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Alps Mountain Farm, Rensselaer County. Photo by Caryn Allen

Letter from the Chair

Jason Post



Hello all, and welcome to our Fall 2025 newsletter. I would like to introduce our two newest additions to the Capitol District Chapter steering committee: spouses Russell Freeman (now vice-chair) and Katie Campbell-Nelson (newsletter editor). Russell has 20 years of experience in ecological restoration and as a residential arborist who has worked all over the country. He is fulfilling a lifelong dream to steward forest lands in New York, including the 80 acres he calls home with his family. Katie has a background in agricultural extension and now coordinates the Northeast SARE professional development program for people who work with farmers. She asked to edit the newsletter so that she could connect people to learn more about forestry and support each other to steward our local forests together.



Russell Freeman



Katie Campbell-Nelson

We are hard at work planning events for 2026. We encourage you to join us and sign up for the events and woods walks we host with professionals in the field to gain a better understanding of sustainable management options for your forested lands. Come to one of our many programs that feature a variety of topics such as timber stand improvements, mushroom growing, plant ID, invasive species management, and more. Learn about these programs on the NYFOA web site, our Capitol District Facebook page, and this email list.

To submit content or provide feedback, please contact the editor:

Katie Campbell-Nelson, 413-834-1090, katiecampbellnelson@gmail.com

These free or low-cost programs develop your forestry expertise and introduce you to many other forest minded folks. Bring a friend along. The more the merrier. I would also like to encourage members to share their comments, questions, and ideas by contacting a member of our steering committee (last page in this issue). We look forward to hearing what's on your mind.

Members' Notebook

Here, members submit short entries about the forested lands they love and steward from each county in our chapter. This issue, we are missing submissions from Montgomery, Saratoga and Schenectady Counties. Please participate – your perspectives are valued.

Albany County

GOT ANTS? *Fred Seely, Seelyfs@gmail.com*

Another fall in upstate New York. I find myself walking away from timber stand improvement for a couple of weeks. Time to do my fall chores of bringing the firewood closer to the house, attacking the invasives that have annoyed me all year, and maintaining my property line signage prior to hunting season. I'm sure fellow forest owners all have similar fall "to do" lists.

This fall, my mind is occupied by a forest challenge that I have ignored for several years. I am being invaded (slight embellishment) by the Allegheny mound ant (*Formica exsectoides*). Four years ago they were of concern, but life took my attention in different directions. This year the mounds are bigger and more plentiful in number. To give you an idea of what I'm dealing with, picture a hillside, five-acre red oak plantation. There are three big mounds, about a cubic yard each, and many smaller mounds (photo below). I talked to a fellow NYFOA member who is a



retired certified forest entomologist. He told me of a job where they bulldozed and burned. Oh, I'm so not keen on that.

I remembered an article by Mark Whitmore in "The New York Forest Owners", July/August 2021. It was a very informative article on ants. He wrote of using pyrethrin for extermination. When first reading the article, I wasn't a fan of using herbicides, pesticides, or insecticides. After going through Master Forest Owner training this year and recent NYFOA woods walks, I'm becoming more comfortable with safe and appropriate chemical usage. I still thought I'd try a borax/sugar solution first. After numerous treatments, the ants seem to be alive, well, and thriving.

In conclusion, this slow learner is going to use pyrethrin. I would welcome any advice from fellow forest owners who have battled the ants.

Columbia County

Mike Birmingham. There have been notable changes in Columbia County forestland over the past 25 years, including shifts in forest composition due to the decline of American Ash, which previously accounted for approximately 11% of forest trees but was significantly reduced by Emerald Ash Borer. Housing development has also increased, particularly on former agricultural land that has reverted to forests. The county is more than 90% forested, with most areas under private ownership, which is significant for maintaining wildlife habitats. Private forests play an important role in supporting sustainable wildlife habitats, aligning with NYFOA's mission. Recently, the Spotted Lanternfly was identified in Valatie, marking its first known presence in the county and posing a risk to various tree and shrub species. Ongoing management efforts are required to maintain the productivity of local forests for both people and wildlife.

Greene County

Russell Freeman. While working on a timber stand improvement project that I started this October, I came across a log lying on the ground with a distinct, left turning twist. This is characteristic of American chestnut. The log had probably been there longer than I've been alive, and when I cut it open, it was still sound and beautiful inside (*photos below*).



Rensselaer County

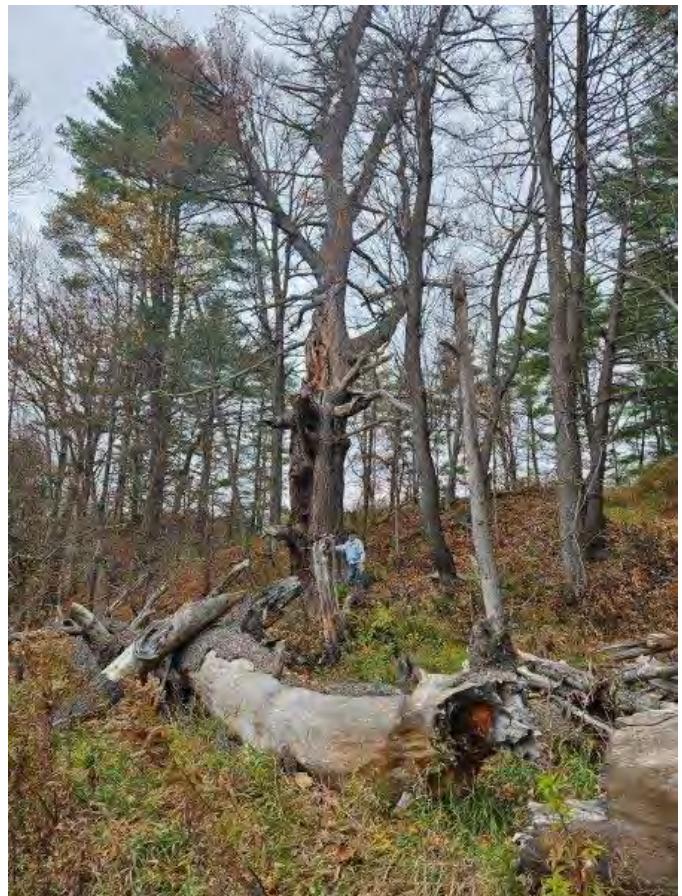
Caryn Allen and Will Bechiom are the founders of [Alps Mountain Farm](#) in Averill Park, a 111-acre property where they're blending regenerative forestry with modern technology. Their young, mixed hardwood forest—last logged 30–40 years ago—is being restored through selective stewardship, habitat renewal, and closed-loop practices that connect forest health to farm productivity. They're currently developing fiber and maple syrup operations while building a model for sustainable, tech-forward land management and are excited to connect with and learn from the NYFOA community!



Caryn and Will took the cover photo while on a private plane ride won at the Hudson Taconic Lands Gala this fall.

Schoharie County

Marilyn and Rick's forest in the hollow. This time of year brings reflections of trees we steward and reminds us of some grand old trees we've lost. When we first saw the big white pine, 25 years ago, we assumed it would be with us for a while. Its DBH was six feet and was estimated to be over 300 years old. We introduced this tree to many family and friends. Several years ago, a major portion split off, revealing an extensive honeybee hive. People who saw it contacted us to send condolences. The children and grandchildren of previous owners stopped by to say goodbye. This year was its last to send new growth to the remaining parts of the tree. We have left it to nurture the soil and provide habitat to numerous animals, having little value as timber. But, its offspring are all around, reminding us of the cycles of life.



Kiskatomas

Justin Wexler, transcription and introduction by Katie Campbell-Nelson

My favorite tree in our home woods is a shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*). I call him Shaggy. Some of you may curse the wood as you chop your firewood. It is stringy, and sometimes impossible to get into segments. It can also be dangerous to fell. The timber can split where you have left holding wood and spring back at you leaving a tall 'chair'. The sawyer may think that the cut would carry through, and the tree would fall, but it is so hard, taut, and unpredictable.

These difficult qualities are also why hickory is valued for tool handles, furniture, and flooring as one of the most durable commercial wood species. And, it can hybridize with pecans to produce tasty nuts!



Shaggy. photo: Katie Campbell-Nelson

To gain an appreciation for the wholeness of hickory- shagbark and others- here is a transcription of a recording on a walk with ethno-ecologist Justin Wexler on October 18, 2025.

Every one of you knows at least 50 words that come from Eastern Algonquian languages that included the languages spoken by the Mohican and other Lenape people here in the Hudson Valley. Hickory is one of those words, but locally, for a few hundred years, settlers called the nuts from this tree Kiskatomas nuts. And that was from a borrowed, very regional Mohican word for this tree, which is, and was, hugely important for native people back in the day.

Hickory is a tree that indicates that land was disturbed previously. They will come up along with white oaks. These woods; they're kind of the opposite of the hemlock, which we were just in. If there's no disturbance, we get hemlock and beechwood. When native people are disturbing through fire, we got more and more oaks and hickories of all kinds. Those feed animals like turkeys, the elk we used to have here, and deer, bears, and sandhill cranes, when they used to pass through the area. And passenger pigeons of course. Hickories are not just a source of nuts for people.

So, I just want to point out something fun. It is the second favored wood for making bows for hunting to this day, for Lenape people and Haudenosaunee people. All hickories; actually. I know people who prefer it, they'll use bitternut, they'll use pig nut, shagbark. But the shagbark is the main reason I'm talking about this.

I'm sure some of you have used it on your grill before, it's nice. But they make quick torches. If you have a neighbor, you really don't like, it is the number one source for Flaming Arrow Material! Daniel Boone, when he was holed up in a blockhouse in Kentucky when he pissed off the Union, they set the roof on fire with arrows, with bundled shagbark hickory from the front and drove him out of there and took him prisoner.

[Participant adds: "You can also tap them like maple trees, and if you boil the bark with sugar water, you get a syrup that's just as good as maple syrup, and probably a little more maple flavor.

Did native peoples ever use the inner bark for weaving?] Oh ya! So, they preferred bitternut hickories specifically for that because they're fast growing and they've got much...smoother trunks and its stupidly heavy bark. I know because I peeled a huge bitternut hickory. They used those for quick canoes. So, if people were traveling overland and they didn't want to have to walk an extra 100 miles, if there was a suitable tree that you could peel easily



Justin Wexler, center, presenting at the October 18th, 2025 Woodswalk when this segment was recorded. Photo: Mike Birmingham.

near the water, like a chestnut, that was the number one choice for that. Or an elm, second choice. They could do it year-round, but it's a lot easier in early summer when you've got the new growth ring. So, bitternut hickory, you can peel the bark really easily. You get big sheets of heavy bark, mid-June to the end of July.

But it's not good bark to use long term. Like, they wouldn't cover their houses with hickory bark. They would use chestnut and elm bark because it's decay resistant. Hickory bark could get bored by I don't know what kind of insects, but it turns to something like, Swiss cheese...

Wolfe Woodswalk

East Berne, NY (owners Tom and Anna Wolfe)

September 27, 2025

On this warm sunny morning, 18 members of NYFOA and the general public gathered to tour Tom and Anna Wolfe's woodlot where a timber harvest had been conducted within the past two years. Tom, who is a retired DEC urban forester, has been taking firewood from these woods on a regular basis to cull undesirable trees and improve the remaining growing stock. The recent commercial timber harvest was conducted for the purpose of generating some income, but just as important, to provide added growing space and light for the high-quality oak and other hardwoods remaining. What was not harvested will clearly be a benefit for future generations.

Openings created in the canopy allowed a flush of new growth on the forest floor. Although the walk was too late in the year to hear warblers and many songbirds, it is obvious they will be here in the spring. Something surprising was the limited evidence of deer in this woodlot. Although protective structures and shelters were in place around some plantings, the new growth did not seem heavily browsed.

We had the chance to guess about the purpose of a stone chamber built into the side of a knoll with two openings, one in front and the other on top. It turns out this structure is probably a lime kiln, built by early settlers in this area, to produce agricultural or cementitious lime. Life wasn't easy in days past!

At the end of the walk the group gathered to share homemade baked goods, hot and cold beverages, and other snacks. It is always a good time to chat about what we are doing in our own woodlots, share from our experience, swap wildlife stories, or get feedback on whatever issue we are having. We learn from one another, one of the truly great reasons to attend woodswalks.

Many thanks to Tom and Anna Wolfe for showcasing the good stewardship of your property and giving us inspiration to keep managing our own land as well as you do!



photos: Mike Birmingham



Lime Kiln.



Artist's conk

Woodswalk at Indian Ridge

Earlton, NY (owner: Charles Best)

October 18, 2025

An ethno-ecologist, a botanist, and a forestry practitioner walk into the woods with about 15 other forest stewards... and what do you get? Certainly, differing perspectives on the value of a forest and the management practices therein.

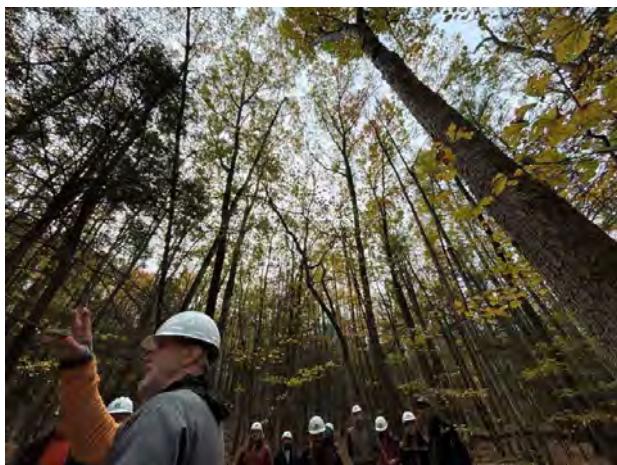
But the walk was also a very rich experience that ended at the owner's silvopasture field overlooking fall foliage and the Catskill mountains. This unique gathering of people shared hard hats, refreshments, and lively conversation. What did we learn?

From our local ethno-ecologist, Justin Wexler, we learned that human disturbance of the land, including fire, is endemic and many species require it for survival such as milkweed (used for making fabric), dogbane, and some berry species. We may know up to 50 words in the Algonquian language, learned by use of the forest around us.

From the botanist, Skye Vanderlaan, we learned that certain plants are indicators of different soil types, something that can be confirmed with a few drops of hydrochloric acid which make the stones fizz in limestone. Maidenhair fern is indicative of calcium deposits and limestone soil. Meanwhile, much of this area is probably siltstone, home to ancient forest fossils.

From the forestry practitioner, Russell Freeman, we learned how to efficiently improve a timber stand, aiming to spend no more than 6.5 hrs. per acre to cut hundreds of stems while protecting and enhancing the forest species and functions that the other two presenters so well described. He also aims to minimize the impact of disturbance by creating bio mats from brush and logs to cover deep ruts from skid tracks. Brush management was conducted May - October to control barberry, buckthorn, honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and stilt grass. Per USDA-EQIP contract requirements, timber stand improvement began October 1st to protect brown bat habitat.

The whole project will encompass 14 acres of forested land at Indian Ridge in Greene Co. NY. We hope for opportunities to see its progress at future woodswalks.



Pointing out a hung-up tree. photo: K. Campbell-Nelson



Maidenhair Fern
photo: K. Campbell-Nelson



Forrest driving a cart.
photo: M. Birmingham

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