

Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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Chair's Column: Passion Play

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

DCNR Service Forester Russ Gibbs took off up the access road like he'd been shot out of a cannon. Once he heard that universal "YES!" from the 2023 Pennsylvania Forest Stewards class, there was no denying that he was inspired, that he had the passion. We were off to see the stand "initiation stage."

Russ and his colleague, Mike Doucette, had the new class out in Forbes State Forest, Somerset County; Mike had explained the harvest history of the tract from 1982 to the present in detail—eight sales, sawtimber and pulpwood amounts, species/MBFs, bids updated to 2023 dollars, a characterization of each sale from selection cut to improvement cut, clearcut to shelterwood, salvage, overstory removal, two-age removal, two-aged shelterwood—prescribed over 40 years by three different management foresters, the detailed sequence laid out in our field guide. We saw the results of each sale over the span of years since harvest, and now we were off to see that initiation stage. Uphill.

I'm more than a bit older than I was 23 years ago when I went through the PA Forest Stewards training myself. Uphill is really UPHILL now. But I still remember, from my initial learning experience, a long car ride through heavy downpours with service forester Rick Deppen, who very subtly revealed his deep passion

for the woods. I also remember an older woman telling Roy Brubaker, then a service forester speaking about stewardship, that she wished he could visit her church and deliver his message to the congregation—she instinctively sensed his passion for the natural world. Of course, it doesn't hurt that Roy has a degree in theater as well as in forestry; he was right in line with a Passion Play.

And it's not just the service foresters. John Schwartzter, DCNR's Woodland Stewardship Practices Specialist, was with this new class the whole way, as was Jeff Osborne, the Finley Center's Forest Stewardship Program Associate. Both are gentle with their corrections of misconceptions. John would pop up out of his chair like a jack-in-the-box with an accurate answer almost before a question was fully formed. I loved Jeff's final quiet analysis of the Sunday morning TUSAF exercise after the class labored over the prescription for an older growth mixed mesophytic deciduous woodland: "I might just not do anything to this stand for a while..."

There were Katie Brooks and Calvin Norman from Penn State Extension, clearly explaining complex concepts like wildlife and habitat, climate change and carbon. Nobody is doing this for a big paycheck!

Of course, Allyson was her usual generous self; it's perfectly obvious (just watch

her hands) that she is in her element coaching a new set of Stewards!

The new class was excited to see all that thick new growth of the initiation stage when we got up on top of the hill. They were full of questions. And more questions. Wild and wooly questions. They are a particularly exciting class. They are also excitable, and can be hysterically funny. They regularly dissolved into laughter, sometimes together and sometimes at each other. They did get some old embedded ideas knocked out of them: discovered that there might be some good aspects to a clearcut, that herbicides might be just the ticket needed to help maintain the ecological integrity of a patch of woods, that they were not entirely helpless in the face of challenges, that their passion would carry them a long way.

They are, indeed, uniformly passionate. I saw tears of frustration well up during a discussion about a town forest. I saw silent stricken looks pass between them when they suddenly realized that they didn't know what they didn't know. I saw big grins when they discovered something they could accomplish.

They are a wonderful reminder that we're all climbing that hill, full of a passion for stewardship; each of us in our own Passion Play.

Nancy

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After a morning presentation on Silviculture, the PA Forest Stewards class of 2023 heads up the hill in Forbes State Forest to see first-hand stand initiation.



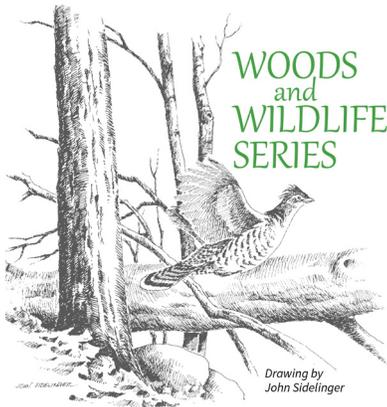
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Wildflower Wanderings, Part 1: A How-to Guide for Planting Native Wildflower Meadows

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.

Did you know you could get funding to convert your lawn to a native wildflower meadow? If you have a half-acre or more of mowed lawn, you might want to sign up for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Lawn Conversion program. According to DCNR's website, there are two million acres of lawn in Pennsylvania and those lawns take a lot of time and energy to cut.¹

It's estimated that a riding lawn mower can mow an average of an acre per hour, while zero-turn mowers could mow about four acres an hour.² Since many people mow their yard every week during spring, summer, and fall, that adds up to a lot of time and money, not to mention air pollution.

Most people don't realize that lawn mowers produce a lot of pollution. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), one hour of operating a new gasoline lawn mower emits the same amount of volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxide as driving a new car 45 miles. The EPA further determined that gas-powered lawn mowers produce up to 5% of the air pollution in the U.S. That's because there are over 40 million acres of lawn across the U.S. If you are concerned about climate change, you might want to consider converting your lawn to a native wildflower meadow.

Another disconcerting issue is the amount of water and fertilizer used to grow grass. Americans spend about \$30 billion on lawn care every year. In fact, there is more acreage in lawns than there is in irrigated corn.³ We're fortunate that most people don't need to water their lawns in Pennsylvania, but near Los Angeles, where Laura's sister lives, the sprinklers are on a timer, so their lawn gets watered twice a day, every day.

Have we convinced you yet to check out DCNR's Lawn Conversion program? If we have, just Google "DCNR Lawn Conversion program" and get started by sharing your contact information so the staff can contact you.

While we didn't exactly have turfgrass around our house, we did have a lot of mowed fields. There were three hay fields totaling about 8 acres on the property when Laura's parents gifted us the land in 1985. Over the ensuing years, the fields slowly converted to grassy meadows with a lot of native goldenrod and milkweed, as well as lots of non-native invasive plants like Queen Anne's lace, Japanese vine honeysuckle, autumn olive, and other nasties. Although Mike brush hogged the fields once a year, the invasives were definitely winning, so we decided to outsmart them.

In 2007, we started experimenting by planting seed mixes of wildflowers. We were initially fooled by plant mixes labeled "beautiful wildflowers for birds and butterflies." We soon found out that these types of mixes had many non-native seeds that did produce beautiful flowers but didn't provide much food for many insects. We also found that many of the non-native plants died out after a year or so and were replaced by unwanted weeds. Fortunately, we learned about a company in Pennsylvania that sold native seed mixes specifically for pollinators.

Now we buy native seed mixes only from Ernst Conservation Seeds in Mead-



Early goldenrod, oxeye sunflower, purple coneflower, anise hyssop, and wild bergamot are just a few of the wildflowers in the Mesic to Dry Native Pollinator Mix. Diverse flowers bloom from June to October.

ville, PA. They sell over 500 individual seed species and over 200 different seed mixes.

Ernst also sells seed mixes with non-native plants, so we are careful to buy only native seeds or native seed mixes. Ernst has a wonderful customer service department and experts who will provide helpful advice. Their extensive catalog is free and chock-full of information on how to plant and when to plant. The last section of the catalog is like a pictorial dictionary with photos and information about each species. We call their toll-free number each year to get a free catalog: 1-800-873-3321. There is also a lot of information on their website.⁴

We buy the seed mixes in late winter (when Ernst has the best inventory), store them in our downstairs garage so they can chill, but not freeze, over winter. We plant the seeds in the spring as soon as the frost-free date occurs (which is late May for us). Every sowing has been successful, so we'd like to share which seed mixes we've planted.

- PA Valley & Ridge Province FACW Mix: ERNMX-231: around vernal pools
- Mesic to Dry Native Pollinator Mix: ERNMX-105: in old hay fields
- Showy Northeast Native Wildflower Grass Mix: ERNMX-153: field below house
- Partially Shaded Area Roadside Mix: ERNMX-140: log yard and log road

Wildflowers, continued on page 3



We planted the Mesic to Dry Native Pollinator Mix in the field below our house in 2015, which still had a lot of blooms when this photo was taken on August 16, 2023.

We customized some of the seed mixes, which costs 5% more, but that allowed us to get a mix that didn't contain big bluestem (it's native, but aggressive). We also asked Ernst to put in more milkweed seeds, but that was a costly mistake on our part since we observed that common milkweed and butterfly weed don't do well in mixes if other plants are taller. Most of the milkweed died out after two years.

Planning and site prep are very important and clearly explained in the Ernst catalog or online.

Here's what we did:

1. We killed all vegetation from the planting area (we used glyphosate, but for small spaces you can kill the weeds with thick layers of cardboard). We sprayed once in the fall and then again in spring. To be successful, seeds must be in contact with bare ground.
2. We mixed the seed with seed oats since the oats act as a cover crop and help hold the soil in place until the wildflower and native grasses germinate.
3. We broadcast the seed by hand using a cyclone seeder, spreading half the seeds in one direction, then we seeded the other half perpendicular to the first pass.
4. We drove a lawn roller over the area, so the seeds had better contact with the bare soil.
5. We covered the seeded area very lightly with clean straw.
6. We prayed for rain! (It didn't rain for two weeks after we planted in 2020, but we still had excellent results.)

We have never tried planting in the fall, but some people prefer that time of year.

Our mountain fields have poor soil, but native plants do great in poor soil. Fertilizer is never recommended. Soil tests will help determine if any soil amendments need to be added before planting.

We planted two acres in late May 2020, but we rented a Great Plains no-till drill from the Bedford County Conservation District

to plant the seeds since the area was so large. Another advantage of using a no-till drill eliminates the need for straw and seed compaction. We manually planted two small areas in the field below our house in 2015 and added



The seeds get mixed with kitty litter for more even distribution when scattered with a cyclone seeder.



The meadows reduce the amount of mowing, but we still have to remove invasive plants like these butterfly bushes that somehow found their way into the meadow. Mike brush hogs the fields every three years in late winter to control trees that seed into the meadows.

another half-acre in 2020. We have never watered or fertilized the meadows. Our oldest planting is now eight years old, but still has a wide diversity of blooms.

Although this summer was quite dry in Bedford County, we still had a bumper crop of native wildflowers which attracted a lot of pollinators like bees and butterflies. In the next article, we will share some of our exciting explorations in the wildflower meadows.

References:

- ¹ <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/Water/LawnConversion/Pages/default.aspx>
- ² <https://canberradiamondblade.com.au/mower-calculator/#:~:text=It%20takes%20approximately%202.5%20hours,a%2060%20zero%20turn%20mower>
- ³ <https://www.businessinsider.com/americas-biggest-crop-is-grass-2016-2>
- ⁴ Ernst Conservation Seeds: <https://www.ernstseed.com>

Toll-free Number to be Disconnected at End of 2023

Please take note that the PA Forest Stewards toll-free number, 800-235-9473, will no longer be in service after December 31, 2023.

With the changes in the ways we communicate, our toll-free line is now rarely used for stewardship business—we are currently averaging fewer than two calls per month from Stewards or general public inquiries.

You can continue to reach our office at **814-863-0401**; staff is typically available 7:30-4, Mondays-Fridays. If we are not available to answer your call and you leave a message, we will promptly get back to you. You can also email us at **PrivateForests@psu.edu** or at any one of the staff email addresses listed on page 6 of this newsletter.

PA Forest Stewards Accomplishments and Futuring: We Want to Hear from You!

It's an odd year, which means this is the time that we compile 12 months of your accomplishments practicing forest stewardship on your own land and sharing what you've learned with others!

Collectively and individually, PA Forest Stewards make a tremendous impact caring for, and helping other forest landowners take good care of, the woods. Thank you!

We hope you've been keeping track of your accomplishments thus far.

In the next month, you will receive two requests for feedback. One will be the accomplishments summary which will look like what it has in the past (activities on land, activities reaching others, time spent and people reached, as well as updates to your contact information, if any), but perhaps a little shorter.

We encourage you to fill it out as quickly as you can and return it to us

in the postage paid envelope; or you can submit everything online through Qualtrics (website will be included in the letter). This is critical information that we report back to funders to show the impact of the forest stewardship dollars through peer connections.

As extra incentive, all returned or submitted accomplishment reports will be entered into a drawing to win a door prize—up to 20 awarded. Yay prizes!

The second request for feedback helps us with our Futuring project, as a committee of your peers works to strengthen the program and ensure its continued success well into the future. Included with your accomplishments survey will be an overview of a questionnaire about the peer volunteer program. The overview will let you see the types of questions we're asking so that you have

a good sense of what is included in the Futuring questionnaire.

To keep responses confidential, we will ask PA Forest Stewards to complete this survey online, if you're able. However, if you'd prefer a hard copy survey, we will be glad to get that out to you. We anticipate this survey taking 20-30 minutes of your time to complete, and the website will also be included so that you can enter your responses as your time allows. At no time will your responses be linked to your name, and you may skip any question you wish not to answer.

We are asking that both feedback pieces be returned or submitted to us by the end of November.

There will be many reminders. Your input in both places is truly critical to the continued success of our programs.

Thank you in advance! Watch your mail (and email)!

PA Forest Stewards Class of 2023 Completes Training at Ligonier Camp

This year, we took our basic training to the southwest part of the state where 25 new PA Forest Stewards spent a long weekend of intensive work at the Ligonier Camp and Conference Center in Ligonier, PA.

From Thursday's dinner through Sunday afternoon's departure, this enthusiastic group participated in 13 indoor and outdoor learning sessions, a deep dive into the harvest history of a tract in Forbes State Forest, and gained practical insight into what it means to be a PA Forest Steward from a panel of eight

current Stewards. They ate together, laughed together, and learned together from a well-rounded team of professionals and staff.

With our 25 newest members, over 800 PA Forest Stewards have been trained since the start of the program in 1991. Your collective impact on the health and vitality of Pennsylvania's forests is immeasurable!



The PA Forest Stewards class of 2023 is ready to put their training to work in their communities.

Finley Center Team Presents Survey Findings at Westmoreland County Meeting

Experts from the James C. Finley Center for Private Forests at Penn State spoke to about 30 interested private forest landowners and foresters at the Houston Center in Greensburg, PA on September 21. Hosted by the Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association, President John Hilewick introduced Allyson Muth, Center Director; Sasha Soto, Center Ph.D. Candidate; and Jeff Osborne, Forest Stewardship Program Associate.

Those present were eager to hear details about the results of the 2021 Pennsylvania Forest Landowners Survey and how those results compared to the 2010 survey, as well as updated information on the PA Forest Stewards program.

Allyson and Sasha reported some of the survey findings and explained how the Center surveyed 6,600 Pennsylvania woodland owners, the first survey in over 10 years to gather information on the values, goals, and activities of Pennsylvania's private forest landowners.

Jeff ended the presentation by describing the PA Forest Stewards program as a community of landowners who have been trained in sustainable forestry practices to better care for their forests. He explained that volunteers also conduct outreach to motivate and assist other landowners to care for their woods and encouraged interested landowners to apply for training.

A series of presentations on the survey findings will be offered around the state in the coming months.



Allyson, Jeff, and Sasha at the presentation.

The Back Page: The Colonel's Table, Part 1

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

As you will see in this two-part story, Bob loves to fly fish and hopes to inspire you to take to the waters!

I love England, probably because I enjoy the English so much. To feel real humility, discuss the world with a Brit sometime...they know the facts and are softly opinionated enough to let you know where things stand.

They also know a lot about fly fishing; they invented “fishing on an angle with a fly insect.” Fishermen seemed to like the term “angle,” so we now all call ourselves “anglers.” The English have fished their legendary chalk streams for centuries and, until recently, killed many fish in South England’s River Test, among others, on their way to becoming early world authorities on trout fishing with a fly.

I have been lucky enough to visit England a lot through my work and have gotten to know many Brits, so I guess I was destined to someday fish with some limeys on their home waters. The trip in this story turned into an adventure of the most sophisticated type, complete with classic food, wine, and gentlemen’s banter.

It began with a recommendation to travel from my usual base at the Mayfair Hotel in London to Devon in the English West Country, a place famous for cream, cheese, and other pastoral products. The trip would entail just about every means of ground transportation available, starting with the early train from Victoria Station to the last stop in Devon, followed by the bus to Black Torrington where a car awaited my arrival for a short ride to Sheepwash and my destination at the Half Moon Inn.

The countryside was pure English, with hedge-lined single-track roads crossed at very regular intervals by an assortment of bovine creatures. The houses had a look best described as early cottage... they were exactly the way they were built centuries ago and maintained impeccably by many generations of the same family. The Inn also fit the mold, with its thatched roof that looked to be two feet thick and a classic tudor style, all plaster and rough wood perfectly maintained.

The proprietors were brothers, born in Barbados of English descent and notable for their hospitality and love of wine, which they showed in equal measure when I arrived and immediately toured a



The River Torridge has been the site where many an angler has landed a trout worthy of tall tales and fish stories.

cellar that would fit nicely in a chateau in Bordeaux. Then onto the room—Spartan but comfortable, up two flights in the attic—and the conversation about the fishing.

The weather had not been kind lately to the River Torridge that I was to fish. It was filled “to the banks” with the usual rains of spring in Devon, having doubled in recent weeks which made all the individual beats unrecognizable and fishing next to impossible for the browns, salmon, and sea trout that like to inhabit or at least visit the river. Had I been here the previous week, I would have experienced perfect conditions. But today, the river was unfishable. In other words, the usual for most of my fishing trips.

One of the reasons I love the English is their unflappability and indomitable spirit. This showed its best side as the river’s height was, for the proprietors of the Half Moon Inn, a “No Worries” scenario. I was given a very limber and antiquated 10-foot rod and pair of green wellies, an old aluminum net, a small box of well-used wet flies, and directions to “The Pond.”

So I set out with directions to cross the road, a field or two, and couple of hedge rows until I came to The Pond. The proprietors sent me off with instructions, not only on where to go, but what to do when I got there. I had all rainy afternoon to fish a roughly square and fairly deep piece of water that was about a quarter acre in size. The instructions were to select any fly, cast to the center of the

pond, and retrieve whatever fish presented themselves.

I was also given a wicker creel and told that the keeper of the land The Pond was on, Ole Jim, liked the taste of trout and the fee for access to the property was a mandatory trout dinner with the fish supplied by me and prepared, poached, at the Inn. At this point, I was faced with two problems that I felt I had to share with the innkeeper. First, I did not normally kill fish and hadn’t for years. I was strictly catch-and-release, no matter the size of the fish or the circumstances of the catch. I’m talking tarpon and permit and bones in the Keys, and trout of all sizes in brown, brook, rainbow, and even tiger varieties...none were ever killed and kept. Second, there is never a guarantee that fish would be caught. What would happen—and what would be the fee—if I was unsuccessful in getting a trout to eat?

The answer to the first question: this wasn’t like catching wild trout, was it? The fish were in the pond because they were put there to be harvested, so harvest them, I should. And the answer to second fell right in with the first: it was a pond, after all, rather like fish in a barrel, right? In conclusion, it was the only option if I wanted to fish on this trip.

So with an “Off with you lad; you can’t catch them ‘til your line’s in the water,” I was sent on my way.

Will Bob catch a fish? Read the conclusion to his Lake Torridge adventure in Part 2 in the next issue.

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Parting Shots: PA Forest Stewards Training 2023



Top: Fun times in the woods; above: service forester Russ Gibbs; right: Saturday night campfire.

Dates for Your Calendar

Thursday, November 30. **LAST DAY to submit your accomplishments summary and PA Forest Stewards Futuring Survey.** (See article on page 4.) We are asking all PA Forest Stewards to participate in these important projects. You can submit your data online or by mail. You will receive surveys and more information on how to submit in October!

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

ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests



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The James C. Finley Center for Private Forests at Penn State
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PA DCNR Bureau of Forestry
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