

The New York Forest Owner

A PUBLICATION OF THE NEW YORK FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION

For people caring about New York's trees and forests

July/August 2021



*Bearing Witness: The Rapid Decline of
Ash in New York*

Volume 59 Number 4



**THE NEW YORK
FOREST OWNERS
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COVER: Front cover: Ash trees across our state have been stripped bare of their bark by woodpeckers, but this is merely a late symptom of a fatal affliction: infestation by the emerald ash borer (EAB).

From The Executive Director

Glue is defined by the dictionary as any of various solutions or preparations of this substance, used as an adhesive. When used as a verb it means to join or attach firmly with or as with glue — to make adhere closely. I imagine at this point in your life you know what glue is and do not really need me to explain it, let alone regurgitate its high browed wordy definition. I also imagine



you are asking yourself, “Why is he talking about glue?” I will answer that in a moment; so, stick with me (no pun intended) and don’t flip to the Ask a

Professional section just yet.

As a forestry consultant for 20 years, I have had the pleasure to work with many families that own land; in many cases I worked with more than one generation. In some of those cases I helped with estate planning and intergenerational transfers of ownership or assisted people when they inherited land. In my experience the transaction of passing land on to the next generation ends up going in one of two directions: 1) The land is kept, loved, and managed just as the family member(s) before them did, or 2) The land is sold. I suspect all of us hope #1 is the outcome for us with our own land.

In forestry school we are taught, and continue to preach after, that the first and most important thing to consider when managing the forest is the landowner’s goals. Being the well-informed landowners that you are, you understand this more than most. I never directly

asked a landowner what their goals were — it’s just too broad a question. Instead, I engage them in conversation over time that includes questions meant to help them discover or fine tune their goals for themselves, and to help me assess their needs; gradually peeling away the layers.

One of those questions is: “What’s your long-term plan for the property — do you plan to pass it to a family member?” I would ask this with hope of eventually connecting with the next generation if the answer was yes. But, more importantly, the answer to that question helped me assess how committed that landowner was to long-term management. Because the reality is that, people who plan to pass their land to the next generation are a little more likely to invest in management that may not yield results within their lifetime when they know it will benefit their family, versus “the next guy.” Unfortunately, it is not always clear to us if the next generation intends to keep our land or not; a concern that I am sure that many of you struggle with.

I have heard some people say that their kids do not seem interested in the property, or that their kids moved away and are not close enough to enjoy or use it, or that their kids do not have the time or ability to take care of it the way they do. And so on. Most facing this, plan to sell their wooded acreage when they cannot handle it any longer or leave it to their kids knowing they will probably just sell it. I often sense frustration from the people in this position, and I am genuinely sorry if that describes your situation.

The benefit I have had working with so many landowners across time is

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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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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.

Could Deer Hunting Improve Habitat For Forest Birds?

BY MARC DEVOKAITIS

Editors Note: This timely article was originally published in the Autumn 2020 edition of Living Bird magazine; our thanks go to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for permission to reprint here.

In the late 19th century, it seemed as if deer were headed the way of the Dodo.

In 1890, the U.S. Biological Survey estimated the white-tailed deer population to be around 300,000 and falling—a sliver of the tens of millions that roamed America in the 1700s and before. But thanks to a confluence of factors including hunting regulations, fewer wolves, and forest regeneration, deer became one of the great wildlife comeback stories of the 20th century.

Since the 1980s, deer numbers in the U.S. have hovered around 30 million—a 10,000% increase in just the past century. Regionally, their density has doubled or tripled in many forested and suburban landscapes in the East. As a result, the happy story of a deer comeback has turned into a troubling tale of conflict as these



A carpet of hay-scented fern, one of the few plants deer won't eat, indicates a lack of plant diversity, and points to high deer numbers. Photo by Nicholas Tonelli/Creative Commons.

traditional symbols of sylvan beauty have destroyed native plants and gardens, collided with vehicles, and transmitted diseases.

In addition to the issues they cause for human communities, deer have also reshaped forests in the eastern

U.S., with consequences for entire ecosystems. Now biologists are trying to untangle how these deer-driven changes to forests are affecting bird populations, and studying how to rein in deer numbers to give forest habitats—and the birds that rely on

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Abundant white-tailed deer populations have degraded ecosystems by munching on the understory, to the detriment of many forest-dwelling birds. Photo by Christina Richards/Shutterstock.

them—a chance for a comeback of their own.

The impacts of deer on forests first caught Ron Rohrbaugh’s attention (and his ankles) when he was a grad student at Penn State in the late 1980s, working on Northern Goshawk breeding surveys in the Allegheny National Forest in northern Pennsylvania.

“I would walk for miles on these remote transects in what should have been pristine forest—far from roads and trails,” says Rohrbaugh, now director of conservation science and forest programs for Audubon Pennsylvania. “Every day, my feet would be getting constantly tangled in knee-high hay-scented fern.”

Hay-scented fern is a native plant that usually shares the forest understory with other species of ferns, shrubs, and tree saplings. But in the forests Rohrbaugh was surveying, hay-scented fern had taken over, overtopping most of the other

young understory plants and creating a forest-floor monoculture.

“It was almost a park-like setting. There were no shrubs, no saplings,” says Rohrbaugh. “Hay-scented fern is one of the few native understory plants that deer won’t touch.”

The pristine look of a forest carpeted in ferns can be deceiving, says Rohrbaugh: “People perceive a natural environment, but in a situation like that, birds can’t meet their breeding-cycle needs.”

Rohrbaugh coauthored a study, published in January in *Forest Ecology and Management*, showing how changes in forest structure caused by swelling deer populations may be affecting birds. The research tracked populations of 40 common bird species in Pennsylvania over 35 years (from 1981 to 2015) and categorized them based on where they make their livings (such as mature forests or younger early successional forests),

and whether they live primarily in the understory or canopy. Then the researchers looked at deer abundance across a corresponding timespan to see how deer populations related to trends in bird species.

Birds living in mature forests that spend most of their time in the understory—such as hooded warbler, ovenbird, and wood thrush—fared the worst, becoming scarcer in the years following a rise in deer population.

According to Rohrbaugh, wood thrush is the poster bird for negative interactions between deer and forest birds, because it was among the birds in the study showing the biggest declines. Wood thrushes most often build their nests around 2 to 3 meters (7 to 10 feet) off the ground. The lack of smaller understory trees and shrubs in deer-chewed forests means fewer places for thrushes to safely put a nest and keep it hidden from predators. A lack of diversity in the forest floor and shrub layer of the forest also corresponds to lack of insect diversity and abundance, meaning less food available for thrushes during breeding season.

While the consequences of having too many deer in the landscape are becoming clearer, it’s not clear how to solve the problem. Removing ferns across millions of acres of forest isn’t feasible. And wolves probably aren’t coming back to the eastern U.S. any time soon to tamp down deer populations.

But there may be promise in an activity as old as life itself: hunting. Bernd Blossey, a professor with the Cornell University Department of Natural Resources, has studied deer management for the past decade. He sees deer superabundance as a full-blown ecological crisis.

“The Adirondacks, Appalachia, central New England—all the major forested areas in the East have been hammered by deer,” Blossey says. And he thinks hunting may be the only way to pull deer populations back to ecologically acceptable levels.

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Ask A Professional

BRETT CHEDZOY



Brett Chedzoy

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

Question:

"My woods seem increasingly overrun with plants in the understory that are a nuisance. What can I do about it?"

Answer:

Unfortunately, a common condition for many woodlands includes an overabundance of undesired plants. I rarely walk around the family farm in Watkins Glen without fretting over the abundant unwanted plants that seem to thrive in every corner that isn't routinely mowed or intensively grazed.

The battle of the bad plants started in the 1980's when we began to realize that portions of our woods were full of stuff like buckthorn, multiflora rose and diseased beech — just to name a few. I would come home from college on the weekends to work in the woods, only to spend most of the time cutting thickets of anything deemed "junk." Afterwards it was hard to tell that much had happened from the fruits of my labor as the freshly cut shrubs and trees lying on the ground seemed to be a bigger mess than the starting point. But at least I would drive back to forestry school on a Sunday evening satisfied that I had dealt a blow and made things better — or had I?

After returning from the Peace Corps in early 1995, I ventured back into the woods that I had dreamed of from afar. To my dismay, the noxious stuff that I had spent countless hours clearing had returned in force. Every stump had become Hydra with multiple new vigorous stems.

And thanks to letting some extra sunlight in, there was plenty of new stuff to fill the voids around the stump sprouts — practically none of it falling in to the "good" category.

Attempting to learn from this hard lesson, I began to experiment with the new "miracle" herbicide of the time: glyphosate. My take-away from that experience was that spraying worked pretty well for killing succulent weeds in easy

to reach places. But most of the invasive shrubs seemed quite unphased by even the hottest doses of herbicide thanks to their tenacious nature. This was also before glyphosate mixes came with surfactant chemicals that enhanced their effectiveness on glossy-leaved invasive shrubs.

The next attempt was to hire a local contractor to push and pile the worst areas with a D6 bulldozer. It was gratifying to see brush thickets on old overgrown pastures consolidated into giant piles — at least until I got the bill. A few years later the semi-burned piles of brush and soil had become thriving oases of invasive plants that were beyond the reach of the livestock, brush hog, and spray rig. The cleared ground — just a bit too rough and rocky for mowing — quickly filled up with the likes of bull thistle, pokeweed, and a rich assortment of other plants (other than the ones that I had hoped to see).

Strike three and time to reevaluate. New efforts were put on hold while work and life kept me away from the farm for a number of years. But after settling back on the farm in the early 2000's with a young family, the next step was to update our forest management plan that I had written a dozen years earlier. I worked with the local DEC service forester to make sure



Figure 1. Rotationally grazing of livestock in silvopastures (woods that have been deliberately managed to grow forages in the forest understory) is an example of a biological method to manage understory vegetation in wooded settings. In this case, sheep and goats target scattered multiflora rose shrubs beneath a young hardwood plantation. The dense sod of grass and forbs additionally helps suppress colonization by invasive plants.



Figure 2. Although deer ignore interfering plant species, livestock relish many of the same plants when at the right stages of maturity. Cattle (and their goat ringleader) are seen here devouring an infestation of burdock along the forest edge. Timing and skilled grazing management are important in these situations. Grazing too early will allow the targeted plants to reseed. Grazing too late will reduce palatability and impact.

that the plan met the “Stewardship Plan” criteria in case we wanted to apply for EQIP funding through NRCS.

Around the same time that I updated the forest management plan, we started to think about a long-term vision for the farm as a whole. Returning to the farm’s past dairying history wasn’t an option, but we also realized that cropping our stony upland soils wasn’t going to pay the bills or provide much satisfaction. Consequently, I worked with the local Soil and Water Conservation District to develop a more comprehensive “farm plan” through their Ag Environmental Management (AEM) program. AEM is primarily focused on water quality and soil conservation, which made sense to us given that our entire southern border was the Watkins Glen State Park Gorge — a unique watershed whose protection was at the top of our priorities.

Aside from water quality goals, the new farm plan made us carefully think through how we could keep the farm in the family for generations. What this boiled down to was finding utilization that would be both profitable and enjoyable. Keeping unwanted plants in check was an important piece of the “profitable and enjoyable” goals.

Why should any of us care about having too many of the wrong plants in our woods — and what can or should we do about it? As you have already guessed, there’s no easy or one right answer to this question. Nor are there any silver bullets. Let’s start the discussion by better defining the issues.

What I have so far referred to as “bad,” “unwanted,” and “noxious” plants can be lumped into what foresters have come to call “interfering vegetation.” Interfering implies that the plants are problematic in some sense and conflict with desired goals and uses. I first heard Dr. Ralph Nyland at ESF use this term about a dozen years ago and quickly adopted it because it could pertain to both native and non-native plants. Common examples of the first are “beech brush” (suckers) and ferns, though many other native plants can interfere under the right conditions. A growing number of plants fall in to the second category — the so-called “invasives.” Many are woody shrubs and small trees, but there are also plenty of well-known herbaceous invasives like garlic mustard and swallowwort.

Each of these plants represent unique challenges if they’ve reached a threshold that warrants a management response.

When and how much to act are nuanced decisions that depend on each woodland owner’s own goals and situation. Decisions should also factor in the risk of delayed action or inaction based on the potential for spread of a particular plant — that is, letting a small problem grow into a big one. As an example, beech and swallowwort can both be problematic, but have very different potentials for spreading beyond the current footprint. Small clusters of beech brush will gradually spread over time, but pose little risk for quickly overrunning large areas. Swallowwort, on the other hand, can increase its presence on the landscape at an exponential rate due to its reproductive and adaptive characteristics.

Individual plant characteristics aside, we lump understory vegetation conditions into one of three categories on our farm. We think of the first as “acceptable or improving.” This condition is relatively scarce on the wooded portions of our farm as much of the land is constantly under some degree of disturbance — and disturbance usually favors interfering plants. The most common disturbance in our woods are when trees die from harvesting, storms, or pests like emerald ash borer. These losses allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor, which in turn stimulates understory growth. Deer then pick the winners and the losers through their selective browsing habits and soon the plants not favored by deer as a food source begin to dominate. A universal characteristic of every interfering plant species is that deer largely avoid eating them.

The second and most common category is: “stable or tolerable.” These are often areas that were at least partially rehabilitated at some point through our past efforts. Judicious, ongoing management is required to maintain or improve the present conditions. But the present conditions are acceptable for most desired uses and activities.

The third category could be thought of as “severely degraded.” These are situations where significant and deliberate efforts — the right efforts — are needed to restore productive and functional use of the area. Over the years we’ve used names like “jungle,” “brush lot,” and “hopeless” to describe such spots.

continued on next page



Figure 3. Purpose-built mowing machines like this FECON can reduce dense interfering understories to mulch. But before making this investment, consider what additional steps may be needed to prevent the freshly created void from quickly refilling with more of the same plants.

Hopeless is a word that shouldn't be in our vocabulary as woodland owners. The challenges of reducing interfering vegetation to tolerable levels are daunting.

But each of us are capable of improving the status quo in our own woods to restore and maintain better habitat, ecological function, aesthetic quality, productive

potential, and numerous other values.

Several years ago, I worked with Extension colleagues Peter Smallidge and Kristina Ferrare on a project called "Forest Vegetation Management." This was an opportunity to combine personal experiences (including many mistakes) with research to help others facing the same issues. The "management matrix" below is one of the outcomes of those efforts. The purpose of the matrix is to allow managers and landowners to rapidly assess options for similar types of plants. A detailed explanation (the "fine print") is below the table. This information was adapted last year for an extension bulletin of the same name that is available on CCE's www.forestconnect.info website.

Every type of plant has at least one control method that will be effective when properly applied. No single method works well across all types. Consequently, developing a sound strategy starts with identifying what type or types of vegetation

Shade-tolerant Interfering Forest Vegetation Management Matrix for the Northeast

Types	Methods					
	Chemical Broadcast	Chemical Basal/inject	Mechanical Mow/Cut	Mechanical Girdle	Mechanical Excavate	Biological Silvopasture
short-lived herbaceous	2	3	2	3	3	2
low perennial herbaceous	2	3	2	3	3	2
tall herbaceous perennial	2	3	2	3	3	2
Annual vines	2	3	2	3	3	2
Perennial vines	2	3	2	3	3	2
canes	2	3	1	3	2	2
shrubs	2	2	1	2	1	2
trees	2	1	1	1	1	2

1 = good results ; 2 = mixed results ; 3 = impractical to implement or insufficient results. See "explanations"

Common Examples

Herbaceous, short-lived	stiltgrass, garlic mustard
Low herbaceous perennial	ferns, mugwort
Tall herbaceous perennial	knotweed, swallowwort
Annual vines	mile a minute, morning glory
Perennial vines	grape, bittersweet, poison ivy
Canes	Rubus, multiflora rose
Shrubs (< 10')	barberry, autumn olive, honeysuckle, privet, Euonymus, buckthorn
Trees (> 10')	beech, Carpinus, Ostrya, striped maple

Comments:

- Chemical - assumes proper application methods, conditions and label requirements are met
- Mechanical - assumes treatments are repeated with adequate frequency to obtain desired result
- Biological - assumes proper management and implementation, and other initial treatments to control plant height

Developed in 2019 by: Brett Chedzoy; Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County (bjc226@cornell.edu) and Peter Smallidge; NYS Extension Forester, Cornell University (pjs23@cornell.edu)



Figure 4. Herbicide injection through freshly cut stumps, frill cuts, or drilled holes is a practical control method for larger woody stems at relatively low densities per acre.

are being targeted, and then selecting one or more appropriate methods (those rated as a 1 or 2 in the matrix) that you are willing and capable of using.

Explanations for predicted outcomes:

Chemical/broadcast: Selective, non-selective, and pre-emergent herbicides for labelled use can be at least partially effective when properly applied under the right conditions. Factors limiting effectiveness in forest applications include: access; coverage; plant conditions like growth phase and drought-stress; resistance features, both genetic and morphological; meteorological conditions; and timely and skilled application. Broadcast herbicide treatments are usually more effective for short-term control — such as to temporarily reduce understory interference to establish or release regeneration — and are most

effective when coupled with other control strategies.

Chemical/basal or injection: basal spray and injection are impractical treatment methods for most types of interfering vegetation, with the exception of larger woody stems that are readily accessible. Basal treatment formulations will be most effective on thin-barked species like beech. Systemic herbicides labeled for injection will yield the best results when wood is not frozen and the proper dosage is used.

Mechanical/mow or cut: Severing stems by cutting either with simple tools or specialized machines provides instant gratification, but usually short-lived results. Most of the example plants are capable of vigorously resprouting, so intensive and continued mowing would be necessary to exhaust root reserves to the point of mortality for these and most other

species. Nonetheless, judicious mowing can increase the viability of more durable methods from the chemical and biological categories.

Mechanical/girdle: Impractical except for larger-diameter woody stems that are unlikely to sucker or coppice. The cambium tissue beneath the bark must be fully severed, and some species can take up to several years to die after girdling.

Mechanical/excavate: Plants and most roots are removed using heavy equipment. Effective for species that will not propagate from root fragments. However, the significant soil disturbance normally associated with excavation will often stimulate the soil seed bank and potentially give rise to other noxious plant problems.

Biological/silvopasturing: Managed livestock impacts such as defoliation, girdling, browsing, and trampling are skillfully used to limit the growth of undesirable plant species, while fostering the growth of desirable ones. Silvopasture establishment usually requires some combination of initial treatments from the other columns to reduce vegetation height and density before livestock can be effective. Targeted livestock impacts through intensive rotational grazing will gradually shift understory vegetation to a more stable complex that is resistant to invading plants.

Other biological controls. The only plant from the list of examples that is known to be somewhat controlled with a biological agent (other than livestock) is the mile a minute vine. Solarization (prolonged, dense shading from black plastic or a tarp) is another method that could be practical when used on small patches of emerging or resprouting plants such as Japanese knotweed imported from contaminated fill. 🚫

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Wild Things in Your Woodlands

MAGGIE LIN

GRAY FOX (*UROCYON CINEREOARGENTIS*)



Gray fox can be distinguished from red fox by the short black hairs on their back that lead to a black-tipped tail. They also have distinct white, black, and reddish-brown facial coloration. Gray fox weigh 7-13 pounds and including their tail, range in length from 31-44 in. Found in much of North America, gray fox prefer warmer, more wooded environments than red foxes. They can even climb trees!

Gray fox inhabit primarily deciduous woodlands, although they can also be found in mixed and coniferous northeast forests. Forested areas next to old fields or farmlands can serve as especially ideal foraging grounds. Catching a glimpse of gray fox in your forest, however, can be challenging as they are primarily nocturnal. If you can find a likely den spot in your woods, June or July may be the best time to see these animals on the move as parents are more likely to be active during the day hunting for their offspring.

Gray fox are versatile omnivores who will eat anything from birds and reptiles to fish, invertebrates, and eggs. They will even eat fruits and carrion, although small mammals like mice, voles, and rabbits make up the majority of their diet. Sometimes, gray fox will forage for sources of hard and soft mast like acorns, grapes, and corn. As solitary hunters, gray fox stalk their prey until they pounce, killing the animal with a single bite to the neck.

Compared to red fox, gray fox are more aggressive and prefer to hunt in thicker cover. Gray fox have a unique ability unlike any other North American canid—their sharp, recurved claws and flexible forelegs

make them agile tree-climbers! Once up in the crown, they jump from branch to branch and will descend the tree backwards. Trees make great daytime resting spots for gray fox, which they leave at twilight or nighttime to hunt. Climbing trees helps the foxes avoid predators and find food, and they will even sometimes construct their dens several yards above the ground.

Typically, however, gray fox den in hollow logs or trees, rocky outcrops, or thick brush. They sometimes use abandoned dens of other small mammals or will raise their young beneath manmade structures like sheds or woodpiles. Dens are usually located in brushy or wooded areas near a source of water. After breeding season in mid-January to May, a mother will give birth to 2-7 pups in March or April. Gray fox pups are nearly hairless, blind, and helpless at birth, but after weaning the young are ready to begin hunting with their parents at about 3 months old. A gray fox family will disperse in the autumn once the young are full-grown.

Equipped with their tree-climbing abilities, gray fox are adept at evading predators—this skill lessens pressures from the increasing presence of coyotes since

gray fox can climb to escape predation, and they eat vegetable matter so their diet overlaps less with that of coyotes and diminishes competition. Bobcats and great horned owls have also been known to prey on gray fox, but humans are likely the primary cause of mortality due to trapping and vehicle collisions.

The gray fox was once more common than red fox in New York, however, deforestation and urbanization have limited the amount of habitat where gray foxes can thrive. Stewarding your woodland is a great way to support these animals and maintaining thick brush areas in your forest, as well as leaving dead hollow trees can help provide them with more denning habitats. Be sure to watch out for foxes while driving, and if you hear a hoarse bark from the trees late at night don't worry—it's likely a gray fox being wild in your woodland! 🦊

*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 and the Environment. . 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: VJ Anderson*

From the Executive Director (continued)

learning what the secret sauce is for those that have been successful in engaging the next generation(s) and were able to successfully keep the property in the family.

The secret sauce is not really that secret though, but there are a few simple things that I have observed that seem to make all the difference in the land being a family legacy or just another asset to be sold off when we are gone.

- Make them sweat. Get your kids and/or grand kids out in the woods to work — clearing trails, cutting trees, dragging brush, killing invasives, digging holes, planting trees, cutting firewood, pruning Christmas trees, mowing fields, moving tree stands...whatever it is that you do out there, make them work with you, whether boys or girls. Even if they moan and groan about it — press on; buy them a root beer afterwards. I cannot tell you how many times a second or third generation landowner has shared with me stories from when they were a kid about “planting those trees” or “thinning those woods” or “hacking those beech.” I have no doubt that they complained every step of the way, but as adults that work has become a source of pride and a precious memory. It connected them to the land and their parents or grandparents; it gave them a sense of ownership; and in the case of working with siblings or cousins, it was a shared connection to the land with family — shared memories.


- Get them vested. Keep the work going by taking that “kid” work to the next level as they become older. Some of the best ways I have seen families stay active together on the land is to organize and schedule one or two work weekends a year, where attendance is required, no matter how far away they have moved. A family I know brings three generations of patriarchs/matriarchs, siblings, and cousins together a couple of times a year to sweat and eat and play and laugh. The patriarch of the family treats it like a family business and leads them in maintaining the property, managing the woods, preparing for hunting season, etc. The thought being that the property will be theirs one day and they need to invest some time and labor in it too as

“shareholders.” And they sure seem to have fun doing it. They are connecting with the land and each other. It has been made into a family tradition.

- Make it a rally point. Whether your kids live next door or have moved away, it does not need to be an excuse to not be involved with the property, just because it is not convenient to their location. If it is in your means, build a cabin, or a camp site, or a pavilion, or a spot to park a couple of campers, or simply a spot with a fire pit and some lawn chairs. Even if your home is on the property, build one of these sites back in the woods away from the house. Keep an ATV or a golf cart on hand for the grandkids to run around on. Give your family a destination for fun or escape, or a hub spot for your work weekends. Start a hunting camp tradition for opening weekend. One family I know holds their family reunion on their property that draws nearly 100 people across four generations with campers and tents in tow from all over the country. When you pass, the kids will likely sell your home because at that point, they probably have their own, but they are more likely to keep the family land if it’s a place they can all rally to, no matter how far away they have moved.

If you have been able to make your own secret sauce, kudos to you. If these things did not occur to you, it is never too late to try one or all these ideas. Or perhaps you have to skip a generation and focus on the grandkids instead. If keeping the land in the family is that important to you but your kids are not interested in it, there is nothing that says you can’t pass it to the grandkids if you can build their interest; it’s an option to consider anyway.

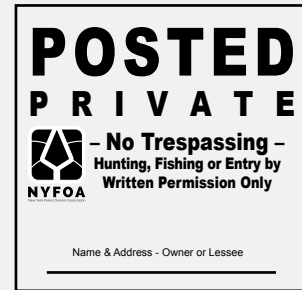
For the families I have seen succeed the most at keeping their land in the family, their land was the glue that kept the family together and interested in keeping it — they made it so it would “adhere them closely.” See, I told you I would explain the whole glue thing. Make your land the family glue.

Until next time...go to the woods — take it all in and love it until you can’t. 

—Craig Vollmer
NYFOA Executive Director

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What the 2021 ATFS Changes Mean for Forest Owners, Inspectors

BY ERIC JENKS



For NYFOA members that are also a part of New York Tree Farm (NYTF), 2021 has brought a change to the standards set by the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). “We are in a transition period from two set of standards,” said NYTF Areas 3 and 4 Chair Erin Perry. “The 2021 interim guidelines are similar, but every 5 years there is a review period with a public comment period to make sure that the standards of sustainability are supported and manageable for people and forest management in general.”


All ATFS forest inspectors are required to retrain on the standards this year. “Everyone will be brought up to speed on the new standards, what the changes are, and what the guidance is to implement them,” said Perry. “Currently, Vermont and NY are doing online classes jointly throughout the year. Inspectors were supposed to be re-certified by March 15th, but the new training wasn’t available until beginning of March. We’re hoping to get everyone trained by fall.”

According to Perry, most of the standard changes are minor, with many of them being simply clarification or wording changes. “They’ve also increased encouragement for landowner education, and included a section where the forester can give resources or guidance in their report on a property, which is nice,” said

Perry. “A nice change is that the eligibility clarifications now specifically include plantations such as orchards and tree farms, as long as they are part of the forest system and management planning. Another wording change is native to naturalized species, which is recognizing that some native species don’t thrive here, and using naturalized species allows a better species selection to compete with potential invasive species.”

For forest owners, Perry says that now is a good time to have your management plan looked at. “For forest owners, changes include better documentation of chemical use, even where it’s applied on a private property,” said Perry. “We’ve never tracked small usage before, so it’s good to start incorporating it as part of your overall plan. There’s a bit more paperwork involved, but I don’t think it’s going to be a big deal to deal with at all. A nice thing about it is that it gives landowners an opportunity to talk to their inspectors about what these chemicals do. A lot of people think that small usage by individuals doesn’t have that much of an effect, but it’s worth having the conversation about the potential ramifications and how it impacts your other management goals. Like the rest of the guidances, it will be applicable to the size and management scope of the property. For example for a 25 acre wood

lot homestead, the guidance is just looking for some handwritten notes with a date and application notes. A large parcel would however be looking for much more detailed records. I think this only furthers the conversation about the usage, what alternatives exist, and the potential overall effects on the environment. There are times it works well. I haven’t found any natural measures to eliminate poison ivy. Some things do have alternatives however, and if it’s written into the plan we can better manage for the goals of the whole property.”

For more information on the 2021 Transitional Guidance, you can visit the ATFS website here: <https://www.treefarmssystem.org/view-standards> 

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

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Could Deer Hunting (continued)

In 2008 Blossey began a decade-long research project to compare several deer management techniques. But instead of counting deer, he planted red oak trees. Seedlings, actually—thousands of them in forests around central New York State. Blossey says red oak seedlings are a preferred food source for deer, so the red oaks are a perfect “sentinel species” for monitoring local deer populations. When populations are at reasonable levels, many red oak seedlings survive and grow. But when deer dominate the landscape, the red oaks get gobbled.

Blossey’s study, published in November 2019 in *Ecology and Evolution*, showed two of the strategies he tested—sterilization and regular recreational hunting—had little effect on how much damage was done to the seedlings. However, in plots where more intensive hunting was allowed, there was a substantial decrease in deer-browse pressure.

These results echo findings from previous studies that have tested non-lethal forms of deer management, such as sterilization, deer-exclusion fences, and relocating deer out of densely populated areas. None of these approaches have been shown to reduce deer impacts on forest ecosystems.

Audubon Pennsylvania’s Rohrbaugh sees Blossey’s study pointing toward the possibility that a sustained increase in hunting—in the right areas, with the right safety considerations and public engagement—could be key to bringing deer numbers to a lower level, giving some hope to birds that rely on a diverse forest understory.

To make that happen, Rohrbaugh says public policy around hunting should be targeted toward reducing deer numbers. That means increasing bag limits, recruiting and retaining new hunters, and perhaps most importantly, supporting strategic deer reduction programs that engage hunters.



Wood thrush is one of the species showing the biggest declines in forests that are overbrowsed by deer. Photo by Jack & Holly Bartholmai/Macaulay Library.

Blossey also suggests that relatively radical ideas could be considered, such as the development of a market for commercial wild venison, which would encourage more of a sustained, substantial deer harvest.

“We have to do something,” says Blossey. “The longer the deer numbers stay high, the harder it will be to have a forest structure that can maintain a healthy ecosystem.” 🌲

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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

I LIKE ANTS...WELL, MAYBE NOT ALL THE TIME!

BY MARK WHITMORE

I like ants! I really do. I've spent many hours of my life entertained by their activity. As a youth I recall days spent on my belly watching them maneuver around the obstacles I would place in their trail, often wielding my magnifying glass death-ray when the sun was out. My fascination has continued and as I learned more of their intricate social organization I live in awe of the clever scientists who figured it out. The ant scientists, or myrmecologists, have their own meetings within the larger entomology community. Studying the complexities of their social organization, E.O. Wilson opened up a whole new field of science termed Sociobiology in 1975, putting forth the argument that all animal behavior, humans included, is the result of heredity, environment, and experience. Heady stuff from someone who studies bugs. He's a great writer and I encourage you to explore not only his books on ants but also his more philosophically oriented writings.

On the more fun side of things, ants have also been the basis of many science fiction books and movies. Too many to list, but one of them got my attention as a child growing up in the time when we would crawl under our desks at school for atomic bomb drills (never really figured that one out as I got older). At that time there was a movie about giant ants infesting the deserts where atomic bomb tests were carried out. I watched that movie on



Formica ants tending aphids. David Cappaert, Bugwood.

my black and white tv on Saturday mornings many times and it scared the heck out of me. Little did I realize that perhaps it was that movie that first piqued my interest in bugs and the world around me, now a part of my everyday life. Sorry, I digress.

The reason for the topic of this article is a question I received recently from a woodlot owner concerned about ants

in their forest. They noticed large mounds created by ants and were wondering if they would harm their trees. They had found the Allegheny mound ant (*Formica exsectoides*), which is common in New York's forests and fields. Worldwide there are many species in the genus *Formica* (accent on the first syllable, not like the plastic countertop) that include the



Mound created by Allegheny mound ant (*Formica exsectoides*). Steven Katovich, Bugwood.

common field ants, wood ants, and thatching ants. All these ants build mounds of various sizes in which to live. The Allegheny mound ants are small, about 1/4 to 3/8 inch long, and should not be confused with the tinier sugar ants you might find in the kitchen or the much larger carpenter ant. Both sugar and carpenter ants can be found

foraging in the house for food but *Formica* ants do not. I'm testing this assumption as I write because there is a *Formica* mound against the foundation of my house, next to my COVID office, and I have yet to see one in the house. On the other hand I have seen many carpenter ants and soon will be sleuthing out their nest to see if I need

to do some home repairs before winter. If you have these big black carpenter ants in your house you should be doing some research and looking for parts of your house that might have wood in contact with earth or constantly wet where they nest, but this is a topic for another article.

Formica ants have three social casts: workers (females), drones (males), and queens. Workers are the ones you see foraging about. Drones are born from unfertilized eggs and are around for only a short period of time. They have wings and do no work but are not couch potatoes. They will fly away with virgin queens in the heat of summer and mate with them. That's their only job. Queens, once mated, can continue to lay fertile eggs for years. When they find a suitable nesting site the queens will clip their wings and consume them for protein before laying eggs. Some queens will return to their original mound but others will wander to found a new nest site. One of the clever tricks a queen may employ to get a fast start on their new nest is to enter into an active nest of another ant species to garner their scent. Workers from this nest will then begin tending to the queens eggs and building the mound until the point when the queens progeny overwhelm them, effectively taking over the nest they built. A case of social parasitism. As the size of the mounds increase the queens hunker down deep inside the mound and continue laying eggs. Mounds can be quite complex with different chambers, and queens can be two feet or more below the surface.

Workers are omnivores, foraging on just about anything, most often dead or dying insects. I love watching them carrying big chunks of bugs, often many times their size, back to their nests. Workers also carry the sweet honeydew exudate from aphids to their nests for the young. They're actually aphid farmers, tending to them by moving them around and protecting them from natural enemies. One of the more astonishing demonstrations of

continued on page 16

their farming prowess was found on Mt. St. Helens after the big eruption by a fellow grad student. He found that where the ground was covered by two to three feet of ash, the ants brought aphids from their nest and placed them on the first plants to emerge on the surface. My original thought was that the ants would be harmful in a garden because they would be defending the aphids, but it turns out that they also scare away other potential pests so it basically turns out a wash in the end.

As a well-studied student of forest ecology my first reaction to the question posed by the woodlot owner I mentioned earlier was that no action against the ants was necessary. *Formica* ants are actually beneficial in developing soil by building their mounds, perhaps even more so in heavy soils, and they don't harm trees. But then I was visiting a friend in Washington State and she pointed to a mound of Western thatch ants (*Formica obscuripes*) next to a play structure she built for her granddaughter who wouldn't play on it because the ants would sting her. A light bulb went off in my mind. I remember this same reaction when I was young and

the mound was next to my favorite swing. This was not a good situation. Then I did some digging. It turns out *Formica* ants can kill or damage plants by injecting formic acid into their stems. They do this to keep their mounds free of vegetation around the edges so they get more direct sunlight, keeping the mounds warm and speeding development of the young within. I then realized this could be a problem in woodlots where you are trying to get young seedlings to grow or in Christmas tree plantations.

It turns out that I was housesitting for my friend in Washington and when I heard the story about the ants the challenge was on. I knew it wasn't going to be easy because I've tried to kill carpenter ants in the past. My friend tries to grow an organic garden so I first sprinkled diatomaceous earth on the mound. The behavior of the ants was crazy. They climbed to the top of nearby grass blades covered with the white powder and likely perished, but the next day after a light rain it was like nothing had happened. Time for a more serious effort. I went for a granulated formulation of pyrethrin. I placed the appropriate amount on the mound and

gave it a shot of water as the label suggested. It killed ants and activity on the mound virtually ceased but the next day they were back! Not as numerous, but they were back. Then my entomology training kicked in. Of course, most of the ants were still well out of reach because they were potentially feet under the surface and the young were still developing and the queen was still laying eggs. Needless to say it took me a full two weeks of repeatedly digging deeper into the mound, mixing the pyrethrin granules into the mound, and watering it down with a good soak before they were gone. Warning: before plowing ahead with a treatment with pyrethrin, even though it is a chemical derived from chrysanthemum flowers, it has been shown to be toxic to cats. Research this possibility before proceeding.

I like ants. I really do! Just not all the time. My apologies to the woodlot owner who originally asked about ants, I should have asked further questions about their circumstances. ☒

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

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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
Aline Ashkin	SAC	John Montefusco	CNY
Virginia & Pawel Bednarek	FL	Mariel & Reynaldo Punzalan	LHC
Miguel Berrios	SFL	Peter Radka	AFC
Debra Borer	AFC	Charles Reid	NAC
Elizabeth Comstock	LHC	Anthony Roides	WFL
Jay Cower	SOT	Timothy Russell	SOT
Kathleen Crowe	AC	Michael Rygel	NAC
Andy Degolyer	SAC	Jonathan Stadt	WFL
Kim Donselaar	FL	Michael Vaughan	NFC
Ryan Green	SFL	Shane Viscosi	SAC
Judith Herscu	SAC	Wally Walters	NAC
John Januskiewicz	NFC	Waterman Conservation Education Center	SOT
Taira & Josh Johnson	SOT	Diana Webster	NAC
Rich Kellman	SOT	Natasha Wolpin	NAC
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- Respecting private property rights as they relate to sustainable forest stewardship.

Woodlot Empathy

BY DICK GIBBS

“Empathy” is not my foremost thought when I power up the tractor and take the chainsaw to the woodlot. If asked, my approximate definition of “empathy” runs something like “...an internal state of anticipating, projecting, and understanding the feelings and perceptions of another, usually as an internal conversation I have with myself while I act in the companionship of another...”. However, empathy is also an urge or inner voice, as a prelude to taking some new action of friendship joining with another into some exploration that neither anticipated. Unstated, my empathic instincts become a vicarious participation with life, even the life of the forest itself.


Considering the wide range of people and their activities that occur at our farm, and the diversity of people that go, for a time, into the woods, I start to re-think and conclude that indeed “empathy” is flowing among those in the woods, whether they know it or not. Folks snow-shoeing, riders on mountain bikes, the Skinners working the sugarbush for maple sap production, me taking the grandkids on Papa’s nature walks, friends being bonded in a wedding celebration, ecologists observing wildlife and plants, our forester helping guide how we care for the forest, our farmer cutting and baling the hay, and of course, our family and loved ones scattering ashes at the cemetery atop the hill to memorialize those now gone, each and all engender waves of empathetic associations. Also, big events like our Thanksgiving in the Woods with over 150 people down under our small stand of tall hemlocks engaging in a festival that implicitly celebrates the experience of being in the woods together, is all about empathy when thought of as relationship building.

The woodlot may not care if we invest into it with our personal relationships, it is not a “person”, but it is alive and teeming with relationships all to its own. I do believe that the web of relationships that has grown among we as stewards but also including the forest trees, plants, and animals, is all part of the fabric. For sure there are scars from past mis-management and careless acts. Why then does it feel special for me to spend time there, alone or in groups? Self-serving empathic relationships are key unspoken reasons we open our land and woods to others. The lingering memory from one-on-one walks in the setting sun, or a time when a friend needs a quiet time to talk about life’s joys and changes, do the trees know? A NYFOA woods walk where everyone does the same walk, but each shares a different “experience” according to what they brought to the time we are in the woodlot echoes long-term on the evolution of the forest as I learn more from other woodlot owners. In every case, the empathic link among individuals and the forest, commonly unspoken, forms the real experience of being in the woods.

A special bond, however temporal, is alive when I, and close working friends cut, split, and stack firewood. These are special times where few words are spoken, and we use our equipment and skills to improve the stands, while trying to avoid danger while laying in a supply of firewood for the long winter ahead. After a good session of working the woodlot with tractor, skidding winch, several chain saws, and a motorized wood splitter we can relax and share a beer when work is all done for the day, possibly sharing a nice meal in the farmhouse. The bonding that is marked by the clunk as each piece of wood lands on the

long row conveys all I need to know. I begin to understand that the woodlot is a place of relationships filled with empathetic threads among people and nature writ large. Nothing new here, we all do this many times a day with family and strangers alike—we open and close our empathetic window as situations change.

I am starting to see the woodlot as a situational setting where I receive benefit from just being in the woods with a different person—the woodlot changes every time I go there according to who I am with and what we are doing together at that moment. No, the trees did not materially change at all—they are always patiently there, but the forest woodlot is an inviting place for new interpersonal experiences, too. For some it might be the location of a first kiss, for others, meditation on a life passed, a life well-lived. Or it might be as simple as sharing a cookie during a pause on a snow shoe hike, and looking up at the giant hemlocks [pray the hemlock wooly adelgid does not take up home in our small stand], branches bedecked with snow. The forest and farm is a tablet where I write my life’s story with whoever I am with that day, but I must remember that I am only one actor on the stage where the forest plays out its life and lines.

My empathetic wish for all humankind is that all have some opportunity to be tuned into the trees in their lives and to share that connection with friends. I know my grandkids love the times we share being in the woods, strolling hand in hand with no words, just the rustling leaves. In truth, the woodlot is a setting where empathy is acting in many directions at once. 

Dick Gibbs is a longtime member of NYFOA’s Capital District (CDC) Chapter.



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Bearing Witness: The Rapid Decline of Ash in New York

BY JEFF JOSEPH

In the end it was only a matter of time. Since 2009, when it was first discovered in New York State, the emerald ash borer (EAB) has relentlessly spread across our forested landscape, and has now been detected in at least 58 of 62 counties statewide. Early quarantines and prohibitions on the movement of firewood, while well intentioned, have proven woefully inadequate against this inadvertently imported invader, for which our native ash have little or no innate defenses. In its wake it has already left innumerable scars---stripped skeletons of ash stems standing out like raw open wounds against the vibrant green backdrop of the surrounding forestland.

The last time I wrote about ash in these pages was in 2017 (*The Impact of EAB: Member Stories, Part I*, September/October 2017, pp.12-15; search the *Forest Owner* archives at nyfoa.org), when I interviewed Greg Lessord about the impacts of EAB on his Monroe County woodlot. At that time, I was interested in gathering stories

and advice from those who had already experienced the onslaught of EAB, as my local woodlands has as yet been spared. Despite the seeming inevitability of its arrival, and my increasing dread, for a long while I had held out vague hope that there would be some kind of last-minute reprieve, an unforeseen miracle of some sort. But even accepting the likely course of events, I still thought that I would have more time---to plan, to harvest, and to process a substantial amount of ash sawtimber. So now I am scrambling to make up for those years of well-intentioned but misguided hope, or, more plainly spoken, those years of denial.

If you still have time, learn from my hesitancy: with the speed with which infestation leads to mortality, and with the fact that ash is not at all a rot-resistant timber, there is no time to lose. Coming up with a management scheme for the ash in your woodlot can still allow for some value, whether in the form of sawtimber or even just firewood, to be salvaged before



Author with 30" DBH white ash infested with EAB, felled to be salvaged for acoustic guitar backs and sides. It attained that size in little over 60 years.

its inevitable decline across the entirety of our landscape. For many of us it is already far too late for such measures (to those of you, believe me, I now feel your pain), with the only remaining consolation being an abundance of new snags for wildlife to inhabit, and rotting stems and roots to enrich the soil for the next generation of timber.

In my travels through the area pre-infestation, I would scan the treelines along roadways, looking for the telltale signs of the presence of EAB, as well as along local creeks and streams, as in my neck of the woods these areas harbor substantial contiguous populations of ash. In retrospect, I now realize that I was looking, but not really seeing, largely because of the initial stealth with which EAB infestation first occurs: mostly high in the upper



Part of the upper stem from the tree in the previous image, showing the advanced state of the infestation. The wood from the lower sawlogs remained sound.

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First EAB larva I discovered in March of 2020. There were many more already at work, as the infestation proved to be quite advanced by the time the first visible signs became apparent.

crowns, in branch forks, away from easy detection from the ground. I was expecting brazen signs, such as flocks of ravenous woodpeckers, prolific epicormic branching, stems stripped of their bark (“blonding”), major crown dieback. As I have since learned, these all come in an onslaught, it just takes a little while to manifest.



Nice old yard tree, unfortunately fully infested and so being removed, in the town of Candor. In coming years, countless dead ash across the state will become hazards as they decay.

Initially, EAB is a rather quiet predator, which is quite insidious, as once many of us become aware of an infestation, it has already progressed to a point of no return, with the clock ticking. To this day, it startles me to realize that I have yet to meet up with an adult borer. Despite their destructiveness in our environment (they have long since struck a balance with the Asian ash species in their native habitat), they are a strikingly beautiful little creature,



A near pure stand of ash, all dead, near Catatonk Creek, town of Spencer.

who never would have made it here without our unwitting assistance.

For me, the fateful day finally occurred in March of 2020. While carrying in a load of firewood, I happened to glance northward toward the nearest treeline, where something subtle caught my eye. Walking closer to get a better view, my worst suspicions were confirmed, as I saw prominent areas on one stem where the ashy gray bark was clearly flecked with patches of tan—areas where woodpeckers were hunting for EAB larvae and had pecked away portions of the outer bark, exposing the corky tan inner bark beneath.

Historically, ash has been known as a reliable member of the forest community as it has been subject to so few insect and disease problems (with ash yellows being a notable exception), so seeing woodpecker activity on ash pretty much means one thing and one thing only these days, and I was looking it square in the face. After years of cutting and burning nothing but diseased beech for firewood, it seemed that I would soon be making an abrupt transition over to ash.

To provide some visual illustration of the EAB onslaught, both for current woodlot owners who have yet to experience it firsthand, as well as for posterity, when an ash may be as uncommon a sight as a healthy chestnut is in a forest setting today, the following are some images taken in vicinity of the towns of Candor and Spencer in Tioga County over the past 15 months.



Ash stem exhibiting 'blonding' of the bark due to woodpeckers probing for EAB larvae, as well as numerous exit holes of the adult form of the insect.



With such extensive larval feeding within this tree's phloem and outer sapwood, there was simply no chance of its survival.



Epicormic branching, normally an isolated response to stress or injury, is greatly exaggerated with EAB infestation. This young stem exhausted its reserves while fighting to survive.

What was it like when the American chestnut was one of the most common species in New York woodlots? When massive vase-shaped elms lined our streets, when stands of arrow-straight white pines towered to 200 feet or more? Within the span of history, our current era will be a small footnote, but the loss of ash in New York is truly a substantial blow, as it is estimated that prior to EAB there were over 900 million ash trees statewide, making it the 5th most populous tree in the state. For those of us experiencing this loss in our woodlots, in addition to the significant financial repercussions, the vanishing of such a prominent member of the forest community is painful, and quite personal, as ash is a very useful and uniquely beautiful species, and one that defines the character of countless valleys, watercourses, and oldfields throughout our state.

For myself, with my home situated in a valley bottom, ash for the moment remains the predominant hardwood in this bottomland, with the largest diameter stems (30-40" DBH for the largest specimens), and second only to white pine in height. From where I sit and write this sunny June afternoon I can see out my window a mixture of healthy sawtimber-sized ash with long clear diamond-patterned stems and with their narrow compound-leafed crowns situated atop the upper canopy. I can also see some with varying degrees of crown dieback, and quite a few others already standing dead. Short of a miracle of genetic variance that provides some resistance to EAB (be sure to keep your eyes open for trees showing signs of resistance/immunity in an infested area), soon they will all be gone, leaving all kinds of holes in the canopy, which will lead to opportunity for other species, but also to a likely onslaught of invasives that will flourish with the increased sunlight reaching the forest floor. The forest will survive, but will be diminished. In a generation or two, an ash-free forest may well be the norm. But those of us who lived through this era and are still around will know better. 🌲



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