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Torturous Catskill Mountains. Photo by Mike Birmingham

Letter from the Editor

Katie Campbell-Nelson



This issue is about Stewardship. As the largest snowstorm our region has seen in several years blankets the forests of Greene County, it's hard to imagine what active stewardship is in the moment. We've changed the fluids, covered the skidder, and brought in enough firewood for a week. What else is there to do?

There's plenty of time now to fret for the trees we may lose to cracking from cold, or blowdown, or that may finally succumb to hemlock wooly adelgid or emerald ash borer. We could take a walk. But instead, we rest. For when the snow stops it will create a buffer for skidding logs without damaging the thin soils or rutting paths. We can take out the weakened trees while they are viable lumber and still leave plenty to thrive and others to recycle for the next decades.

Wendell Berry wrote "the finest growth that farmland can produce is a careful farmer", I would echo that to say - *The finest growth that a forest can produce is a careful steward.* What would you say?

Please enjoy this issue containing many perspectives of stewardship from Capitol District Chapter members in "Members Notebook" and a feature article "Stewardship Beyond the Political Cycle" by Ron Dodson.

Interested in sharing and learning forest stewardship with your peers and in the forest? Consider joining the Cornell Master Forest Owner program – see the Resources section for more information.

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

Here, members submit short entries about the forested lands they love and steward from each county in our chapter and beyond. Any member is invited to submit a contribution of about 150 words and a photo. The next one is due April 15th, 2026.

Albany County

Gerry MacDonald

Our property in southern Albany County is currently at the tail end of several years of spongy moth infestation. The caterpillars defoliated oaks in large areas of the forest in 2022, 2023, and 2024. It was a stressful time as a landowner seeing our forest decimated and not being able to do anything about it. The caterpillars seemed to particularly like chestnut oaks and the female moths seemed to gravitate to and lay their eggs in the deep furrows in the bark. The repeated defoliation coupled with long periods of drought, stressed and likely contributed to the death of some of the older white and chestnut oaks. I have not seen mortality in red oaks.

I am currently harvesting a dozen trees in a particularly hard hit small area where most of the dead trees are located. The trees are between 14 inch and 20 inch dbh. I'm keeping the bottom 10 feet of butt logs from the bigger trees to have sawn into boards. White oak is great for outdoor use, and I'll eventually come up with a furniture project for using the handsome chestnut oak lumber.

The remainder of the trunks will be used for firewood to heat our house. I'm currently processing the firewood and find it slow going since the sapwood has gotten punky and the bark sloughs off easily and has to be managed separately.



An interesting aside was the presence of black cords under the bark of a white oak tree. These cords (photo above) are the rhizomorphs of the

Armillaria fungus which can be a virulent parasite especially on trees that are already stressed.

Columbia County

A THORNY DILEMA, Mike Birmingham. Multiflora rose was originally acquired by me from the US Soil and Conservation Service and planted on my family's western New York farm in the 1950s as a shrub to support wildlife, but it became invasive, making land management more expensive and hindering access. Its thick growth eventually required heavy machinery to control and access woodlands impeded by its thorny dense canes. Its branches offer shelter for wildlife and fodder, and its berries serve as important winter food for birds such as Northern Mockingbirds and Wild Turkeys. The Audubon Society notes that multiflora rose has contributed to an increase in Northern Mockingbird populations in the Northeast. In certain areas, such as Mud Creek Environmental Learning Center diseases help keep it in check. Alternatives to the invasive multiflora rose are native holly, dogwood, winterberry, elderberry, raspberry, and blackberry among many native species providing berries for wintering local wildlife. When wildlife is important for the landowner, multiflora rose is also a productive species, well adapted to many sites, and supports wildlife including several bird species that depend on berries including multiflora rose hips to survive in winter when insects are scarce.

Greene County

Russell Freeman. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

Rensselaer County

WOODLOT STEWARDSHIP ON THE CHEAP, Dick and Shari Gibbs. We grab small nippers, or possibly

short loppers, and head to the woodlot. Years ago, Mike Greason, then our forester, now deceased, taught us to walk the woodlot and look for small saplings less than an inch in diameter. Thankfully we have such young trees and we want to help them become tall and healthy, adding yearly growth decades down the road. To help reach this goal, we nip off some branches in the sapling stage, clipping off crotched shoots and whatever catches our eyes as not being helpful to the future trees that we will never see in our own lifetime.

Of course, some stewardship work requires big equipment, money, planning, and a much larger project mindset. But if we are looking over the horizon and down the generations, we in our 80(s), can stick nippers in our pockets, head outside, smile, and do the things that John Prine sings “don’t cost very much and last a long while.”

With the leaves down and the ground frozen, the forest becomes easier to read. Structure replaces color, and the long reach of past decisions is suddenly visible. Winter shows the woods as they are, not as they appear in leaf.



Thanksgiving, first snowfall of the season. Caryn Allen

Caryn Allen and Will Bechiom, [Alps Mountain Farm](#)
Walking our land this season, I’m reminded that stewardship often means restraint. Knowing when not to cut. Leaving tops and limbs where they fall so they can return to the soil. Letting snow press the understory flat, giving roots and seedlings a season of rest.

Tracks in the snow tell quiet stories about movement and shelter. Broken limbs and bent crowns remind us that disturbance is not failure, but part of how forests renew themselves over time. Not every change requires correction.

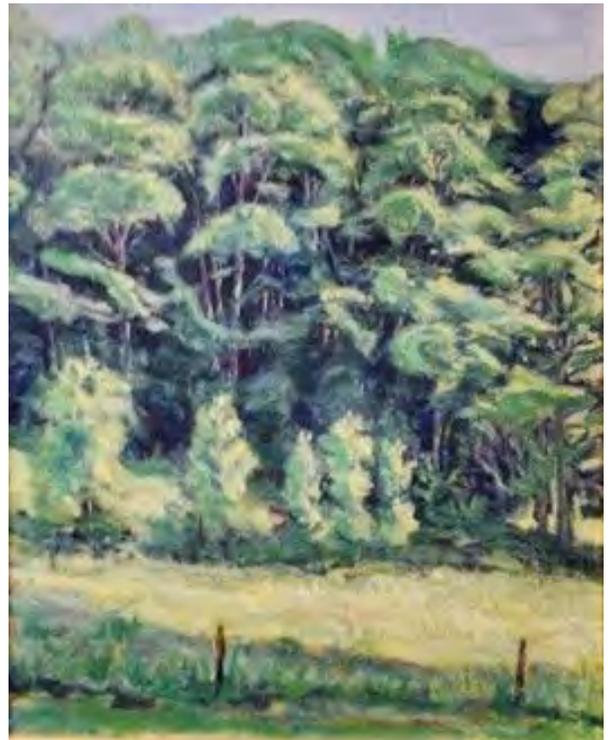
Winter work is slower and more deliberate. It’s a time to observe, reflect, and plan rather than act. The forest doesn’t ask us to hurry. It asks us to pay attention, season after season, and respond with care.

Schoharie County

ART AND OUR FOREST, Marilyn and Rick Wyman.

What are the values of our forests? Of course these values include the production of oxygen, wood, soil formation, participation in the water cycle, home of biodiversity and many other practical things. But what of art?

The Hudson River School of Art developed in part as a response to the clear cutting of much of the forests in the Eastern United States, and by the notion that people would be inspired to preserve and protect this essential and beautiful resource if they could only see it. In New York, painter Thomas Cole was an important proponent of forest conservation. And thank goodness - because the Catskill and Adirondack protected forests were established in part due to the activity of the artists who showed them to the politicians and the public.



The Oak Grotto, Richard Wyman

This first painting is of a section of our forest in Schoharie County that allows for a view of the interior and reveals three large red oak trees, and to the far right several sugar maples. The second painting is after leaf fall and wonderfully reveals an

old roadway probably used by early Native Americans and European settlers.



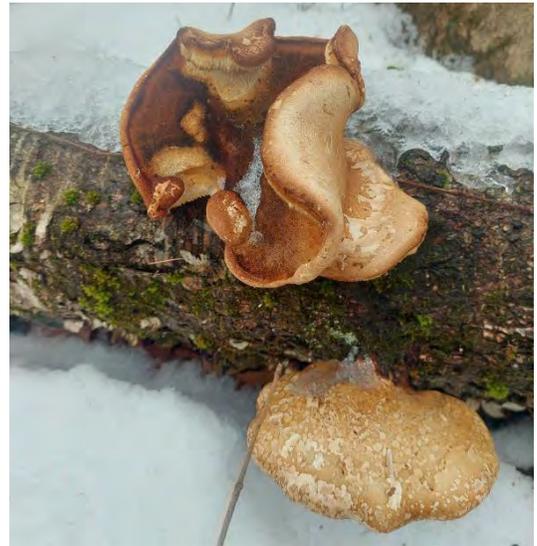
The Naked Forest, Richard Wyman

We have 75 acres of forested land in Schoharie County and 90 acres in Delaware County which we have managed to help preserve for their many values. We love our forests for their practical and important attributes but also for the qualities that transcend practicality including their role in physiological and mental health and what they may teach us about ourselves and our heritage. We hope these forest paintings may awaken within you these abstract values that are sometimes impossible to put into words.

Washington County

Sean Murphy. It won't be lost on those who already enjoy walking in the woods, but winter really is one of the most pleasant times to get out there. In a world of never-ending advertisements and noise, the winter forest offers a balm of silence. Many

interesting things are really only visible in the winter, when the evidence of life is presented in whispers instead of songs. As a forager, winter is often the best time to ID robust stands of plants that I'll be interested in when spring and summer come around. Plus, it's a fun challenge to recognize a thing even in its dormant or expired, winter state. Tall spikes of dead mint really jump out to the eye, showing me where to return in early summer to find them hiding in the shade of faster growing plants and grasses. Persistent black seeds on sweet cicely plants are easy to notice in winter, when the short things aren't competing for attention with taller neighbors in the summer. Occasionally, there are even the remnants of mushroom life that give clues for future forays. Though this common mushroom is not really for the table, it's still one of my favorites, since it's noticeable year-round in the northern woods. This birch polypore (photo below) is exhibiting a cool habit called gravitropism. The initial mushroom grew before the tree fell, and after the tree fell the mushroom continued to grow, orienting the new growth so that spores would continue to fall down and out of the pores.



Stewardship Beyond the Political Cycle: Why Forest Owners Matter Most in Uncertain Times

Ron Dodson

Forest owners are, by necessity, long-term thinkers.

Trees do not grow on election cycles. Forests do not respond to quarterly reports. A decision made today—about harvesting, regeneration, access, or protection—can shape the land for decades, sometimes for generations. Anyone who owns and actively manages forestland understands this at a visceral level.

That long view becomes especially important during periods of political volatility, policy uncertainty, and institutional stress. When leadership changes rapidly, priorities swing, or public trust in institutions erodes, it is often private landowners—quietly, consistently—who provide continuity.

This article reflects on why **forest stewardship matters most when the broader system feels unsettled**, and why forest owners should not underestimate the role they play during such times.

When Policy Is Unstable, Forests Still Grow

Over the course of a lifetime, forest owners witness repeated changes in:

- Federal and state administrations
- Environmental regulations
- Tax policy and incentive programs
- Agency leadership and priorities

Some of these changes are helpful. Others are disruptive. Many are short-lived.

What remains constant is the land itself.

Forests do not pause because policy is unclear. They continue to grow, age, regenerate, and decline according to ecological processes, not political agendas. When public systems are distracted, underfunded, or reshaped for short-term goals, the responsibility carried by private forest owners becomes even more significant.

Stewardship during these periods is not ideological. It is practical.

The Quiet Risk of All-or-Nothing Thinking

In times of national tension, it's easy to slip into a kind of all-or-nothing mindset:

- *If public policy is broken, why bother?*
- *If institutions aren't functioning well, what difference does my land make?*

This way of thinking is understandable—but dangerous.

History shows that landscapes are rarely protected or sustained by sweeping national actions alone. They persist because thousands of individual landowners continue to make careful, informed decisions even when the broader system feels unreliable.

Forest stewardship is not about waiting for perfect policy conditions. It is about acting responsibly **despite imperfect conditions**.

Private Forests as Anchors of Continuity

In New York State and across the Northeast, private forest owners manage a substantial portion of the land base. These forests:

- Support biodiversity
- Protect watersheds
- Store carbon
- Provide timber and non-timber forest products
- Offer recreational and cultural value

During periods of political uncertainty, these privately stewarded lands become anchors—places where long-term care continues regardless of who occupies offices in Albany or Washington.

That continuity matters more than it often appears.

Forests maintained through thoughtful management become living records of restraint, patience, and responsibility. They stand in contrast to short-term extraction, demonstrating that value can be created without depletion.

Stewardship Is Not Withdrawal from Civic Life

Choosing to focus on land stewardship during unstable times is sometimes mistaken for disengagement or avoidance. In reality, it is a form of grounded civic participation.

Forest owners contribute to public good by:

- Maintaining ecological function
- Modeling long-term responsibility
- Supporting local economies
- Passing on knowledge and skills

These actions reinforce democratic norms more quietly than protests or policy debates—but no less meaningfully. They keep alive the idea that responsibility extends beyond immediate self-interest.

Forests as Teachers of Scale and Patience

One of the great lessons forests offer is scale.

A forest reminds us that:

- Recovery takes time
- Damage can be slow and cumulative
- Good management often looks unremarkable day to day
- Poor decisions may not reveal their consequences for years

These lessons are especially valuable when public discourse rewards speed, outrage, and spectacle. Forest owners are accustomed to working against that grain.

This perspective is not passive. It is disciplined.

Why This Moment Calls for More Stewardship, Not Less

Periods of institutional stress often tempt people to either:

- Extract what they can while they can, or
- Disengage entirely

Forest stewardship offers a third path.

By continuing to manage land thoughtfully—planting, thinning, protecting, restoring—forest owners help preserve ecological capacity that future generations will depend on, regardless of political outcomes.

In this sense, stewardship is not a reaction to instability. It is a safeguard against it.

A Closing Reflection for Forest Owners

If there is one message worth carrying forward, it is this:

Forest owners are not caretakers of a moment.

They are caretakers of time.

When policies shift and institutions strain, forests remain—and so does the responsibility to manage them wisely. By staying grounded in place, committed to long horizons, and guided by care rather than expediency, forest owners quietly reinforce the values that make both landscapes and communities resilient.

That work rarely makes headlines. But it endures.
And in uncertain times, endurance is a form of leadership.

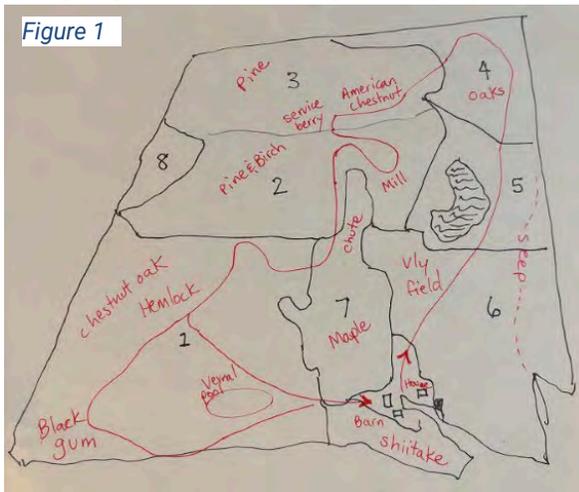
Woods Walk on Meadow Lane

Hannacroix, NY (Katie Campbell-Nelson, Russell and Forrest Freeman and Forester Ron Frisbee) November 8, 2025

On this crisp and sunny fall day, a group of friends, neighbors, and other stewards gathered to walk Katie, Russell and Forrest's property with their forester Ron Frisbee. A recently completed forest management plan was the guide for the woods walk, taking visitors through each stand (1) to learn about the biodiversity and goals for each. We hope to revisit our stewardship goals on future walks. From a vly, past a beaver pond, to an oak harvest (2) to an American chestnut tree (3), to a tall service berry (4) to a portable sawmill demonstration (5), to a maple grove, to a black gum bog, by a vernal pool, to a shiitake yard - here is a bit of the tour:

About the author:

Ron Dodson is a conservation professional and writer with more than five decades of experience in environmental education, land stewardship, and conservation program development. Over his career, he has served as a steward of thousands of acres of forestland through leadership roles with conservation organizations and the creation of stewardship and habitat management programs. He is the founder of Audubon International and continues to write and speak about long-term, place-based stewardship that sustains forests, communities, and natural systems across generations.



Resources

Become a Cornell Master Forest Owner (MFO)

Shane Stevens, Master Forest Owners, Regional Director – Catskills/Lower Hudson

Are you interested in enhancing your knowledge of forest ecology and stewardship while networking with peers? The Cornell Master Forest Owner program is now accepting applications for our 2026 volunteer training program.

Become a volunteer and make a difference by supporting informed decision-making by visiting woodland owners on-site to share available resources based on your knowledge and experiences. Peer-to-peer visits encourage landowners to engage in woodland activities and work towards achieving their goals and improving forest management through best practices.

Training occurs Tuesday evenings, March 17 through April 28, 6:30-7:30pm.

- Topics include forest ecology, silviculture, invasive species, wildlife, and agroforestry.
- Weekly self-paced online coursework of readings & webinars
- Live Zoom review and discussion on Tuesday evenings
- In-person field day in June

To complete the training, participants will:

- Commit to visiting 1-3 nearby landowners per year
- Attend Tuesday evening zoom training (March 17-April 28)
- Attend one MFO in-person field day

The training fee will be collected after you have applied and completed a phone or zoom interview with your MFO regional director.

New: \$35/person, \$50/couple

Returning: \$18/person, \$25/couple

Apply by March 1 to be considered.

Master Forest Owner – Become a Volunteer, Zoom Info Session

Date and Time: February 19, 2026 from 6pm to 7pm

Location: Online Zoom Event

Fee: Free

Register Here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/master-forest-owner-become-a-volunteer-zoom-info-session-tickets-1978894933015?aff=oddtcreator>

Curious about the Master Forest Owner (MFO) program and becoming a volunteer? Join us for a free Zoom info session about the MFO program!

Are you interested in enhancing your knowledge and becoming a Cornell Master Forest Owner (MFO) Volunteer? We are now accepting applications for our 2026 MFO Volunteer Training. Join us for a free info session on Zoom to learn what the MFO program is, what to expect for the training course, the in-person field day, volunteer MFO tasks, and what it really means to be volunteer MFO in the Catskills and Lower-Hudson region.

Learn how to become a volunteer and make a difference by supporting informed decision making by visiting woodland owners on-site to share available resources based on your knowledge and experiences. Peer-to-peer visits encourage landowners to engage in woodland activities and work towards achieving their goals and improving forest management through best practices. There will be plenty of time for questions. All woodland owners welcome!

ForestConnect

FREE WEBINAR SERIES by CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Peter Smallidge

We connect woodland users to the knowledge and resources needed to ensure sustainable production and ecological function on private woodlands.

All webinars are archived at: www.youtube.com/user/ForestConnect

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