

New York Forest Owners Association Capital District Chapter Newsletter

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Why Do We Have This Woodlot?



The reasons change with passing years, and also even within a single day. Shari and I come from family farms in Minnesota that are still family operations. Land is "in our blood" so we had, like many country folks, an unquenchable thirst to figure out how to own some land once we were settled here in Rensselaer County. Somewhere in the 70's-80's there came an oil crunch. It was not just that gas had jumped in price, it was rationed and scarcely available. Living in a car culture with jobs and

kids when gas is rationed had a lasting imprint on our priorities. Our parents had heated with wood back on the farms, so it was easy to think that this mode of individual action was the direction for us; but we did not have a supply we could call our own. The land behind our farm house in North Greenbush had only recently been separated from our house as two brothers had divided the whole farm. Eight years after we bought the house from one brother, we were finally able to sell some valuables and raise a down payment sufficient to make a private contract for the woodlot and open fields with the other brother. We did not have a stove, a chain saw, any sort of tractor, or any real idea about managing a woodlot, but we did now own one, or it owned us. Energy security is a driving force even if you can't yet extract energy or use what you own. Our woodlot has, in theory and practice been a source of comfort in knowing we owned a lot of stored solar energy.

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We did not buy this woodlot and farmland with any sort of calculated financial return. It was more emotion and instinct than a monetary plan. Over each year we “owned” the woodlot [monthly payments forever], we started using it for personal enjoyment: picnics, C-X skiing, tobogganing down the big hill from the farm cemetery, restoring the Hidley Farm cemetery at the top of the hill, weddings, memorials, photography, meditation, and sprinkling ashes of our own loved ones there. While I have forgotten the exact year, somewhere about 15+ years ago Shari had the idea to have our Thanksgiving down in that woodlot under a stand of hemlock trees. The first year was snowy, and the trees were bedecked with light snow. Little crystals of snow would trickle down and sparkle in the horizontal rays of sun while we enjoyed a full-course Thanksgiving dinner. Hemlock logs may not be so valuable as timber for sale, but having Thanksgiving under a few hemlock trees in the glistening snow is a value money can't buy. We had dragged a few 3 inch thick planks and set them up on stands for a table. Weather turned bitter cold and windy as our dinner progressed, we strung a rope from tree to tree and hung a tarp over the rope to block the wind. We had borrowed a dozen bales from my neighbor's barn, just one of many things that good country neighbors do for each other as a farm starts to build community, one simple act upon another. We dug a fire pit near the table and lined it with stones. We had some left over clay chimney flue tiles from our building of a new fireplace. We laid a few of these flues on the ground under the plank table, and shoved hot stones from the fire into them. Our feet were toasty and hearts were warm as we sat cheek-and-jowl on hay bales and savored Thanksgiving dinner. The net result of this first T-Day in the Woods was that everybody had such a life-changing experience that the die was cast and “Thanksgiving in the Woods” became an instant tradition. Now we routinely have guests from various parts of the country and, indeed, the world, who return to share a woodlot thanksgiving. The work to get this organized and set up, carried out, and cleaned up afterwards was sufficient that almost every year I would mutter to myself [and Shari] “I am never doing this again...” But every year the memories of years past overwhelms any feeling of just sitting in the house

and eating turkey on Thanksgiving Day so down to the stand of hemlocks we journey.

Over the years T-Day in the Woods has become an open invitation pot-luck affair. For some we are only a part of T-Day as a drop-in stop before their family dinner. Now some start T-day early in the morning down in our woods. A hardy group of mountain bikers show up for an early lap on our trails and finish with coffee with bagels. It is up to

each person to choose to invest themselves in the event as fits their own needs and find their own niche, whether making food, tending fires, moving bales of hay, making of an outhouse nearby, playing musical instruments, helping with clean-up and if it should turn to nasty rain, putting up tarps so we can remain somewhat dry, or simply watching the day go by under the hemlocks. People come with a daypack and we now start early in the morning serving mulled cider and clam/corn chowder. Things just flow along until there is a general moment about noon when Shari rings a bell, and we circle together, hold hands and sing the Shaker hymn “..’Tis a gift to be simple..” Thanksgiving under the hemlocks has evolved and still is changing as we age. Now the grandkids romp in the woods, the guitars and fiddles mix with drums and saxophones while we meet friends, old and new. A couple of years ago we topped out with about 180 visitors for the whole day. The overabundance of food seemed to be anything but in keeping with “’Tis a Gift to be Simple” Last year people were encouraged to bring their own “One Bowl” and except for deserts, we did simplify. Keep evolving. Music crowds the campfire as night takes over early under the hemlocks in late November. Someone now sets up sand candles in Mason jars spaced about 50-100 yards apart to guide people out of the woods as the day winds down.

So why did we buy this woodlot? What started out as securing a firewood supply has morphed into so many tangent activities that the original instinctive reason for owning a woodlot surely seems wiser than we knew. What now might look like great foresight may have simply been dumb luck based on primitive instincts. When we first bought the farm, one money-

based man said to me the woodlot and farm were a non-income producing investment and financial mistake. Not everything we value can be measured in dollars and cents. We have not monetized most of what the farm has meant. We have come to advocate that everyone should find some way to spend connection time with the big Nature in the woods. While we have a consulting forester, and work hard on Timber Stand Improvement cuts to fuel our clean-burning gasification boiler [we burn no oil], we have yet to consider a real timber harvest. That day may come, and possibly should be on the horizon. I am sure there is significant monetary value of the standing timber in the forest we care for, and we will harvest in due time. This leads me back to why we bought the farm in the first place--love of land for sure, but energy security was in the mix. Now, as the years roll by, the reasons we could not have foreseen in the fog of finding the down payment to own the woodlot are dominant: life on the farm and woodlot has become a defining interlocking identity. I can't imagine who we would be or what we would be like if it were not for the farm and forest.

It is almost time to start fire up the wood gasification boiler, send out the invitations to Thanksgiving in the Woods, mow the Hidley (and Gibbs and friends) cemetery where our ashes will be scattered, fuel up the pole saw and trim back the buckthorn around the hay fields, Charlie and Joe have totally cleaned up the twenty trees that were felled as part of the GOL training we hosted last spring. The tasks and projects that call for more time than we will ever have are all agreeable ways to avoid moving to a different retirement dream.

Dick Gibbs
Chair, Capital District Chapter



The Case For Wood Heat

Wood offers many advantages over other heating fuels. It is inexpensive, renewable, locally sourced in most areas of New York, safe to store and transport, and does not add carbon to the atmospheric carbon cycle (except what is added in processing). But it has its drawbacks, which must be taken into account and minimized.

Trees are called a renewable resource because forests can deliver relatively inexpensive fuel year after year—between half and one cord per acre—while at the same time being improved to encourage the growth of high-quality tree species, hold back the spread of invasive species, create optimal wildlife habitats, and decrease the likelihood of forest fires when properly managed. In most areas of New York State, wood is also a local resource. Responsible use of wood to heat buildings reduces our reliance on imported fossil fuels while strengthening our local economies. It also cuts down on transportation of fuels, which carries costs to our environment as well as our roads and bridges.

Another advantage cord wood has over many other fuels is that it can be stored for years without degradation nor any risk of harming the environment. It's also preferable to fossil fuels when it comes to adding new carbon into the atmosphere: the carbon released when wood is burned is carbon that is already in the carbon cycle, as opposed to fossil fuels, whose carbon was sequestered until the fuel was brought into production.

The main concern with wood combustion is particulate matter and carbon monoxide. These can be serious health hazards, but modern, high-quality units have significantly reduced emissions—and the technology is improving all the time. The biggest problems arise from outdated or poorly maintained wood stoves, open fireplaces, and outdoor wood boilers (OWB) or furnaces. Wood stoves made after 1991, when Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Phase II-certified wood stove standards went into effect, incorporate several technologies that improve the stoves' efficiencies and result in lower emissions. It's estimated, however, that more than 70% of wood stoves currently in operation in the United States were made before 1991. Some see that as a testament to their quality construction, but, more accurately, others see it as a significant source of air pollution. The EPA is working on developing new source performance standards (NSPS) for all wood heating equipment. But, again, they may not achieve much unless older, inefficient units are phased out.

Seasoned Wood

Outdoor wood boilers (OWBs) are undergoing improvements as well, and there are now voluntary standards that many manufacturers adhere to, but these units continue to be almost universally highly inefficient and significant polluters. The New York State Attorney General's Office published a report in 2005 that found that "OWBs may be among the dirtiest and least economical modes of heating." Note that not only do they emit high levels of dangerous particulates and smoke, but because they're so inefficient, they provide far less heat value for the wood than other types of heaters. They have become such a public health concern that many municipalities have banned them outright.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) issued regulations governing OWBs that took effect in 2011 because of these concerns. The new regulations set performance standards for all units sold in New York. Provisions for phasing out older units were cut from the final regulations. The New York State Department of Health also has some information on their web site concerning OWBs, including for residents considering purchasing one of these units, as well as information for anyone affected by a neighbor's OWB smoke.

Two-stage gasification wood-fired boilers, which maximize efficiency and minimize emissions by pumping air into a secondary burn chamber for a more complete combustion, are a much cleaner option, especially when coupled with secondary water storage tanks that minimize on-off cycling. These types of boilers can be found at prices competitive with OWBs, and have the added benefit of being able to be installed indoors or out. Wood-fired boilers with this type of technology, pellet stoves, and masonry heaters have the lowest emissions of the wood-burning appliances. EPA Phase II-certified wood stoves—which all units currently sold are required to be—are the next best. In the next couple of years, we expect to see even more advances in wood stove technology hitting the mainstream home-heating market, as well as tighter EPA standards.

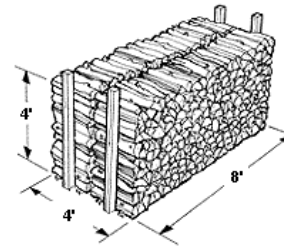
As more people turn to wood for heating their homes and businesses, what we burn and what we burn it in are critical to ensuring we get the most out of this valuable resource without negatively impacting our health and environment.

Credit: Guillermo Metz, Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County

Seasoning takes place when the moisture content in wood reaches equilibrium with the moisture in the surrounding air.

When wood is stacked outdoors with good air circulation in a spot that's dry, sunny and open for about six months it will be dry enough to support efficient combustion. Seasoned wood has a higher heating value than green wood. In general, because of its moisture content, a cord of green wood will weigh 70 to 100 percent more than seasoned wood.

The time of year and the size of the wood pieces influence the amount of time that wood takes to season. You can help the process by properly stacking and storing your pile of firewood. The best way is to store it outside, under cover and close to the house for easy access. It should be stacked on a supporting base -- such as cement blocks, pallets or wooden planks. This prevents the wood from drawing moisture from the ground, allows air to circulate around it, reduces insect infestation and cuts down on the amount of dirt that accumulates. End braces or stakes can be used to keep the woodpile from collapsing; they can be built to measure accurately a standard cord.



Species	Million Btu's per Cord
Hickory –	27.7
Ironwood –	27.1
Black Locust –	26.8
Beech –	24.0
Red Oak –	24.0
Sugar Maple –	24.0
Ash –	23.6
Birch –	20.2
Red Maple –	18.1
Hemlock -	15.9
White Pine -	14.3
Cottonwood –	13.5
Basswood –	13.5

Would You Like to be a Master Forest Owner?

Master Forest Owners (MFOs) are volunteers who have received training from Cornell University's Department of Natural Resources that complements their experience as forest owners. The purpose of the program is to have trained volunteers available to meet with forest owners in their woodlots to discuss forest owner objectives and how to find the assistance they need.

All MFOs are graduates of a 4-day training program, where they learn about sawtimber and wildlife management, forest economics, and ecology. The MFOs continue to receive information updates, attend refresher classes and maintain contact with natural resource managers from private, public, and academic organizations.

Training takes place at the Arnot Teaching and Research Forest in Van Etten, a 4,200-acre forest about 15 miles south of Cornell. "There's no cell phone reception, which is a good thing," quips Goff. Recruits don't need any distractions during their intense training schedule. Trainees arrive on a Wednesday afternoon. After checking in, they enjoy dinner, introductions and socializing before retiring to rustic cabins where they rest up for the busy days ahead.



Participants Learn To Use a Compass

Thursday through Saturday are packed with activities and information, starting with breakfast at 7:00 a.m., followed by indoor classes. Topics range from forest ecology and wildlife biology, to effectively communicating with landowners and managing real estate taxes. After lunch, trainees gather notebooks and other materials and head into the woods for fieldwork.

Outdoor lessons involve everything from identifying trees and estimating "stumpage" (timber) values, to finding and posting property boundaries. Trainees discuss the day's lessons at dinner and then have downtime before heading back for a 7:00 p.m. class. A visit to nearby Wagner Hardwoods sawmill (where trainees see how timber becomes lumber), an evening owl prowling, quiet fishing on one of Arnot's ponds, and other fun activities are program favorites.



Tree Identification

The program is advertised primarily through county Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) offices and NYFOA chapters. Applications are reviewed to determine the candidates' forest management experience, as well as how much time and energy each candidate is willing to devote as a volunteer. The cost to each volunteer is \$100, \$175 per couple. This helps defray the cost of lodging and board, as well as all handouts and supplies. Chapter members Dick and Shari Gibbs, Lisa Holt and Filomena Riganti were recently trained as "Master Forest Owners"

If you are interested in becoming a Master Forest Owner volunteer apply for one of 20 slots to attend the four-day program held each September. Applications can be downloaded from the website: <http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/mfo/>

Welcome New Members

The following individuals joined the Capital District Chapter in the past three months. Welcome all!

Thor Eriksen	Gilboa, NY
Cindy Gersterzubrick	Troy, NY
Martin Navojosky	Ballston Spa, NY
Filomena Riganti	East Nassau, NY
Mark Schwabe	South Burlington, Vt.

Woodswalk Calendar

Ties to the Land – Keeping Family Forests & Farms in the Family

Date: Saturday, October 19th
Registration deadline: Thursday, October 17th
Time: 9:00-4:30pm
Cost: \$40.00/\$10. Refreshments & lunch provided.
Location: 50 West High Street, Ballston Spa
Facilitator: Dr. Shorna Broussard Allred, Cornell University Cooperative Extension

This workshop on succession planning will focus on; maintaining family ties to the land from generation to generation and building awareness of key challenges facing family forest owners and farmers. Effective tools will be provided that families can use to decide the future of their land. This workshop will coach families to develop techniques and communications skills they need to address the tough issues in passing family lands along to the next generation.

Each family will receive a copy of the workbook and companion DVD, Ties to the Land, designed to help families focus their communications at home.

To register: Contact Cornell Cooperative Extension, Saratoga County. 50 West High St. Ballston Spa, NY 518-885-8995 and ask for Ellie. Sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Warren County and the Southeastern Chapter of NYFOA.

Woods Forum – Rensselaer Plateau

Date: Thursday November 14
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Location: Sand Lake Town Hall

At the woods forum woodland owners exchange ideas and experiences on management of forest land. This is not a lecture type event but rather an opportunity to learn from others, including natural resource professionals who will be in attendance. Call Dick Gibbs for more information – 283-0155

2013 Steering Committee Meeting Schedule:

October 8th – 6:30 p.m.

Note: Chapter members are encouraged to join the steering committee. Meetings are held every three months at the Colonie Library

Steering Committee

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Fearsome Critter

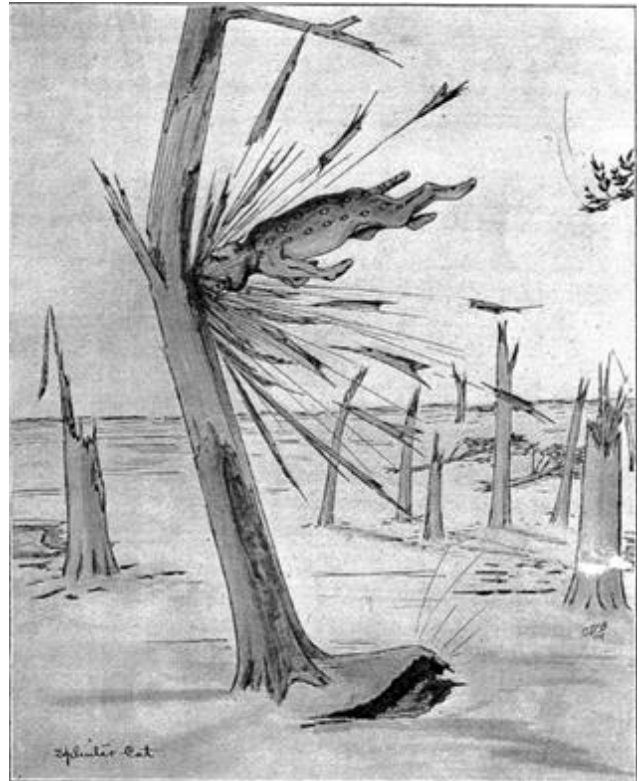
Another Puzzle to Solve

Clues:

1. How often do we see big trees that have been snapped off, split, or shattered? Such breakage is frequently erroneously attributed to lightning, high winds, or snow and ice. These natural factors do cause some of this damage, but the experienced woodland owner knows well that the bulk of it results from the moronic activities of this nocturnal beast.

2. This powerful feline, harmless to mankind, is found in nearly all the timbered regions of North America. Like many of the cat tribes, this one is strictly a night traveler and hence is rarely observed. But often heard, and the abundance of its work is ample evidence of his existence, numbers and activity.

3. A heavy, chunky body with a short wheelbase, mounted on tremendously powerful legs, with the countenance in a wedge-shaped nose formed of unusually dense bone, this critter goes a-roaming in search of hollow trees, since bees, honey and coons are its favorite diet. He climbs a tree, guns-himself at it with terrific force. The bony nasal process splinters and shatters the stem, sometimes snapping it clean off. If the critter finds food in the ruptured trunk, he is temporarily appeased. If not, he goes immediately for another tree. And right there is the big trouble. This critter doesn't use any judgment in selecting trees, it just smashes one after another until it gets a meal. Unlike more intelligent parties, it doesn't seem to be able to learn the outward signs of a bee-tree or coon-tree.



The _____ in Action

What it's Name?

Answer:

From: Fearsome Critters, by Henry H. Tryon •
Illustrated by Margaret R. Tryon 1939

The Splinter Cat
Nasusossificatus arbordemolievus

Join NYFOA

Help Support Sustainable Forestry

The New York Forest Owners Association is a not-for-profit organization established to encourage sustainable forestry practices and sound management of privately owned woodlands. Members include woodland owners and all others who care about the future of New York's trees and forests. Please consider joining because your support helps make a difference. Regular annual dues are just \$30.00 for an individual or \$35.00 for a family.

Contact: NYFOA, P.O. Box 541, Lima, New York 14485 1-800-836-3566 www.nyfoa.org
