

HISTORY OF THE NEW YORK FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION

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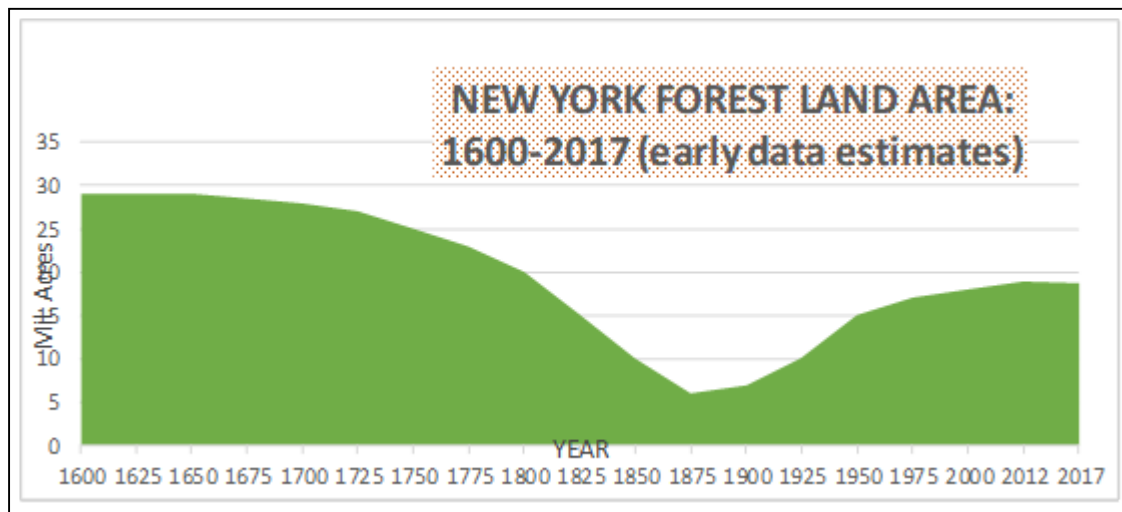
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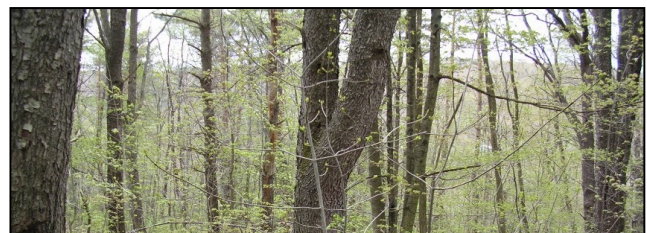
For over 50 years the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) has educated forest landowners, helped influence public policy, and has informed the public about the critical role New York's forests and woodlands play in the economy, environment, and well-being of the 19 million people who live and work in the Empire State. In part, the evolution of NYFOA is due to the particular social and physical geography and history of New York but is also typical of landowner associations across the United States. Hopefully, reading this history will help in planning for the future of NYFOA and other similar organizations.

The Setting

European settlers in the 1600's found 95% of the New York region covered with forests, over 31 million acres covered with trees. Land grants resulted in subdivision, sale, or lease of lands. In the Adirondacks and southwestern New York large forest products companies acquired lands for timber harvesting: logs for lumber then pulpwood and specialty wood products. Across what is now New York State was inhabited by settlers wishing to subsist by farming small tracts which later developed into market-oriented farms supplying milk, cheese, meat, grains, and fruits and vegetables to the growing metropolitan areas in the region. By the turn of the 20th century only 20% of New York State remained in forests and wooded areas.



Farming became more mechanized and market oriented; less productive fields, and those away from transportation corridors (canals, railroads, highways) were retired and the native tree cover quickly returned. Societal events, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, etc. lead to further concentration of farmlands and regrowth of forests on former agricultural lands. Today over 65% of New York State, almost 19 million acres, is covered by trees.



Along with regrowth of forests, landowners, and reasons for owning rural land in New York changed. Early farmers and settlers were primarily interested in obtaining wood products for on-farm use (fuelwood, fence posts, lumber) or to sell logs to commercial sawmills. Most of these lands have now passed into ownership by the new “family forest owners.” In the heavily forested regions of the State (Adirondacks and southwestern New York) where lumber and paper companies once held and harvested large tracts along with some large private estates, individuals or investment corporations now prevail.

The new family forest owners hold 59%, over 11 million acres of New York’s forests and woodlands. Their reasons for ownership are extremely varied. Some hold land for investment returns from future sale of the land or timber products but surveys reveal the most important reasons for owning the land are wildlife enjoyment, recreation, part of a home site, and other nontimber uses.



A thriving wood products industry exists in New York State and timber harvesting conducted by industrial foresters and loggers provides financial return to landowners. Equally important, harvests can enhance the land for these other forest values and ownership objectives. However, many family forest owners are unaware what can be done with their woodlands and how to obtain professional technical advice and assistance.



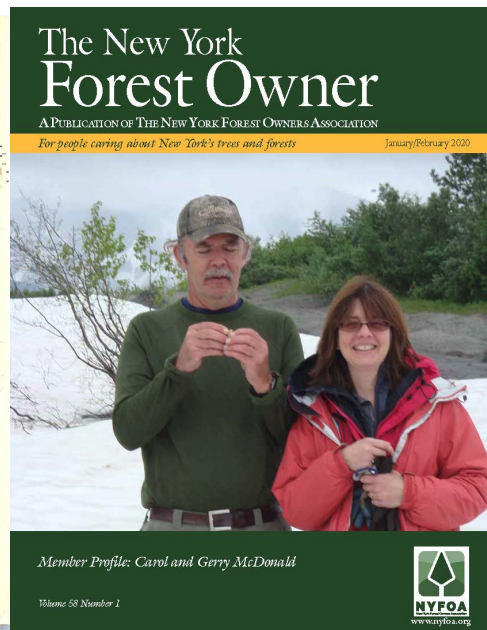
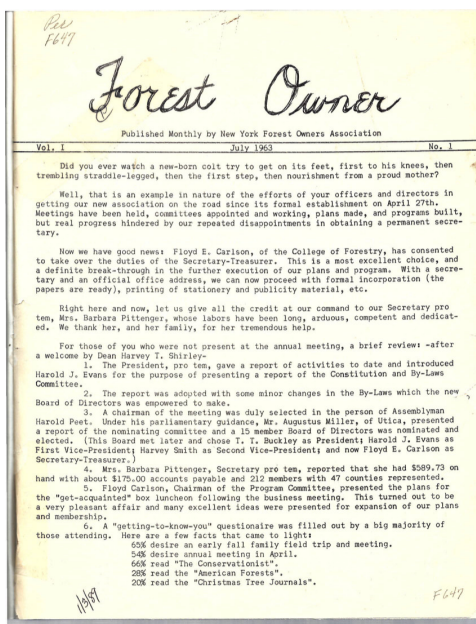
Interest in educating and assisting nonindustrial forest owners has long been a part of government programs in the United States. Examples in New York State include Cooperative Extension Service, related programs of the US Department of Agriculture, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and others. In northern Europe, a somewhat different kind of approach was taken. There, organizations of family forest owners have a long history. New York State seemed like a good place for a forest owners association.

Founding

The New York Forest Owners Association, Inc. was formally organized with 212 members on April 27, 1963 and incorporated under the laws of New York State on August 12, 1963. Dr. Svend Heiberg, Dean of the College of Forestry at the State University of New York at Syracuse University, now State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF), is credited with the initial proposal to establish the Association. Originally from Denmark, Dr. Heiberg was internationally known for his work in silviculture. His insight and first-hand observation of successful forest owner associations in Scandinavia sparked the movement for an organization here in New York. He enlisted the assistance of Dr. William Duerr, forest economist, and Dr. Paul Graves, forest policy specialist, both at the College. Duerr, a native of Iowa, had done his Ph.D. work with forest owners in Appalachia. Graves was a native New Yorker. They and several other forestry leaders in New York discussed the need for an organization of forest owners to give forestry in New York the organized strength, clarification of objectives, and unity of purpose that are shown in agriculture by Farm Bureau, the Grange and Dairymen's league.



Dr. Heiberg headed up a faculty committee on forest ownership in New York which led to two forest landowner forums, on November 9, 1961 and October 9, 1962, sponsored by the College of Forestry, the New York Forest Practice Board, with backing from New York State Conservation Department (now DEC) and Cornell University College of Agriculture. NYFOA was officially organized in April 1963 with 212 members, and the first issue of the *New York Forest Owner* magazine was published in July 1963. This publication remains the official organ of the Association.



NYFOA's first president, Theodore Buckley, stated in 1963, "With over 250,000 forest land owners in New York State and half of the State's 30 million acres consisting of forest land, our Association has an outstanding opportunity to help develop more wood wealth, job opportunities and recreational appeal as the people of New York State become aware of the vast tree growing resource. We invite those interested to join us in making New York State truly proud of this great forest potential. Better managed forest land can bring additional benefits to numerous communities where forest land is the most important single natural resource." The main points in that statement are still true today.

Goals and Purpose of NYFOA

The Association has stayed with its formally stated objectives and the more recent codified Mission statement. These are put forth below. However, in addition to its formal objectives NYFOA provides a valuable social role. It is a place for members to get together, discuss forestry-related issues and equally important, to get to know each other on a personal basis. Annual picnics held by some chapters, development of long held friendships: These and other social interactions have evolved over the years. On the surface it might appear that after 55 year the statewide organization is primarily a collection of 10 local “Clubs.” However, the statewide organization carries out vital roles and is one of the major ways’ information is disseminated to the public. The major goals of NYFOA include:

1. Encourage forest landowners to identify their individual objectives, to use natural resource professionals in developing management plans with practices to help achieve those objectives, and to support owners in their implementation activities.
2. Promote public understanding of the benefits derived through sound forest stewardship, including cleaner water, improved wildlife habitat, continued recreation opportunities, and the wood products essential to meet society's everyday needs.
3. Support economically sound use of privately owned forest lands through studies and education to allow enjoyment of forest benefits today without compromising the ability of future generations to also meet their needs.
4. Provide resources and information to the public to increase their understanding of the concepts and importance of sound principles of forest management.
5. Foster communication and cooperation with other organizations and agencies with similar purposes and among and between all participants in the forest product cycle, such as: landowners; harvesters; sawmills and processors; pulp mills and manufacturers; wildlife, recreation and other natural resource interests; industrial, commercial and domestic consumers; and others.

Through local chapter and statewide activities such as woods walks and tours, the bi-monthly *New York Forest Owner* magazine and other publications, and affiliation with other organizations with similar objectives, NYFOA helps woodland owners to achieve their management objectives for their properties and encourages the appreciation of the qualities and importance of New York’s forests.

Membership

Membership in NYFOA is open to anyone interested in the forests and woods of New York who pays the annual membership fee (\$3.00 in 1963, now \$45.00). The organization attracts mainly the family forest owners who control over 11 million acres of New York’s 19 million acres of forest land (USDA Forest Service statistic). Over the years, other organizations and several of the large industrial ownership joined the organization to support its activities. Finch-Pruyn Corporation and the Empire State Forest Products Association became members and lent their various expertise to helping NYFOA. Westvaco (West Virginia Pulp and Paper Corporation) and Cotton-Hanlon were early supporters and Cotton-Hanlon still supports NYFOA. W. J. Cowee Corporation joined in 1969.

By October 1963 there were 302 members. The newly formed Board of Directors posed the question, “What is the optimal growth rate of NYFOA?” a question that has been pondered many times since. Within that first year, membership doubled and by January 1965 there were 561 members. The organization continued to grow to 734 members by 1966. Two Membership meetings were held each year, as specified in the original Bylaws; the winter meeting usually held at SUNY ESF and a fall meeting rotating around the State. By 1967 there were 805 members. Membership rose and fell but 13 years later, in 1980, there were only 664 members. As of January 2020, there are 1467 members.

Over the decades various initiatives have been undertaken to increase membership. Some have helped

to bring in more members, others did not result in much change. The most successful ones were those that presented something useful to landowners; local wood walks (described below), information and assistance in developing management plans for specific objectives such as birds, other wildlife, trails, etc. The organization has realized that attracting more landowners and other members is not the objective, rather the goal is to provide services and activities that interest in New York's woodland owners want, and from that new members will evolve. Interaction with other natural resource and environmental groups across the State has been an important activity.

Activities of the State-Wide Board of Directors

Governance of NYFOA is by a Board of Directors. From the beginning of NYFOA, up to the year 2016, directors were elected by the membership. In that year, the Bylaws were revised to have Directors selected by the current Board. This change was brought about by two factors. First, over the years very few members voted. (Similar situations exist today in many corporations where stockholders are asked to vote at an annual meeting.) Second, the federal regulations governing tax-exempt member organizations changed in 2016.

From the beginning of the organization, the Board of Directors has taken a major role in advancing the association. Enthusiastic and energetic presidents provide continuous leadership. Presidents come from many different backgrounds: Some have been trained foresters, some local or state legislators, many are retired professionals from varied careers; most owned some woodland during their tenure.

Board members have also come from various fields. Many own some woodland, but the only requirement to be a Board member is a strong interest in the organization and willingness to serve. In the early years, many faculty members, and staff of the College of Forestry (SUNY ESF), and Cornell University served, and were regular contributors to technical articles in the *New York Forest Owner* magazine.

The number and function of committees varied over time. In 1966 NYFOA Board committees were:

Membership	Meeting registration	Program
Forest taxation	Personnel	Heiberg memorial
Meeting Arrangements	Publicity	Harvesting

By 1973 the number of committees had grown to:

Accreditation	Annual reports	Archivist
Budget & finance	Editorial board	Education
Fall meeting	Forest industry	Forest taxation
Heiberg award	Job description	Land acquisition
Legislation	Membership	Natural resources & planning
Nominating	Personnel	Publicity
Printing and mailing	Program	Spring meeting
Timber harvesting	Trespass	Woods walks

The great increase in committees reflects the added activities of both the Board and the interests of members. Committees have changed over time but still reflect the many different tasks that a growing organization must face. By 1977 the number of committees had shrunk to 12 but a new one, a Board of Trust Managers was added. This was in response to requests from persons wishing to donate land or money to NYFOA. After 1981 the Trust Board was in suspension, but 3 people served on the Board.

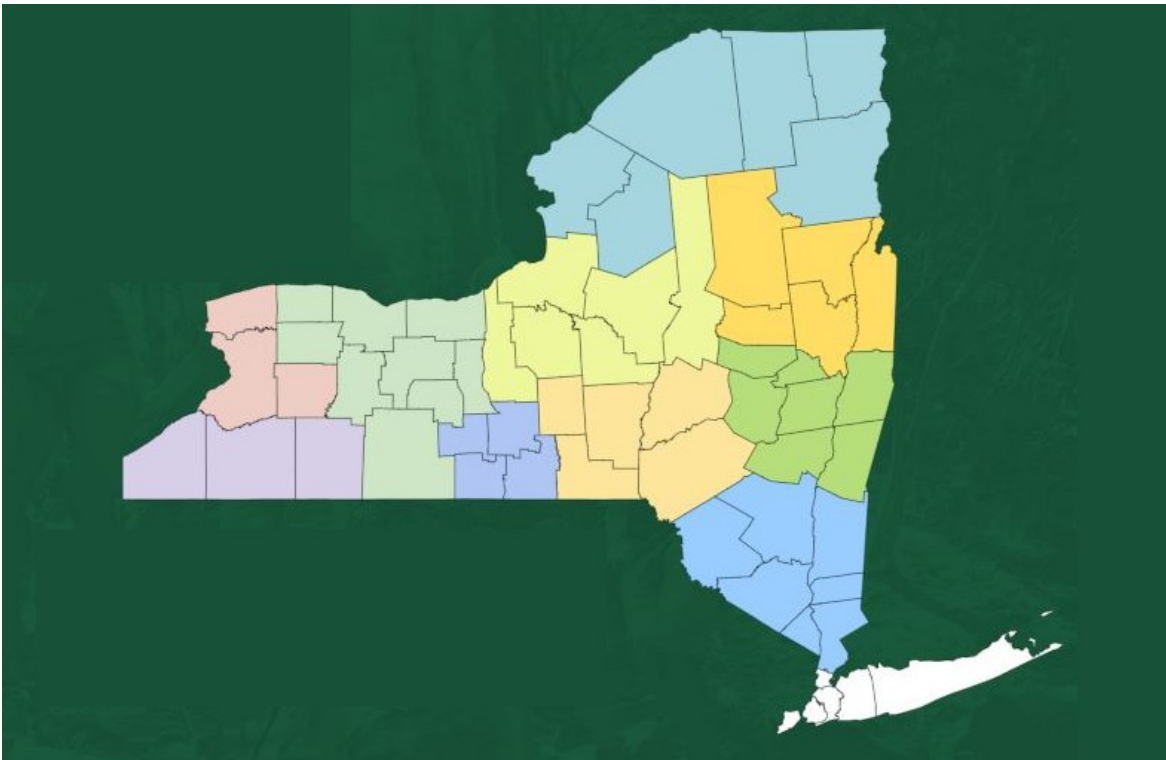
In 1983 a long-range planning committee was established. By that time, it was deemed necessary to

examine where NYFOA was and what should be its priorities and plans for the coming decades. Subjects discussed included Executive Director, chapter development, membership growth, public policy activities, youth education.

One task of the Board is keeping the Bylaws up to date to reflect changing conditions. Changing bylaws can raise objections and NYFOA has experienced these occasionally. Member organizations, as defined in government rules and regulations, depends on having the membership actively involved in all activities and decisions. NYFOA was set up with this in mind; patterned after cooperatives such as farm marketing, rural electrification and other endeavors started in the 1930's. This system appeared to work well at the beginning of NYFOA with only 300 members and frequent interaction among all. People got to know each other and met regularly and exchanged not only forestry ideas but also social news and personal gains and losses. A type of family atmosphere prevailed. However, as membership grew, and people became geographically separated, organization officers and the Board of Directors were forced to make more decisions. Some charter members of NYFOA resented the shifts of decision-making to the Board and its Executive Committee, but changes were enacted to meet changing conditions. This is not unlike changes taking place in other member organizations: religious groups, school boards, shareholder financial corporations.

Chapters

The original NYFOA bylaws contained a clause that any county having 10 or more members in NYFOA could organize a county chapter and elect a Chapter chair, vice chair, and secretary (NY Forest Owner Vol. 18, no.6). The subject of chapters arose many times over the years. The 1984 bylaws contained a section on regional affiliates allowing the Board of Directors to designate any appropriate group in New York as a regional affiliate of NYFOA. In 1985 Cayuga County became the first chapter. In 1986, the Southern Tier chapter was formed, and that same year two regional affiliates were recognized, THRIFT (Tug Hill Resources-Investment for Tomorrow) and the Catskill Forestry Association. These two actions brought NYFOA membership above 1,000. Other chapters were soon formed and by 1991 there were chapters or affiliate member organizations across the State except for Hamilton county in the Adirondacks, and in the New York City-Long Island region. Membership had grown to 1600. This growth is attributed to the formation of local chapters and increasing the profile of NYFOA by connecting with the broader forestry community.



Chapters have a representative on the state-wide Board of Directors as did affiliate members. The category of affiliate members was discontinued in the 1999 revision of the Bylaws and chapter boundaries and extent will be determined by the Board; another reflection of the maturing of NYFOA and the transition to a Director run organization instead of the older Membership organization.

Activities of chapters include business meetings, presentations on various forestry related subjects, woods walks, social picnics and pot-luck suppers, staffing booths at county fairs and other public events, and publishing a chapter newsletter. There have been discussions over the years concerning the role of chapters versus statewide activities. The chapter activities have also developed a social focus. While some have argued this takes away from the overall mission of NYFOA, others point out that the interpersonal relationships that can develop at the local level bring a much-needed human dimension to the organization.

Meetings

At the beginning of the organization 2 membership meetings per year were held, in the spring usually at the College of Forestry at Syracuse, and in the fall at various locations throughout the State and incorporating a field trip to a local industry, member's woodlot, or other place of general interest. Spring meetings were well attended but over the years, attendance dropped at fall meetings. With the rise of chapters and their own woods walks, the 1984 Bylaws stipulated only one annual statewide meeting although statewide fall meetings were held some years around New York State. Meetings featured speakers on pertinent topics, a business session, catered lunch, and awards to outstanding members. A silent auction or raffle was often featured with the funds going to support general expenditures or dedicated to a scholarship fund. In 2003 the location of the annual spring meeting was moved to the Syracuse Fairgrounds in conjunction with the Farm Show. At this annual show various organizations, including NYFOA, had been conducting 3 days of seminars/talks on forestry and it was hoped that NYFOA members could attend some and then go to the annual meeting. This arrangement

continued until 2013 when the annual meeting was moved back to SUNY ESF. Attendance at the annual meeting was dropping and many people expressed a preference for facilities at the College over those available at the fairgrounds. Subsequently there has been a spring statewide meeting of NYFOA at SUNY ESF.

Outreach and Education

Showing forest landowners, the many opportunities that their woods present and informing the public of the importance and significance of New York's private forest legacy are stated objectives of NYFOA. These have been achieved through a variety of means: Woods Walks, Booths at County Fairs, Educational Seminars, and special targeted presentations with other organizations.

NYFOA initiated the idea of "Woods Walks" to demonstrate the benefits of good forest management practices and to encourage sharing of information among and between private woodland owners and forestry professionals. Member landowners host a day or half day visit to their woods to observe various land management practices: timber sales, silvicultural thinning, road and trail construction, pond, and other riparian treatments, among others. Unique events such as recovery from a forest fire, horse logging, exotic species have also taken place. Calling them Woods Walks as opposed to forest visits is an important distinction. This conveys the idea that there is a familiarity and oneness with the land by the owner. Various studies have shown that many family forest owners (formerly called non-industrial forest owners) do not think they own a forest but rather they have their woods. The first Woods Walk was held on Saturday May 27, 1967 at Henry Kernan's property in South Worcester, Otsego County. 10 people attended the 3-hour session. Henry Kernan was a professional forester concentrating on international affairs. In the 1950's he and his family settled in upstate New York and managed the property with multiple-use sustained yield forestry principles. He has been a frequent contributor to the *New York Forest Owner* magazine.

Other Woods Walks developed across the State, set up and run by the state NYFOA Board. In 1973 it was proposed to divide the State into chapters with a Woods Walk chairperson in each chapter to set up and coordinate woods walks in his area, including notifying local news etc. of the locations and dates of walks as well as other information about NYFOA. Further development of chapters would wait more than 10 years, but statewide Woods Walks were set up in various regions, drawing on members for assistance. After the formal development of Chapters, Woods Walks were mainly run by individual chapters. Notice of walks are published in the *New York Forest Owner* magazine, and Cooperative Extension Service and other public agencies and private organizations publicize the events. These events are a major activity of chapters and can attract new members. NYFOA holds a group insurance policy that protects chapters in the event of accidents etc.



Since the beginning of the organization, the annual statewide meetings have included presentations on various issues of interest to NYFOA's members. Development of Chapters facilitated more local educational and outreach opportunities. County Fairs have had booths staffed by volunteer NYFOA members in many areas. At the State level, the Woodsmen's Field Days at Booneville, Empire Farm Days in August, and the Syracuse Farm Show have all featured NYFOA booths and displays of educational material.

The evolution of NYFOA at the annual Syracuse Farm Show is an interesting example of the growth of a volunteer organization. Originally the central New York chapter, working with the local NYS Department of Environmental Conservation conducted a few seminars at the Farm Show at the end of February. Coincident with that the chapter had a booth displaying material etc. Mounting these activities put a strain on local members and a call was put out for NYFOA members across the state to volunteer to staff the booth and help with logistics on the seminars. Foresters, educators, landowners, and others conducted the seminars but local volunteer help, especially by John Druke, made the event a success. By 2012, local personnel could no longer maintain the event. Ron Pedersen and Hugh Canham (the author) stepped in and organized the booth and the 3-day series of seminars. Both the booth and the seminars were moved from outbuildings to a central location in the Farm and Home Center. This provided good exposure for NYFOA. The seminars cover a variety of forest and land-related topics. Presenters are drawn from regional natural resource educators, public agencies, professionals such as lawyers, and forest landowners. Successful attendance depends on having a topic that interests people. Some come to get information they can use on their own situation; others are drawn to what seems to be an interesting subject and are looking for a break from looking at machinery etc. Some school groups such as FFA and 4H sometimes drop by. As with all winter events in upstate New York, weather can affect attendance.



Having attractive posters, brochures, and other display material is essential to effective marketing. NYFOA has developed some materials, often with much volunteer input. Modest sums were spent on some displays. One hurdle has been the storage of such materials (other than a member's basement or garage) and transport of these to different chapters as needed. Cooperative Extension Service, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, and other agencies have helped in this endeavor.



Forest Family Fairs developed as an idea in the 1990's. The first event was held on June 4, 1994 at Gurnee Woods, the Tree Farm of Vern and Marg Hudson, in central New York and repeated in 1995 and 1996. There were activities for entire families, with guessing games, food vendors, demonstrations such as portable sawmills, and other educational presentations. The development, planning, publicity, and management of the day was all done by local NYFOA members with technical presentations from cooperating agencies and organizations. In 1997 the Eastern Adirondack and Capital District chapters brought the Forest Family Fair to the Washington County Fairgrounds in eastern New York. This was successful and the chapters hosted the fair again in 1998. A call went out to the membership to have some other chapters develop a similar fair for their region, but no one appeared able to mount such an ambitious undertaking.

In 1976 Alan Knight, then Editor of the magazine, proposed a NYFOA tour to Europe and the next summer a group visited the forests of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. A second trip to Scandinavia took place in 1980. These trips were very well received by those who attended and in 1982 Alan Knight again organized a trip across Canada via rail, visiting several private forest owners and the Canadian Rockies. A second trip to meet with woodlot owners in eastern Canada took place in 1987. Other trips took place over the years to the United Kingdom with stops in England, Scotland, and Wales; a 2 ½ week trip to New Zealand in 1986, and others.

A data base of professional help, loggers, and markets was set up as a member service in 1969. People could call or write to the NYFOA secretary, who at that time was Louis Dumond, for information. This service is not currently advertised as such, but the administrative secretaries or office manager routinely receive telephone and email requests for information on every conceivable tree-related, woods, forest, or other subject. The administrative assistants are not professional scientists, but they serve as a first contact with people who want information and can refer them to the appropriate specialists or agencies. From 1990 to 1992 a quarterly Woodland Steward newsletter recounting activities of the national Woodland Steward program was sent to 7000 woodland owners in New York. In addition to information to owners it was hoped that the communication would result in more members for NYFOA.

One interesting development has been the adoption of logos for NYFOA. The original logo first appears on the 1967 issues of the *New York Forest Owner* magazine. In 1989 a new logo appears, designed to reflect the multiple interests of forest owners. However, this logo did not catch on and the original one was used until 2017, at which time the present logo was adopted.



Staff

Since its inception, questions of staff and leadership for NYFOA have come up. In 1966 the Board sought applications for an Executive Secretary position. The Board discussed the pros and cons of paid staff versus volunteers. Dave Hanaburgh had a very pertinent statement (*New York Forest Owner*, vol. 22 no.6) “There are great advantages in a paid or subsidized Executive Secretary - the primary one being to remove the responsibility of day-to-day administration from the shoulders of the membership. The removal of this responsibility permits the membership to become lazy. Soon the Executive Secretary is not only performing the administrative work but tends to direct policy and development with the consent of the membership. The alternative to an Executive Secretary is dedicated volunteer service. The problem is again related to membership laziness. When the NYFOA finds a dedicated volunteer, it tends to work that volunteer to death or frustration.”

In 1986 Ruth Thoden is appointed Executive Secretary. When she retired in 1991, Debbie Gill replaced her as Administrative Secretary. After her retirement, Liana Gooding took over as Office Administrator, serving up to the present. As the job titles changed so did the responsibilities. Prior to hiring a paid staff member, correspondence, membership records, and other secretarial needs were handled by the President, Membership Secretary, and other volunteers.

The paid secretarial staff greatly facilitated the day to day management of the organization. However, with the retirement of Ruth Thoden other activities also slowed. John Marchant volunteered to serve without pay as an Executive Director for at least one year. John had recently joined NYFOA but was a leader in establishing the Western Finger Lakes chapter and had hosted a Woods Walk on the property owned by him and his wife who also volunteered to assist John.

From 1991 to 1995, John Marchant served as NYFOA's first Executive Director. He worked hard to increase membership, monitor legislative matters, and keep in touch with other forestry related groups. He was enthusiastic in his work and did much to establish NYFOA's presence with other groups. John and others suggested hiring a paid half-time Executive Director although he cautioned that such a person must have clear direction from the NYFOA Board and which direction she or he should go in carrying out stated directives. In 2002, Dan Palm was hired and served until 2005. He worked on developing a set of guidelines for chapters and how to increase membership. Following his tenure Mary Jean Packer was hired and served from 2005 until 2009. She helped develop some grants and initiated some programs for attracting new members. However, carrying out these grants entailed additional work by the staff. In addition, more responsibility was put on the Board to provide guidance and direction to the Executive Director. Membership did not increase during this period and adding the Executive Director significantly increased the annual expenditures. From 2010 to 2018 NYFOA functioned without a paid Executive Director.

In 2018, Mike Zagata, a former Commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation was hired as Director of Organization Development, serving until 2020. He concentrated

on helping chapters increase programs and participated in several NYFOA events. After much deliberation, the NYFOA Board went ahead with recruitment of a new Executive Director with Craig Vollmer being appointed as of January 2021. Craig has a professional forester background with industry experience and organizational skills.

The New York Forest Owner magazine

Since the beginning of NYFOA the organization's official communication organ has been the *New York Forest Owner* magazine. Professor Floyd Carlson, charter member of NYFOA, and faculty member at the College of Forestry, served as Editor until 1976. The magazine consisted of a few typed pages. Material covered included reports of Board meetings, short letters to the Editor, meeting announcements, and short briefs of noteworthy forestry happenings. After 1976, when Alan Knight became Editor, the magazine was printed, and the number of pages increased. Evelyn Stock took over as Editor in 1978, serving until 1985 when Alan Knight again becomes Editor. Dick Fox replaced him and in 1999, Mary Beth Malmsheimer became the present Editor. At that juncture, the magazine expanded with more pages, color pictures and advertising. The latter was needed to offset the costs of a paid editor but also showed woodland owners where they might obtain professional forest services or those of other professional, and forestry equipment distributors. For the last 20 years the content of the magazine has remained constant with 6 issues per year. Regular inclusions are the Chairs column, Ask a Forester, Wild Things in your Woodland, a member profile and meeting announcements. One feature that has remained over the entire 57 years of the magazine has been a column on woodland health, sometimes named insects and diseases. For decades Dr. Douglas Allen, faculty member of SUNY ESF authored this extremely useful column. The column was then authored by Dr. Mark Whitmore, entomologist from Cornell University.

Becoming a Non-Profit Organization

Financial issues were not of great concern during the early years but as NYFOA increased efforts to reach out and attract more members and the need for staff increased, the need for financial resources increased. By the mid 1990's fiscal issues led to further discussions by the Board as to type of non-profit organization NYFOA should become. Up to this point NYFOA was a 501 (c)5 not for profit. It could engage in political lobbying, but donations and gifts were not tax deductible. A few people had expressed interest in donating property to NYFOA and others inquired about tax-deductible donations. The easiest way to tap into these funding sources was to set up a separate but related fully tax-deductible nonprofit organization; a 501 (c) 3. In 1997 New York Woodland Stewards was set up as an independent tax-exempt organization to raise money for educational purposes for NYFOA. It had its own Board and replaced the Board of Trust committee in NYFOA. The arrangement allowed NYFOA to obtain some grants and expand on advertising and information materials. Individuals and other non-profits now contributed money. However, having two organizations with separate but related Boards was confusing and led to some competition for projects, disagreements, and tensions between its two boards. Efforts were then pursued to get NYFOA reclassified as a fully tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization. There were several legal hurdles to overcome and problems with the word "Association" in NYFOA's title. However, by 2006 the New York State Department of State allowed the name to remain and two groups merged, resulting in full non-profit 501(c)(3) status for NYFOA. This in turn allowed NYFOA to expand on giving and introduced several levels of participation with a listing of donors in and issue of the *New York Forest Owner* magazine.

Interactions with other Organizations

Interactions with other organizations, both in New York State and nationwide, is important to the strength of NYFOA. Public agencies, especially the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, State University of New York College

of Environmental Science and Forestry, Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and Cooperative Extension have supported NYFOA and made valuable contributions in technical advice, landowner workshops, and public policy areas. Many private organizations have worked with NYFOA over the last 50 years.

The American Tree Farm system, and its counterpart in New York State has had varying relationships with NYFOA. At first it was considered a valuable ally. Later, it was competing with NYFOA. However, many NYFOA members are also Tree Farm members and the Tree Farm system has name recognition and signage. Various attempts have been made to join the two organizations more closely. Tree Farm news has been a regular column in the New York Forest Owner magazine and members of both organizations are made aware of chapter activities. A major outreach to Tree Farm members was made in 1994. The January-February issue of the magazine featured several articles aimed specifically at the New York Tree Farm members and the issue was sent to the approximately 2000 New York Tree Farm members who were not also NYFOA members.

Two years after forming NYFOA, the Empire State Forest Products Association joined NYFOA as a Supporting member. This was a strong recognition by one of the oldest and strongest forest-related organizations in New York (ESFPA was founded in 1906) that the mission and work of NYFOA was important. The NYFOA Legislative Committee has depended on ESFPA's knowledge of pending New York state legislation to inform members. The two organizations do not always agree on what are important issues and the stance to take. Timber theft, while important to both groups is seen differently as to penalties etc. Workers Compensation is important to both but for different reasons. Other differing viewpoints have arisen over the years but the communication and partnership between NYFOA and ESFPA has benefitted both groups.



ESFPA sponsors a Forestry Awareness Day each spring at the State Capital in Albany since the early 1980's. Many different organizations were invited to attend and NYFOA is an active participant. In 2005 these several forestry-oriented organizations formed the Council of Forest Resource Organizations with the aim of developing a set of mutually agreed-upon issues to advocate for with state legislators. Member groups included the following:

NYFOA	Adirondack Landowners Association
Catskill Forest Association	Catskill Landowners Association
ESFPA	New York Society of American Foresters

New York Farm Bureau	New York Maple Producers
New York Tree Farm	Timber Producers Association
THRIFT	Institute of Consulting Foresters
Urban forest group	

While this was a noble effort it was difficult to achieve uniform agreement on concerns such as property rights, property tax relief, the role of urban forestry, invasive species, logger licensing, etc. In 2017 ESFPA decided to abandon the idea of one unified Council and go back to its own conduct of a Forestry Awareness Day. They invited other organizations to attend with the understanding that the issues discussed were those of ESFPA. NYFOA continues to attend and participate each year. The approach is to present legislators or their staffs with information but not act as a lobby.

The New York State Forest Practice Board was established as part of the New York State Forest Practices Act in 1946. Its purpose was to promote and encourage the practice of sound forestry by private woodland owners. Regional Forest Practice Boards across the State had members from each county. In 1987 the Legislative Committee of NYFOA urged members to communicate with their local Forest Practice Board members and sought closer ties with the state Board.

In 1984 the Forest Practice Board proposed an Empire Forest Association. This new organization would offer liability insurance to landowners and charge annual dues. They wanted to blend NYFOA into this new organization which would be run by the NYS Forest Practice Board. NYFOA decided not to affiliate with the proposed Board but a member of the NYFOA Board would serve on the Empire Forest Board.

The Audubon Society has helped NYFOA by integrating bird habitat and management into forest management plans. Staff of New York Audubon made presentations at chapter and statewide NYFOA events over the years. Recently Audubon and NYFOA have partnered to conduct targeted assistance to landowners particularly interested in bird habitat in three specific areas of the State.

Advocacy

The stated objective of NYFOA in the original founding documents strongly suggests that the organization will study and evaluate various public policy and legislative issues. NYFOA provides a voice for private woodland owners in New York State. Over the years, NYFOA has informed its membership on various public policy and legislative issues of interest to woodland owners. Although there may not always be consensus among NYFOA's members on an issue or legislation, NYFOA informs its members on the pros and cons of those issues and legislation and how they will affect private woodland owners. Position statements on pertinent issues have been developed and are posted on the NYFOA web page (www.nyfoa.org).

Forest property taxation has long been troublesome for private forest owners. In New York State it has been identified as a major obstacle to long-term sustainable forestry on private woodlands. In the 1960's NYFOA started discussions on what could be done. Over the years various meetings were held with state agencies and legislators. Francis "Mike" Demeree, NYFOA member with lands in Chenango county was a major force in developing and pursuing forest property tax reform in New York. His efforts with support from many other members of NYFOA and other organizations resulted in passage of a new forest tax law, section 480a of the real property tax law. This was not a perfect solution and its merits continue to be debated with various amendments proposed. However, without Mike Demeree's early efforts there might not be at least some tax burden relief for New York's forest owners.

Availability of public foresters to help private landowners has changed over the last 60 years. The New York State Forest Practice Act law, enacted in 1946, provides foresters through the New York State

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to give technical advice to landowners, prepare management plans, and help in timber harvests. Faced with budget cuts the State has cut back on the amount of time and number of foresters. NYFOA repeatedly has advocated for more foresters but to no avail. However, the DEC does recognize and support the mission of NYFOA.

Logger regulating and licensing has appeared as an issue for NYFOA to debate. While many other organizations have similar views on many forestry subjects, logger licensing often divides people and groups. Similarly, licensing of professional foresters tends to divide groups. NYFOA has considered these two related issues but no clear consensus can be developed within the organization.

Timber theft, in contrast, is an issue that seems to bring complete agreement within NYFOA. Other groups, while disagreeing on laws and enforcement, generally agree that timber theft is another major deterrent to long-term forest management and timber production. In 1995 Ron Pedersen, long time NYFOA member and former president gathered information on the extent of known timber theft across New York State. The New York State Joint legislative Committee on Rural Resources pursued the topic. Sessions at the New York Society of American Foresters meetings were devoted to timber theft. A series of articles on timber theft appeared in the New York Forest Owner magazine. With the support of state legislators, a comprehensive timber trespass law in New York was enacted in 2003.

In 2013, NYFOA launched the **Restore New York Woodlands** (RNYW) initiative to bring forest health issues and solutions to the attention of all forest stakeholders and the public. As stated in the proposal, “Without timely and comprehensive action, many of the environmental and economic benefits of our forests will be denied to future generations.” Jerry Michael and Kelly Smallidge as NYFOA members, took the lead on this project. A symposium was held at SUNYESF in April 2015, cosponsored by New York Audubon, Catskill Forest Association, Cornell University, New York Farm Bureau, and the Nature Conservancy. Under the aegis of RNYW news articles were distributed and contact with state legislators increased. One focus was on the effect of deer on forest reproduction, and the loss of early succession woods as abandoned farmlands have become more forested.

Where We Are Today

NYFOA was founded in 1963 with 212 members. Membership rose to 1400 in 1990 and peaked at 2100 in 2003. For the last 20 years membership has averaged about 1900. Changing economic conditions in New York's rural economy, the aging demographic of private woodland owners, and the subdivision of private woodlands into smaller parcels all impact membership. In addition, many civic and religious organizations across the country are struggling to gain new members. Meanwhile, people are barraged with pleas to support a plethora of causes through mail flyers, television advertising, and phone calls. Social scientists tell us that the citizenry is changing in its views of joining clubs etc. The key to increasing members in any group is, as it has always been, offering something that people want and value. NYFOA must decide what it can and should offer. NYFOA's mission of educating its membership on wise management their forest resource and educating the public on the importance of that forest resource to all of society remains relevant today.

Currently, the country is suffering tremendously under the COVID-19 pandemic. This restricts many activities including Woods Walks, in-person seminars, in-person Board meetings, and limits the social interaction which has been important in the organization. Hopefully, this will pass, and we can learn from the experience. Several recent initiatives by NYFOA may bode well for the future. These include strengthening ties to the Tree Farm system, obtaining another Executive Director, new communication tools, and furthering the Master Forest Owner program.

The American Forest Foundation, sponsors of the Tree Farm program, appears interested in closer ties with NYFOA in New York. Other states have developed close relations among the two organizations.

Conversations have occurred and details must be worked out. A cooperative atmosphere between the two groups would be beneficial to both. Common interests exist between the two organizations and members often partake of the other's events.

The Executive Director position in NYFOA has come and gone over the years. Such a position has the potential of greatly advancing the status and strength of NYFOA. Past experiences have shown that the Director must receive specific guidance from the NYFOA Board and must maintain close communication with the President. Dedicated professional help can relieve the president and Executive Committee of NYFOA from many administrative tasks and allow them to concentrate on developing more long-range programs. The Director can also maintain the close relationships that have developed between NYFOA and other organizations and develop new ones.

Effective and timely communication to, and among members is vital in this era of electronic media. NYFOA recently started a monthly email newsletter, *The Woodlot*, sent to members and others in the forestry community of New York. Continued publication depends on timely news articles being supplied from a variety of sources. This does not replace the bimonthly *New York Forest Owner* but gives people another source of information.

The Master Forest Owner program, conducted by Cornell University Cooperative Extension program, prepares laypersons, who own woodland and are NYFOA members, to meet with woodland owners and give them practical advice on managing their land and how to get further professional assistance. NYFOA has supported this program and it serves as a first contact for owners who might be reluctant to hire a professional without knowing what might be done. This is of increasing importance as public assistance programs face cost-cutting and personnel reductions.