The New York Forest Owner

A Publication of The New York Forest Owners Association

For people caring about New York's trees and forests

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Conservation Easements: A Conversation with Jim Minor

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NYFOA
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In This Issue . . .

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Volume 60, Number 1

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The New York Forest Owner is a bi-monthly publication of The New York Forest Owners Association, PO Box 541, Lima, NY 14485. Materials submitted for publication should be sent to: ***Mary Beth Malmsheimer****, Editor, The New York Forest Owner, 134 Lincklaen Street, Cazenovia, New York 13035; Materials may also be e-mailed to mmalmshe@syr.edu; direct all questions and/or comments to jefffjosephwoodworker@gmail.com. Articles, artwork and photos are invited and if requested, are returned after use.* ***The deadline for submission for the March/April issue is February 1, 2022.***

Please address all membership fees and change of address requests to PO Box 541, Lima, NY 14485. 1-800-836-3566. Cost of family membership/subscription is $45.

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Cover: Front cover: Drone image of Jim Minor's property. See page 4 for full article. Photo courtesy of Bill Hecht.

From The President

I hope that all of our members have had a great autumn and took the opportunity to spend some time in the woods. We have several interesting things happening in NYFOA — driven by input from our chapters, state board members, and executive director. I would like to provide a summary of key decisions and issues we considered at the November 6, 2021 state board meeting which I hope will provide members a good sense of where we are going as an association.

Membership development strategy: The board approved the membership development strategy prepared by Executive Director Craig Vollmer with input from the chapters and our board membership committee. Some interesting observations: From 1991–2021, membership numbers fluctuated a fair amount. NYFOA had 1,560 members in 1991, while as of November 2021 total membership reached 1,460. Generally, our association has done well recruiting new members. That said, member retention, particularly immediately after year one, is an area where we need to improve. Are first year members simply forgetting to renew, or are there specific reasons people opt out? We plan to remind all members to renew membership and contact those who do not, and try to find out why. We will use member feedback to to improve programs and communication, thus encouraging retention. In his report, Craig recommends we refocus volunteer time to more targeted, sportsperson events versus the broader-based county fair type venues. The reason for this is to concentrate our efforts on groups whose members are more likely to be private woodlot owners and probably more interested in pursuing NYFOA membership. Another key recommendation is to develop closer relationships with kindred organizations whose members are likely to be private woodlot owners. Examples include the National Deer Association, Maple Producers Association, NY Nut Growers Association, Women Owning Woodlands, and The National Audubon Society. We always welcome constructive suggestions and will keep members informed of progress in this important initiative.

Fundraising: Another area the board agreed to explore is whether to retain the services of a professional fundraiser. The overall goal would be to increase available funds of our association so we can continue to finance existing programs, and take on new ones based on member interests. The idea we are considering is to work with a professional fundraiser to review/revise NYFOA's message as an environmental resource association and consider ways of reaching corporate and individual donors who would welcome supporting NYFOA's role as a valuable environmental resource to the private woodlot owner in NY. The executive committee is currently

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The mission of the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) is to promote sustainable forestry practices and improved stewardship on privately owned woodlands in New York State. NYFOA is a not-for-profit group of people who care about NYS's trees and forests and are interested in the thoughtful management of private forests for the benefit of current and future generations.

Join!

NYFOA is a not-for-profit group promoting stewardship of private forests for the benefit of current and future generations. Through local chapters and statewide activities, NYFOA helps woodland owners to become responsible stewards and helps the interested public to appreciate the importance of New York's forests.

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Conservation Easements: A Conversation with Jim Minor

By Jeff Joseph

I recently learned that former NYFOA president Jim Minor had completed a conservation easement on a unique parcel of land he owns in the Finger Lakes region. As many of our members may consider such an arrangement for their land at some point, I thought it would be beneficial to have a conversation with Jim about his motivations, the process involved, as well as his thoughts on the benefits and/or drawbacks of conservation easements in general. The following is a lightly edited version of our discussion, with my questions in bold.

Hi Jim. Thank you for your willingness to share your knowledge and experience with this topic. To start, could you describe the land in question, and your history of ownership? What drew you to this specific parcel?

Although we lived and worked in Rochester, a couple of branches of my family were from the Seneca/Cayuga Lakes area of New York. We summered on Cayuga Lake in a cottage built by my great-grandfather in 1888. With our kids through college, we began to build some retirement equity but we could only get so excited by stocks and mutual funds… wanting something more tangible. We loved the Finger Lakes area and, having missed out on the purchase of some property adjacent to our cottage, began looking in neighboring areas. After looking at about a half-dozen parcels for sale at the time, we settled on this one which, as it turned out, was in Schuyler County where another branch of my family were the first settlers.

With no surface water on the property, Jim's management plan called for the digging of several ponds to benefit wildlife; maturing Norway spruce in background.

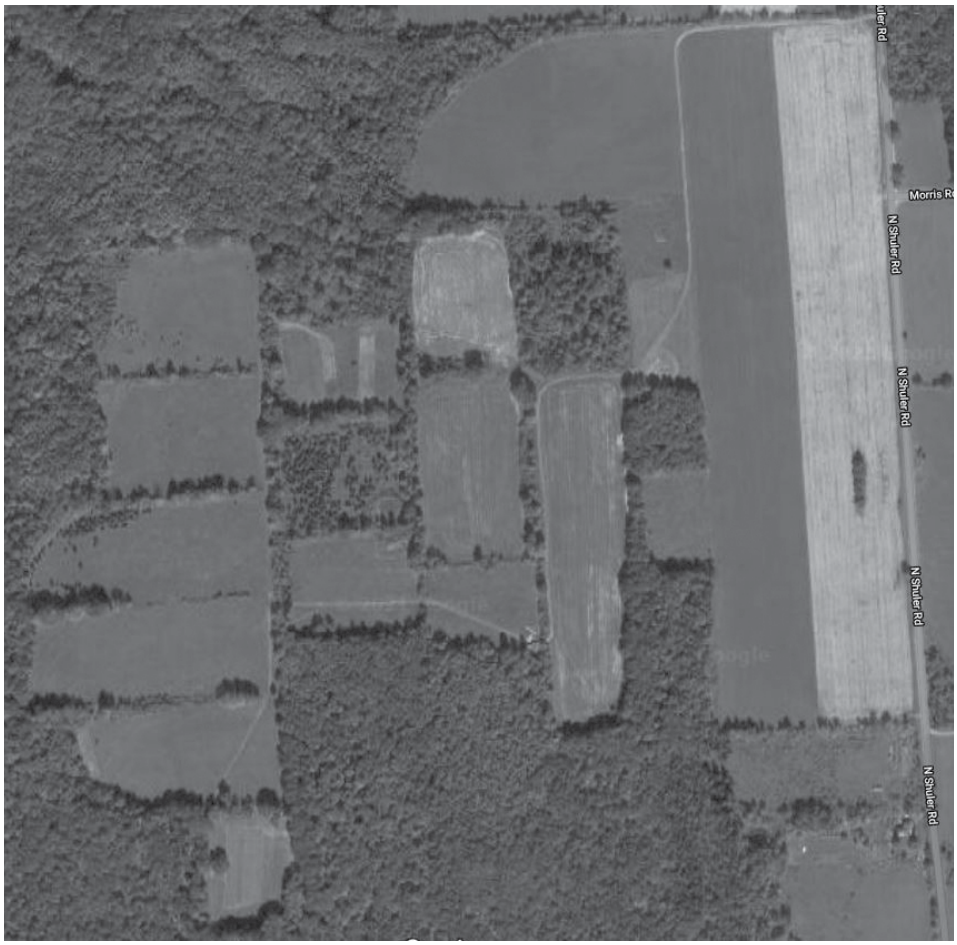
Several things drew us to the property. First it was just land. There were no houses or buildings to maintain. Second, it was a mixture of woods and open fields giving an aesthetic appeal. Third it was a good size (210 acres) … not too small to be just a farmette nor too large as to be unmanageable. After several trips to the town records office (where I found, not too surprisingly, buyers with zip codes more removed from the selling area paid more per acre than the locals) the seller and I agreed on a purchase price and we bought the property in 1994.

What kind of management and recreational activities did you engage in on this property over the years?

From the start a prime objective was to be good stewards of the land. Being absolute novices in this sort of venture, one of our first contacts was the Monroe County Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) office. One of their recommendations was to contact NYFOA and thus our involvement with NYFOA began. After going on several woodswalks and becoming familiar with others in the WFL chapter, we decided that we needed a management plan and hired Bruce Robinson as our forester to write this plan, two years after purchasing the property

As documented in the plan, 61 acres were currently being farmed and the recommendation was to continue that. Another 59 acres were forested across 8 different stands. Several of these were damaged by cattle grazing. The forested stands were mixed species: red oak, red maple, ash, hemlock, hickory, red and white pine, and spruce, with walnut and apple near a long-abandoned homestead

In walking the property with Bruce, he remarked that the property was somewhat unique in that it still had some of the small field characteristics laid out by the original settlers. Most farms had removed the intervening hedgerows to facilitate the use of large modern equipment. However, the property was also somewhat limiting to wildlife support in that there was no surface water on the property. Bruce also noted that the property was ideal for many bird species and that they were making good use of it.



Satellite image of Jim Minor's property illustrating the abundance of legacy hedgerows dividing the fields.

Local hunters building a small barn on the property for the storage of mowing equipment.

To enhance wildlife appeal Bruce included in the plan the creation of several small ponds and began efforts to maintain the hedgerows that defined and separated the fields which served as wildlife corridors. Also, a central field (now with adjacent ponds) was planted with Norway spruce to provide a central draw as a wildlife haven. Trailcam photos showed I had plenty of deer (or

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Ask A Professional

PETER SMALLIDGE

Peter Smallidge

Landowner questions are addressed by foresters and other natural resources professionals. Landowners should be careful when interpreting answers and applying this general advice to their property because landowner objectives and property conditions will influence specific management options. When in doubt, check with your regional DEC office or other service providers. Landowners are also encouraged to be active participants in Cornell Cooperative Extension and NYFOA programs to gain additional, often site-specific, answers to questions. To submit a question, email to Peter Smallidge at pjs23@cornell.edu with an explicit mention of "Ask a Professional." Additional reading on various topics is available at www.forestconnect.info

Acceptable and Unacceptable Growing Stock

Question:

I heard another woodland owner talking about AGS and UGS, but I didn't get a chance to ask what that meant. Is this something I should be thinking about when I'm in my woods? (Devin, NAC)

Answer:

For some woodland owners, all trees are equally enjoyed and other than aesthetic and size differences the trees are equal. For other woodland owners, there may be benefit in differentiating between trees that have attributes which directly support the owner's objectives, versus trees that lack attributes of direct support. Desirable attributes are associated with acceptable growing stock (AGS) and not with unacceptable growing stock (UGS). By convention these are usually spoken as words ("AGS" with a hard "a" like "aggie"; "UGS" more like a sound of dissatisfaction "uhg").

The history of these terms goes back to forest inventory on large properties or properties that are visited and assessed infrequently. In those situations, an AGS tree can eventually produce a minimum grade sawlog > 8 ft *and* will live for another 15 years. An UGS is any tree that isn't an AGS.

The assessment of longevity can be challenging, but try to judge as fairly and accurately as possible. Several tree features are helpful to suggest trees that might not live as long as the neighboring trees. A weak or split fork is a good example. If the stem is splitting below the fork or a large flare of the stem has developed immediately below the fork, a failure seems probable (Figure 1). These trees might still live, but they can become a hazard or minimally lose a significant portion of their crown. A tree that leans more than 10% is usually considered at risk. Damage to roots or evidence of decay at the base may be good markers of poor longevity (Figure 2). Finally, a tree with significant dieback in the top of the crown has a low probability of good longevity.

The use of AGS and UGS designation is not the same as grading a tree. Tree grading is usually only applied to a current sawlog or tree of commercial value. The purpose is to assess value per acre for monetary potential or in comparison to a previous or future point in time. It doesn't assess if that tree will be alive for any period of time.

The utility of AGS and UGS allows for decision making about the future potential of a stand (Figure 3).

Figure 1. The fork of this maple stem has a flare beneath the fork, and a split in the stem immediately to the left of the flare. This fork might last a while longer, but probably not a decade.

Figure 2. Closure of the scar on this butt injury seems good, and the presence of decay seems under control by the tree. The tree might survive for more than 10 years. Assume survival unless the tree is growing on the wrong soil or is otherwise stressed.

Remember, a stand is a management unit similar to a farmer's corn field or pasture. If trees are classified as AGS or UGS during an inventory, then the percent of the number of stems or of basal area for each level can be calculated. Management guidelines for timber often set a minimum threshold of about 65% full stocking in AGS as a trigger for taking some significant action. The reason is because timber production per acre is optimized at about 65% full stocking or a similar level of relative density (relative density is a complicated calculation but describes how much of a stand is occupied. At 100% relative density, the stand is fully occupied by trees).

The two criteria of sawlog potential and longevity are based on practical aspects of management in the particular case of a timber revenue ownership objective. Timber is a product that creates value and offsets the costs of management. Longevity, in the traditional case, is set at 15 years which is slightly longer than the typical return interval for the next inventory. This time frame allows the owner and manager to plan for interventions for expected mortality that captures value before it is gone.

In one stand, called B1 for example, AGS may represent 80% of full stocking and UGS 20% (Figure 4). The owner and manager know that they have enough trees that will be alive in 15 years that will some day have a product. In this example, if all the UGS happened to die the owner would still have enough trees, plus some extra, to optimize growth for timber production.

In another stand, B2 for example, AGS may represent 30% of full stocking and UGS 70%. The owner and manager know that the future of this stand for timber production is poor. Either there are few trees that are of current or future sawlog potential, or they are not likely to live for at least 15 years. High-grading, the cutting of only the best trees, can increase the proportion of UGS in a stand.

In these two examples, there is no action required before the next inventory in stand B1. In stand B2 if there is no action before the next inventory then the stand may experience significant mortality or there may be little to no return on investment. As an analogy, consider your financial investment in a company. You want the stocks that you purchase to get more valuable through time, and you don't want the company to fail before you think you might sell the stocks.

The merits of AGS and UGS in their traditional usage are instructive given the widespread infestation of emerald ash borer (EAB). There are forests with ash trees that might be beautiful trees of modest to significant value as timber, but those trees are almost certainly

continued on next page

Figure 3. This picture illustrates at least 4 distinct areas. Two are plantations, the brushy clearing, and the surrounding woods. The two plantations might be similar and lumped as one stand. However, the ability of plantation vs. clearing vs woods to contribute to an owner's objectives would vary as would the management actions. Those should each be considered different stands.

Figure 4. Past management will influence if the stand has a high or low proportion of AGS versus UGS. Defective stems removed through firewood or thinning will result in woods with a high percentage of visually attractive trees.

Figure 5. This stand is a mixture of ash (likely green ash) and red maple on poorly drained soils. The ash are likely to die as a result of EAB and the diversity of the stand will decline.

not going to live for another 15 years (Figure 5). An inventory of those stands would allow a calculation of AGS and UGS to forecast the impact of EAB. The calculated proportions of AGS vs. UGS does not determine an action the owner should take. Rather it is information an owner uses, along with other information about their objectives, family goals, etc. to decide on the best management actions.

AGS and UGS – Beyond Timber

While many woodland owners, or the next woodland owner, will sell trees for revenue, that is not a high-priority ownership objective. A woodland inventory is useful for ownership objectives that include recreation, privacy, agroforestry, and more. The traditional, or a variation of the traditional, use of AGS and UGS can be applied in these areas.

The first distinction is to modify the output. If timber is not a primary goal, the owner can stipulate what is. Perhaps

Figure 6. The task to assess trees as bee trees is most easily done by starting with a bee, and tracking it home. Bee trees are important, and usually not of high economic value. They are better left for the bees. Learn more in the book Following the Wild Bees, by Thomas D. Seeley (a NYFOA member) via Princeton University Press.

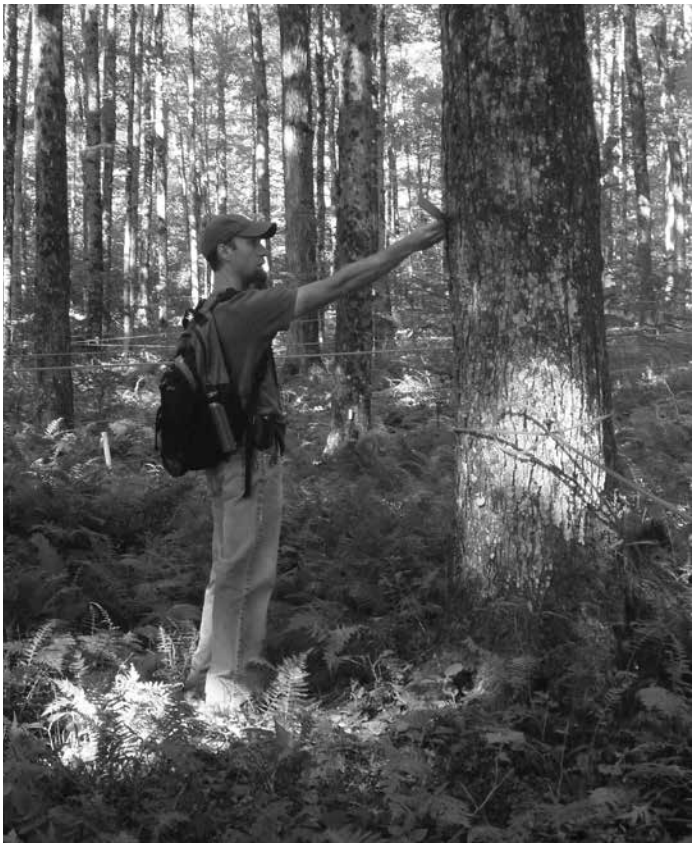

Figure 7. Maple producers and woodlot owners can easily learn the basic practices of an inventory. This allows them to understand how their property can best support their objectives. An internet search for "how to sample a woodlot" or "woodlot sampling" and similar phrases will be helpful.

a goal is maple syrup production, then the output product might be a sugar or red maple that will be tappable within the next 5 to 10 years. Another goal might be cavities for birds or honeybees (Figure 6). In this case, if the tree has a cavity of the appropriate size (different of course for birds and bees), then it is an AGS tree. Another goal might be aesthetics, and a tree that has a certain architecture of crown or limbs is determined to be AGS.

The owner might be a DIY type, with an interest in timber for their sawmill or firewood processor. They might use a broader definition of output to include species that can be sold as hardwood firewood.

On the longevity side, 15 years is likely much longer than is helpful to many owners. They might be walking through the woods several times a year, not visiting each decade and a half. If there is some decline in tree vigor or health the owner will take note. A widespread decline can be promptly tended. The owners can conduct their own inventory and might set a 2-to-5-year threshold on longevity. The point is to select a time frame of longevity that ensures you will inspect the woodlands more frequently than some event that might force you to make a decision.

The numeric threshold for action will vary with these non-timber or DIY goals, and there are no established recommendations. The maple goal for AGS might be high, perhaps greater than 65% (Figure 7). The bird and aesthetic goals might be lower, perhaps 10 to 40% to reflect realistic conditions. Again, these thresholds are not judgments of good or bad. Rather they provide information to guide decisions.

Other variations on the traditional usage of AGS and UGS are possible. A common one would be to split AGS into "crop tree" or "not crop tree." Both would be AGS, but "crop tree" would allow the owner to know the number of trees in a stand that might be released from competition for sunlight through a crown-touching thinning. Pick the variations that you think would help your goals, test it to make sure the data are useful, and then proceed.

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Wild Things in Your Woodlands

Maggie Lin

Woodchuck (*Marmota monax*)

The woodchuck is a compact, chunky animal, the largest member of the squirrel family in New York State. From nose to tail, woodchucks are about 20-27 in. long and weigh 5-12 lbs. With short, strong legs and a blunt face, woodchucks also have long, curved claws on their forefeet perfect for digging, and chisel-like incisors. They have yellow/brown to black/brown fur, and short, bristly tails. Woodchucks are widely distributed across North America, and prefer farm fields, idle lands, woodland edges, and suburban neighborhoods. On average, they live about 4-5 years.

Woodchucks are prolific herbivores and eat a wide variety of plants including grasses, flowers (dandelion, daisy, aster, etc.), and other succulent plants, as well as garden vegetables, orchard fruits, and the bark of hickory and maple trees. They get their water from plant moisture or dew, so they often feed in the early morning or late afternoon.

You can find woodchucks basking in the sun during the warmest hours of summer days, and they sometimes like to sleep on large rocks, fallen logs, and grassy areas close to their burrow entrance. They are solitary animals, but usually do not travel more than 50 yards from their dens other than to find a mate or forage when there is a drought. Woodchucks are winter hibernators, seeking the warmth of their burrows after the first heavy frosts (usually in October).

Woodchucks use their burrows to hibernate, bear and raise their young, and escape from predators. They usually dig them in woodland edges, open fields, or near lumber piles or human buildings. These burrows can be anywhere from 8 to 66 feet long, 2 to 5 feet deep, and have multiple entrances—the main entrance is usually identifiable by the mound of excavated dirt and stones surrounding it. Woodchuck burrows also have multiple chambers or rooms, each used for a different purpose. Separating activities like sleeping and rearing their young from where they urinate and defecate helps keep the woodchucks' den relatively clean and free from disease.

Woodchucks are sexually mature by the time they are one year old. Mating activity begins in late February or March. After a 30-day gestation period, litters of 3-4 young are born in April or early May. The babies travel outside the burrow at 6 weeks old to feed on grasses, then leave their home by early July to establish their own territories. Young woodchucks tend to prefer to live in abandoned burrows rather than digging their own.

A woodchuck's primary predators include hawks, owls, foxes, bobcats, coyotes, dogs, weasels, and humans. Woodchucks can be taken at any time in New York state without a hunting license if they are causing a nuisance. Because of their taste for plants and gardens we enjoy, some people do consider woodchucks to be a pest animal. Wondering if you have these wild things near your woodland? Look for their tracks—woodchuck tracks look like handprints but are smaller than a raccoon's and show claw marks as well.

Maggie Lin is a Program Assistant for the New York State Master Naturalist Program, directed by Kristi Sullivan at Cornell University's Department of Natural Resources. More information on managing habitat for wildlife, and the NY Master Naturalist Volunteer Program, can be found at https://blogs.cornell.edu/nymasternaturalist/

Photo credit: Paul VanDerWerf

From the President (continued)

looking at various options, and will provide recommendations to the chapters and solicit input before going forward. My personal view is that as a non-profit association, NYFOA's existing goals and programs will resonate well with potential donors if our messaging is right. If we do go down this road, I wish to stress that the core mission of NYFOA will not change. I want to avoid having fundraising efforts become an 'irritant' to members — so we would aim for a workable balance. If the research of the executive committee is favorable to chapter leadership and members to work with a professional fundraiser, we will put the issue to a vote of the full board. Will keep you posted.

Looking ahead, the Western Finger Lakes Chapter (WFL) has graciously agreed to host NYFOA's Spring 2022 statewide members meeting. Previously the board agreed to diversify the venue of the annual members meetings by having various chapters host them. This will be the first in-person meeting for all members since 2019 BC (Before Covid) when our Capital district chapter hosted an outstanding member event outside of Albany. The WFL chapter has already begun planning for the members meeting, which will take place in late April 2022. The WFL steering committee is developing some excellent ideas for the program. Stay tuned for further details.

The New York Forest Owner magazine and now *The Woodlot* e-newsletter represent our key forms of communication with all members, while chapter newsletters remain the best source of news about chapter-specific events. In response to member interest, we plan to have regular columns in the *Forest Owner* and *The Woodlot* about legislative and regulatory initiatives at the federal and state levels which pertain to our members. Hugh Canham will spearhead this effort.

On a related note, I ask each chapter to nominate one or more members to be the subject of a "Member Profile" article in the *New York Forest Owner*. The member profile has long been a popular feature of our magazinem, and represents an excellent way for members to share information on woodlot management, legacy planning, available cost-sharing programs to support best management practices, and more. In these pages, please read the member profile featuring Jim and Megan Sollecito who are long time members of our Central NY chapter. The Sollecitos own a garden center and landscape contracting company in Syracuse and have done an amazing job implementing a "forest landscaping" plan for their woodlot properties.

Have a great holiday season!

–Stacey Kazacos
NYFOA President

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Christmas Trees

Growing for Business and Enjoyment

By Eric Jenks

Unless you're a holiday fanatic or a dedicated tree farm, it's not likely that you think about Christmas trees outside of November or December. But those picture perfect trees take years of tending before they're ready to beautify your home and add to your family's yearly tradition. If you're looking to start a tree farm and have the right conditions, it can be a fun hobby or a serious business.

"You can plant in a 6'x6' spacing and get around 1,000 trees per acre," said G. Bob Baker, a logger that runs Baker Tree Farm in Queensbury, NY in his spare time. "It's a legacy that I wanted to continue when I bought this property in 1980. My dad did it when we were kids, and we had fun pruning Christmas trees down in Gansevoort, NY. I'm a logger working 60 hours a week, so I'm more of a hobbyist with Christmas trees. I sell or give to friends and family about 80 trees a year. If I had been more prudent and had more time, I would have planted 20 more acres and I could have retired early and just focused on this. It's good physical and mental therapy. When I get home from work I go out and prune Christmas trees. It's physical, but also mentally relaxing. It's the most enjoyable part of it for me."

For Allen Bailey and his family at Bailey Christmas Tree Farm in Cambridge, NY, it started small and grew from there. "We started our first trees in 1967," said Bailey. "By 1974 we hung a sheet of plywood out and wrote $4 per tree and started selling. We had planted Scotch pines, which grow fairly fast and we had a few that we could sell fairly quickly and we did. They get every disease known to man though, which is very intensive on the labor, so today we sell Fraser, Balsam, Canaan, and Concolor firs, along with blue and white spruce." The Bailey's currently have around 20,000 trees on 20 acres of land. "I enjoyed it part time, when I worked as a teacher. I'd get out of school, get out here and work for an hour of two. It was a nice change of pace from the school job; I enjoy the outdoors. When it's time to sell the trees, it's hard work, but enjoyable because most people are happy and want to be there. It's a great social thing."

For both Bailey and Barker, knowing your property is a large part to being successful. While Bailey's trees are replaced on an eight to nine year cycle, Baker's trees are on a twelve to fourteen year cycle due to his sandy soil. "You need to have someone that knows something about Christmas trees take at a look at the land you have," said Bailey. "Do a soil test, find out the pH, and make sure that it's not too wet." For Baker, it's knowing which trees grow the best on his soil. "I bought and planted 2,000 Douglas fir from a DEC nursery once," said Baker. "I pruned and cultured them almost to market age, when they all came down with needle cast, and I had to cut them all down and throw them all away. It's all part of the learning experience of farming and growing trees. For the sandy loam that I have, Fraser fir seems to be the most resilient."

Planting of course, is only a small part of the process in growing trees. "You really need to know up front you that you don't just plant a tree and ten years down the road you sell it," said Baker. "You have to mow, prune, and fertilize. There's a lot of work involved. If you don't do that every year, you're

Brittany and Seamus Jenks look at Christmas trees at Baker Tree Farm in Queensbury, NY. Photos by Eric Jenks.

in for trouble. It's like raising a child. You can't turn your back on them. If you don't prune a tree every year it gets out of control. You're got to be into it for the long haul. You've got to pay attention to it, like any farm project. When you do, you end up with a better product. I get disappointed and discouraged at times because it's just me and I can't quite keep up with all the trees I have."

When the season does come around, sales happen very quickly according to Bailey. "Over the years, we've stuck to opening the day after thanksgiving," said Bailey. "But last year we gave in and opened the weekend before, and we did that again this year. It's not our preference, but the malls and commercial businesses have pushed in that direction. Business wise it's the way to go. By the first weekend in December, we're usually sold out of trees for the season. When I go up over the hill and look down at the barn that weekend after Thanksgiving, there'll be 100 cars in the lot and parked all down the road. The police and sheriff are very nice and we try very hard not to block traffic on the three days that we just went through and on other weekends. We work on it all year long, and that reward comes in a short span of time. It's a whirlwind.

We've learned to have people tag a tree starting on Columbus Day weekend, and we had 300 tagged before opening weekend, which helps with congestion. In the summer we physically go around the farm and count what we have. Trees that are six feet or more will be seven foot next year, and we figure out if we can sell half that number we will have a good crop next year. When we get to that number we stop cutting anything that isn't already tagged. It's not something we like, but that's the way it's been going the last few years. The tagging business is quite popular, and others are happy to find a tree no one has claimed."

If you're interested in learning more on how to best use your property for forest related activities, you can reach out to New York Tree Farm, NYFOA, Cornell University Cooperative Extension, DEC, and a number of other organizations to help guide you on your way.

Eric Jenks is a freelance writer with Morning Ag Clips, LLC. Morning Ag Clips is now managing the Tree Farm column.

Would you like to receive an electronic version of future editions of *The New York Forest Owner*? If so, please send Liana an email (lgooding@nyfoa.org).

You will receive an email every two months that includes a PDF file of the publication. While being convenient for you – read *The Forest Owner* anytime, any place – this will also help to save the Association money as the cost of printing and postage continues to rise with each edition.

Woodland Health

A column focusing on topics that might limit the health, vigor and productivity of our private or public woodlands

Coordinated by Mark Whitmore

Curb Your Enthusiasm

By Paul Hetzler

With their marvelous interpretive-dance routines, complex social life, and the delicious amber sweetness that we steal from them, honeybees are widely esteemed. However, they're anything but sweet to wild pollinators. In fact, a surfeit of honeybees is a major threat to our native bees and butterflies.

A July 24, 2021 article in *The Guardian* reports that professional beekeepers in the UK are asking the public to moderate the current outbreak of hives because it puts native bees at risk. The London Beekeepers' Association issued a statement that reads in part: "The prevailing 'save the bees' narrative is often based on poor, misleading or absent information about bees and their needs. It can imply that keeping honeybees will help bees."

London-based beekeeper Dale Gibson explains that "Honeybees are very efficient, almost omnivorous consumers of nectar and pollen; they are voracious. There is no 'off' button. They will carry on consuming what's out there."

I suppose one could view this request by professional beekeepers as self-serving, but Andrew Whitehouse of the insect-conservation group Buglife agrees that an unfettered embrace of honeybees by the public can have serious consequences: "We know the main reason native pollinators are in decline is a lack of wildflowers in our countrysides and urban areas.

Homemade mason bee nest block filled. Photo by Red58bill Wikimedia Commons license.

To increase competition for limited resources puts a huge pressure on the wild pollinators. The populations of those wild pollinators are reduced; you have less abundance and less diversity."

Too many honeybees can also bring diseases to native pollinators. As reported in the same *The Guardian* piece, Dr. Jane Memmott of Bristol University says honeybee hives can be "little ecosystems of plagues and contagion."

Closer to home, Dr. Scott McArt, a bee specialist at Cornell's Dyce Laboratory for Bee Research, says there are an estimated 416 species of wild bees in New York State. When I estimate stuff, it tends to be less exact, such as "more than five but less than a thousand," just so I can be right, if not at all helpful. But I've met Dr. McArt, and I trust him on his count.

He is quick to point out that wild critters take care of things just fine in most places. In 2013 and 2014, Dr. McArt led a multi-year study of commercial apple orchards throughout New York State. The study assessed, among other things, the impact of honeybees on pollination rates. His

Red Mason Bees. Photo by André Karwath aka Wikimedia Commons license.

team concluded that in nearly all cases, honeybees had an insignificant effect on fruit pollination. The 110 species of wild bees that the researchers cataloged visiting apple blossoms in orchards did the real work.

In sterile, impoverished settings like California's almond plantations and North American suburbs, wild bees cannot find enough food to survive year-round. But outside of these environments, wild bees and other insects do a bang-up job pollinating crops, provided there is enough variety of wild plants (in other words, messiness) around to keep them fed the whole season.

Beekeeping is a rewarding hobby and a great educational tool, and no one is suggesting we must put an end to non-commercial apiaries. But we need to remember that the wildflowers in a given locale are already spoken for by native pollinators. It's not some uninhabited land that honeybees are free to exploit. When large numbers of a non-native species are introduced, there will always be repercussions.

Over the past several years, enterprising "urban beekeeper services" have blossomed to take advantage of the increased public interest in backyard beekeeping. Updated bylaws which allow this practice also contribute to the success of these businesses. They will look at your property, assess how many hives it will support, and then deliver and tend those hives. Part of their pitch is that accepting hives on one's land is a selfless deed which will help save the planet.

The reality is more complicated. These companies, and hobbyist beekeepers everywhere, must help compensate for the loss of nectar to wild bee species. Pollinators need flowers that bloom at all different times, grow at various heights, and have a multitude of shapes.

Very often, providing more pollen and nectar to bees is a matter of letting some of our land go wild; welcoming a bit more entropy onto the scene. It's as easy as falling off a log, which of course is an example of increased entropy. For greater abundance and diversity of wild flowering plants, we can first cut back (so to speak) on mowing. Ideally, landowners can choose areas to mow once a year in late fall, and others which will get mown every second or third year.

We can ease up on pesticide use. Most grub-control products, for example, are highly toxic to bees. And

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although non-insecticide sprays like fungicides were once thought safe for pollinators, the folks at Cornell's Dyce Laboratory for Bee Research have determined that "non-lethal" chemicals significantly weaken pollinators.

Bumblebees often nest in rock piles and old foundations, things which tend to get "tidied up" as rural areas become more populated. Mason bees make use of all manner of unkemptness for their nests. Since both these types of bees are far and away more efficient than honeybees at pollinating, a small drop in their population is remarkably significant. A change in mindset regarding aesthetics will go a long way toward saving bees of all stripes.

Given some benign neglect, coltsfoot and dandelions, essential early-season flowers, will come back. Asters and goldenrod (which by the way do not cause allergies), highly important late-season sources of nectar and pollen, will likewise move in. Milkweed will begin to flourish, attracting monarch butterflies.

We may choose to help this process along by sowing perennial or self-seeding annual wildflowers like purple coneflower, foxglove, bee balm, mint, or lupine. Pollen and nectar-rich woody plants include viburnums, shrub dogwoods, hawthorns, and elderberries. Black locust trees are now considered invasive, but they are important nectaries, too, so perhaps we can spare a few from well-meaning eradication crusades. We will not only get more wild pollinators, but redstarts, tanagers, orioles, hummingbirds, catbirds, waxwings, and other songbirds will be attracted to such glorious neglect — no feeders required.

Honeybees provide us with food, medicine, educational opportunities and more, but this comes at the expense of native pollinators unless casual beekeepers provide additional forage through planting and/ or by allowing a portion of the landscape to go wild.

For more information on making your property more hospitable to native pollinators, visit the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation website at *https://www.xerces.org*.

Paul Hetzler is a former Cornell Cooperative Extension Educator. His latest Book, Head of the Class: Smart as a Slime-Mold, is available on Amazon.

Mark Whitmore is a forest entomologist in the Cornell University Department of Natural Resources and the chair of the NY Forest Health Advisory Council.

Would you like to see an article about a particular topic we haven't covered?

Please send your suggestions to: Mary Beth Malmsheimer, editor at mmalmshe@syr.edu or Jeff Joseph, managing editor at jeffjosephwoodworker@gmail.com

Welcome New Members

We welcome the following new members (who joined since the publishing of the last issue) to NYFOA and thank them for their interest in, and support of, the organization:

Name	Chapter	Name	Chapter
Richard Baake	SOT	Kellen Murphy	CNY
Janet & John Bartow	CDC	James Sanchez	WFL
Dan Carlson	AFC	Jessmyn & Matt Schwartz	CDC
Nathan Cutting	SOT	Patricia Simpson	WFL
Sandy Festa	SOT	Sandra & Mark Stacey	SOT
Gina & Maurice Gilbert	NAC	James Stevenson	SOT
David Gutowski	AFC	Gay Thistle	AFC
Jennifer Johnson	CDC	Dale Thompson	WFL
Cheryl Kelley	WFL	Peter Yeager, Jr.	SOT
Christine McBrearty-Hulse	SOT	Peter Yeager, Sr.	SOT
Suzette Morabito	WFL		

course), turkey, coyotes, and numerous small mammals (fox, fisher, bobcat, rabbit, skunk, opossum, etc.).

Under Bruce's supervision we had a couple of TSI cuts. We also "discovered" that keeping the fields from becoming overgrown was a big job. I naively started with a 36" walk-behind mower (good for paths and not much more), quickly graduated to a 4' tow-behind for my newly acquired ATV and finally bought a full-size tractor with a 6' (now 10') rotary cutter. We also needed to have a barn built to house all the newly acquired equipment.

We were helped enormously in all this by neighboring farmers with whom we've become friends who wanted access to some of the more readily tillable fields. Another source of support was a small group of hunters who had farming experience and were more than willing to keep the internal fields under control. I became good friends with them as well. Both groups have become invaluable in managing the property in the ensuing years with the passing of my wife and as my own health has become more limiting.

What motivated you to consider a conservation easement for this property?

I was seeing the pressure that was being put on land such as this. First was parcelization. An adjoining farm went on the market and was broken up into 15 distinct parcels that were auctioned off, first individually and then with gradual aggregation during the 1-day auction process before the final sale was complete. There were several adjoining parcels that became 5-acre hunting camps (guess where they thought they could hunt). Also, the farmers who were renting out part of my property wanted to use some of the internal fields but wanted to cut down the hedgerows that separated the fields (and which gave each its own distinct characteristic) to facilitate their use of the land. I "declined" the opportunity, as I treasured the distinct characteristics of each "room" as I walked the property. The general area also showed signs of creeping urbanization with new houses starting to pop up along the roads leading to the property.

Can you briefly describe the steps involved in creating a conservation easement?

After first talking to fellow Western Finger Lakes NYFOA member Mike Seager, who had recently done a conservation easement on his property, for his thoughts, I contacted Kris West of the Finger Lakes Land Trust to start discussing what I wanted in the easement. Bear in mind that in a conservation easement the property owner is relinquishing certain rights s/he and all future owners have with respect to the property *forever* (it becomes part of the abstract on the property and is recorded as part of the deed… neither I nor anyone else can ever change it).

First, I wanted to eliminate parcelization. Going forward the property must be sold as a unit per the requirements I wanted placed

Jim Minor

in the easement. Second, I didn't want a park-and-ride, trailer park, wind-farm, solar farm or similar built on the property. Thus, per the easement, an 8-acre section adjoining the neighboring road could be used for a single-family residence and farm building. All other construction on the property was prohibited. Third I wanted the hedgerows preserved. At first the FLLT was reluctant to include this as it was their responsibility

Partially mowed field with hedgerow boundary.

to monitor the use of the property (again, forever) and this would involve surveying/documenting each of the hedgerows. However, as they reviewed the water-table flow on the property they concluded the hedgerows were instrumental in preventing erosion and thus they became part of the easement as well.

I also didn't want clearcutting, high-grading or similar forest-negative activities to take place, so all timber harvesting must be done under a sustainable management plan. Conventional farming could continue unabated.

What are the benefits of a conservation easement for a landowner?

The #1 benefit driving all this for me is the knowledge that the land that I have grown so fond of will remain this way for future generations to appreciate as well. Everything else is secondary. There is a price to pay for this, however. An easement consists of the landowner giving up rights they originally assumed when they purchased the property. Furthermore, since these rights are excluded in any future sale, the value of the property will be diminished. I am in the process of having two assessments done on the property, one of the land prior to the easement being put in place and the other after it has been put in place (i.e., now). My intent is to declare the difference as a charitable contribution on my income taxes. BTW, the FLLT does not charge for the process of putting an easement in place but if the landowner does not make a substantial voluntary contribution to them, they must mount a fundraising effort to cover their considerable expenses in both creating and monitoring the easement. I also had to pay lawyer's fees to review the easement from my perspective.

Based upon your experience, what advice would you offer to someone considering protecting their land in this way?

Think carefully about what you want to preserve. Also, anyone contemplating doing this for their land should be prepared for it to take some time (well more than a year) to put in place. Also, if you plan on helping defray the FLLT's costs, it will not be inexpensive.

This is very helpful information, and the easement itself a most generous gesture on your part. Thanks again Jim.

To read more about Jim, I wrote a profile on him for the November/December 2014 issue of this magazine (pp. 21-22), which can be accessed in the Archives of the New York Forest Owner at nyfoa.org/resources.

—Jeff

Save the Dates!

April 22-24, 2022

NYFOA Annual Meeting

We hope you can join us fo a statewide meeting next spring.

Friday April 22: An Ice breaker will be held on the evening of for those traveling

Saturday April 23: Annual meeting will be held followed by field tours Saturday afternoon.

Sunday April 24: Field tours will be held in the morning.

The meeting will be held by the Western Finger Lakes chapter. Venue location, agenda and registration information will be announced later.

NYFOA
New York Forest Owners Association

Member Profile:
Jim and Megan Sollecito

By Jeff Joseph

Jim Sollecito grew up near Syracuse, and went on to receive a BS degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Cornell University. Megan is from rural Marathon, and received her BA degree in English from SUNY Oswego. They have been married for 40 years, raised two daughters, and currently own and operate Sollecito Landscaping Nursery LLC.

In 2003, Jim and Megan purchased 188 acres of land four miles from their home in the town of Van Buren, in Onondaga County. Jim already had connections to this land, as he had hunted the property for years prior to the purchase, so was prepared to make a fair offer when the farmers owning the land decided to sell. The close proximity of the land to their home made it convenient for Jim's hunting, as well as for visits on bicycle for Megan.

Jim describes the land as having a rolling topography, with a mix of managed forest, about 35 acres of former fields that have been converted to shelterbelt, orchards, and huntable habitat (including warm season grass plots for nesting), along with some additional good quality, well-drained acreage on Madrid (class 2A) and Hiltonwood (class 2B) soils that they lease for field crop production (and which averaged 220 bushels of corn per acre in 2021). 34 acres are hydric soil swampland. There is also a year-round stream running through the property that attracts a myriad of waterfowl.

The forested acreage comprises approximately 75 acres, and is predominantly a late-successional beech/maple cover type. Other prominent species on the land include red and grey-stemmed dogwood, elderberry, hornbeam, pin cherry, green ash, eastern hemlock, and over 150 old apple trees that Jim has pruned and released from competition.

Gold rush apple trees, grown organically by Jim and Megan.

Jim and Megan Sollecito

The Sollecitos have been very active managers of their land from the outset, having taken on a vast array of habitat improvement projects over the years, with some facilitated by funding from the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP); some additional funds came from selling the development rights to the swampland acreage. They have dug and stocked fifteen ponds on the property, installed a number of bat and bird houses, established plantings to encourage dragonflies, reclaimed fields for songbird and pollinator habitat, and of course, as nurserymen (and women), have planted 17 varieties of tree fruits, 7 types of brambles, and a small vineyard with 4 varieties of table grapes, all of which is managed organically. The property allows them to field test

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Jim doing his part to control the local deer population.

varieties grown on tougher than normal rootstocks, as they sell hundreds of bare root habitat trees annually to people looking to grow fruit without spraying.

They have also planted over 8,000 other shrubs and trees on the property over the years, including Norway spruce, shrub dogwoods, larch, white pine, swamp white oak, bur oak, northern red oak, Chinese chestnut, buttonbush, red alder, and a variety of willows, grasses, and ornamentals and perennials for their aesthetic value, as well as for the creation of habitat in support of pollinators. To ensure adequate pollination, they also partner with a local beekeeper who manages some of his hives on the property.

In terms of recreational activity on the land, Jim is an avid and dedicated deer hunter. Having grown up with a tradition of hunting, he is a member of the National Deer Association, and has harvested enough venison annually that the family has not needed to purchase beef in over 30 years. With the aid of strategically placed trail cameras, Jim makes an annual determination of the carrying capacity of his land to help in setting quotas for the annual venison harvest, which is facilitated with the use of 32 treestands throughout the property, each situated in strategic relation to prevailing winds, and along pinch points and travel routes that are enhanced with plantings of red clover, chicory, apples, and crabapples. In order to maintain his desired buck to doe ratio of 1:1.5, he does invite newer hunters to come and shoot does during muzzle loader season, passing the tradition on to the next generation. While Jim once made it a practice to shoot coyotes, he no longer does, as he asserts that they help to balance the herd, and also consume a large number of rodents.

With 15 stocked ponds to fish, Jim is also an accomplished fly fisherman, holding 5 IGFA world fishing records, and enjoys teaching people of all ages (including the handicapped) how to be successful fly fishermen (and women).

In terms of the challenges involved in undertaking all this management, Jim says that the "…biggest challenge is the clock. Nobody has extra time to help me out with tasks; luckily I own a landscape company and several employees enjoy working in the woods and helping me to plant trees. They are rewarded with hunting opportunities. But I am not getting younger, and have to pace my activities into 4 to 5 hour blocks of time so I stay mentally sharp and physically in the game."

As for equipment to help with efficiency, and to reduce the physical toll of so much labor as he ages, he says the following: "Although I do most of the work myself with the help of two Kubota tractors, 5 chainsaws, 2 chainsaws on poles, and a large assortment of Felco pruners (including battery operated), now when I need to fell larger trees, especially ash that died due to EAB, I hire the services of an arborist. I also am transitioning to battery powered chainsaws and other tools—less vibration

Tree planting on the land.

Autumn view from one of Jim's many treestands.

and easier on my ears. When the multiple batteries wear down, I am done for the day. At age 67, I find that being a participating land owner really is one of the healthiest things I can do. Because old age comes at a really bad time…."

As for advice that he would offer to other woodlot owners (and nascent tree planters): "Owning property allows us to enjoy all four seasons and not hibernate." And this: "The second-best time to start improving your land is today. The first would have been a while ago, after you first outlined your goals. Absolute rule: Nothing substitutes for preparation. Second rule: If you stop trying to get better then you cease being good." And this: "Taking care of your trees throughout the year can minimize stress and improve their chances of survival. The most common mistake I see people making when planting trees on their land is trying to get them to grow in marginal locations, such as next to an existing forest which minimizes light. And then letting grass take over the root area (grass is the enemy of roots), and never adding fertilizer to help spur new growth. If plants are deficient in one or more nutrients, then winter injury is likely to occur."

Jim and Megan have been, in their words, 'proud' members of NYFOA since 2011, and look forward to each issue of this magazine, as well as Northern Woodlands magazine, to which they also subscribe. They have been dedicated stewards of their land over the past 18 years of ownership, and have made great, lasting efforts to enhance the diversity of the landscape, and quality of the habitat, for all the life that coexists there.

Some parting words from Jim: "Planting and managing for quality wildlife habitat is a process, not an event. Just being able to see game is a side benefit to being able to enjoy and involve oneself in the woods. The therapeutic value of owning woods with projects that fortunately never end is a journey, not a destination. Turning those roadblocks into pathways gets the creative juices flowing, is physically demanding, and good for the soul."

Jeff Joseph is the managing editor of this magazine.

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