

Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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Chair's Column: On Listening

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

Some of you know I was initially destined to become a cellist...I started young, with a stellar teacher and a beautiful German cello (which I still own), and played until I went to graduate school. Although I performed as a soloist and with orchestras, my heart really fell for chamber music where, as a teenager, I learned to listen intently to other musicians. An only child, I didn't have a lot of practice with conversation, but in chamber music, you're part of an ensemble that performs without a conductor, and while there's LOTS of verbal discussion during rehearsals, there's none during playing; if you or someone else doesn't listen intently, the whole deal falls apart. You learn to listen in spades.

I once attended a concert in Maine where the pianist began the third movement of a piano quartet with its crashing downbeat—while the other members of the quartet looked on totally bewildered...the correct movement was #2. The pianist stopped and buried his head and hands on the music shelf. He looked up and apologized to the other players, and then stood formally and apologized to the audience. And then he said, "I'll just go back to Manhattan now..." (They did persuade him to continue).

Just so you know that maybe my heart was conflicted about all this music, as a sixth-grader I was sent off to the guidance counselor to discuss my future. She asked the classic, "What would you like



As an accomplished cellist as a child, Nancy learned the importance of listening.
Photo provided by Nancy Baker.

to be when you grow up?" And I replied, "A forester." I've not forgotten the look of dismay on her face, nor her answer: "Oh Nancy, girls can't be foresters!" My dad backed me up with, "You can be whatever you want to be!" Hmmm...

So, come college graduation, I made a choice. I know many individuals who manage both music and profession, but I chose the single forest path.

That doesn't mean, however, that I've left the listening part behind. We all laugh about the foresters who choose their career because they can hike off to the back forty and do their work in the silent absence of any companions. And we acknowledge that the number one reason folks buy woodland in Pennsylvania is for privacy and solitude. But it's such a visceral thrill to hear hermit thrushes sing, isn't it? The music plays on...

So this year, as I have since 2008, I bought tickets for Cornell's premier chamber music series Mayfest. On five sequential days, I drive to Ithaca, NY and I listen to musicians listen to each other. Participants come from all over the world to play in musical combinations and permutations that range from ancient to modern; it's unlikely that, as individuals, they have played together before. These are not set ensembles. All are world-class musicians, and they are also world-class listeners. Indeed, during last year's final performance (Olivier Messiaen's seminal work *Quatuor pour Fin du Temps* [Quartet for the End of Time], a work suffused with bird song), the lights in Sage Chapel were lowered to near total darkness—and there was only sound. They played essentially without any visual cues.

At this year's final performance, there was a world premier: *Rampike* composed by Christopher Stark. He noted in the program:

"In recent years I have been reading a lot of creative non-fiction about the environment. Terry Tempest Williams and Elizabeth Kolbert are writers who have shown me a path to art-making that feels authentic to my interests and life experience, and I am deeply inspired by them. A recent book I discovered by Elizabeth Rush has a section titled Rampikes, and it got me thinking about this word, a word I rarely use that refers to the skeleton of a

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PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting: Not Registered Yet? Sign Up Today!

A few weeks ago, we sent a packet inviting you to the PA Forest Stewards Biennial Summer Meeting on Saturday, July 20 at the Dauphin County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018. This full-day event will feature a PA Forest Stewards update, three learning sessions with 12 topics to choose from, a closing keynote by

Seth Cassell, State Forester and Director of the DCNR Bureau of Forestry, and continental breakfast and lunch.

If you would like to attend and haven't already registered, please **return your registration form or register online at <https://tinyurl.com/PAFS2024> by June 24**. Questions? Contact Jeff Osborne at jao5194@psu.edu or 814-867-5982 or the office at 814-863-0401.



Expanding Opportunities for PA Forest Stewards: We Need Your Input!

As we've been getting feedback over the years, we hear many of you are looking for opportunities to advance your training and skill sets in specific areas. We would like to ask for your help in investigating the creation of a master peer volunteer network under the umbrella of the PA Forest Stewards volunteer program.

We are looking to gather willing and interested PA Forest Stewards to take part in a 90-minute discussion around the potential and opportunities for such a programmatic effort. We will ask for your consent to have the session audio recorded so that we can more fully cap-

ture it. These recordings will be transcribed so we can compile them across the sessions. No names will be associated with the transcriptions and your contributions will not be attributed to you.

We'll provide dinner at the beginning of the meeting, followed by an interactive discussion session where you can share your successes and challenges supporting other landowners as they care for their land. We'll also talk about potential subject areas for deeper dives and the support needed to make a master volunteer program successful.

We have already sent information to current Stewards in and surrounding

Clarion County about our first discussion session at Holiday Inn Express & Suites, 325 Perkins Road, Clarion, PA 16214 on June 24, 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. We are planning to hold future sessions in Bradford, Westmoreland, Centre, and Lebanon Counties, and will send out invitations to the rest of our PA Forest Stewards, based on your home county's proximity to one of these locations. These discussions will be scheduled from late July to late September; stay tuned for dates and locations. Contact Jeff Osborne at jao5194@psu.edu or 814-867-5982 if you are interested in registering for a session or for further information.

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tree after it has died. This image stuck with me, the gray-white bark, absent of leaves and needles, the unadorned form laid bare, and I became inspired to compose a piece of music that might express this visual through sound. My work, Rampike, is a strict canon imbued with a rhythmic dynamism that attempts to conjure the feeling of observing a tree in full bloom; the leaves and branches endlessly varied and repeated. The canon returns at the end, but now unadorned, simpler, and bittersweet, as if the branches have now been revealed without their embellishment.

"I grew up in western Montana, and I think often about its landscape and its increasing vulnerability in the face of climate change. Rampike is also an homage to a favorite childhood pine tree that was recently felled due to beetle infestation as a result of our warming world."

Chris was sitting just a few seats away from me, so at the end of the evening, I spoke to him—for the music had somehow spoken to me. As I explained where I was coming from, he interrupted: "Oh, I always wanted to be a forest ecologist!" The medium and the message coalesced for us both.

This morning, NPR interviewed Viggo Mortensen, actor and director of the newly released movie *The Dead Don't Hurt*. To paraphrase him:

...what you really should always do—react, be in the moment, completely in the moment, and react to everything you see, hear, and feel from the environment you're in...Look at gesture, expression, eyes, listen to the tone of voice...and everything around—the light, objects...

So, let's not just listen to the music. Let's listen to it all. I might not be practic-

ing music anymore, but I'm still studying and practicing listening!

Nancy
(Reach out to me at bakerii@epix.net.)

References:

- ¹ <https://www.newburyportchambermusic.org/post/messiaens-quartet-for-the-end-of-time>, don't miss the video of Messiaen imitating birds with his voice, the call then repeated on the piano by his wife.
- ² <https://music.wustl.edu/people/christopher-stark>
- ³ In music, a canon is a contrapuntal compositional technique that employs a melody with one or more imitations of the melody played after a given duration.
- ⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2024/06/01/nx-s1-4906556/viggo-mortensen-on-the-dead-dont-hurt-a-western-set-during-the-u-s-civil-war>

Read about PA Forest Stewards in the 2023 Annual Report

We are pleased to share our 2023 Annual Report with our PA Forest Steward volunteers. Thank you for your support of the James C. Finley Center for Private Forests at Penn State in 2023.

With our work at the intersection of people and forests, the Finley Center has established itself as a trusted leader in studying and supporting private forest landowners, their land, and the professionals who provide service to them. In this report, we share our accomplishments and the integral role the PA Forest Stewards volunteer program plays in the mission of the Center.

The Finley Center's deep understanding of the woodland owner community

provides a foundation for us to collaborate with landowners, natural resources professionals, and policymakers alike in cultivating stewardship of privately owned forests. Our annual report highlights the many ways in which the Center is advancing research on landowners, providing impactful educational resources and programming for landowners and professionals, creating educational opportunities for students, and advancing the PA Forest Stewards volunteer program.

Building a strong, engaged community that cares well for our woods takes coming together, finding common ground, strengthening connections, and forg-

ing the tools to do the work. This is the heart of what we do and what you do as Stewards.

We are so grateful for your support and the many hours and ways in which you contribute to the Center and its work. Together, we are making great progress in moving woodland stewardship forward. We are grateful to all who give of their time, talents, and resources to enable the Center to help people care well for their woodlands.

We hope you enjoy reading this annual report and invite you to share it with others. You can also find/share the report online at <https://ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests-annual-report>.

The Back Page: The Mohawk's Day, Part 2

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

Over the years, Bob has penned stories combining his love of history, good forest stewardship, and adventures in the woods. Enjoy Part 2 of this tale of a hunt, set many years ago in Penn's Woods.

There had been movement all over the woods this morning. Chickadees flitted among the branches, red squirrels ran amuck, a prickly porcupine was lounging in the hemlock above the Mohawk brave. He was as much at home as any of these creatures; he belonged here. He had taken a smoke bath this morning to cover his strong human scent, and that, combined with his perfect position, ease of movement, his deerskin cape, and the cloak of the rain, made him one with the point of land he was hunting.

He favored points of land and hunted them whenever he could. They tended to be where a small valley fed into a larger one and the land coming from the top of the small valley met with the side hill of the larger valley. This formed a point of land on both sides of the smaller valley that game used as a shortcut from one valley to the other.

Much of the land in the valleys below was covered with hemlock and white pine, some as wide as the base as he was tall. This land was quiet and peaceful—his church, really, where his ancestors were sent on to the “next land” on raised burial platforms—but not good for hunting. The trees kept most of the sunlight from reaching the ground, so the game didn't live there. They just passed through on the way to their feeding grounds or to the openings that were scattered about where the wind and lightning had taken some trees down for a clearing.

He had seen one deer on the way this morning, but that deer sensed his presence, and, although it did not run off, it stayed too far away for him get close enough for a perfect shot. These were the only shots he took, the perfect ones of less than 30 steps and broadside. He never rushed the shots; he was always slow and careful. Arrows and points took many hours to make, and missing a deer often meant a long search for his arrow.

He had been sitting under this tree for an hour, watching and listening to the tapestry of nature in front of him, patient as always, knowing the deer would come as they always did, when he saw the doe, as just the tip of an ear twitched behind a small beech bough. Immediately, his

muscles tensed as the doe moved slowly toward him, feeding on low, nut-covered branches. He knew to be very still, even when the doe was not looking his way, because there were bound to be more sets of eyes on alert in the family that accompanied the lead doe.

Two fawns fed behind the doe, watching her mostly, feeding and moving as she did. He could tell that the deer would move past him within range to his right, so he slowly, almost imperceptibly, moved his bow to his other hand...he would have to shoot left-handed. No problem; he practiced shooting many ways with both hands and was comfortable with any shot offered. He waited before the draw, urging the doe in his mind to move closer, closer, closer, then stop for that perfect broadside shot.

He loved watching the deer move; he learned so much about them in these moments—how they fed, how they moved, what they looked for. He was part of their surroundings and could study them intently. The doe stopped at 30 yards and looked directly at the brave. For a moment, his heart stopped, as he hoped the deer had not picked up a trace of his scent. In the end, they relied on smell above all other senses to detect danger. His gods were generous today because the doe looked away and then back at him, then kept eating and moving toward him as before.

The draw happened at 20 steps as the deer chewed on some beech shoots. The deer saw him move but the movement blended too perfectly with the movement around him. Instinct took over in the brave. He did not think about aiming or holding steady, he just let his body and

mind work together to make the shot. How long the hold at draw was, he didn't know, but the instant the doe turned slightly...he let fly.

The shot was perfect, just behind the front shoulder, one-third of the way up from the bottom of the deer. She instantly wheeled and ran diagonally over the ridge for a distance he knew would be no more than 100 steps before she stopped and laid down. She would then stiffen and die if he took enough time before following. So he napped for a while, relaxing in the pine needle mattress where he sat until the sound of rustling coming from the direction of the doe awakened him. He instantly was up and running toward the deer, expecting the worst.

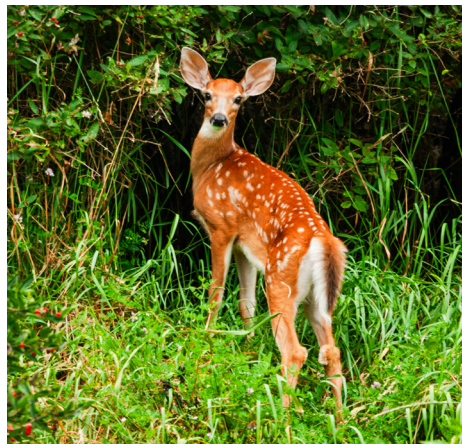
The worst is what he found, for just as he crested the edge of the ridge, he could see only a drag trail in the leaves where the deer had been stolen from him. Just then, he heard snarling and growling coming from below on the blood trail. As he moved low and slow toward the noise, he could make out several large forms in the low brush below. No mistaking the wolves. There were four of them, an alpha female and her three nearly full-grown pups, ripping the doe limb from limb. The brave knew they would feed on the insides first, feeding on the doe from the inside out. What they didn't eat now, they would take with them and cache for a later meal. He did not fear wolves, but with four of them, he was badly outnumbered...the wolves wouldn't give up the doe easily, having already begun to feed. This doe was not worth the fight it would take to get her back.

Disappointed, he backed away, going up the hill toward the spot of the shot, thinking about the deer chops that the wolves were eating instead of him and about the disappointment on the face of his wife when he came home without meat for the fire.

He was just about to leave the point when he felt, more than saw, legs off to his left. He stopped, nocked an arrow, and knelt all at the same time. Instinctively he saw the deer, found the spot to shoot, drew, and let fly all in the same moment. With the wolves around, this shot would have to be perfect, right in the spine to drop the deer on the spot.

It was right on target, and this time, the brave moved quickly to the deer. It was one of the fawns of the doe he had

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For centuries, the white-tailed deer has been the center of many fascinating tales.
Photo by Laura Kirt.

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

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shot. Often, when a fawn loses its mother, it is confused and waits to see if she will come back. This had worked in the brave's favor, and, as he quickly took his knife to clean the deer, he silently thanked the animal for the gift of its life. Usually, the brave spent some time lingering over the kill and doing his ritual of thanks while cleaning and tasting a piece of deer heart as he cleaned the deer. Not today, with the wolves around...today he would quickly clean the deer, cover the entrails with dirt and leaves, and carry the small animal over his shoulders to make it harder for the wolves to follow if they decided they needed more meat.

During his long walk back, he thought how funny the gods were, how they test you for their own amusement. He had gotten and lost, and gotten food for his family, all in one morning. Why had this happened, if not for the entertainment of the gods?

He thanked them for the food and knew his dreams of a happy and cooperative wife and a full belly would be realized for tonight. He also thanked them for his life, for being wild, and for having this wonderful home to live in. His brothers, the wolves, would eat as he and his fam-

ily would, and the last deer of the group would live and grow and have more deer to sustain him next year.

All was well.

Dates for Your Calendar

Saturday, July 20. PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting, 9:30 AM – 4 PM (check-in opens 8 AM). Dauphin County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018. (See article on the front page of this newsletter.)

August 13-15. Ag Progress Days. Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center and surrounding grounds, 2710 W. Pine Grove Road, Pennsylvania Furnace, PA 16865. To volunteer to help with staffing, contact Jeff Osborne, jao5194@psu.edu.

September 19-22. PA Forest Stewards Class of 2024 Training. Krislund Camp & Conference Center, Madisonburg, Centre County, PA.

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

ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests

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Contact Us

The James C. Finley Center for Private Forests at Penn State
416 Forest Resources Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-0401
PrivateForests@psu.edu
Allyson Muth: abm173@psu.edu
Jeff Osborne: jao5194@psu.edu
Barb Sellers: bss213@psu.edu

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