as if the voice box has to be primed before calling.

The truly unexpected soloist of that June 1 evening was the howl of a coyote (*Canis latrans*). Just one coyote. Just one howl. Normally we hear a lot of coyotes yipping and yapping when the Everett fire siren sounds at night, but this song was like the mournful note of a French horn as it ascended the musical scale. No wonder the coyote is also called the song dog.

Of all the songsters we heard that night, coyotes are species least associ-

ated with forests. But now that many coyotes have interbred with the wolf and the dog, the animals that live in our forests are larger and more of a forest dweller than when settlers first encountered coyotes in the plains of North America.⁴ Regardless of its controversial genome, the coyote is now part of the biodiversity of Penn's Woods and should, perhaps, be called a coywolf, a coyote-wolf hybrid typically larger than coyotes but smaller than wolves.

Since we live in temperate deciduous forests, we enjoy the variation of song, color, and behavior caused by the changing temperatures. The biochemical changes in the trees due to temperature and changing amount of sunlight help to shape the changes in the animals that live in our forests. Take some time to explore your forest in the spring and listen to the sounds of its inhabitants.

References:

¹<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589004221001620>

²Fergus, Charles. *Wildlife of Pennsylvania and the Northeast*. 2000. Stackpole Books. Mechanicsburg, PA.

³Wilson A., Brauning D., Mulvihill R., Editors. *Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in Pennsylvania*. 2012. The Pennsylvania State University Press. University Park, PA.

⁴<https://wildadironacks.org/adironack-mammals-eastern-coyote-canis-latrans-var.html>



The coyote's soul-haunting howl was a thrilling sound at dusk.

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The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802

Register Now for the PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting

As you can see with the enclosures included in the packet with this newsletter, our PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting will take place on Saturday, July 16, 10 AM–4 PM at the Ag Progress Days site's Special Events Building in Rock Springs, PA. Check-in opens at 9 AM, so come early and enjoy some continental breakfast items and good conversation before activities get underway.

Open to all Stewards and their guests, the day will be packed with learning opportunities, program updates, good food, and a special afternoon segment in honor of Jim Finley.

Be sure to complete your registration and mail it back to us by July 1 or save a stamp and register online at <https://tinyurl.com/PAFS2022> by July 1.

Note that this is a one-day event; overnight accommodations in State College may be limited due to the Central PA Festival of the Arts and People's Choice Festival.



The PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting will feature an afternoon filled with learning as we explore forest topics that were close to Jim Finley's heart. A tent, benches, and assistance navigating the woodlot as needed will be provided.

Dates for Your Calendar

July 16. PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting. 10 AM–4 PM. Ag Progress Days Site, Rock Springs, PA.

September 29-October 2. PA Forest Stewards Class of 2022 Training. Krislund Camp, Madisonburg, PA.

For more information, check the Center for Private Forests website:

ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests

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