



Restore New York  
**WOODLANDS**

— A NYFOA Initiative —

**Woodswalk Planning  
Information for  
NYFOA Chapters**



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## What is RNYW?

In conjunction with the celebration of the New York Forest Owners Association's (NYFOA) 50 years of service to New York's woodland owners, and in response to the critical challenges facing our forests over the next 50 years, NYFOA launched the **Restore New York Woodlands (RNYW)** initiative in 2013. The thrust of the campaign is to identify and bring attention to the widespread lack of regeneration in NY's forests, and to explore strategies for encouraging sustainable regeneration. NYFOA's main objective is to celebrate the many benefits society derives from forests, while helping people understand there are threats to the future forest.

The target audience for **RNYW** woodswalks includes forest owners who are not members of NYFOA, members of other organizations with an interest in environmental issues (wildlife, outdoor recreation, etc.), as well as the general public. Our objective is not to "preach to the choir", but to engage and educate woodland stakeholders about the regeneration problem and other forest health issues, and to address anticipated concerns about the remedies (deer control, herbicides, intensive silvaculture).

Once Chapters have established dates and locations for their woodswalks, the information can be posted on the NYFOA website, by submitting the registration form found on [this site](http://form.jotform.us/form/30434257142143) (<http://form.jotform.us/form/30434257142143>). Once your woodswalk is registered, the **RNYW** committee will post your woodswalk on the website and on the **RNYW** Facebook page.



## Tips for Selecting a Good Site For Regeneration Woodswalks

- A typical second-growth forest, aged 75 – 125 years.
- A good representation of desirable hardwood species in the canopy.
- The absence of desirable hardwood seedlings or saplings in at least part of the stand.
- The presence of hardwood seedlings that have been heavily browsed by deer.
- The presence of interfering vegetation such as diseased beech, beech brush, hay-scented fern, striped maple, invasive plants, etc.
- Satisfactory logistical characteristics, such as proximity to population centers, adequate parking, availability of rest room facilities, etc.

In addition to the above minimum characteristics, the following would be desirable.

- The opportunity to see examples of unsuccessful and successful regeneration during the same event, on either the same property or nearby properties.
- A broad diversity of tree species if tree identification will be a part of the event.



## RNYW Woodswalk Leader Guide

In addition to forest owners, the intended audience includes the general public and members of organizations with an interest in natural resources and the environment

### Objectives:

- to engage the general public and members of organizations who have an interest in natural resources and the environment
- to celebrate the multitude of benefits to the environment and society from trees and woodlands
- to help people understand the many threats to woodland health and sustainability
- to secure understanding and support for solutions to forest health problems

### Agenda

- **Welcome** participants
- **Review** objectives for RNYW
- **Review** history of the stand
- **Discuss** owner's objectives for the stand
- **Begin** woods walk: cover a route selected to maximize exposure to the variety of tree species on the property
- **Discuss** tree identification and any noteworthy characteristics of the stand
- **Involve** children
- When the group is assembled at the primary stand venue, **discuss** the following: (these ideas are expanded upon in "**Supplement to the "Leader's Guide"**" on page 7. Supplement to the "Leader's Guide"
  1. **the many benefits from trees and woodlands:** water retention & purification, oxygen generation, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, forest products, recreation, tourism, and quality of life. *Make this interactive, asking participants, including youth, to provide input.*
  2. **the history of our second growth woodlands:** from 15% forest cover in 1900, to 65% today; few deer in 1900, to 5 times carrying capacity in 1970's; destruction of understory by deer; replacement of understory by "interfering vegetation".
  3. **the condition of the surroundings:** note mature trees will be absent in another 50 years or so; point out diseased beech if present, explain root suckering; note species of interfering vegetation present and how they prevent germination of desirable tree seeds or seedling development; note absence of hardwood regeneration and browsed seedlings if present. *Ask the question: "What will this stand look like in 50 years?", and "Can you think of any natural phenomena that might reverse the impending decline and elimination of this stand?"*



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4. **Discuss** consequences of status quo and ask the question “Should we care?”. *Note studies done by Cornell and The Nature Conservancy concluded that much of New York woodland stands lack adequate regeneration to be sustainable.*
5. Much of New York woodlands are privately owned and the owners will need **public awareness and support** to solve the regeneration problem. *Elements of the solution must include:*
  - better control of deer population until regeneration is established
  - judicious use of herbicides to control interfering vegetation
  - thinning & harvesting practices that will admit sufficient light to establish regeneration
- **Take** questions, **distribute** handouts, **invite everyone** to join **NYFOA**, **offer** MFO visits.

**Note:** A link to a YouTube seminar on leading RNYW woodswalks can be found [here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G99csJgiE10) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G99csJgiE10>).



## Supplement to the “Leader’s Guide”

### *Why do we care?*

#### **Woodlands provide indispensable ecosystem services to the planet.**

- root systems of trees hold the soil, preventing erosion and the siltation of downstream watercourses and estuaries
- roots also keep soils porous, increasing water retention and reducing flooding.
- two thirds of our clean water supply originates from precipitation filtered through wooded landscapes
- a single mature tree can absorb (sequester) 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year: enough to meet the needs of two human beings
- woodlands contribute to the varied habitat required by NY’s wildlife
- woodlands are an increasingly important source for renewable energy

#### **Woodlands provide significant economic benefits to New York**

- forest products industry employs 67,000 people with a payroll in the billions
- forest products industry contributes billions to New York’s gross annual product
- woodlands are the backdrop of a multi-billion dollar NYS tourism industry
- woodlands naturally minimize water filtration costs to metropolitan areas such as NYC

#### **Woodlands contribute to the quality of life for many residents of the state.**

- Recreational opportunities available on NY’s woodlands (private and public) provide a multitude of benefits (exercise, fresh air, opportunities to observe and experience the interdependence and dynamics of natural systems).

### *Now, a little history..*

#### **Human expansion, settlement and utilization**

When European settlers first reached America, approximately 90% of the land area in the northeast was forested, and the forests provided the raw materials to establish and build communities for the expanding population. After nearly three centuries of development, agriculture, logging, industrialization and residential construction, the forest cover in New York State had been reduced to about 15% by 1900. It was at about this time, actually in the late 1800’s, widespread abandonment of agricultural land began. That abandonment continued through the mid 1900’s. As a result, since then forest cover has steadily increased to about 65% of New York’s land area today. Of that, nearly eighty percent of the NYS woodland is privately owned by approximately 600,000 people. **So, why is there concern for regeneration if so much of NY’s landscape is forested?**



The concern about the condition of and the future health of NY's woodlands starts with the realization that even though about 65% of NYS landscape is wooded, according to a 2009 survey by Cornell University and a 2010 study by The Nature Conservancy, most of New York's forestland is not producing viable regeneration for future, diverse, healthy woodlands.

## ***Problem #1: White-tailed Deer***

The healthy, sustainable carrying capacity of a forested landscape for deer varies around the state; but is generally between 5-15 deer per square mile. That said, prior to European settlement, the deer population was likely balanced and stabilized by subsistence hunting, predation by predators and natural winter "kill".

As human populations grew and spread, agricultural development and subsistence hunting pressures increased, and essentially removed both deer and their predators from the landscape in most of New York by 1900.

Large-scale abandonment farmland through the 1st half of the 1900's led to the second-growth woodlands dominating NY's landscape today. As of, about 100 years ago, tree seedlings and saplings (the favorite food for deer) started to emerge, and in the absence of natural predators, and very limited hunting, the inevitable happened: the return of deer populations to their former range. Their habitat requirements were being met there, so they re-populated their former range. However, their former predators did not.

Consequently, by the 1950's, deer populations had not only recovered across the landscape, they also exploded to levels as high as 50 per square mile in some areas, far exceeding the carrying capacity of the forest. The ecological consequences to the forest, and the deer themselves, were not understood at the time. Furthermore, the state game regulating agencies felt pressured to accommodate the desires of hunters, who wanted to see a lot of deer in the woods. As a result, the deer populations continued to grow.

By the 1970's, forest owners, foresters, academics, the wood products industry, state regulators and the US Forest Service had become aware of the devastating effect excessive deer populations were having on woodlands in Eastern States. Starving deer had consumed most of vegetation they could reach, including the seedlings and small saplings of desirable tree species. The desirable regeneration was replaced by shade-tolerant species which are unpalatable to deer. Those plants include beech, striped maple, hay-scented fern, and several invasive species. Often referred to as "interfering vegetation", they shade out more desirable tree species, thus limiting diversity.



## ***Problem #2: Interfering vegetation***

Unfortunately, due to the excessive white-tailed deer population, interfering vegetation is now so well-established in many woodlands that the germination and healthy development of desirable tree seedlings is limited, and sometimes prevented. And, despite the efforts of state regulators to manage the deer population with woodland health in mind, regeneration problems persist in most areas of NY State.

## ***Problem #3: Unsustainable tree-cutting (harvesting) practices***

Many second-growth forests have matured and have undergone harvesting activity.

Unfortunately, some harvests have employed unsustainable harvest practices such as "diameter-limit cutting", or the removal of all trees over a certain size. This is one form of "high grading" which, although it may maximize immediate financial gain, may remove genetically superior seed trees from the forest, making regeneration difficult or impossible.

The challenge is to educate the forest owner about the benefits of accepting less immediate income in exchange for a larger and steadier stream of income from the forest over time.

When a landowner embraces that idea, and works with a professional forester, everyone benefits: the landowner, the forest industry, and most importantly the woodland.

## ***Solutions are available, and are being considered***

Cornell, Syracuse and Penn State Universities, as well as the DEC and US Forest Service have been researching these problems and testing solutions for 30 years. Elements of the solution include:

- control of the local deer population
- control of interfering and invasive vegetation, in many cases, with the purposeful, judicious use of herbicides. (see [The Great Glyphosate Debate](http://northernwoodlands.org/articles/article/the-great-glyphosate-debate) at <http://northernwoodlands.org/articles/article/the-great-glyphosate-debate>)
- Employment of silvicultural practices to provide sunlight necessary for the development of desirable tree species

However the window of opportunity to restore the viability of NY woodlands is closing.



## **What do we mean by the window of opportunity is closing?**

Many of the trees in our current woodlands will have reached maturity within the next 50 years. If regeneration is not accomplished before the vigorous, seed trees are gone, many of the forest benefits we currently enjoy, will not be available to future generations. Through its RNYW initiative, NYFOA is working to educate woodland owners about long-term woodland viability and sustainability. But, NYFOA is not just reaching out to woodland owners. NYFOA is seeking alliances with other stakeholder organizations and is prepared to engage the general public. The intention is to increase awareness of NY woodland health: past, present and most importantly, the future.



## Inviting Stakeholders to RNYW woodswalks

Chapters are encouraged to contact stakeholder groups and invite their participation just as soon as locations and dates for woodswalks are established. Those organizations plan their own activities well in advance and early contact will minimize calendar conflicts. Consider sharing a Guest Editorial (sample provided on page 12) with stakeholder groups in advance of printing of their publications. The Guest Editorial provides a good summary of the theme of the woodswalks.

Don't forget to invite elected officials like State Senators and Assemblypersons, and County Legislators who Chair committees dealing with natural resources.

If a stakeholder organization expresses an interest in the **RNYW** campaign, but cannot attend a woodswalk because of a schedule conflict, report this to the **RNYW** committee. We may be able to arrange for a MFO to attend an event sponsored by the stakeholder group and present the **RNYW** story to their membership on their own turf.



## Publicity for RNYW: Guest Editorials

A version of the following guest editorial was published in several NY newspapers in 2013. Chapter presidents may wish to submit a version of it to local newspapers in advance of planned woodwalks.

### **New York's Forests – An Endangered Species?**

Recent studies by Cornell University and The Nature Conservancy have concluded that up to seventy percent of our state's forestland is not regenerating itself. Since our current second-growth forests are entering the last quarter of their life cycle, this is a problem that should concern every New Yorker.

Our forests provide critical services to the ecosystem, including the purification and holding of fresh water and the prevention of soil erosion. A single mature tree can absorb and sequester 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year and produce enough oxygen to meet the needs of two people. Forests provide varied habitat for countless species of wildlife, and recreational opportunities and aesthetic values that contribute greatly to our quality of life. Forests also provide important economic benefits to the state. The forest products industry employs more than 60,000 people and contributes almost nine billion dollars per year to the state's gross annual product. Forests cover 65% of our state; losing them would be unimaginable.

Most of our current forests developed as farmland were abandoned starting in the late 1800's. During the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the absence of natural predators, white tailed deer populations exploded to levels far exceeding the carrying capacity of the forest. In many woodlands the deer consumed the entire understory of the forest, including seedlings and saplings of desirable tree species. In some cases, the natural understory has been replaced by undesirable vegetation not eaten by deer, and this vegetation is so well established that it prevents the germination of tree seeds and the establishment of viable tree seedlings.

Aggressive management action will be required to address this problem before the seed trees are gone. Deer populations will have to be significantly reduced in some areas, or the deer will have to be fenced out of woodlands where forest regeneration is being attempted, an expensive alternative. Broad use of EPA approved forest herbicides will be necessary to control interfering vegetation. Appropriate silviculture practices, including heavy thinning of the existing forest may be required to admit the sunlight necessary to establish the future forest. Eighty percent of New York's forestland is privately owned, and forest owners will need the public's understanding of the measures necessary to establish the next forest, and will need cost-share assistance from established state and federal programs in order to succeed.

In conjunction with our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) announced the "Restore New York Woodlands" (RNYW) campaign to engage and educate other

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[www.NYFOA.org](http://www.NYFOA.org)

[RestoringNewYorksWoodlands@gmail.com](mailto:RestoringNewYorksWoodlands@gmail.com)

[Like us on Facebook at Restore New York Woodlands](#)



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forest stakeholder organizations and the general public about the issue and solutions. NYFOA's ten regional Chapters will host public woodswalks in May and throughout the year to celebrate the many benefits of our forests and discuss the threats they face. Go to our website at [www.NYFOA.org](http://www.NYFOA.org) to find more information about the forest regeneration problem and the locations of woodswalks planned in our area.



## Press Releases: The plan and samples

Chapters can submit press releases to local media with details of the woodswalks planned within their chapter area. Three sample press releases follow, or chapters may compose their own. Don't forget your local Pennysaver newspapers, calendar of local events, radio stations, etc.,

### Sample press release is for use in local newspapers.

#### PUBLIC INVITED FOR A WALK IN THE WOODS

The .....Chapter of the New York Forest Owners Association is inviting the public to join them for an informative and fun walk in a local woodlot. The walk will be led by Master Forest Owner Volunteers affiliated with Cornell Cooperative Extension and will include instruction on tree identification and contests for children. The important contributions of forests to air and water quality will be discussed, as well as their impact on the state's economy. Participants will also hear about the many threats facing the future forest, including invasive plants and insects, climate change, destruction of the young forest by excessive deer populations in some areas, and the degradation that can result from unsustainable harvesting practices. The New York Forest Owners Association is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by launching the "Restore New York Woodlands" campaign. The **RNYW** campaign includes many initiatives to address the threats to our future forest.

The .....Chapter woodswalk will be held on.....at .....  
An attendance is free, but please give us a call so we can plan for parking, guides, etc.  
Call.....

### Sample short press release for use in Pennysavers or in "community calendar" listings of major newspapers.

#### PUBLIC INVITED FOR A WALK IN THE WOODS

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Attendance is free, but please give us a call so we can plan for parking, guides, etc.  
Call.....  
Details: Date, time, location, directions, etc.



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**Second, sample short press release for use in Pennysavers or in “community calendar” listings of major newspapers.**

### TAKE A HIKE !

Join the .....Chapter of the New York Forest Owners Association for an informative and fun walk in the woods. Help us celebrate our 50 years of service, promoting healthy, sustainable New York forests. Learn about the important ecological and economic benefits our forests provide. Participate in a tree identification contest (prizes for kids). Hear about the serious challenges facing our forests and what is being done to assure their future. Attendance is free, but let us know you are coming so we can plan for parking, guides, etc. Call.....

Details: Date, time, location, directions, etc.



## Sample planning timeline for woodswalk organizers

Time remaining:	To be accomplished:	Who is responsible?
<b>6 months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select a location and date; including a rain date</li> <li>• Walk the woodlot looking for competing vegetation, deer browsing and other impediments to regeneration</li> <li>• Take notes, draw a map, flag areas that you wish to highlight and identify two or three objectives that you hope to accomplish with the woods walk participants</li> <li>• If you wish to have a demonstration area--portable band mill, horse logging, woodcraft, etc., begin discussing needs and expectations ASAP</li> </ul>	Local woods walk team Landowner/Host, Chapter <b>RNYW</b> Liaisons MFO Volunteer
<b>3 months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare and gather informational materials. For example, laminated signs for various stations, handouts, etc.</li> <li>• Procure additional literature through, NYFOA, CCE or other sources.</li> <li>• Write (or request) promotional article for local newspaper, Pennysaver, CCE newsletter(s) NYFOA NYFOA newsletter, <b>The New York Forest Owner</b> and the NYFOA website.</li> <li>• Invite elected officials, Planning Board members, DEC forester, high school biology teachers, etc. to attend and/or participate</li> </ul>	Local woodswalk team (see <b>RNYW</b> material at <a href="http://www.nyfoa.org">www.nyfoa.org</a> )



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<b>2 months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check the trails and improve as necessary--remove branches, look for hazards such as dead or leaning trees, mud holes, etc.</li> <li>• Determine how to mark trails--arrows, tape, paint and secure needed materials</li> <li>• Plan ahead for parking and space for demonstrators to set up and work</li> </ul>	Local woods walk team and demonstrator
<b>1 month</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit promotional articles for publication in local newspaper and Pennysaver</li> <li>• Check trails again for safety issues. Grade, fill or spread chips as needed</li> <li>• Prepare signs to guide participants to the woodlot</li> <li>• Construct supports or make stakes for signs</li> </ul>	Local woods walk team (see <b>RNYW</b> material at <a href="http://www.nyfoa.org">www.nyfoa.org</a> )
<b>1 week</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check (again) and mark trails</li> </ul>	Local woodswalk team
<b>1 day</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post interpretive materials at various stations</li> <li>• Mark demonstration area with tape for safety purposes</li> </ul>	Local woodswalk team or demonstrator (if applicable)
<b>2 hours</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put up signs directing visitors to woodlot</li> <li>• Set up demonstration area (if applicable)</li> </ul>	Local woodswalk team and/or demonstration personnel (if applicable)

Logistics (see [www.nyfoa.org](http://www.nyfoa.org) for more helpful tips):

- Safety
- Parking
- Signage
- Refreshments
- Bathroom facility availability
- Family friendly activities
- Documentation (photos, registration of participants, requests for feedback ...online and hardcopy)
- Evaluations

If possible, post and publicize the availability of bathroom facilities, refreshments and parking; and remind attendees to dress appropriately.



## Background materials: NYFOA articles, webinars, other publications

Much has been written about the condition of NYS forests and forest regeneration. Some articles have been featured in the **Forest Owner Magazine** (a publication of the NYFOA); and those articles provide a balanced overview of the scope and significance of regeneration challenges in NYS and of practical solutions to address the problem(s) associated with regeneration.

### RNYW Articles in the Forest Owner Magazine

Tools to Manage Interfering Plants. 2012 NYFO. March/April

The economic potential unlocked. 2012. NYFO. July/August

Anticipating the next forest. 2012. NYFO. September/October (and Maple News)

The forest's future is our legacy. 2012. NYFO. September/October

President's column. 2012. NYFO. September/October

Member profile: Walter and Theresa Kersch. 2012. NYFO. September/October

Restoring NY's Woodlands: A NYFOA Initiative. 2012. NYFO. November/December

Regenerating your forest: keys to success (deer emphasis). 2012. NYFO. November/December (and Maple News)

Member profile: Jerry Michael. 2012. NYFO. November/December

**Webinars** (If you have not viewed webinars in the past, you may have to register. There is no expense).

**Penn State Webinars:** <http://extension.psu.edu/private-forests/tools-resources/webinars>

**Cornell Webinars:** <http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/forestconnect>". There are many valuable webinars listed. A few of particular interest:

Managing for the next forest. October 2012

Forest Vegetation Management Using Herbicides February 2012

Rehabilitating a Cutover Stand April 2009

### Other Publications

Northeastern Forest Regeneration Handbook

[http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/info/pubs/management/forest\\_regn\\_hndbk06.pdf](http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/info/pubs/management/forest_regn_hndbk06.pdf)

Forest Regeneration in New York State. 2010 Study

[http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newyork/placesweprotect/easternnewyork/final\\_nys\\_regen\\_091410\\_2.pdf](http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newyork/placesweprotect/easternnewyork/final_nys_regen_091410_2.pdf)

Regenerating Hardwood Forests: Managing Competing Plants, Deer & Light.

<http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/uh181.pdf>

Foresters' perception of forest regeneration and possible barriers to regeneration in New York State <http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/hdru/pubs/HDRUReport10-2.pdf>



## **RNYW woodswalk exit survey (Sample)**

How did you learn about this woodswalk?

Had you been familiar with RNYW prior to attending this woodswalk?

Identify one thing you learned today about:

Regeneration?

Deer density and forest regeneration?

Interfering vegetation control?

Tree-cutting methods?

List/name any evidence of desirable forest regeneration occurring in this woodlot?

Describe the conditions you observed that might prevent desirable forest regeneration.

If you are a woodlot owner, are you likely to ask for a free MFO-volunteer visit to your woodlot?

Please share any comments you might offer to help us provide future programs.

Based on what you learned today, please list any actions you (as a woodlot owner, or not...) are likely to take in the future, to promote woodland sustainability.



## What about liability?

The general liability coverage carried by NYFOA protects NYFOA and its members during NYFOA-sponsored events, such as the Restore New York Woodlands initiative. Though there is general liability coverage for the RNYW initiative, all hosts of RNYW woodswalks are encouraged to minimize risk by taking common-sense precautions such as:

- disallowing people from climbing trees
- limiting water crossings
- avoiding exposing participants to unnecessary hazards, such as trails that need clearing (ground and eye-level), precipices, log piles, etc.
- selecting sensible refreshments and carefully considering how to handle and dispense hot foods
- avoiding the use of motorized vehicles, in general and, to transport event participants between locations

The Hunter Agency, NYFOA's insurance carrier, suggests every property owner who participates in the RNYW events should check with their private property insurance carrier to inquire whether, and how, their insurance may offer additional protection.

For more information see the NYFOA chapter manual online at [www.nyfoa.org](http://www.nyfoa.org).