



NYFOA
New York Forest Owners Association

Niagara Frontier Chapter

Spring 2021 Newsletter

Chairman's Corner:

When I left school last March 13, 2020- I never expected I would spend my spring and summer at home. We did curb-side pickup, instacart, and allowed Jeff Bezos to step down from Amazon- speaking of Amazon- NYFOA is an Amazon Smile participant: **AmazonSmile** is a program that donates 0.5% of your eligible purchases on Amazon to a charity of your choice. (that's US!) All you need to do is start your shopping at **smile.amazon.com**. The donation will be made at no extra cost to you and you can choose NYFOA!

The very best thing about owning a forest? You can easily social distance and not feel badly about it. Another terrific outcome my husband and I shared: we captured about 20 bee swarms because we were stay-at-home to see them and we could safely provide a new home for them. Mark has provided some interesting reading and at the end of the newsletter, I'll post websites for general interest.

There's still snow on the ground and we are officially still in winter until March 21 so consider this your winter issue of the Niagara Frontier newsletter. In a way it is even more striking in that the groundhog saw his shadow and forecast another year of COVID, oops I mean six more weeks of winter. It goes without saying that COVID has affected everyone's lives one way or another. Perhaps it gave you more time to get out into the woods. Maybe it led to changes in your short- or long-term goals for your land. It has definitely led to changes in everyone's plans. One of the things that I hear that everyone misses is gatherings, chances to meet others and share stories. The demographic of most people in this club puts us squarely in the crosshairs of high susceptibility and danger for our health. Perhaps some of you have been vaccinated, we were fortunate as both being educators to get early allowance for the vaccine. Club events have been put on hold as a cautionary measure. Hopefully we will reach herd immunity sometime soon, stop the pandemic, and go forward with a new appreciation for the forces of nature.

They are uncertain times for sure. Vaccination rates are going up and yet at the same time variants are appearing that may or may not be controlled by existing vaccines. This cat and mouse game is an example of a game that has gone on as long as there has been life on this planet. Pests, pathogens, parasites, infectious agents are all in the eye of the beholder. Who exactly is the pest in this case, is it some bipedal mammal that has seemingly moved into many habitats on this planet, changing the world around them as they go, thus providing opportunities

for novel interactions? Is it some virus that was able to jump hosts? I would think the answer is yes to both.

The concepts of invasive species, succession, extirpation, natural selection, and a host of other biological terms are familiar to woodlot owners. (OK, maybe not extirpation, I just threw in a new vocabulary word for you to learn, in this context it means wiping out something). Forests may look static to the naïve, untrained eye, but there is a dynamic occurring all the time, some locally, others on a larger scale. Walking through my woods after a wind storm means bringing a chainsaw to clear fallen trees across trails. Thanks EAB for destroying one of our native species. Ash produce such a good seed crop that the understory is filled with young saplings which will grow in an uncertain future. Will the parasitic wasps that attacks EAB larvae become established in our country and protect future generations of ash trees? Will other species of trees fill in the spaces laid bare from the loss of ash trees? Will invasive species move in and perhaps prevent the establishment of a hardwood forest? There are singular pests attacking other trees in the area as well, such as the wooly adelgid attacking our hemlock trees. Will this tree species meet the same fate as the ash tree? Time will tell. What's next? We hear about other pests that are even worse - like the Asian long-horned beetle, that is not very selective about which of our hardwood trees it will destroy. What will our forests look like after something like that comes through?

As grim as the picture painted above appears, remember one other thing: Mother Nature is very creative. And we are here to assist. I would think it is fair to say that those of us who own land do so because we love it, and have an attachment to it and a reverence for the flora and fauna on it. We are environmental stewards, trying to manage it with the future in mind.

Whether it is for timber stand improvement or recreation or hunting or providing wildlife habitat, we put the needs of the land above ours. So although this newsletter is something produced by me, recognize that it is yours. We want to hear your stories, how you care for your land, your successes and failures, your observations and insight. We want to tell your stories to others. So please feel free to reach out to us, whether it is informally in a conversation or via a story ready for inclusion in the newsletter. I can be contacted at mgallo@niagara.edu or via cell phone at (716) 525-5973. Enjoy all that nature has to offer!

Mark Gallo, newsletter editor.

Starting off the alphabet with A, let's talk about ash trees. There are several ash tree species that can be found in the area, all belonging to the Genus *Fraxinus*. We can run into white (*F. americana*), green (*F. pennsylvanica*), and black ash (*F. nigra*). Ash is a wonderful lumber as it has so many uses, including baseball bats, handles, flooring, and furniture. People can use for turning or carving. It can even be used for utensils, as it doesn't impart a taste to foods. It should be mentioned that there is another tree, mountain ash, that is not related, but can be found in the area, usually as an ornamental. It has small orange berries that are appreciated by birds late in the season.

Ash have what are known as compound leaves – each petiole contains multiple leaflets. Each of these leaves typically grow out in a whorl pattern. Buds are usually found opposite on the stems. The tree is a fast-growing species, it is typically an early colonizer of abandoned fields and can be found in high density in certain areas. It is a prolific producer of seeds that are sort of like helicopters that can be broadcast fairly far and wide.

This tree that has received plenty of attention because of the emerald ash borer, *Agrilus planipennis*. This shiny green pest has wrought immeasurable damage on this major tree species in the United States in general and NY state in particular. It was believed to be brought to this country in wooden packing crates and was first found in Michigan in 2002. This pest lays its eggs on the bark and the larvae burrow in and munch on the phloem layer right underneath the bark. This is disastrous to the tree, cutting off nutrient movement and leading to its death. The larvae pupate and exit by a distinctive “D” shape hole. They do not burrow into the lumber so if harvested upon first signs of infestation the wood is fine.

So what are the signs of infestation? Typically one will notice dieback of the canopy. Adventitious shoots begin to appear lowdown on the trunk. The bark may start to peel, or turn white due to birds picking at it. If you decide to harvest, do so early on. Ash trees have a tendency to become very fragile in a short period of time after their death. Their fate is very unpredictable, some will drop branches, others will snap at unpredictable places, and still others will fall over bringing up a healthy size root ball. (see photos). Dead ash trees have already put a large financial burden on communities and homeowners as removal is not always cheap.

APHIS (Animal, Plant Health Inspection Services, a division of the USDA) has recently described a change in their rule regarding quarantine regulations effective January 14, 2021. There is no longer a federal quarantine on the movement of ash wood products. However recognize there may be rules from other agencies that are still in effect regarding ash movement. It was recognized that the quarantine was not working and the spread of this pest continues.

Can we save the ash? There does not appear to be any native control mechanisms. In Asia there are parasitic wasps that appear to keep the borer numbers in check. They are trying to release in our country as well, however it has been challenging to get high enough numbers of wasps. There is also the issue of introducing another species into our environment without knowing the consequences – perhaps these wasps will cause some unforeseen damage. They continue to release the wasps and hopefully they will be able to survive in our climate and reproduce quickly and provide some type of balanced protection.

For individual specimen trees in one’s yard there are insecticides that can be injected or used as a ground drench around the base of the tree. Chemical treatments must be re-applied so it is a temporary solution. The bright news is that there is plenty of seeds present in the environment and the number of young trees is sufficient to fill in the gaps IF a way to protect them is found. Let’s keep our fingers crossed for a future forest containing ash. (The dangers of dead ash trees)



The next letter, B, brings up a tree that does not make it on anyone's list of favorites. I am talking about buckthorn. Buckthorn belongs to the genus *Rhamnus* and there are a number of species. We most commonly deal with common and glossy buckthorn. Why is it considered invasive? It can grow in low light, has no predators, is a prolific producer of seeds. It is rather non-specific about soil type so you can find anywhere. It is one of the first trees to leaf out in the spring and one of the last to lose its leaves in the fall thus making it easy to spot in a woodlot. Usually unfortunately when you find it you find lots of it.

The common buckthorn can be confusing because its bark looks like that of cherry and plum. Its leaves and stems are found opposite on a branch, as opposed to the alternate pattern found in cherry and plum. It has small oval leaves. It does have small thorns which you will discover when trying to remove this shrub. This tree is dioecious, meaning that there are 2 sexes, male flower producing and female flower producing trees. Their flowers are relatively unremarkable yellowish-greenish, followed up by small dark purple berries on the female trees.

How to attack this beast? Burning is typically discouraged but would be effective in an oak savannah. For most of us the first thing to do is remove any that are large enough to produce seeds. Concentrate your first efforts on destroying the large female trees. For most of us viewing under one of these one will see a carpet of young trees. They can carry out a process known as allelopathy, which means that they release chemicals in the ground preventing the growth of competitors. So you think you won the battle by cutting down this tree? Think again. It is a prodigious producer of numerous shoots and grows back Medusa-like (See photo). Small seedlings can be pulled out of the ground. For larger ones chemical means are typically used. Triclopyr is one of the main agents used in its control, so is glyphosate. The cut stump method is typically used, where one cuts through the tree close to the ground and then applies a herbicide. Fortunately this can be carried most of the year, except in spring when sap is flowing.

Once you have eradicated the tree you are not finished. The seedbed will erupt with many, many buckthorn seedlings. They can be easily pulled; knock the soil off the roots and toss to kill. Follow up this procedure for three to five years. You CAN win against this pathogen but only with a high level of vigilance and recognizing that birds may bring more seeds into your region.



Left: Buckthorn seedlings under a female tree

Right: Re-growth of buckthorn after cutting to ground with no chemical treatment.

We made it to C. It would be too easy to go with coronavirus although we probably should. It has had a tremendous impact on forestry. First there were all the shutdowns, including lumber mills, then for some odd reason there has been a surge in construction, thus raising the price of lumber through the roof. Anyone who has projects in mind better get ready for sticker shock. I guess everyone being at home made the home remodeling craze get crazier than ever, and the construction of new homes is up as well, even with high unemployment, go figure. No, instead we are going to talk about cottonwood. Cottonwood is in the Genus *Populus*, like poplars. The common cottonwood in this area is *P. deltoides*. It receives its name for its seed clusters which are released in a cottony mess. If you have a large tree you can watch piles of this cotton rolling by on the ground like a tumbleweed. It is also a dioecious tree, meaning there are separate male and female trees. They have leaves shaped somewhere between a heart and a triangle. The leaves have toothed edges and rustle in the slightest breeze, like aspens to which they are related. Animals do love eating young cottonwood.

This fast-growing tree loves water and can reach tremendous size. It makes a good windbreak in a hurry. The wood is relatively soft but does have some useful properties. It is prized by the pulp industry for paper production. It is used in pallets and shipping crates. It can also be used in horse stalls, it seems able to take quite a kick and flex instead of break. It also does not taste very good so horses do not chew on it. It is of very low heat value, don't bother using it for firewood unless you like shoveling wood into your burner. Woodworkers do not use it much because it has a tendency to get fuzzy when sanded or planed. It is a very light wood. It is also a very fibrous wood and does not split very easily, so pounding nails into it do not split it. It rots very quickly when in contact with the elements, but if kept in a dry location works out reasonably well. A novel product of cotton wood trees is their bark which is used for carvers. Large trees have very thick highly furrowed bark.

Typically not planted as a yard specimen tree due to its water-seeking nature (hello clogged pipes) and the fact that it is fairly soft and prone to drop branches, and there is that cotton production which some people find objectionable. Resin from the trees is used by bees to make propolis in their hives. This material has antimicrobial properties. The tree is loved by animals as a homesite. Woodpeckers can easily burrow into this tree. Holes form when branches break off, making room for owls. It has been purported to have medicinal uses, it does contain salicin, which can be converted to salicylic acid, the active ingredient in aspirin. We can all use a little headache relief after 2020!

(One use of cottonwood- an oyster mushroom totem.)



From farm to field to forest.

I love the articles that come from people like Peter Smallidge regarding regeneration of a forest, timber stand improvement, etc. to enhance our forests. But one small point I would like to make – some of us don't start out with forests, not primary, not secondary, not tertiary growth forest. In fact it's not a forest at all. But rather we have acquired old farm land that is going through a very different type of succession. There is no seed bed of desirable species like white oak just waiting to be released when light becomes available. What we do have is fertile land that leads to very rapid growth of plants. And most of the seeds available are from invasive species, thus making for a plot of land that is overrun by undesirable shrubs and trees. Honeysuckle, multiflora rose, buckthorn, barberry, Tree of Heaven, autumn olive, and countless others become commonplace.

One thing we do share with folks who have cleared a previous woodlot is the problem of keeping pests off of the desirable emerging seedlings and saplings. Enclosures, exclosures, whatever, become relatively expensive and seem to have a limited payback for some of us, how shall I say it, non-youths, who will not be around to ever see a harvest of timber. I use a low-tech trick that works to keep the deer population from bothering the trees of interest which is to cut some twigs and push in the ground surrounding the sapling you are trying to protect. (See photo) It seems to only take four or five to encircle the tree. Deer leave it alone since the twigs dry up and hence do not provide browse and they don't bother to stick their head into the center to get at your tree of interest. Bucks also don't bother to scrape on it because of this jumbled mess of twigs protecting your tree. I have a different weapon to take care of rabbits and mice. (See photo at end of article)

Purchasing seedlings and planting can/does work to re-populate your land, but I find it is also important to know your land and find lots of "freebies". For instance near one big old white oak tree that was most likely left for shade for cattle has produced a number of offspring. I always carry a roll of marking tape. The little seedlings are the ones I prefer to move. Oak seem to send down a taproot to China so even a three foot tall tree becomes impossible to move. Hickory is even worse. Small seedlings are unremarkable once they drop their leaves hence the need for marking tape to indicate their presence during the growing season so you can find them and move them during their dormancy. This method has proven to be quite effective in transplanting species of interest for me.

Another thing that I have found is to embrace what you do have (if possible). I have tons of pin oak. It is probably my major species. I have taken all the limbs off the trunks for the first 12 to 16 feet. Within a year or so the scars are gone and after 5 years they are producing a nice clean butt log. I have harvested a few of those after ten years of growth and it has made for some beautiful looking red oak, some of it even clear! I also have cottonwood. A local sawyer likes it to make sheds and I allow him to take any of them that are in the culverts or ones that are competing with species of interest. I have many undesirable species and my current strategy is to remove those that are near any desirable trees first and then in the future go back and continue to make larger and larger clear zones around these trees. (As if we all have time to do that!). I have been girdling trees when I don't feel like dropping them immediately. Why? Well it dries better if left standing so if I want it for firewood in a year or two this works out well. I also don't like littering up the forest floor with dropped trees everywhere. Although for some trees dropping them to the ground is something I may do so I can inoculate with mushroom spawn. Chemicals do enter into the equation for invasive tree species that have a tendency to re-sprout, but I try to use very sparingly as it may inadvertently lead to selection to those that are resistant to the herbicide. These are hard-fought battles but I feel I am winning the war - for now.



The use of sticks placed in a perimeter around a valuable young oak tree for protection from deer.

Odditrees- a favorite:



This elm is swallowing a pin oak branch

Spring tree sales.

Spring brings thoughts of renewal, and for foresters, planting. Here are a few places to purchase: DEC tree sale - open to anyone. Sales ends May 12.

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9395.html>

County soil and water conservation districts each have their own tree sales. They do not all offer the same selection of trees. They are pick-up only on particular dates and locations. To find the one for your county type in your county followed by swcd.com/Treeandshrub.html. An example is listed below.

Niagara County

<http://www.niagaraswcd.com/TreeandShrub.html>

Erie County

<http://ecswcd.org/html/treeshrub.html>

Wyoming County – I couldn't find a sale, but here's their web address.

<https://www.wcswcd.org/news>

Stumpage price reports:

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5259.html>

Here's an interesting site that highlights monument trees:

<https://www.monumentaltrees.com/en/records/usa/newyork/>

In other news – (this is from Peter Smallidge)

As a woodland owner you have a special set of skills that you could share with other woodland owners in your area. These skills are enhanced by educational resources available through Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell's [ForestConnect](#) program. Learn how to merge your skills with existing resources so you can be a volunteer that helps other woodland owners more thoroughly enjoy and manage their property. You are invited to the annual training for Cornell's Master Forest Owner (MFO) volunteers. MFO volunteers work through Cornell Cooperative Extension to visit woodland owners in their county and direct them towards resources that help them manage their woodlands. This training is open for new volunteers and previously trained volunteers seeking a refresher.

Questions, questions, questions.

One of the challenges that the Committee deals with is understanding what you, the members, value most from the organization. Please consider mailing/emailing your thoughts about the following questions to Mark Gallo, the editor of this newsletter. He can be reached at mgallo@niagara.edu or (716) 525-5973 or at 2345 Ridge Rd, Ransomville, NY 14131.

1. What was your reason for joining the club?
2. What would make the club better?

3. What types of activities are your favorites (woodswalks, potluck meals, presentations by organizations, receiving the newsletter, others)?
 4. Are there areas you would like to see more discussion? (legal, landowner rights, land use, environment, sustainability, hints/tips/tricks in forest management, ???)
 5. Would you like to volunteer, either by becoming a Steering Committee member, or help distribute the word about the organization at other events (farm shows, outdoor expos, etc.)?
 6. Interest in learning/showing other members in a how-to session (like bee, bird, or bat houses)?
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