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DEC Forester Tyler Levy leads a Forest Friday walk at Harvey Mountain State Forest in Columbia County, NY on August 28. photo: M. Birmingham

Letter from a Member

Collaboration is Nature's Way, Dick Gibbs

We are highly individualistic people. Our training, upbringing, and everyday interactions constantly highlight our independence. In spite of this ingrained outlook, however, we also know that we live and work in deep connection with others. This truth is especially evident in nature where myriad forms of life collaborate to yield outcomes that benefit all parties involved. Consider the humble lichen. It is a collaborative organism composed of fungi and algae that manages to survive and thrive in the inhospitable Arctic North where it serves as a vital food source for vast herds of reindeer. Fungi alone cannot photosynthesize sunlight, and algae are merely single-celled plants that could never independently produce the massive amount of food that reindeer rely on. Together, they form a resilient life form that blankets the Arctic region like hay.

In her groundbreaking bestseller, *Finding the Mother Tree*, Suzanne Simard—a professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia—demonstrated through direct experimentation that individual trees in a forest share resources underground. They do this through the cooperative, interconnected network of fungi attached to their root systems. We are traditionally conditioned to view trees as discrete, isolated entities. In reality, we are only beginning to grasp the complex underground collaborations between trees and fungi that knit myriad life forms into a single, cohesive ecosystem.



photo: M. Birmingham

The next time you walk through the woods, pause to think of the trees actively collaborating with one another right beneath your feet. We NYFOA members are not so different. When we gather for woods walks, meetings, and picnics, we share valuable insights and personal experiences about caring for our woodlots and forests. This exchange is essentially the human version of trees sharing resources underground. At its heart, NYFOA is

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

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a collaborative organization where each of us contributes what we can and receives far greater benefits in return. As nature so beautifully demonstrates, collaboration is the true secret to growth and success.

Members' Notebook

Here, members submit short entries about the forested lands they love and steward from each county in our chapter and beyond. Any member is invited to submit a contribution of about 150 words and a photo, if relevant. The next one is due January 5, 2027 for the next issue.

Albany County

Forestry Friday, August 7, 2026, Gerry McDonald

The NYFOA CDC chapter hosted a forest walk at the Rensselaerville State Forest located just northeast of Preston Hollow in southwestern Albany County. Tyler Levy, a forester with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Region 4 office, organized the walk to center around examples of softwood harvests in mature spruce and pine forest stands. Paul Farley, the DEC forester who oversaw the cuts, explained the cut prescriptions and the rationale behind them. The stands included a four-year-old spruce clear cut on approximately 40 acres that was nicely greened up, a white pine stand that recently underwent a heavy improvement harvest, a site where a smaller diameter spruce stand was thinned 10 years ago, an experimental area where strips had been cut through a spruce stand with the goal of creating a young forest with a high percentage of hardwood regeneration, a marked and recently sold spruce stand with 20,000 board feet per acre that was to be cut this winter, and a hilltop spruce stand that was clear cut last year.

The open conversations at each stop were exceptionally informative and entertaining. Simply said, it was a great walk with lots of education and wisdom shared by those in attendance. For many of the senior members of our chapter it was reassuring to hear and see the work they once did being carried out with skill and passion. For the residents living within earshot of the noise generated by loggers it gave a perspective not previously understood, and a common ground with the foresters as both shared a love of the Rensselaerville Forest.

Columbia County

Local White Pine Decline, Mike Birmingham, Entomologist.

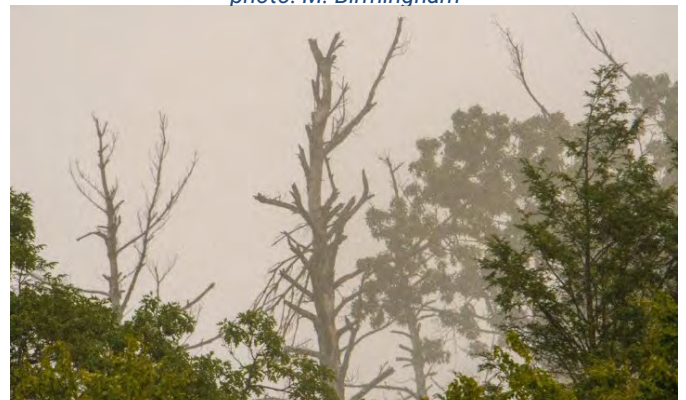
White pine decline is increasingly visible across Columbia County. On a recent tour of Rensselaerville State Forest, DEC foresters showed NYFOA members and other forest owners a salvaged, overmature plantation planted by the Civilian

Conservation Corp in the 1930s that was cleared of overmature, dying white pine. They also showed NYFOA and guests a healthier thinned stand at Harvey Mountain State Forest. The contrast raises an urgent question: What is affecting our white pines?

In decades of investigating forest health across New York, I have never seen pine mortality on this scale. While birding at Olana State Historic Site, I noticed more large, mature pines dying above the hardwood canopy. On September 20, I examined pines just south of Stockport Creek off Route 9, those east of Columbia-Greene Community College off Route 23, and more at the Olana State Historic Site. Young and mature trees were affected, though most dead or declining pines were mature. No single cause was apparent.



*Sparse crowns on immature white pines at Olana.
photo: M. Birmingham*



Mature dead white pine photo'd from the parking lot near the bridge. photo: M. Birmingham

Research points to combined stresses: warmer, wetter springs and pathogens affect needles, stems, and roots. Because decline occurs on wet and dry sites, former farmland, reforestation areas, mixed hardwood and conifers, the causes remain uncertain. I recommend inspecting white pines annually, salvage declining trees when appropriate, and thin crowded stands to promote healthier crowns. Early action may reduce losses and help preserve white pine in Columbia County. A consultant forester could add value to your decisions on what to do about white pine decline. Timely management can benefit wildlife by improving residual white pine health.

Greene County

Insights on Invasive Insects (mostly) of 2026, Katie Campbell-Nelson

Emerald Ash Borer: On a calm sunny day in September, the emerald ash borer almost caused a car pileup in Greene County. Driving around a corner on Rt 41, I braked to a halt behind a car—seconds earlier a 12" dbh dead ash tree had crashed across the road. It took three of us to drag the tree out of the road. I noticed the characteristic D-shaped holes left by the insect years back when they killed the tree. We congratulated each other on good teamwork and went our separate ways. This was a first for me - no wind, rain, or bad weather, yet a tree had almost crushed a vehicle on a rural road. Learn more about monitoring, managing, and protecting ash trees through the [the MaMA citizen science project](#) run by the Ecological Research Institute. Some trees are exhibiting resistance!

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA): As I look forward to another cold winter, I am reminded and hopeful that temperatures of -15F will kill hemlock woolly adelgid. While prolonged cold temperatures are less common now, snow acts as an insulator, so freeze/thaw cycles with cold temperature dips can actually increase HWA mortality despite the overall warming trend. Last winter, NY state had a higher-than-average HWA mortality, but the Hudson Valley did not.



Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, summer 2026.
photo: W. McCall

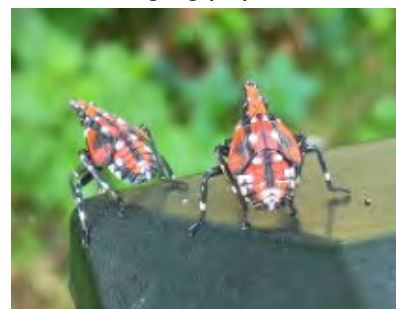
See Mike Birmingham's article in the summer issue of this newsletter (p. 2) for more information, and learn to monitor and manage HWA from the [New York State Hemlock Initiative](#).

Spongy Moth: Precipitation and humidity have been above average this year which means that the fungi *Entomophaga maimaiga* has been active and effectively parasitizing the spongy moth population

We have not seen many egg masses typically abundant—500-1,000 eggs each!—on our chestnut oak bark this time of year. Want to learn more? Enjoy this Nature Calls Podcast—[Episode 148: Spongy Moths](#)—from the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia and Greene Counties.

Spotted Lantern Flies were seen by the thousands floating in the Hudson River this month—an alarming sight! They prefer ailanthus (Tree of Heaven) as a host, but this invasive pest invades 70 plant species. Communities near the river such as Catskill, NY have reported damaging populations.

However, in more upland areas (800–900 ft. above sea level) around Greenville, NY we have not experienced damage and have seen only one adult this year.



Spotted Lantern Fly nymphs, summer 2026. photo: W. McCall

Beech Leaf Disease is caused by a nematode (*Litylenchus crenatae*), not an insect. Although we first noticed this disease in our forest a few years ago, it has probably been the most alarming this year. Despite the moist season, our understory, once thick with healthy beech, is now full of trees that look drought stricken. It is not drought stress though. Leaves are curled, and upon close inspection, interveinal yellowing had occurred due to colonization with nematodes. Beech, once considered 'interfering' vegetation because the trees are not



Interveinal yellowing of beech leaves colonized with nematodes. photo: M. Birmingham

eaten by deer and will outgrow diverse understory plants, this native is now at risk of collapse due to a nematode. For more on this, see [Updated Beech Leaf Disease Biology and Management](#) from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. This pest spreads with rain splash and in aerosolized water droplets. Pay attention to those seasonal storms – they're spreading nematodes!

Rensselaer County

[Alps Mountain Farm](#), Caryn Allen

Fall started at the top of our property. The trees around the house, 200–300 feet higher in elevation than the front of the property, began changing colors and dropping leaves first. It took a week or so longer for fall to reach the maple stand down at the barn. Most of our season has been spent in that stand, reopening an old equipment road that runs parallel to the creek. We're turning it into a trail and perimeter road, and clearing it has been a lesson in the land's history. There are stone walls through nearly every part of these woods; locals still call this the "hundred-acre farm" area. Someone logged it 30-50

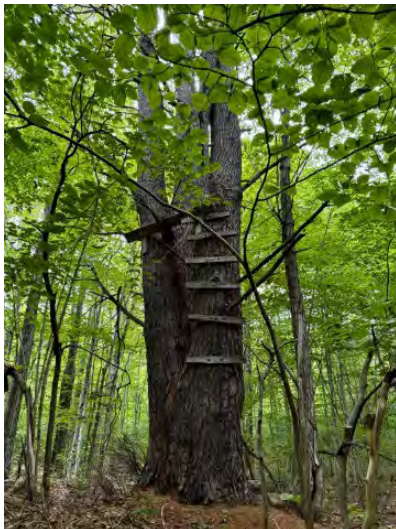


photo: Caryn Allen

years ago and took most of the biggest trees. A few are still standing. Out near the wetland, two white pines have been split into several trunks low to the ground, wider than anything around them. One still has a hunter's ladder nailed up its side, the rungs gone gray.

Our mark is the pink flagging tape. I've been doing an inventory of the maples trunk by trunk, hoping to tap this season. Everyone who worked this land before us left something you can still walk past. We'd like one of ours to be a sugarbush.

How To Build Wildlife Shelter Brush Piles with Apple Crip, Ellen Graf

I have a knack for getting in over my head. Like the time I promised to plant multiple numbers of seven different kinds of trees to feed wildlife, forgetting that the underground realm here is nothing but stones. Let's just say I broke the pickaxe. This fall,

one of three 10'X10'X5' brush piles for wildlife shelter had to be completed. The first layer is 12' diameter logs placed 6–12 inches apart. Moving up, smaller logs are placed the other direction and so on.



1. Cut



2. Stack



3. Rest



4. Complete

photos: Ellen Graf

Since we had a timberland improvement cutting about five years ago, I was able to cut wood that was already down plus a few dead standing trees. Next step—call for help! My friend Megan showed up with her very strong sixteen-year-old daughter Vivi, and they went at it. The hardest part was moving the large base layer logs into place. After that, Megan took over as chief engineer, while I showed Vivi how to use the chain saw, and the pile grew. After nearly three hours, we returned to the house for apple crisp and homemade ice cream. Later, I topped the pile with a thick layer of pine boughs from trees I have cut in the pasture to make room for pioneering nut trees.

Schenectady County

Bearly Missed Me! *Tracy Lamanec*

On Saturday, August 15, 2026, I went out to check my trail cameras and put deer attractant on branches. When I checked the SD cards I saw this bear had been there just before me. Probably heard me coming. You can see me standing in the same spot. The bear is about a foot taller. Note the time on the pictures.



August 15, 2026, 6:44 pm



August 15, 2026, 6:54 pm

Schoharie County

Our Forest, Our Food, *Marilyn and Rick Wyman*

A satisfying way to enjoy your forests is to cultivate shiitake mushrooms. We have produced countless delicious mushrooms to enjoy and share. It is also a good way we illustrate simple yet effective forest management activities to others. We've grown shiitakes from oak, maple, and even beech bolts (6–8" diameter logs, cut into 2–3' lengths). Our favorite is maple because we did timber stand Improvement work over a decade ago that included opening a stand of maple saplings. Some trees are now the perfect size to harvest and inoculate with shiitake mycelium-infused sawdust. We also use suppressed oaks and other small appropriate hardwood trees that would otherwise languish in the understory. We harvest bolts in the spring and are now marking trees we intend to harvest. Once inoculated, the bolts are laid close to a stream with hemlocks overhead to provide moisture needed to keep them from drying out. We don't force our bolts by immersing them in the stream, but rather let nature trigger the mushroom fruiting. We also expose shiitakes to sunlight, gill side up, increasing their Vitamin D content. One particular bonanza of mushrooms occurred after Hurricane Irene, 11 years ago in August. Every bolt fruited, even those inoculated that spring, leaving us with hundreds of mushrooms! We dried most and enjoyed them for years. Rehydrated shiitakes are a favored way to cook them in many Asian recipes as they impart a deeper, richer flavor. Growing shiitakes is a great way to have forest landowners take a first step in active engagement with their forests.



Shiitake bonanza. photo: M. Wyman

Founder Plots for Native Plant Restoration

Kristopher Williams, Capital Region PRISM, Cornell Cooperative Extension

Saratoga County. capitalregionprism.org

The Capital Region Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management PRISM partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Saratoga County Master Gardner, Master Forest Owner (who supported funding), Master Naturalist Program to build seed production (founder) plots and a small nursery to grow ecoregion sourced wildflowers, shrubs, and trees.

Founder plots are dedicated areas used to grow, isolate, and harvest high-purity, genetically diverse seeds from specific plant varieties or native ecotypes.

The development of founder seed production plots and nursery seedlings serve several purposes:

1. They help to provide pollinator habitat and animal refugia and can increase the diversity and abundance of priority plant species.
2. They support resiliency and adaptability to a changing climate.
3. They produce native plant materials that can be hard to find from commercial growers and reduce pressure on wild populations.
4. They serve as a ready and healthy source of a small-scale supply for conservation projects.
5. The plots can be used to educate the public, to guide land managers, landscape architects, and gardeners on high-value native species.



Krisopher Williams

This pilot began with the construction of two fenced areas. One 40,000 ft² community garden houses successional plants including trees and shrubs that need full sun exposure and is maintained by the PRISM. The second area is approximately 1,000 ft² and supports shade tolerant seedlings. Both plots are deer enclosures. Plant selections have been derived from Mid-Atlantic Regional Seed Bank (MARSB) and the New York Native, Plant Supply Priority List developed by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. Priority species matching on both lists have been selected for production to meet the needs of restoration in the multiple eco regions of the Capital Region-PRISM.

The Capital Region PRISM would like to acknowledge and thank Laura Lehtonen, Wildlife Biologist, Madison Blodgett, Community Horticulture Educator, and Jessica Luse Community Horticulture & General Agriculture Manager of the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Saratoga County for allowing this program to come to bloom.

Resources:

1. Mid Atlantic Regional Seed Bank www.marsb.org
2. New York Natural Heritage Program Species Selection Tool <https://nynhp.shinyapps.io/speciesselectiontool/>
3. Reforestation & Afforestation Guidance for New York <https://www.sleloinvasives.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Reforestation-and-Afforestation-Guide-TNC.pdf>
4. Reforestation Guide: Enrich, Restore, and Adapt Northern Forests <https://masswoods.org/planting>
5. Northern Woodlands <https://northernwoodlands.org/articles/article/climate-adapted-tree-species>
6. New York Native Plant Supply Priority List <https://agriculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2026/05/nynativeplantprioritylist.pdf>
7. Wild Ones Guidelines for Selecting Native Plants: The Importance of Local Genotype. <https://wildones.org/wp-content/images/Guidelines-for-Selecting-Native-Plants-Ecotype-Paper-v9.pdf>

Events

Albany County Woodswalk

When: October 24th, 2026, 9:00am arrive, kick-off 9:30

Where: 249 Stanton Rd. Coeymans Hollow, NY 12046
Gerry and Carol McDonald will host featuring a look at a clear-cut area performed six years ago to see tree regeneration. In addition, see other timber improvement areas and discuss the funding process used to support the efforts. We have transportation options for folks with limited mobility. The walk area has roadway.

RSVP to: happyinthehollow@gmail.com. Let us know if you need any accommodations to participate.

Wildlife Tracking with Daniel Hansche

When: Monday, November 9, 2026, 9 AM - 12 PM

Where: Siuslaw Model Forest - Cornell Cooperative Extension Acra, NY

Cost: \$50 per person. Limited space available. [Click Here to register.](#)

Free registration! To a NYFOA member willing to attend and write 200 words about this event. RSVP to: katiecampbellnelson@gmail.com

This event is hosted in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Join international wildlife tracking expert Daniel Hansche for a walk afield in search of the tracks & signs of our wild neighbors. Landowners, foresters, and citizen scientists can key in on dozens of wild mammals by searching for the signs they leave behind. Tracks, scats, feeding signs, homes, and many more signs help us to know who lives in a property or woodlot and what they need to thrive in the landscape.

Wildlife tracking is experiencing a great resurgence as an essential field skill for those managing,

monitoring, hunting, or protecting landscapes in North America and beyond. Participants will return to their place with clear tips and practical skills, leading them to know where and how to look for more signs of their local wildlife.

Meet Daniel Hansche: A full-time wildlife tracker with 30 years in the field, Daniel's work in conservation & education has taken them to wolf dens, rhino encounters, lion trails, wild pig families, and more - every moment a special one. Daniel is a Track & Sign Evaluator with Tracker Certification North America and certified in Eurasia & Africa. Daniel has mentored 100's of trackers and taught 1000's through workshops, trainings, and certifications. Brimming with creativity, Daniel's approach to tracking is wholly unique. Everyone has unique gifts, needs, & styles. One of Daniel's virtues is in learning, respecting, and serving each student's needs. Spur Wander was founded to offer high-quality experience & trainings to wildlife trackers worldwide needs. Spur Wander was founded to offer high-quality experience & trainings to wildlife trackers worldwide.



Daniel Hansche Photo Credits: Carla Rhodes



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