

Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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Chair's Column: Slow Thinking

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

Dear Friends,

"You've heard of Slow Food?" I said to Allyson. "Yes," she replied. "Well, I like Slow Thinking," I replied.

Slow Food is a global, grassroots movement, founded in the late 1980s to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life, and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, and how our food choices affect the world around us.¹ You might think of Slow Food as the opposite of the American Fast Food Drive-Through...Yum! vs. Yech!

Many of you know that I go to Maine in the summer, out on an island in Penobscot Bay. That's my anchoring Slow Food time; I cook for 16 to 24 people in a big old house with minimal electricity (several solar panels provide enough juice for the water pump and a few electric lights) in a kitchen with a huge vintage cast iron Queen Atlantic "range" powered by wood. Knowing the character of the wood and the sound of the fire, knowing the multiple draft controls, knowing that the cooking surface is all hot (well-burnt thumb to prove it), and that successfully producing terrific meals requires an all-day dance, is important. And no, a quick trip to the grocery store is not going to happen if you forget an ingredient. And yes, you better know who is allergic to what before you start. This is cooking that entails menus, recipes, seven-page shopping lists, assistant shoppers, lots of boxes (bags don't do well on boats),

and many coordinating helpers...This needs lots of thought.

Slow Thinking, in my book, also means lots of thought. I don't mean slow thinking in the sense of dim-witted. I mean standing back from one's initial quick inclinations, digesting things, and considering what ideas and structure can come out of it.

Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman's mental model of *Fast and Slow Thinking*² explains how we live most of life on automatic pilot, essentially irrational, and prone to cognitive biases. Fast thinking is automatic, intuitive, error-prone and used for most common decisions. It's by far the majority of how we think each day. Slow thinking, on the other hand, is effortful, reasoned, more reliable, and used for complex decisions; slow thinking requires considerable attention and delivers a more accurate understanding. It's also more apt to creep up after you've been mulling over it for a while, when you least expect a revelation.

Allyson, Jeff, and I have been working behind the scenes for the past few weeks on a structure we all can use to "future" the Pennsylvania Forest Stewards. We've certainly used fast thinking to pinpoint items from our conversations with you to find areas on which to concentrate. Fast thinking is useful when individuals are well-informed about a subject. But Slow,

Slow Thinking has definitely refined our focus.

Slow Thinking has led us to propose four basic steps over the next 18 months:

1. **Benchmarking**—How does the PAFS program look as compared to other "like" groups all across the US (including forestry, watershed, master naturalist, master gardener, women's landowner groups).
2. **Listening to you**—Survey and listening sessions with PAFS volunteers to uncover perceptions, challenges, opportunities, and needed support. What are your expectations and perceptions of the program? What tools do you need to be effective?
3. **Mapping** the commonwealth's larger forest stewardship network's roles and responsibilities. Can we collaborate across the state to move toward better stewardship on private forestlands?
4. Then, building on the information gathered in steps 1-3, **creating and drafting** a dynamic and flexible program with support, leadership, and expectations clearly defined, to guide a highly effective future for the program.

We're excited to begin to share the structure that we've come up with when we see you at this summer's regional meetings. After all this Slow Thinking, I am SO excited to get this on the road.

But just FYI, I don't do the dishes.

Nancy

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¹ <https://www.slowfood.com>

² <https://modelthinkers.com/mental-model/fast-and-slow-thinking>



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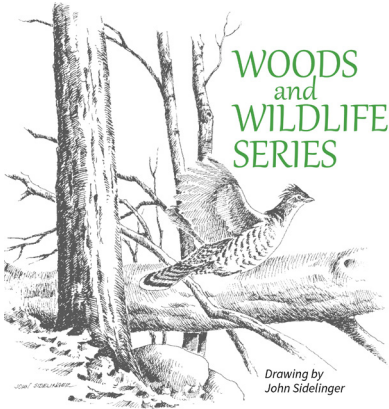


PennState
College of Agricultural Sciences



Black Bears: Big, Bold, and Brawny

Article and Photos by Mike and Laura Jackson, PA Forest Stewards, Class of '00

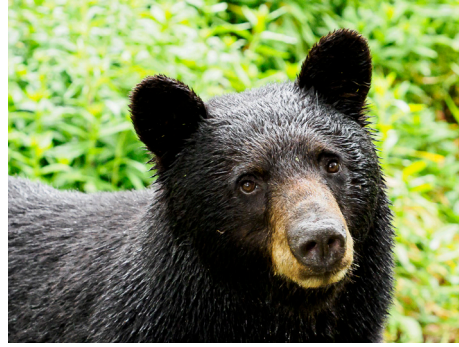


This article is part of a series exploring animals and their dependency on forests. Each article blends personal experiences with factual information and will challenge you to look closely in your woodlot for evidence that you are a habitat provider for the species.

I'll never forget that phone call. I was on a trip with my biology students at Wallops Island, VA, immersed in crabs, fish, clams, and shorebirds. It was late at night when Mike called, and I could tell that he was excited—an unexpected visitor that he described as big, black, and furry stopped by for a visit: *Ursus americanus*. The first black bear sighting on our property was on April 12, 1992, four years after we moved into our house on the lower flank of Tussey Mountain in Bedford County. Fortunately, I got to see the bear when I returned home a few days later.

Woods walks suddenly became more dynamic and the nights somewhat fearful. We hadn't really anticipated a bear "adopting" us, but bears are smart, have a keen sense of smell, and are always on the lookout for food. Since we had a lot of bird feeders, a grill on the side porch, and a shed with corn and birdseed, our new neighbor thought he had found the perfect setup and we were the perfect hosts: dumb, friendly, and generous. We were friendly at first, since this bear needed some TLC. His right front foot was crooked, causing a noticeable limp.

The novelty of our new neighbor quickly wore off after "Limpy" damaged our bird feeders, knocked over our grill, and spilled over 50 gallons of rainwater by tipping one of our rain barrels. Yes, he overstayed his welcome so it was time to send him on his way! Mike had the



Bears don't have very good eyesight, but their hearing and sense of smell are very keen. A bear's sense of smell is 2,100 times better than a human's, while a blood hound is only 300 times better.¹

brilliant idea to scare Limpy by setting off firecrackers, so he lit a small pack inside the house, but they went off before I could open the kitchen door. As our ears rang, and we coughed and sputtered from all the smoke, Limpy just watched our antics, then slowly meandered into the woods behind our house!

We learned a lot from Limpy:

1. Always put the bird feeders away each night, except in the dead of winter when bears are in their winter dens.
2. Keep the grill in the garage when not in use. Better yet, give the grill to a friend.
3. Don't pour vegetable oil in rain barrels to smother mosquito larvae—use Mosquito Dunks instead.
4. Save our firecrackers for the 4th of July celebration!
5. We are not as smart as bears—or as strong.

Since that first encounter in 1992, we have seen dozens of bears. It has been



This sow was nursing four cubs, so she climbed up on top of the platform feeder to eat some bird seed. We've seen as many as five bears in the feeder at one time.

amazing to see mother bears (called sows) bring their cubs to our backyard. Word must have gotten around quite quickly when Mike built a "bear-friendly" platform feeder that was strong enough to support bears and wouldn't get ripped apart like so many of our other smaller feeders.

It is illegal in Pennsylvania to feed bears, even if the main intent is to feed birds, so we stop feeding birds when the bears show up on a regular basis. Of course, it isn't illegal for game wardens to feed bears when they need to trap them. We agreed to let the local game wardens trap bears at our house in 2007.



The culvert trap is so named because it's similar to a metal culvert. They are rigged so that once the bear pulls on the bait, the door is triggered and closes with a loud bang. When we heard the bang, we knew it was time to call the game warden.

At that time, game wardens were asked to trap seven bears a year, in order to collect data like age (by pulling a premolar behind the canine tooth), weight, and overall health. A numbered metal tag was also placed in each ear. Bears really love donuts, so some day-old donuts were typically placed inside a culvert trap to entice bears. A topping of bacon grease on donuts was an even better bear attractant. It didn't take long before the first bear was trapped. The game wardens trapped numerous bears at our house for over two years, releasing them by the trap after processing them. One male bruin that was trapped on May 18, 2007, had a 51-inch chest circumference and weighed 403 pounds. That same bear was caught a year later, on May 9, 2008, but weighed 520 pounds! Female bears typically weighed around 150 pounds.

Black Bears, continued on page 3

We also learned that raising chickens and domestic turkeys is a challenge in bear country. On August 10, 2010, we arrived home at 1:30 p.m. to discover that a sow and her three small cubs had stopped by for a visit to our large turkey pen, which was empty at the time because the turkeys were foraging in the woods. The bears found their way into the pen because the door was open but panicked when they saw us. The mother quickly escaped to the woods, but the squealing cubs couldn't find the open door, so Mike went into the pen to shoo them out while I nervously urged him to get back in the truck since we didn't know if the sow would return. Fortunately, she did not.

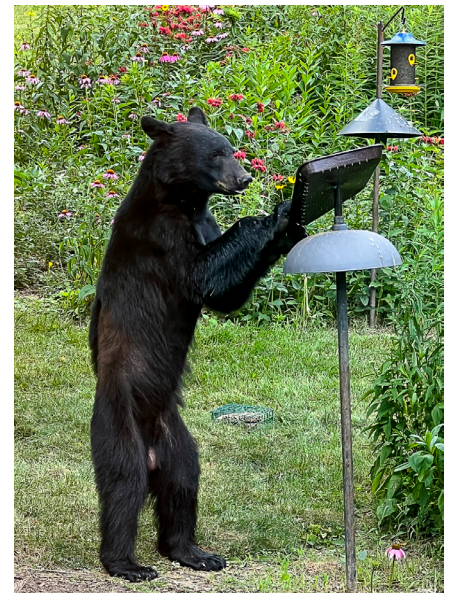
The turkeys did eventually return and all was well—until a month later when we discovered the bears were back in the turkey pen, but this time they didn't enter through the door because it was closed and locked. The sow tore a hole in the wire roof, so mother and cubs got in the pen, killed the 16 adult turkeys, and ate their fill. When we showed up, the mother escaped out the hole in the roof, but the cubs were trapped in the pen, so Mike opened the door and they escaped. Momma and cubs returned the next day to finish dining—leaving only piles of feathers behind. What could we say? The bears outsmarted us again!

Bears have an incredible sense of smell. We thought bird seed was securely stored in our small shed, but we didn't realize that louvered windows—even

when closed—are no deterrent to a hungry black bear. While we were enjoying exotic wildlife at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., a bear was testing its strength on the louvered window of our shed. The bear was strong enough to tear out the window and frame, crawl into the shed, and devour a huge amount of sunflower seeds. The bear was gone when we got home, so Mike quickly covered the hole with plywood and set up a trail camera. Sure enough, the culprit came back the next day, stood up on its hind legs, sniffed and pulled on the plywood, but couldn't get in. This time we outsmarted the bear, or did we?

Further proof that we aren't as smart as a bear: We put out lots of bird feeders so the Bedford County Master Gardeners could enjoy our backyard birds when they visited last year on July 13, 2022. Everyone enjoyed the flowers and the birds, but little did we know that a young black bear was lurking nearby in the woods, planning his strategy. Just a half-hour after the garden tour ended at 11 a.m., we looked out our kitchen window and were surprised to see an uninvited guest, damaging yet another bird feeder. We chased him into the woods and hurriedly put all the feeders away.

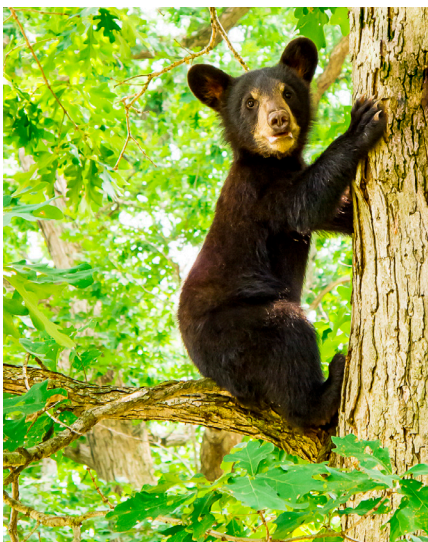
We've had a lot of exciting encounters with bears, but we'll share just one more because it made us laugh. We had tofu hotdogs left over when Laura's sister and



This young male black bear twisted a bird feeder in our backyard in broad daylight! No more bird feeding for a while!

husband, who are vegetarians, visited us. Mike and I tried the hotdogs, but didn't like them, so Mike stuck one in our wire fence behind the house. Later that evening, we watched a big bear gingerly grab the tofu hotdog in its mouth, hold it for a few seconds, then drop it. If bears won't eat tofu hotdogs, then we don't think they are fit for humans, either!

Black Bears, continued on page 4



One cub scampered up the white oak tree just outside the turkey pen and posed so Mike took its photo.

Important News for PA Forest Stewards:

Taking Steps to Increase Peer Connections

The Finley Center frequently receives questions about forest stewardship, but very few inquiries specifically ask for peer advice from PA Forest Stewards. While many of you have engaged with forest landowners over the years, it's still a fact that a large majority of Pennsylvania's forest landowners are unaware of the Pennsylvania Forest Stewards peer-to-peer program and the more than 500 active volunteers across the state. Over the coming months—and years—we will be working hard to change that.

As a first step, we will update and modify the PAFS webpage, found under the Finley Center (ecosystems.psu.edu/paforeststewards), to include a place where landowners can request

to receive peer advice from a PA Forest Stewards volunteer. When we receive a request, we'll email the landowner's contact information and questions to PAFS volunteers in their area. Note that we will not share a PAFS' information with the landowner; it is up to you to decide to make a connection. More details will be shared as we roll out the revised webpage.

On social media, check out quarterly posts on the Center's social media pages showcasing the PAFS program and promoting peer volunteer connections. Find the Center on Facebook and Instagram ([@finleyprivateforests](https://www.instagram.com/finleyprivateforests)). Through these efforts and more in the future, we are working to elevate your role in your communities.

Fish for Free, continued from page 5

fished for free. This spring when the water is up a foot and the color is a perfect olive green and the big one is coming off a winter-induced low-carb diet, I will simply grab the rod, a few flies, and my boots and sally forth to fish all of Caldwell.

The boy comes back to the man when he simply fishes...when he fishes simply. Instinct takes over, presentation and stealth count for more than the fly or the equipment, your line stays in the water instead of being changed with every bend in the stream. You will see mink and beaver and herons and wood ducks in addition to uncountable song birds.

You will feel the water better, you will see the pockets behind the rocks, you will know where the stream goes subterranean on each bend in the stream...you know this to be the home of the big one. I may or may not catch more fish this way, but I know it will feel reminiscent of days gone by...wonderful days when I fished for free.

Black Bears, continued from page 3

Have you ever found a big pile of bear scat in the woods? We have! It's an exciting find for sure, but it also serves as evidence that bears are ecosystem engineers in forests because they have a huge impact on forest health and species abundance. When we hiked in the Tongass National Forest in Southeastern Alaska, we found remains of rotting salmon and learned that bears drag salmon into the woods to eat the succulent flesh, but often leave the bones and head behind. The decomposition of the salmon provides important nutrients in temperate rainforests that benefit tree growth.

Take a close look the next time you find some bear scat and you might see a lot of partially digested grass if a bear has been feeding in the open. In the woods, though, bears eat ants, bee nests with larvae, berries, rodents, and even young fawns. Poke around in the scat and you'll see remains of their latest meal—mostly chewed vegetation and seeds.

If you really want to know what bears eat in your woods, you could plant the

Volunteers Needed for Saturday's Panel Discussion at 2023 Basic Training in September!

Current PA Forest Stewards are invited to share their experiences with this year's trainees and answer questions as part of a panel at the PA Forest Stewards Basic Training on Saturday afternoon, September 9, at the Ligonier Camp and Conference Center, Ligonier Township, Westmoreland County, PA. The panel discussion, which was a huge hit during last year's training, is scheduled for 1-2:15 p.m., followed by sessions on invasive species ID and vegetation management, where you can share your knowledge when we head outdoors. And you are invited to stay and chat with new

class members during dinner at 6 and the traditional campfire at 7.

If you are interested in serving on the panel, contact Jeff Osborne, jao5194@psu.edu or 814-876-5982.



2022 panel members shared their insights and experiences serving as a peer volunteer.

Last Call to Sign Up for Summer Regional Meetings

Thursday, June 15 is the last day to sign up to attend one (or both!) of two regional meetings for PA Forest Stewards and their guests.

Join us on **June 30, 4-7:30 p.m.** at Dale Spitzer's property in Lawrenceville, Tioga County, or on **July 14, 4-7:30 p.m.** at Timothy Troup's property in Apollo, Armstrong County. Each meeting will start with walks to features on the properties.

Then participants will enjoy a meal; the Center will provide an entrée and drinks, and PA Forest Stewards are asked to bring side dishes and desserts to share. After the meal we will provide updates on the PA Forest Stewards program.

RSVP for either meeting to Jeff Osborne at 814-867-5982 or jao5194@psu.edu **by June 15** for exact program addresses and to receive any updates.

seeds found in bear scat. That's what a biologist did after collecting some bear scat in Rocky Mountain National Park. The biologist planted the seeds from just one bear scat sample that was collected in the fall, and those seeds sprouted 1,200 seedlings the next spring—mostly Oregon grape and chokecherry. The biologist estimated that it saved about 100 work hours if people collected those seeds, and pointed out that the seedlings grown from bear scat were twice the size of the seedlings grown that weren't collected from bear scat. Those seedlings were distributed to various areas in the national park where they were planted to promote more food for wildlife.²

We're glad we have black bears in Pennsylvania since they are important links in food webs, especially helping to maintain white-tailed deer populations. If there is a good crop of acorns, blueberries, and pin or chokecherries, bears can double their body weight in late summer or fall when nuts and fruits are plentiful. The next time you find a fruit-bearing tree



In their quest for food, bears have damaged a number of wild cherry trees, and have destroyed quite a few apple trees that we've planted. The hard-to-digest seeds of many fruits are easily seen in bear scat.

or shrub growing in your woods, thank a black bear for spreading the seeds.

References:

¹ https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/Public/DOE_Trainers/13_The_Sense_of_Smell.pdf

² <https://blog.nature.org/2017/05/10/what-happens-when-you-plant-pile-bear-scat/>

The Back Page: Reflections from a Sporting Life and Other Ramblings

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

Fish for Free

Bob wrote Fish for Free during the Christmas season in 2005 and still enjoys the simple approach to fishing best!

I just booked a trip to the Bahamas and will probably spend \$3,000 to go to Deadman's Cay for a week's fishing for 'bones. I know it's a vacation and, with or without fishing, it costs money for vacations, but it makes you wonder what has happened to a kid and a sport that used to be done essentially for free. Of course, we are talking about an entirely different way to approach fishing, but, in the end, it is essentially the same process.

When you break it down, you use a pole with reel and line attached to a hooked attractor and some water with a hope of fish.

The kid's approach to fishing is based on the hope that the fish that are known to be in the hole he is fishing will be biting, and he focuses on coaxing them to do just that. He starts out with a Zebco or Mitchell reel which he fills with Stren monofilament line and mounts on a Shakespeare pole. He has some well-patched hip boots and vest or creel—depending on his preference—which he fills with snelled hooks, salmon eggs, and lures that were purchased from a display in the sporting goods shop after endless debate with his buddy about which ones will catch the big one. Oh yeah, he doesn't just want to catch some fish; he wants to catch "the big one." That fish lives under the banks of Oil Creek—or Caldwell or Pine—and he's a beauty... at least 15 inches, but possibly 18 or 20 inches, and it displays every color of the water it lives in and sky that nurtures it. That fish is the reason for fishing season as well as for standing in icy water during a cold rain at sunup, chipping ice out of the eyes of that Shakespeare rod.

But, the thing is, the equipment was either given to him by friends or family, and until he turns 16, the state says he can fish without a license...so the adventure of seeking "the big one" costs only the discretionary income he uses to buy those secret lures at three for a dollar. This great adventure is essentially free. Makes you wonder what happened to the sport for that kid. He now finds he needs a fly rod and reel and floating line and breathable waders and a vest filled with



Making fishing simple again can yield big rewards, as Bob found when he landed this big one.

implements and flies. The total cost has gone from next to nothing to the other side of \$500 to seek the same prey. He long ago caught "the big one"; in fact, he has caught many big ones...some monstrous trout...even up to 7 pounds...far beyond his childhood expectations, but the reason for the season is essentially the same—to stand in the water under the sky feeling the wind and water and just angling. It's just that now he complicates the process with a selection of rods and lines and flies and fishing methods... dry or wet or nymph or whatever. It's not bad to be the way he is now, but it certainly lacks simplicity, and fishing, maybe above all else, requires a certain simplicity as part of its nature.

How simple the basic allure of the sport...to capture for a brief period of time a wild being perfectly adapted to its home and beautiful enough to inspire an entire industry devoted to featuring this creature on canvas. You can kill the fish if you choose, if you love the taste of its flesh and need to harvest the meat for your enjoyment, OR you can simply catch and admire (even take a quick photo) and let the being swim back to its home. What else can you do that allows that kind of natural interaction? How perfect is that kind of intercourse? It may be sport in its simplest form.

So, if simplicity is at the core of this interaction, why complicate it with multiple rods and trips and the latest fly patterns? The answer is, again, simple... because the more you catch of the generations of "the big one," the more you need to catch. So you begin to change ways of pursuit and money spent in

pursuit. You end up with trips for trout and salmon and stripers and bonefish and tarpon. You also end up with multiple generations of fishing supplies, all costly, but all required to fill you with the hope that this newest addition will aid in catching more big ones. Sometimes it works, sometimes not so much.

But you keep going until you reach a point of saturation and/or maturation. The saturation point is reached when you forget what rods you have because it has been so long since you used some of them. The maturation point is reached when you automatically use the same rod virtually all the time for the same species. My 7' 4" Orvis PM 5 wgt. is usually in my hand when I go out the door on Caldwell Creek, and I always take my Sage RPLX 11 wgt. tarpon fishing, even though the guide is an Orvis tackle tester and has the latest equipment. So I consider myself at a point now where I can finally begin to say, "Enough!...I need to make this simple again."

I start by not wearing my vest. I can now select a handful of patterns that are my (and sometimes the fish's) favorites and some tippet material and attach those with some snippers and forceps to a lanyard worn around my neck. I grab a rod, put on the boots and go fishing... simply go fishing. I am fortunate that for about nine months of the year, Caldwell runs free of ice, and I can fish literally 20 steps from my cabin door and have caught fish in all months except December, January, and February on my home water.

That is not to say I know more about Caldwell and how it fishes than anyone else, but I do have immediate and year-round access, and the quantity of time spent fishing has made up for the quality of the fisherman in my case.

But, in the 40-plus years I have been fishing it, I have never fished the entire stream. That would require about 10 miles of walking the stream and let's say at least three days of fishing. So when reflecting on the complication of plane trips and customs and boats and guides and multiple rods coupled with multiple fly selections and the cost of all those complications, I have resolved to get back to those days of yore, when the boy

Fish for Free, continued on page 4

Pennsylvania Forest Stewards
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Dates for Your Calendar

June 30, 4-7:30 p.m. PA Forest Stewards Regional Meeting. Dale Spitzer's property, Lawrenceville, Tioga County. RSVP requested (Jeff Osborne, jao5194@psu.edu or call 814-867-5982).

July 14, 4-7:30 p.m. PA Forest Stewards Regional Meeting. Timothy Troup's property, Apollo, Armstrong County. RSVP requested (Jeff Osborne, jao5194@psu.edu or call 814-867-5982).

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 on Saturday need to RSVP Jeff Osborne, jao5194@psu.edu or call 814-867-5982.

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 a fellow Pennsylvania Forest Steward volunteer:

- John Hoover (Class of '94)

Our thoughts are with the family of this long-time Steward who many of our recent class members met as John hosted them at his property during their basic training and shared many of the stewardship projects he undertook on his 600 acres.

We also learned that a ceremony was held in April at the Penn State-Schuylkill campus, Schuylkill Haven, in memory of long-time Steward Ben Vaupel, who passed away in late 2021, as noted in this space. A Kentucky coffeetree was planted on campus in honor of his memory.

We are so grateful for each Steward's service; if you hear of any of our volunteers who have passed away, please let us know.

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