

Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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Chair's Column: The Signature Landowner

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

Late this summer I received an invitation to the National Forest Stewardship Program Gathering in Frederick, MD. This is a three-day national meeting sponsored by the USDA Forest Service and the Northeast-Midwest State Foresters Alliance; the 130+ attendees are involved in federal and state programs for private forest landowners; they come from Maine to Hawaii, from Puerto Rico to Alaska, from Louisiana to the Dakotas. With recent new funding opportunities to support forest landowners, especially those “historically underserved,” this Forest Stewardship Program (FSP)-supported gathering was a chance to bring together a broad group of practitioners “to learn, share, and connect, seeking to provide high quality information and peer-network and learning opportunities.”

Given their role working directly with private landowners and bringing together partners in each state, the FSP is the foundation of technical assistance and this community of practice which ultimately serves us. I said yes.

I was asked to represent the northeastern region on a panel of “underserved” forest landowners (in my case, women forest landowners); the southern region was represented by a black forest landowner from Georgia working at the intersection of heirs

property and longleaf pine restoration, and Puerto Rico by a young fellow involved in *mano Yola*, a program seeking to support the Hispanic forest community across the US Caribbean islands, Florida, and now New Mexico, by facilitating surveys, providing a bilingual information hub, and supporting Hispanic forest internships.

Knowing that I would be off-grid in Maine at the beginning of September, I immediately put together a PowerPoint with the knowledge that the planning team for the conference was, at that point, still sharpening the focus of the program. They knew I would be out of touch; indeed, they knew there was the possibility that weather might delay my island departure, and they kindly had a back-up presenter in reserve in case I got stuck out on Penobscot Bay. And in between learning the quirks of a brand new wood range, eating incredible home-grown oysters, and making Eggs Benedict with Hollandaise Sauce

and left-over lobster, I'd review that PowerPoint in my mind.

I reviewed it on the 660 miles home; reviewed it the next day driving to Frederick (200 more miles), reviewed it that night (and shortened it)... only to find out the following morning that they had switched to a facilitated panel discussion...

So much for PowerPoint's slow thinking (guess I'll call that preparation!), on to fast thinking, the gut reaction... Within 30 minutes, Sam Cook of the University of North Carolina was gently lobbing questions at me: What about your land? Adaptive management over 160 years, extraction, reforestation, ecological integrity, some version of a functioning forest. Challenges? Multiple diseases, multiple invasives, deer, climate change, carbon, ecological grief. He saves the last reply of the session for me (i.e., his eyes say, “Please sum this

Chair's Column, continued on page 4



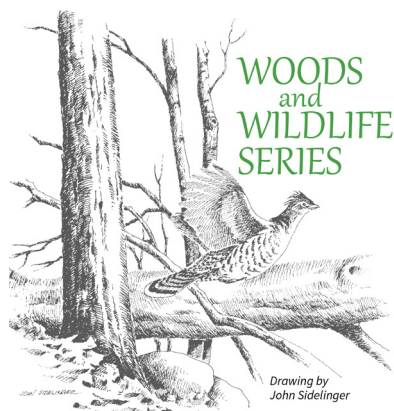
THE JAMES C. FINLEY
CENTER FOR PRIVATE FORESTS



Our stunning lunch stop, The Tea Room at Gambrill State Park, the Crown of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Parks. Photo credit: The Maryland Historical Trust.

Bees and Trees: What's all the Buzz?

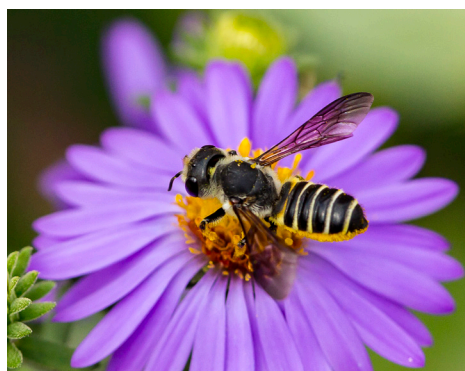
Article by Laura Jackson, Photos by Laura and Mike Jackson, PA Forest Stewards, Class of '00



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 wildlife species.

I just love to watch busy bees as they feast on flowers—there is something soothing about getting my nose close to a tiny creature that is oblivious to my larger self as they so intently focus on collecting pollen and nectar. I see thousands of bees on native wildflowers from spring to late fall since my husband, Mike, and I transformed about three acres of fallow farm fields into native wildflower meadows because we want to support pollinators: butterflies, wasps, flies, beetles, and especially bees.

Most of our 120-acre property is wooded, so it's fascinating to learn that the interactions between flowers and pollinators just inches from my camera are insignificant compared to what is



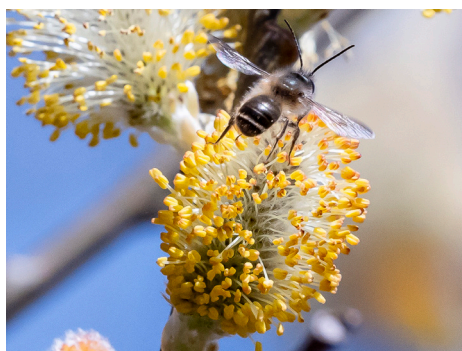
Native wildflower meadows are a wonderful resource for native bees like this leafcutter bee, but forests provide more food and nesting resources.



Bumble bees, like this one pollinating American wild plum, can rapidly increase their body temperature, allowing them to fly even on cool spring days. Their ability to thermoregulate is truly remarkable.¹

going on high above me in the forest canopy. Research shows that native trees provide MOST of the nectar and pollen collected by bees.²

I invited two beekeepers to educate us about honey bees at a recent meeting sponsored by the Woodland Owners of the Southern Alleghenies. We learned from Nate Caudill, a beekeeper who has over 1,000 honey bee hives, that trees are the most important food source for honey bees. I asked him to elaborate because I thought he'd say apple, cherry, peach—all the familiar fruit trees. But he surprised me by naming native trees that grow and bloom in our woods: black locust, tulip poplar, and basswood, to name a few.



Some of our earliest pollinators are native ground-nesting bees like this solitary bee on a pussy willow flower.

I'm more interested in native bees than the non-native honey bee (although I love honey), so it made me wonder if our native bees also depend mostly on our native flowering trees. Native bees are in trouble due to pesticides, habitat

loss, and climate change, so what trees do our native bees need and how can we manage our woods to help bees?

Native Trees that Feed Native Bees (in approximate order of bloom time from spring through summer)

- Maple species (*Acer* spp.)
- Serviceberry species (*Amelanchier* spp.)
- Native willow species (*Salix* spp.)
- Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)
- Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)
- American sweet crabapple (*Malus coronaria*)
- Hawthorn species (*Crataegus* spp.)
- Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*)*
- Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*)*
- Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*)
- American wild plum (*Prunus americana*)
- Oak species (*Quercus* spp.)*
- Black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*)
- Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
- Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*)
- Sumac species (*Rhus* spp.)
- Cherries (*Prunus* spp.)
- American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)
- American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*)*
- Tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)
- Devil's walking stick (*Aralia spinosa*)
- American basswood or linden (*Tilia americana*)

*Oaks, walnuts, butternuts, and chestnuts are wind-pollinated, but their pollen provides an important food source for native bees.

If you know of other trees that should be on this list, please email Laura at jacksonlaura73@gmail.com.

I think we all know that bees are valuable pollinators of many food crops, but it isn't quite as clear that bees are important to forests, so hopefully the list will help you make important connections between bees and trees. Scientists have a lot of unanswered questions about the actual interaction between bees and trees, especially high in the canopy. Since bees aren't the only

Bees, continued on page 3

pollinators, do other types of insects, like beetles and flies, play more important roles in tree pollination? It's difficult to collect insect samples high in the canopy, but more researchers are using blue vane traps that hang from branches high in the treetops. I precariously balanced on a tall step ladder so I could sample bees attracted to a blooming Hercules club.



Hercules' club blooms in mid-summer in Bedford County and attracts a wide variety of bees, which I collected and sent to the López-Urbe Lab at Penn State for identification. I'm a trained volunteer in a statewide study to collect bees in order to understand their diversity, distribution, and abundance in Pennsylvania.

Hercules' club, also called devil's walking stick (because of the stout, sharp spines on its stems, branches, and leaf stalks) is a good example of a forest species that has very high ecological value but low economic value. When in bloom, the air around it comes alive with the sound of bees and wasps, while butterflies flutter all around. In late summer, the dark purple fruit is in striking clusters that attract songbirds. Bears tend to bend or break the trees to access the fruit, but that makes it accessible to small mammals as well.

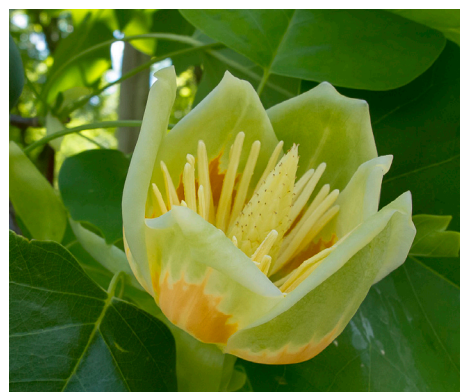
At the opposite end of the spectrum is one of Pennsylvania's most important economic trees: black cherry. Black cherry trees flower from late May to June, and I've staked out low blooming

branches, but have never been able to capture a bee. Maybe next year I'll be lucky! As many of you know, most of the really valuable black cherry grows in the northern tier of Pennsylvania, but since 2000, it has produced poor seed crops which threaten black cherry regeneration. Since black cherry is insect pollinated, researchers are collecting and identifying the pollinators to determine if the poor seed production is linked to pollinator decline. In 2022, a research team from Penn State published their research findings: native ground-nesting andrenid bees are "likely the most important pollinators." They found that the number of viable seeds increased as the number of andrenids increased, since they carried 347 times the amount of black cherry pollen than flies or other bees.³

Of course, other factors need to be analyzed, but this is an interesting example of current bee research as it relates to the health of forest trees.

What can we do, as private forest landowners, to help native bees (many of which are ground-nesters) so their populations don't decline in our woodlots? Here are a few suggestions:

Native tree biodiversity supports a diverse number of bee species. As more diseases and foreign insect pests invade our forests, we can't rely on monocultures of just economically important trees to maintain forest health. A diversity of native trees also helps to provide resilience to climate change stressors like heat, drought, and excessive rainfall.



Tulip poplar has beautiful flowers that attract both native and honey bees, plus it's commercially valuable. It's also a tree that has an important role in climate change impacts, since it's more adapted to warmer temperatures than are trees like sugar maples.

Build habitat piles and keep snags that provide coarse woody debris for nesting bees, as well as many other pollinators. There are over 400 species of native bees in Pennsylvania, and many of them nest in decaying wood.



Brian Jones (formerly of Western PA Conservancy) stands in front of a habitat pile on our property that will slowly decompose, providing shelter and nesting habitat for a number of species, including native bees.

Structural diversity in a forest is also important. We had a shelterwood cut of 30 acres in 2014 that created a young forest, hoping to attract Golden-winged Warblers. Although these threatened birds never found us, the regeneration did attract many other birds and created a multi-aged forest. More light reached the forest floor, resulting in more flowering plants like blackberry, which supported more bees and other pollinators.

We seeded the log roads and log landing after the tree harvest with a native pollinator mix from Ernst Conservation Seeds that included native warm-season bunchgrasses like Indian grass, little bluestem, and big bluestem. About 70% of native bees create burrows in the ground, and bunch grasses provide space around the base of the plant so bees can access bare soil. The other 30% of native bees are cavity nesters in dead wood, hollow stems of perennials, or in habitat piles.

Invasive plant species management is our biggest challenge since so many invasive plants respond quickly to gaps in the canopy where more sunlight reaches the forest floor. Japanese vine honeysuckle, Asiatic bittersweet, mile-a-minute, Japanese barberry, and multiflora rose are the most common invaders, taking over native plant habitat

up!”). What are the rewards, why do you do what you do? Definitely working with other forest landowners and all those who assist them to facilitate the incredible hard work they do to support this thing, this construct, this intricate and delicate volume of interactions we call a forest!

Done.

Whew!

And then there were all the subsequent three days of concurrent themes and sessions to attend: engaging underserved landowners, climate mitigation and forest resilience, general landowner assistance, plus an extended field trip to Gambrill State Park and the Frederick Watershed Forest (with the Gambrill's incredible CCC Tea Room, and the very competent Maryland foresters doing a strange new jig—stamping on spotted lanternflies), plus a workshop on delivering forestry assistance to women.

And a strange thing happened during these three days. Someone would sit down beside me, engage me in conversation, and pursue a line of thought that I had apparently evoked in them with one of those rash and hasty initial answers. And then someone else would connect. And then another. These were one-on-one conversations—in the back of the bus, over a cup of tea or a cookie, waiting for the elevator, in the elevator, passing in the hallway, hanging over the CCC railing looking at the view.

My take is that, particularly among federal employees, they miss their woods. I found they shared a nostalgia

for the outdoor surroundings they had known as youngsters; perhaps even a bit of envy for a landowner who could walk out their back door into something the landholder felt directly responsible for. It was very evident that they certainly do care. And among the state employees, they felt universally shorthanded while charged with doing more in caring for this unique system...

Late in one of the days, in a smaller session, we were asked to introduce ourselves again. There were lots of official titles, long ones. I offhandedly said, “I’m your pet forest landowner...” which elicited a burst of laughter.

Keith Thompson, the Private Lands Program Manager for Vermont’s Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (“supporting private landowners in their understanding and stewardship of forestland in Vermont”) quickly and gently corrected me. “No, Nancy,” he said, “You’re a signature landowner.”

I’ve been thinking about his comment ever since. You know, I think that as PA

Forest Stewards, we are all signature landowners.

During this year’s PA Forest Stewards training, I became even more sure of this. I did my best to get to know this new class. I would have needed another week to really acknowledge each of them well. They’re real. They care. They bring amazing life experiences with them. They’ll get better with more experience. They are not afraid to try something—they are stunningly not afraid to try! I promise to catch up with them again later.

This year’s panel of seasoned PA Forest Stewards at the training numbered 10, the most we’ve ever had. Their experience is so imposing. And our field trip returned to Jim Walizer’s lands, his family, and his chestnuts; Jim is an extraordinary 90 years old.

None of this work comes easy or fast!

I think Keith is absolutely right: we are all signature landowners!

Nancy

Find me at bakerii@epix.net.



Top: A panel of 10 veteran PA Forest Stewards traveled to Krislund Camp in Centre County to share their experiences with the class of 2024. **Bottom left:** 90-year-old PA Forest Steward Jim Walizer explains various features on his property during the 2024 training's Saturday tour. **Bottom right:** Jim (center) and his son Mike (yellow vest) shared their triumphs and challenges with the group.

20 New PA Forest Stewards Complete Training in September

On September 22, we welcomed 20 newly minted Pennsylvania Forest Stewards into our statewide peer network of over 500 active volunteers.

During the four-day training at Krislund Camp and Conference Center in Centre County, participants learned about tree ID, creating wildlife habitat, silviculture, forest measurements and assessing timber harvest sustainability, invasive plant control, non-timber forest products, outreach opportunities, forest legacy, and more. On Saturday, veteran Stewards joined us and shared their outreach efforts and challenges in an engaging and informative panel discussion, followed by an afternoon field trip to Jim Walizer's property. Jim, along with his wife Libby

and sons Mike and Denny (who also PA Forest Stewards), shared his vast knowledge about chestnut trees, showed his Chinese chestnut tree groves, and finished the tour by sharing "the good, the bad, and the ugly" in some of their forested acreage.

As they wrapped up their training and set their goals, the Class of 2024 is ready to put their new skills and knowledge to work helping private forest landowners across the state. We welcome them into the volunteer program!

Right: Laura Van Velsor (left) and Allyson Muth discuss key observations for accurate tree identification.



Clockwise from above: Chris and Bianca Shadle work through the tree ID key; PA Forest Stewards Class of 2024; Jeff Osborne checks as class members identify a tree specimen; the class wraps up their tree measurement session with a hearty, "Sticks up!"





We pull and bag mile-a-minute that we find in canopy gaps throughout our forest. It's tedious, but such a joy to outsmart these bio-bullies!

that prevents native tree regeneration, thus decreasing native biodiversity.

I hope this has opened your eyes to the importance of trees and forests for bees. As private forest landowners, it's important for our forest's health to consider native bee diversity and abundance as we write and implement our forest management plans.

References:

¹ https://www.bennington.edu/sites/default/files/sources/docs/Sherman_thermoregulation%20in%20bees.pdf#:~:text=Bee%20warms%20up%20by%20contracting,ready%20level%20near%2040%20degrees.

² <https://research.fs.usda.gov/srs/products/compasslive/deeper-connection-between-forests-and-pollinators>

³ McLaughlin R, Keller J, Wagner E, Biddinger D, Grozinger C, Hoover K. Insect Visitors of Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) (Rosales: Rosaceae) and Factors Affecting Viable Seed Production. *Environ Entomol.* 2022 Apr 22; 51(2):471-481. doi: 10.1093/ee/nvab141. PMID: 35020889.

3 Days. 2 Events. 1 Venue.

Forest Health Briefing and Forest Landowners Conference Coming March 6-8, 2025

Forest Health, Insect, and Disease Briefing: March 6

Two-and-a-half days of events focused on Pennsylvania's forests kick off with Penn State Extension's full-day Forest Health Briefing on Thursday, March 6, 2025 at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College, PA. The briefing is open to professionals, landowners, and the general public.

Pre-conference events will get underway on Thursday evening with a special gathering for PA Forest Stewards and their guests featuring dessert, a brief update, and conversation with fellow Stewards. The Finley Center will also host an evening reception, and the conference's Exhibit Hall will be open.

6th Biennial Forest Landowners Conference: March 7-8

Join the Finley Center staff and our partners for the 6th Biennial Forest Landowners Conference on Friday and Saturday, March 7 and 8, 2025 at the Penn Stater. Friday will feature a full day of activities, including six concurrent learning sessions with multiple presentations offered during each session, lunch with keynote, Exhibit Hall, and an evening banquet with keynote.

On Saturday morning, conference-goers can choose from a wide range of in-depth tours and workshops. In addition, the morning will be filled with family-friendly activities in Exhibit Hall.

For the many PA Forest Stewards who have attended our past conferences, you will see some changes to our conference schedule. We are excited to team up with Penn State Extension to bring the Forest Health Briefing and Forest Landowners Conference back-to-back for those who want to attend both events. Also, we have streamlined the conference schedule to maximize cost effectiveness, to provide more options for attendees, and to introduce fun, forest-related activities for families on Saturday morning.

Watch for more details and registration information in November!

Deadwaters, continued from page 7

With the smoke from the fire keeping the bugs at bay, the guys put the booze away, snuffed out the butts and laid back on their blankets and talked about little things like what happened today and where they would go tomorrow...they might hike, or, better yet, hop a slow-moving freight another two miles further to Dotyville where Eddie and Chuck's older brother Bill worked and boarded on a farm all summer. They could check out the animals and maybe, if lucky, get a free meal from the farm family. Bill was a great fisherman and could probably be persuaded to take them to catch some brook trout up Stoney Hollow Run. It was one of the little creeks that was shaded and spring-fed, thus staying cold all year and full of small succulent brookies.

But that was tomorrow. Tonight all was well...today having been perfect... and these guys lived whatever life presented at arm's length. They were a part of this night, listening to the frogs croak and crickets snap while the raccoons and possum listened to them talk. There was much about this life that was perfect and harmonious, and it would be this way for such a short time, not only for this gang but for all of us.

Deadwaters 80 years later is filled in for a cattle pasture, and the tracks were taken out in the 60s and the new owner posted the property against such vagabond wanderings. The town had shrunk over the years—as all small-town America has—and the old factories are now used by plastics manufacturers and the like. The frogs no longer croak, having long since succumbed to acid rain, and if you tried to gig a trout, you would be arrested summarily and fined beyond reason.

It is great to think that those days once existed where absolute simplicity ruled, when my dad, Eddie, and his brother, and life-long friends could grow up together in the wild. And even though the times no longer exist, it helps me to know they were once here...it drives me to look for those small, wild, simple places to explore in my time. Before they are gone for good.

The Back Page: Deadwaters Sojourn, Part 2

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

Enjoy the conclusion to this tale (Part 1 appeared in the last newsletter) based on stories told to Bob by his father ("Eddie" in the saga below) about childhood adventures in Titusville in the 1920s. As Bob says, "It was another place and time and it may be fantasy, but I like to think these times really happened. Enjoy this trip back!"

In the last issue, brothers Eddie and Chuck Slagter set out on a 1920s summer camping adventure with their friends, Bruce and Flynn. Together the boys marched, talking about what they would see and what they would try to "bag" on this trip, with the first stop at "Deadwaters," their home swamp.

After setting up camp and stashing the "shine" that Eddie had pilfered, the four boys took off and began working the swamp, looking for something to put back for dinner. Swamps are full of treats, and they quickly got several large bullfrogs, with Chuck showing his worth on the gig. He proved deadly of aim, silently moving through the muddy water, looking on lily pads and under brush along the shore. As they explored around the area, they found an old deer carcass next to a small bay in the swamp. It was too old to determine cause of death, but they did take the skull which displayed a nice little six-point rack...a worthy trophy in an era when deer were not plentiful. Eddie and Chuck's dad hunted for a living and when he found deer tracks in the snow, he stayed on them as long as it took to run the animal to ground... they were a rare and precious commodity due to the huge size of the trees and lack of understory the deer needed for food.

Next, a hapless woodchuck was spotted and immediately dispatched by Eddie with one shot to the head. It was a perfect specimen, young and

tender with a dark coat unbleached from the sun...this one had spent most of its life close to the den hole so it would skin up plump and juicy, ready to roast on an improvised spit for dinner. They kept to the swamp for most of the afternoon, seeing a rabbit that both Flynn and Bruce missed with the .22. Their errant shots got them no end of taunts from Eddie and Chuck, with threats that one more miss would mean they would only get beans tonight. It was all okay, though; they had enough now for dinner and had not even been to the creek yet.

The creek was at July levels, with only some suckers and chubs showing themselves in the crystal clear water. But the guys knew where the trout lived in this water, and they made their way barefoot along the bank with Chuck holding the gig in the lead. When they came to where the creek undercut the bank, forming a watery cave filled with tree roots, they stopped, and Chuck began his act. He would wriggle his way into the water and under the bank, holding his breath until he could get his head up into the root system. Then using his hands in the dim light, he would feel around for a trout. He was good at it, using his right hand to feel along the fish's belly while he moved the gig into place to stab him.

The first hole produced a smallish brown of about a foot and little brookie that got away. The next place, however, held a monster 18-inch female brown

along with a water snake and a large snapping turtle. Chuck was quick enough to get his hand away from the snapper before he lost a finger or two. The snake slithered swiftly out of his hole into open water where Eddie grabbed it by the tail and smashed its head against a rock. With the fish cleaned and rolled in some streamside grass, the guys stripped to their skivvies and swam for a couple hours in the cool water of the creek.

They sun-dried on rocks in the stream then redressed and headed back to camp for the evening. Starting a fire, they began by opening two of the cans of beans to heat slowly on the rocks next to the small blaze. They then cleaned the woodchuck and stuck it on a stiff branch, leaning over the fire to slowly roast. The trout, similarly impaled, were set to roast next to the rodent on its stick, and the stage was set for a Deadwater's surf and turf.

The guys ate the beans first, then filled the cans with creek water and put some of the frog legs and crabs they had gathered from under rocks in the creek to boil. They then grabbed the trout and savored the sweet pink flesh in small bites to avoid the bones, which they picked clean. The woodchuck followed, seasoned with some salt brought by one of them in a little bag and sliced directly from the stick into their mouths. It was virtually black on the outside but a succulent red inside...heavenly tasting, much like squirrel, which was one of their favorites.

The real treat came after dinner. It was time to roll the smokes and pass around the hooch. It smelled like turpentine, and this made Flynn, for one, hesitant about trying it. One sip, however, convinced him it was the real thing. It burned like fire from the lips all the way through the gullet, but once it hit the gut, you knew you were in for a ride. The smell, the burn, all receded a little with each sip until, sometime during the third round, it became somehow wonderful. They all liked it except Chuck...he loved it and began that day a life of drinking that would end his life with a perforated liver some 50 years hence...but he wouldn't have changed it if he could.



For the four boys, no overnight camping adventure to Deadwaters was complete without beans and the catches of the day prepared over a blazing campfire. Free stock photo from Pexels.

Deadwaters, continued on page 6

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Correction

In our last issue, we acknowledged many of those who have served in various leadership capacities in the Pennsylvania Forest Stewards volunteer program over the years. In addition to those named in the article, we are grateful for Fred Peabody, who served as a past chair of the PA Forest Stewards Steering Committee.

As we said before—and it's so well worth repeating—we are grateful to each and every one of you for sharing your love of the land with us, for being willing to educate yourselves, and for sharing your knowledge and experience with others. Because of you, there is a wide network of support for the woodland owners of our state. You are the reason we stay in this space.

Thank you so much for all that you do!

Dates for Your Calendar

Thursday, March 6, 2025. Forest Health, Insect, and Disease Briefing. Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center.

Friday, March 7 & Saturday March 8, 2025. 6th Biennial Forest Landowners Conference. Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center. See more on page 6.

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

ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests

Remembering PA Forest Stewards We've Lost

We recently learned of the loss of these fellow Pennsylvania Forest Steward volunteers:

- Richard Hoover (Class of '21)
- Reigel Haas (Class of '95)

Our thoughts are with the families. We appreciate each Steward's service; if you hear of any of our volunteers who have passed away, please let us know.

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