

Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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Chair's Column: Why We Do What We Do

By Nancy Baker, PA Forest Stewards
Steering Committee Chair, '00

Dear Friends,

WHY?

Here's Why:

In spite of Smoke and Haze—so thick the stunning views from northern Tioga County's portion of I-99 are obliterated,

In spite of Gully Washers—at least that's what my Georgia husband would have called them—so heavy that I consider exiting Rt 22 in Cambria County,

In spite of 770 miles on mostly secondary roads...and me thanking my automatic transmission on all those ups and downs, and more ups and downs...

It's Dan.

Dan's not a Pennsylvania Forest Steward—at least not yet. Dan's at the PA Forest Stewards western regional meeting simply because he's the one who knows where to find it. He's been corralled by a Steward to get him to the right place at the right time, and he appears unannounced. Of course, he is most welcome.

We've gathered outside of Apollo in Armstrong County, to see Tim Troup's beautifully managed woods; we visit his woodworking shop (he specializes in stairs), and get an idea of his land's history. Tim's son shows us what an impressive Gravely mower can accomplish, we are puzzled by the numerous stone cairns in the woods, we...are interrupted by a downpour and take refuge, dripping, in Tim's immaculate two-car garage. We wait for a break in the weather and break into multiple lively conversations.

Dan's got it figured out now, that Allyson has been part of the program for a while. He approaches her and asks a bit more about the group, saying he somehow feels very connected to them. Allyson describes the group and the people within, and what the PA Forest Stewards are trying to do—and Dan says something along the lines of, "While I only own 1 acre of woods, and am responsible for 600 through a recreation area, I feel very connected. We share a common interest and passion."

He also speaks to Allyson about her role in the group and says, "You're very lucky that you get to be part of this. These people share their passion with you, every day."

Of course, Allyson agrees.

We All Agree!

What Dan sees is that we've built a community: A welcoming community. A thoughtful community. A sharing community. It's the community of Dale Spitzer's Tioga County colleagues who trailer in their multiple UTVs so that all of us at the PA Forest Stewards eastern regional meeting can survey his timber stand improvements, his vernal pools, the Serbian spruce, and the waving switchgrass plantings where the bear hunts each spring for fawns. We bring our exceptional tamales and halupki to share, our special salads and best desserts. We break bread together.

We share our woes (here are four of us in a circle commiserating on our stiltgrass, buckthorn, multiflora rose and the litany of all I've just driven through on my

way across the commonwealth—white ash skeletons, struggling sycamore trying to recover from a late spring freeze, and the unnatural pea-green oak mountainsides indicative of spongy moth). We are close enough to share our ecological grief, and even our personal griefs.

We are also lucky enough to share how we define success. Here's Rebecca Trigger of Keystone Woodland and Field Tree Farm. Rebecca is an RN; she's decisive. She has to be—she has patients and patience. She also has a positive message: don't bite off more than you can chew—then you'll feel a sense of accomplishment each time you finish that bit. Encourage your canopy. Rebecca's our encourager; she's got the medicine; she knows we can "get on with it."

This is such an amazing community; it's built by you.

So Dan is going to apply to be a PA Forest Steward; he wants to sign up for our community.

Dan—and all of you—are why I found the Pennsylvania landscape so beautiful on my return trips—the white native rhododendron blooming under the big woods at Fallingwater, rich fields rolled out before the ridges in parts of the Laurel Highlands, the Allegheny Front west of Altoona looking deeply green, the Osprey flying over Cowanesque wetlands on the New York border.

Many thanks for permission to be part of this! And welcome, Dan.

Nancy

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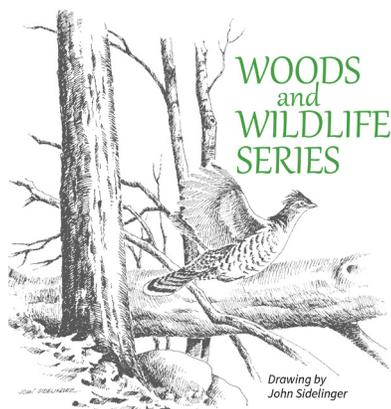
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*Native rhododendron at
Fallingwater. Photo credit:
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Sometimes Dreams Really Do Come True: Golden-winged Warbler Adventures

Article and Photos 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.

Simple actions combined with serenity can have far-reaching impacts. Such is the case in our quest to attract a small bird called the Golden-winged Warbler to our woods. Our journey in forest tending has evolved since Laura's parents gave us 120 acres of mostly forested property that was part of the dairy farm where Laura grew up in southern Bedford County, PA.

Before Laura's parents asked us to move back to the family farm in 1983, they decided to build a new house, and, like many other forest landowners, they hired a logger to cut trees to pay for that new house. Unfortunately, Laura's father followed an all-too-common practice: just a handshake to "seal the deal" with the logger and then he gave the logger full rein to selectively cut veneer logs and other big trees from the forest—resulting in a classic case of high-grading. Just as the logger finished, waves of spongy moth caterpillars blanketed Tussey Mountain, indirectly killing almost all the trees on the upper slopes of the mountain above our future property. Sadly, many of the oaks on the lower slopes of Tussey Mountain that escaped the logger also died from stress caused by the spongy moth defoliation.

In 1985, after the mountain property was deeded to us, we walked the eroding log roads, gazed at all the woody debris and trash that covered almost an acre



Much of our woods has very little regeneration due to a history of high-grading and high deer pressure.

of a mountain field where we wanted to build our house, mourned the loss of big trees, and vowed never to cut another tree. As Mike recalls, that vow was accompanied by Laura's tears.

We borrowed the farm's log splitter and bulldozer to clean up the field, and back-bladed it, and then seeded the logging roads. We also planted native tree seedlings to replace some trees that were logged. Deer pressure was high, so we caged every seedling and checked around for funding to help with other forest improvements. We eventually got cost-share funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help repair some of the damage in the woods, and even more importantly, we participated in the Pennsylvania Forest Stewards (PAFS) volunteer training program in 2000. That training inspired us to formulate goals for our land and helped us develop a forest management plan written by a professional forester in 2002. Having a plan was a significant factor in obtaining NRCS funding, but the PAFS training was critical in helping us understand forest ecology.

The two PAFS weekends were a fantastic learning experience! We both had a pretty good handle on tree/wildflower identification and we knew a lot about wildlife, but we didn't have any forestry training. Learning from experts like Jim Finley, Mark Banker, and many others inspired us to dig deeper to understand forest dynamics and the complex concepts of forest health and sustainability. We were shocked when we learned about invasive plant species and all the harm they cause, since we had so many in our woods. We learned how to identify and

control Japanese barberry, Japanese vine honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and many others—a struggle that continues to this day. The PAFS training also helped us realize that we might need to cut trees to overcome the impacts of high-grading and deer pressure.

Fast forward to 2011 and we found out about the Golden-winged Warbler program offered through the NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife Program (this program is still funded for forest properties in the Appalachians—contact your county NRCS office for more details). Since much of our forest was high-graded and regeneration was stunted from deer impacts, we thought it might be possible to turn the forest clock back by logging an area to remove most of the understory but keep many of the best trees (the opposite of high-grading).



Golden-winged Warblers nest on the ground in young forests, below a clump of goldenrod or other thick vegetation like blackberries, usually at the edge of a clearing.

We learned that Golden-winged Warblers and many other species of wildlife prefer young forest habitat, which is very scarce in the Appalachians. Wildlife food and cover would be on the ground—easy access for all animals except deer since we'd keep them out of the area with an 8-foot fence. We'd get free expert forestry advice from NRCS, Bureau of Forestry, Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), and Pheasants Forever. Another key component of the project was funding to knock back the invasive plant species that were threatening the stability of our forest. After much discussion and research, we signed up for the program in 2011. In 2013, a licensed herbicide

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applicator treated invasives on most of our property before any logging started.

NRCS even offered a cost-share payment to help make up for lost income since the higher quality trees were not logged. In 2014, we hired loggers who used low-impact logging equipment to transform 27 acres of high-graded forest into a young forest with 40 square feet of basal area, commonly called a shelter-wood cut. The remaining seed trees were randomly scattered, but we also kept an island of trees, as well as snags and den trees to create diversity and more nesting habitat. The 8-foot fence was constructed just as the loggers finished in December 2014.



The amount of regeneration was impressive the second summer, thanks to the deer fence and a heavy acorn crop in the fall before the area was logged in 2014. Mike maintained trails through the cut so we could track the changes.

We were already volunteer monitors for the PGC Golden-winged Warbler (GWWA) studies on State Game Lands, so three years before our 27-acre cut, we started monitoring on our own property. We had not seen any GWWAs on our property since the late 1990s, so we thought some baseline data would be helpful. In addition to our monitoring efforts, trained technicians who were younger and had better hearing visited our cut twice each summer for several years to do point counts of all the birds using the young forest habitat. We continued our monitoring for the next eight years on our property and on our neighbor's, who was also in the same program.

Why would so much money be available to help a little songbird like the Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*)? It is a beautiful bird with a very distinct buzzy song: "zee bee bee bee," but many people have never seen it or heard of it. This little bird needs our help! It is one of the "most critically threat-



Although our neighbor's forest did attract nesting Golden-winged Warblers, we did not see or hear any in our forest.

ened, non-federally listed vertebrates in eastern North America,"¹ partly because it depends on young forest habitat for breeding, and young forests are uncommon in the Appalachians. While GWWAs were the focal species, we learned that this project could potentially help 49 other bird species that rely on early successional habitats—not just for nesting, but research showed that birds like Wood Thrush, which nest in mature forests, bring their fledged young into young forests since so much food is available. Our initial concern that this project could hurt birds that nest in mature forests turned out to be unfounded.

Laura was the president of Juniata Valley Audubon Society (JVAS) at the time and thought we should also try to help GWWAs on their breeding grounds since they are neotropical migrants and spend the winter in Central and South America. In January 2015, she discussed two ideas with JVAS vice-president Mark Bonta, who had lived in Honduras for a number of years. The first idea was pretty easy to implement—they organized a workshop on GWWAs for chapter members and forest landowners, inviting Dr. Jeff Larkin and his grad students from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Research Institute to share their research on Golden-winged Warblers and young forest ecology.

Her second idea was to find a Honduran farmer who grew shade-grown coffee and help him import his bird-healthy coffee to Pennsylvania, since studies showed that shade-grown coffee farms are excellent habitats for birds like Golden-winged Warblers that migrate from the U.S. to over-winter in tropical countries. Laura thought this would be a good project for JVAS since we could sell bird-healthy coffee, make a small profit,

and return the proceeds to help bird conservation and education in Honduras. When she shared this idea with Mark, he said it would be a nightmare to navigate through all the red tape, let alone even find an interested farmer. He estimated it would take at least 15 years to implement her idea, so Laura reluctantly gave it up.

That disappointing discussion occurred in January 2015, but here's where serendipity took over. We stopped at a small bakeshop in New Oxford on the way home from a birding trip in May 2015, and while waiting to pick up an order of gluten-free goodies, Laura saw a small handwritten notice on the wall: "I am a coffee farmer from Honduras trying to sell my coffee in Pennsylvania. If you are interested in purchasing any coffee, please contact me. Thank you, Emilio Garcia."

Laura excitedly jotted down Emilio's phone number and called him a few weeks later. "Are you a shade-grown coffee farmer?" she asked. "Yes," he said. He explained his roastery was in Chambersburg, PA, and invited us to visit him. A few days later we drove 1-½ hours to Chambersburg to meet Emilio and see his small roasting operation. It turns out that Mark's estimation was pretty close—it actually took Emilio "12 years" to get through all the red tape, permits, and arrange a way to import his coffee. His first import was in 2012, but he hadn't been able to sell all of it, so he was trying

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JVAS has partnered with Emilio Garcia, owner of Lenca Coffee Roasters, to sell his shade-grown coffee since 2015, sending thousands of dollars in proceeds to help conserve birds in Honduras.

PA Forest Stewards: You Are Invited to Saturday Activities at the 2023 Basic Training in September

We are excited to have a diverse class of participants for the 2023 PA Forest Stewards training at Ligonier Camp and Conference Center, Ligonier Township, Westmoreland County, PA, September 7-10. Twenty-five eager folks will join us for hands-on activities and focused learning during our four-day weekend together.

In-service for PA Forest Stewards!

There will be an in-service opportunity for all current PA Forest Stewards to join the new class on Saturday, September 9. Come for lunch at noon, and stay for the afternoon program on identifying invasive species in the woods, discussing options for treatment, and developing plans to carry out the treatment for the area. You can assist by sharing your own experiences in treating invasives, or just

come to learn. You are also welcome to stay for dinner at 6 p.m. and a 7 p.m. campfire with conversation.

Please RSVP to Jeff Osborne, jao5194@psu.edu or (814)-867-5982, **by August 21** with your plans so we can have a count for lunch and dinner.



Above: Saturday dinner at the 2022 training. Current Stewards are invited to come out to the Ligonier Camp and Conference Center on Saturday afternoon for in-service activities and to meet the 2023 class.

We're Sharing Your Work!

We've added a new page to our website to share videos and other media that capture the passions and pursuits of PA Forest Stewards.

Here's what you'll find right now:

- *The History of Saws with Jim Walizer*
- *A Heart For His Forestland: Profile of a Forest Steward* featuring Glenn Early
- *Wood, Water, Wildlife and Work: Profile of a Forest Steward* featuring John Hoover
- *Is There Hope for the American Chestnut?* with Jim Walizer

Let us know if you have been featured in media we can share!

To view, go to ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests and click on *Resources for Woodland Owners* in the menu at the right, then click on *Pennsylvania Forest Stewards*, and then click on *PA Forest Stewards Featured in Videos and Other Media*.

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to expand. We asked if JVAS could buy his coffee wholesale since we'd be sending the small profit we made on each bag back to Honduras, and he loved the idea.

In the fall of 2015, JVAS purchased several hundred dollars of shade-grown, organic-practice Honduran coffee from Emilio's company, Lenca Coffee Roasters, which we quickly sold. Since then, in addition to purchasing thousands of pounds of Honduran coffee, we have helped Audubon chapters, coffee shops, and stores purchase Emilio's bird-healthy coffee. Emilio also helped JVAS connect with a bird club in Marcala, Honduras, near his coffee farm. We've sent binoculars, spotting scopes, and money from coffee sales to fund club projects.

Coffee proceeds also helped to fund the first ever "Migratory Bird Festival" at the Agricultural University in Olancho, Honduras that we and other Audubon members attended in February 2016. A goal of the trip was to inspect Emilio's farm, to make sure the native trees were still in place to form a canopy over the coffee plants, thus maintaining the native biodiversity. "Our" wintering birds don't eat the coffee cherries, but they feed on the insects found in shade-coffee farms—a win for the farmer and for the birds. We were thrilled to see Emilio's farm and learn that some of the land is untouched and protected for wildlife, and the coffee is planted under the native



Emilio's shade-grown coffee farm near Marcala, Honduras retains the native canopy, as well as some cash crops like bananas and mangos. Research by Cornell University shows that 58 bird species that breed in the U.S. migrate to Honduran shade-grown coffee farms for the winter.

tree canopy. And, very importantly, Laura wanted to see if Golden-winged Warblers wintered in Emilio's coffee farm.

Even though we have never seen Golden-winged Warblers in our young forest, we consider the project successful since we have a healthy, regenerating forest that attracts a lot of wildlife. Equally thrilling, we saw GWWAs overwintering in Emilio's coffee farm, as well as other

warblers that nest in the U.S. Our dream to help Golden-winged Warblers really has come true!

References:

- ¹ Bakermans, M., Larkin, J. et al. "Golden-winged Warbler Habitat: Best Management Practices for Forestlands in Maryland and Pennsylvania." Appalachian Mountain Joint Ventures. November 2011.

The Back Page: Wisdom from Walmart

By Bob Slagter, PA Forest Steward and Retired Steering Committee Chair, Class of '08

When it was finally our turn to check out before Christmas at Walmart, the lady at the register said, "Sorry for the delay, the guy ahead of you was struggling with his card." To which I responded, "I always pick the slow line, but no matter, this is our annual trip to get toys for Toys for Tots. We've been doing this for over 30 years and have given more than 750 toys since my grandson was a baby." She looked almost reverently at the cart and said, "Aren't you blessed to be able to give so generously?"

Wisdom for the ages from a Walmart associate. I have carried that kernel with me through the years, so when I was offered some funds for a project from NRCS, I immediately started thinking about where I could make the funds do the most good. The answer dropped like sunshine from the sky.

One of my favorite walks is up the old railroad grade that partially serves as my driveway. I could only go so far because time, water, and the dreaded beaver had destroyed parts of the grade. I had accepted the destruction because the cost of doing a fix-up was way too high...



Inspired by a Walmart associate's comment, NRCS funding, and 10 Bald Eagles, Bob will soon see a new trail open. Photo credit: Terry Spivey, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org.

upwards of \$25,000 by some estimates. But this one particular spring day as I stopped on the edge of the beaver dam/grade, an immature Bald Eagle took off from my left about 30 yards away, sailed across the pond, and landed in a tree. Then, about a minute later, another one—this one full size and mature—sailed away right on the same glide path. At regular intervals, a total of 10 eagles flew out for my pleasure.

Of course, then it hit me: take the money and do some shopping for the earth moving, and redo the two miles of grade that I own. And then what about donating the rehabbed trail to the Foundation for Sustainable Forests and opening it as a walking and biking path? Well, like so many good deeds, this one took on a life of its own. The Foundation loved it because it sits in the heart of 1,000 acres of the conserved Caldwell Creek watershed. The land is worth \$23,000 and improvements \$13,000 to \$15,000. So, with a couple thousand of my funds and some work hours from Foundation folks, we will open the trail this month.

This is not something everyone can do, but when you really want to help a cause you believe in, when you know that what you do—no matter how big or small—will make a difference, when you are willing to overcome hurdles, and especially when you believe in what you do, there is no way to fail. So, offer your resources, be creative, show up at events, and give what you can as often as you can.

Now I have a legacy, something that everyone who cares to can enjoy. With this project especially, I am truly blessed.

Summer Regional Meetings Bring PA Forest Stewards Together

After a four-year hiatus, the Finley Center staff was excited to bring back our regional summer meetings this year.

On June 30, Pennsylvania Forest Stewards and their guests—over 30 people in total—traveled to Dale Spitzer's property in Tioga County to explore a timber stand improvement cut, forest edge cut, wildlife food plot, tree plantings, and several created vernal pools and ponds.

On July 14, another group of Stewards and their guests gathered at Tim Troup's property in Armstrong County to explore its rich history. Situated adjacent to a 40-home settlement built for coal workers before 1938, the property has transitioned over almost a century from mostly fields in 1938 to completely forested in 1993. The tour included a demonstration and discussion of the use of a Gravelly brush mower, which is used to help control invasive shrubs.

Both meetings were capped with a great meal, fellowship, and a brief business meeting.



Photos above: PA Forest Stewards and guests learned about Dale Spitzer's property. Photos below: Tim Troup's tour included a Gravelly brush mower demo and some rain to escape from in Tim and Sandi's garage!



Pennsylvania Forest Stewards
The Pennsylvania State University
The James C. Finley Center for Private Forests
416 Forest Resources Building
University Park, PA 16802

Dates for Your Calendar

Tuesday-Thursday, August 8-10. Ag Progress Days. Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center, 2710 W. Pine Grove Road, Pennsylvania Furnace, PA 16865. Visit us at the Forestry and Wildlife booth in the J.D. Harrington Building.

September 7-10. PA Forest Stewards Class of 2023 Training. Ligonier Camp and Conference Center, Ligonier Township, Westmoreland County, PA. Current PA Forest Stewards planning to attend Saturday's in-service need to RSVP **by August 21** to Jeff Osborne, jao5194@psu.edu or call 814-867-5982.

Sunday, October 1. 7th Annual Walk in Penn's Woods. Join a walk near you! And, **walk hosts are needed.** The PA Forestry Association is taking the lead on this year's event, joined by the Finley Center and other supporters. Find out more at www.walkinpennswoods.org.

For more information about other upcoming events, check the Finley Center website:

ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests

Remembering PA Forest Stewards We've Lost

We recently lost these members of our Pennsylvania Forest Stewards family:

- Tom Fitzgerald (May 2023). Because of his commitment to good stewardship, Tom was made an honorary PA Forest Steward following his retirement as a Bureau of Forestry service forester.
- Earle Ryba (May 2023). Earle joined his wife, PA Forest Steward Kathy Ryba, at many events over the years, including the 2023 Forest Landowners Conference, and was a familiar face to so many of our volunteers.

Our thoughts are with the families of these long-time supporters of the PA Forest Stewards volunteer program.

We are so grateful for each Steward's service; if you hear of any in our volunteer family whom we have lost, please let us know.



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