



Fall/Winter Newsletter 2020/21

GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello to all of you on an unusually warm day in November. Today, we would have hosted the annual Potluck at the Woodland Lodge, which was canceled due to the continued presence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Believe me when I say, I *miss* you all! I miss the opportunity to gather and break bread together, to find out how your families are doing, and to hear what you have been up to in the woods. Believe me, I will never take such conversations for granted again.

Thankfully, I have had the opportunity to interact with some of you – a handful of socially distant woods walks have been breaths of fresh air, and hearing about your connections and commitments to the land are always inspiring. Additionally, the annual Erie and Crawford Gives Days campaigns in August were not only a wonderful success and extremely energizing to this work, but the phone campaign became an unexpected joy to check in with you in the midst of the pandemic. Thank you for continuing to support the FSF on those important days.

And now, we at the Foundation for Sustainable Forests want to take the opportunity to check in with you again. How are you? Perhaps you are spending more time in the woods to recharge, reboot and temporarily escape the challenging news headlines and the rising concerns around Covid-19? One question I have been pondering is: during the pandemic, how has the significance of your woodlands shifted for you and your family, if at all? I would love to hear your thoughts on this, and I invite any

and all of your updates – by mail, phone, email, social media, or socially distanced woods walks- it would be wonderful to hear from you.

In the meantime, the hard work continues. The importance of conserving forested land before it is developed or damaged is more urgent and important than ever. In the absence of in-person events, we have focused more intensely on organizational capacity-building and land conservation efforts. Thankfully, that work received a large boost last month with the news that the FSF will receive a large grant to conserve 440 acres in the Caldwell Creek Watershed via the PA DCNR's Community Conservation Partnerships Program. Additional land conservation projects continue to move forward, maintaining focus on the FSF's core mission.

In a recent virtual presentation hosted by WeConserve-PA, one quote truly resonated once I swapped out “fish” for “forests” to get:

“What we are doing to our forests, we are doing to ourselves.”

Depending on your leanings, you could view this in a negative or a positive light, and today I choose to see it positively. Every conserved acre and every stewardship effort to restore and preserve healthy ecosystems is an investment in our community's healthy future. Thank you for supporting the FSF in that investment – particularly in this most unusual year.

Annie Maloney



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Erie & Crawford Gives 2020



Thank you for being the Foundation's "heartwood"!

Together, your 144 gifts on Erie & Crawford Gives Days in August raised a total of \$37,775—including matching donations from the Erie Community Foundation, Crawford Heritage Community Foundation, and the Corry Community Foundation. In a year where the FSF has focused heavily on thoughtful capacity-building and growth, thank you for creating metaphorical “growth rings” through your support for the FSF as it works towards a strong and resilient future!



Loving the Land —Landowners Tell Their Stories

Contributed by Susan Murawski on behalf of the Presque Isle Audubon Society, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the enjoyment and benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity in northwestern Pennsylvania.

Presque Isle Audubon Society (PIAS) in Erie owns a beautiful 51-acre forested property in Crawford County, the Laura Olsen Memorial Sanctuary (LOMS). It is named for a PIAS member who enthusiastically supported its acquisition, but sadly died just a few months after the land was bought due to injuries suffered during a robbery.

Purchased in 1968 for only \$5,000, LOMS includes forested ravines, a wetland on Little Federal Run, and a former farm field becoming a woodland. Early on in our ownership a short trail was built and a few shrubs planted, but the property remained mostly untouched and unused except for a few hikers. We did have it surveyed in 1997 by Biological Consultant Karlin Marsh. In her Forest Stewardship Plan, she spoke highly of the aesthetic qualities of the property, noting the beauty of evergreen hemlocks, sculpted gray-barked beech trees and imposing large old red oaks. She also wrote that, "Any timbering of the property will decrease its aesthetic value, by removal of large specimen trees which possess aesthetic attributes...and by the littering of the forest floor with the large tops or canopies of the harvested material."

We've all seen poorly logged woodlands left with trees smaller than 4 inches in diameter that look like elongated pencils. Or forests with deep log skidding roads that turn into creeks when it rains. But, thankfully times have changed, and managing a woodland now can leave it still attractive, plus more diverse, vibrant and a better home for wildlife.

The Board of PIAS found this out when we met Executive Director Annie Maloney and forester Guy Dunkle of Foundation for Sustainable Forests (FSF) in July 2017. They explained their philosophy of forest management, and asked us to partner with them in a possible project with the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation's Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program. Sarah Sargent of PA Audubon had accompanied them to this meeting. Sarah strongly encouraged this partnership, noting that FSF could walk our property and suggest improvements to it that would attract more breeding songbirds. Being bird lovers, this sounded good to us, so the Board approved. The NFWF Stewardship Program project didn't pan out, but we still wanted FSF to look over our property and present their suggestions to improve LOMS for the birds.

Guy submitted a written management proposal for LOMS to our Board in January 2018. He suggested two primary opportunities for improving the ecosystem: control invasive species by careful application of herbicides, and develop new age classes of trees through careful timber harvesting. Herbicide could be applied judiciously with backpack sprayers to significantly reduce the numbers of multiflora rose, Japanese barberry and bush honeysuckle. Growing spaces for native species would be created once these invasives were gone. A "worst-first" thinning of diseased ash trees, cut by foresters who were trained in Audubon Forestry for the Birds programs, would introduce sunlight to the forest floor. Log skidding would be done by horses, not machinery. The Board discussed his ideas for several months, as we had lots of concerns, and invited FSF to attend our September 2018 Board meeting. We bombarded them with questions. How many trees would be cut? Could we list certain beloved trees as off-limit to cutting? How would we keep ATVs off the property once there was an access road? What is the cost of spraying invasive species? Was the herbicide safe? Wouldn't the forest floor be ruined by horses? How would the property look after the spraying and tree cutting? Guy and Annie patiently answered our questions, and after more discussion at the November Board meeting, we voted in favor of accepting their proposals.

We signed a memorandum of understanding with FSF in January 2019. But the weather that year was not conducive to tree-cutting; the ground never dried out enough to allow horses to be able to come in without damaging the forest floor. That delay worked to our benefit, as some members of PIAS

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Susan Murawski is President of Presque Isle Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society

A Blast from the Past

We wish that we could have hosted the annual Fall Potluck in 2020, but for everyone's safety we had to cancel due to Covid-19.

Until it is safe to gather again, please enjoy these photos from past years!



Stewardship at Laura Olsen Memorial Sanctuary

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had misgivings about this project. At our February 2020 program for all members, Annie and Guy explained how their philosophy of sustainable forestry fosters native plants, increases tree age and species diversity, and improves the overall health of our region's forests. The members responded enthusiastically to their presentation and expressed comfort in having the Sanctuary in such capable hands.

Finally, in early 2020, diseased ash trees were cut and removed, and in the spring months invasive plants were sprayed. I was leery about visiting the property afterwards, as FSF had warned us that LOMS would look "changed." In late July I decided it was my duty to check it out, however reluctant I may be. Walking in, I was simultaneously pleased and relieved. Stumps were here and there, but not many. I didn't see any deep skid marks. The wood thrush and scarlet tanager were still singing. It really didn't look changed in any major way. The biggest difference was the new gravel road leading a bit into the woods.

Now we're looking forward to 2021, to see how the

birds respond to these changes. Over time, we're expecting LOMS to be a demonstration site, with tours led by FSF, as they show other woodland owners how a managed forest can be beautiful, healthy, and of course, sustainable.



Guy Dunkle addresses a student group from Mercyhurst College during a "worst-first" thinning in the Laura Olsen Memorial Sanctuary, February 2020



Our Woods & Waters Film Series is going virtual in 2021



Join us online for this live stream event
and enjoy a selection of conservation-minded and engaging films

Friday, January 15 & Friday, February 12

More details to follow at foundationforsustainableforests.org/events
or facebook.com/sustainableforests



PA DCNR Awards Grant Funds to the FSF for Caldwell Creek Watershed Conservation Project—Phase II

In October, the FSF received word from Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCNR) that it is being awarded \$450,000 towards the conservation in perpetuity of 440 acres of forested land surrounding Caldwell Creek, Warren County. These acres are comprised of four adjacent parcels, and include matching land donations. They include frontage on Caldwell Creek, along the catch-and-release public

access part of this trout stream.

This award, granted by the DCNR's Community Conservation Partnerships Program is the next phase of the FSF's Caldwell Creek Watershed Conservation Project, which successfully conserved 540 acres of forest in the watershed last year.

The FSF is extremely grateful for PA's Keystone Fund, which supports this important work, and does

not take it for granted that these funds can be proposed for reallocation in the state legislature when there are budget shortfalls in other areas. **If you value the conservation efforts that these funds support, please let your State Representatives in the General Assembly know, and soon!**

You can find your Legislator at:
<https://www.legis.state.pa.us>



A view of the Caldwell Creek Valley from the edge of a 150-acre forest that will be conserved in perpetuity along with three other parcels as a result of this grant. Part of the landscape in the distance is currently protected by the FSF, thanks to DCNR support in of the Caldwell Creek Watershed Conservation Project in 2019.

If Not Now. . . ?

Contributed by Bob Slagter, Board of Directors

Thanks to all of you who have made our recent fundraising efforts such a success. With your help, FSF has moved from the start-up phase to growth mode and we now conserve and manage over 1700 acres of forest.

We have learned a lot in the past 16 years and have tried to share much of that learning with you, our members. For example, the as we protect more forest land we expand our capacity to do even more good work. What that means is that during our critical period of organizational growth, when you work with FSF to protect forest land in perpetuity you are also securing the future of the organization. We have come a long way but we need to continue to grow, and meanwhile the need for working forest conservation has not diminished!

In a nutshell, you our members hold the key to continued success in forest conservation! After all, you got us this far and we know how much you care about your forests. While we will continue to pursue funding sources such as grants, the reality is that YOU will be the greatest influence on this organization. This simple formula can be summed up , I think, by my personal example:

I was putting together my family's Estate Plan and my wife asked "who are we leaving the land to?" We had about 60 acres in Warren County that is a big part of our lives. We knew that although my kids and grandkids love visits and outings to the land, they in no way want to carry on my devotion to stewardship when I am gone. Working with FSF, we designed a way for me to remain active on the property and for the FSF to oversee management of the property in perpetuity. I do not believe I could have found a better match for my desires or that many of the actions since then could have been done with anyone but FSF. What is important to note about the decision my wife and I made is the timing.

Like most landowners, at first we thought of conserving the property "upon our death" or some distant time in the future. But, we realized that there is no better time than the present to begin a process of good forest management. By donating to FSF during our lives, we have been able to participate in, and witness all of the

wonderful projects taking place on the land that we love. Under FSF ownership our forest land has been transformed, and we're very glad that we didn't wait.

How do you find if your Legacy Plan works best with FSF involved sooner rather than later? We'd like to talk with members who have expressed an interest in conservation of their land. FSF can work with you in a wide variety of ways, to help you and your land gain more by involving the expertise and capabilities of FSF now. Of course, conserving land during your life time may involve tax benefits, but most importantly it provided my wife and I with peace of mind and excitement as we watch management implemented on the ground rather than just dream about the possibilities. As we talk about the future of The Foundation, we reflect on people who brought us here. We realize that to continue growing, the FSF needs to offer landowners a clear opportunity, just as they did for my family. A clear opportunity is one that is tailored for your individual needs and that brings the greatest benefit to you and your land, sooner rather than later. So, if you have expressed interest in working with FSF and your phone rings this fall, we hope you'll invite us to have a conversation about the future of your forest, and maybe even take a walk together for a discussion that might leave you with the same thought that my wife and I had: "If not now, when?"

Thanks so much for all you have done to promote healthy, sustainable forests.



*Bob Slagter stands on a bridge overlooking Caldwell Creek.
Photo credit: Laura Kirt*

Spotlight on Thompsons' Wood in Autumn



Forests have a tendency to truly shine in autumn, and the FSF-conserved Thompsons' Wood, a 194-acre forest in Troy Township, Crawford County, is no exception. In early October, Executive Director Annie Maloney joined Directors Craig Schwegman and Guy Dunkle (*bottom right*) on a woods walk to discuss the condition of the forest, future management plans, and its varied natural and human history.

Later on in the month, the Thompsons of Virginia, Jim & Connie (*upper right and lower left, with their daughter Beth*) paid a visit to the region and were excited to visit the forest that they helped to protect, and which will hopefully

host the next "Loving the Land Through Working Forests" Conference in September 2021.

Like many of you, we try to balance humor with the urgent and sometimes solemn nature of conservation work, and so we will happily let you in on a little joke: In August, Doug & Julie Jennings of Tennessee made a donation towards the conservation of Thompsons' Wood, and in doing so they mused that since their friends the Thompsons had a forest named after them, perhaps they would be lucky enough to have a culvert pipe named in their honor. As you can see in the photo (*lower left*), the FSF was more than happy to comply!

Support the Foundation for Sustainable Forests With a Year-End Gift!

Your continued support is essential to the FSF's ongoing success in forest conservation and stewardship. There are many ways that you can ensure healthy forests for generations to come:

- **Make a donation in your name or a loved one's name**
- **Gift a membership in this season of giving!**
- **Include the FSF in your Planned Giving portfolio**

Visit foundationforsustainableforests.org/get-involved to learn more about these possibilities and ways that you can make a positive impact on forests now and for the future.





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The Foundation for Sustainable Forests is a 501(c)3 nonprofit land trust and outreach organization dedicated to conserving forested land and protecting sustainable working forests. Through direct ownership and active forest management we promote the protection and stewardship of healthy, resilient forests.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

January 15 Our Woods & Waters Film Series

Live Virtual Event—Details will be shared

February 12 - Our Woods & Waters Films Series

Live Virtual Event – Details will be shared

SPRING (Tentative) - Lynn Firth Wildflower Walk & Picnic

September 17 - Friends of the Foundation Dinner

Iroquois Boating & Fishing Club, Conneaut Lake, PA

September 18 - Loving the Land Through Working Forests

Thompsons' Wood, Centerville, PA

**For more information, call (814) 694-5830
or visit Foundationforsustainableforests.org/events**