

Fall/Winter Newsletter 2021-22



Through Difficult Times, You Make Our Future Bright

The past few months have been punctuated by peaks and valleys for the Foundation for Sustainable Forests community.

At its peak, you came together in August to make the most-ever gifts to FSF on Erie and Crawford Giving Days— amazing! In September, both the *Friends of the Foundation for Sustainable Forests Dinner* and *Loving the Land Through Working Forests Conference* were a joyful return to in-person events. We were so fortunate to have Doug Tallamy and his wife, Cindy, attend both and offer two thoughtful presentations. Nancy Baker, Gavin Deming, Guy Dunkle, Troy Firth, Steven Latta, and Robert Long rounded out a wonderful day at Thompsons' Wood for the conference with their energy and wisdom (see *Event Scenes* on page 6).

Sadly, this fall FSF lost two core members of its community. A valued horse-logging crew member, Eli “Junior” Fisher, passed away unexpectedly earlier in September. FSF relies heavily on the skilled work of its loggers to remove timber from the woods with minimal damage to the remaining forest. Junior was a talented woodsman, and FSF is feeling the loss deeply. See page 3 for a remembrance by Guy Dunkle.

And, as you may now know, one of our Directors for over ten years- Dr. James Finley- passed away tragically in early October. A giant in Pennsylvania’s forestry and conservation communities and an important mentor and friend to the FSF, he will be so greatly missed (see *Tribute* on page 2). Our sincere condolences go out to the

families and friends of Junior and Jim.

Throughout these ups and downs, one thing has been made very clear- you as FSF’s community are here, and this community is strong. From the number of you who volunteered to make Erie and Crawford Giving Days a success, supported the fall events, or reached out and offered support to Jim’s and Junior’s friends and family over the last several weeks, you are invested this organization and its impact on the region’s forests. Thank you.

Despite the difficulties of these past few months, you have helped the important work of FSF to continue, and to build momentum. Because of you, our future is brighter. Together, I am certain that we can accomplish so much more on behalf of FSF’s mission, all the while carrying forth the work of those whom we have lost.

In the months ahead, we will remain focused on critical land conservation projects and raising funds to meet the needs of the land. You can support this work through an end-of-year gift to FSF. See page 5 for a description of current needs, and consider making an end-of-year gift to a specific project of your choosing.

On behalf of the FSF, I wish all of you a safe and wonderful season of gathering with your loved ones in the weeks ahead. Sincerely,


Annie Maloney, PhD
Executive Director

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A Friend & Mentor to Remember

A Tribute to Jim Finley

Written by Bob Slagter

In October, the Foundation for Sustainable Forests, alongside others across the region, lost a valued Board Member, mentor and friend, Dr. James Finley. Jim devoted his career to Pennsylvania's forests, and we are so fortunate that he served the Foundation for Sustainable Forests and its mission for over ten years.

For those of you who did not know Jim, or never had the pleasure of learning from him, I wanted to offer a snapshot of his talents with an excerpt from "A Weekend in September", which I wrote for the Pennsylvania Forest Stewards program several years ago:

The sun is just beginning to rise over the side of the Pennsylvania ridge. The coolness of the morning sends little fingers of fog reaching from the surface of the small creek that runs through the Ludlow valley. Our guide stops and so do we... all goes quiet as we absorb the moment... the smell of hemlock and old leaves and fresh



Jim Finley (seated) collaborates with Bob Slagter at a Center for Private Forests meeting earlier this year.

water... the sight of the first rays of sun filtering through the tightly-woven bows of the trees overhead... the textured silence of the woods at dawn provided by the far-off woodpeckers, closer cardinals, and the music of the moving water.

"What do you feel here, right now? What is this like for you?" *Jim asks.*

Jim is the leader of the program that brought us here and the guide for this morning's sojourn. We have learned from the previous five days of work with Jim to pay attention when he speaks.

"It feels like we're in the essence of a Pennsylvania woodland..." "It's peaceful and calm..." "It's a perfect place to be," *we respond.*

Jim is silent for a moment, then in almost a whisper, "To me, it's very much like being in a cathedral. The sun coming in through the canopy draws your eyes skyward, toward our maker, like you do in church with light streaming in through the clerestory windows."

Of course, you CAN feel the religion of the moment. In fact, it is easy to imagine that the earliest concept of a deity may have come to our oldest ancestors in a place like this back in the mists of time. It must have grabbed the others of the group the same way, because the next moments were spent in some silent devotion like so many monks at vespers.

Jim broke the mood directly ...

"Now imagine that this is the last place like this on earth... because I'm afraid we may be the last generation of people to experience these places. The hemlock woolly adelgid is moving inexorably south out of New England and it will soon pass through here taking 80% of our state tree with it. We are homogenizing our forests in this global economy and spreading diseases like this and the emerald ash borer and others as we go. It's a sad consequence of being who we are."

That was the first I remember hearing from Jimmy thirteen years ago. Since then, there have been many walks in the woods, many lectures, and lots of opportunities to hear about the forest and many other topics from Jim.

Most recently, I worked with him on the Board of the Foundation for Sustainable Forests where he continued to impress and enlighten me with his incredible intellect,

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precise focus and deep insight into the working of our Board. Jim believed deeply in our mission and as was true thirteen years ago, when he spoke, everybody listened.

What motivated a man like Jim to give so freely and frequently of his time and energy to the forests of our state? I am sure it's about intellect, outreach, communication, the need to share his knowledge, the need to give to the natural world and of course his love of people. It was all about these things and more, much more. I believe Jimmy gave so much of himself for one overriding reason – kindness. He believed in humankind and our ability to be the best we can be and in a world that gives as much as it takes. He was essentially a kind person and his model was kindness begets kindness. When we are kind, we make the world better like Jim did every day of his life. He made the world a better place and he made me a better person.

Jimmy, you will be with me always, and we will always be for your students and friends. To quote the musician Charles Puth:

*“It's been a long day without you, my friend
And I'll tell you all about it when I see you again
We've come a long way from where we began
Oh, I'll tell you all about it when I see you again.”*

So we will see you soon my old friend. Thanks for your many gifts and for sharing your world with us, your students.

Share Your Remembrances of Jim

It was a lovely spring morning on Jim and Linda's place in Ridgeway. Jim was the student this time, using a brand new Fly outfit I bought him for his retirement. We had fly-fished the Clarion River all morning and were now on a small headwater stream on his property. His favorite spot. As I watched, he made the sweetest little cast and immediately a 10" native brook trout took the fly.

The picture of the excitement and childlike enthusiasm on his face will be with me forever. It was my “Norman Rockwell” moment and I am sure you have yours as well.

Would you take a minute to share your fondest memories of Jim? Send it to Annie via email at amaloney@forestsandpeople.org or call it in to (814) 694-5830, and we'll print it in our next newsletter.

Remembering Eli “Junior” Fisher, Horse-Logger

Written by Guy Dunkle

In September, FSF lost one of its most consequential supporters, Eli “Junior” Fisher of Atlantic, Pennsylvania. I have many, many memories of working with Junior over the five years that he was involved with FSF, however the first image that will always come to mind for me is of him leaning toward me from the seat of his logging cart, a big smile behind his thick red beard and a quick laugh that seemed to come as much from his eyes as anywhere else.

Junior was a regular participant in our *Loving The Land* Conferences as a horse logging demonstrator. Although he had a wonderful sense of humor, Junior was also very quiet and preferred to be at work in the woods rather than chatting with conference attendees. Over his many years of work with FSF Junior helped us to develop our forests into what they are today. Trees live for a long time, and it warms my heart to think that decades and even centuries from now folks will be marveling at forests that came to be due to the thoughtful work of Junior Fisher.





In September, you gathered for a gorgeous evening on the shore of Conneaut Lake to celebrate forest conservation. *Clockwise from above:* Author Doug Tallamy presents “Nature’s Best Hope” and impels all of us to support healthy, diverse ecosystems for future generations; FSF President Troy Firth and John Vanco of Erie, PA; good company and a golden sunset make for a memorable evening.

Connecting & Learning at the *Friends of the Foundation Dinner* & *Loving the Land Through Working Forests Conference*

Clockwise from top left: Bob Long, retired USDA forester delivers an opening address titled “Observing our Forests in Changing Times” to kick off the day; Bennett Gould and keynote presenter Doug Tallamy attend a demonstration by Allegheny Goatscape; Rachel Meerson and Jean Engle meet goats and their “guard donkey” Sunshine; Steven Latta, National Aviary researcher, presents to a crowd on the importance of forest gaps to songbirds; Nancy Baker offers tips and tales by the tailgate about women working in their woods.



Increase Your Impact with an End-of-Year Gift

Wrap up 2021 in style with a donation to the Foundation for Sustainable Forests.

You can make an unrestricted gift or fund a specific project that energizes you.



Land Conservation Planning

The need to conserve forested land before it is subdivided, developed, or mismanaged is more urgent than ever. Your donation towards land conservation supports the process of working with landowners to conserve their land, and other expenses associated with land acquisition.



Tackling Invasive Species Together

Moxie Woods, Thompsons' Wood, and Florarozze Forest are all slated for invasive species mitigation in the year ahead, and there is much work to be done. Your donation today is an investment in the next generation of trees and a healthy future forest that can host diverse wildlife.



Sustainable Forests Need Thoughtful Infrastructure

Well-constructed access roads (ex. sturdy road-stream crossings to limit sediment erosion into waterways), and accessibility for the use of horses [which minimize damage to the forest during a timber harvest] are all considerations for a sustainable working forest. Your gift will support road maintenance and landing construction at Dotyville Hill Forest in the year ahead.



Lights, Camera...Action!

The ability of FSF to tell its story through high-quality, high-impact media is pivotal to accomplishing its mission. Your gift supports a series of short videos to engage forest landowners and supporters. FSF has an important story to tell, and you can bring it to life with an end-of-year gift!

Make a gift today, for forests tomorrow!

On the Web: Make a secure gift online using by credit card at foundationforsustainableforests.org/donate/

By Mail: Send the enclosed envelope (be sure to include postage) with a check payable to "Foundation for Sustainable Forests" to 22418 Firth Rd. Spartansburg, PA 16434

Loving the Land—Landowners Tell Their Stories

Featuring Troy Firth

Written by Annie Maloney

McLaughlin Run, a 160-acre forest located in Rome Township, Crawford County south of Centerville, was the first property that Troy Firth ever purchased. It was 1972, Troy was in his mid-twenties and land was cheap. So cheap, in fact, that Troy was able to purchase it for \$150 per acre, including the timber. “They were giving the stuff away back in those days” recalls Troy as he sits in the conference room of Firth Maple Products, a business that exists because of McLaughlin Run and the other properties that he would later own. Troy’s thought at the time of the purchase was “This ought to work – I should be able to cut trees once in a while to pay for it.”

True to the plan, Troy and his partner put in a sawmill that year, and recalls cutting around half a million board feet of timber, over half of which was a thinning of big-toothed aspen. A few hemlocks harvested by the creek would later build the famed geodesic “dome” houses north of the property, home to a thriving hippie community in the 70’s and 80’s that was inspired by the famous architect Buckminster Fuller.

Although that initial harvest removed quite a bit of volume, it was the right prescription in a forest primed for optimal growth. And, Troy was in luck. That year the price of low-grade lumber for blocking- including aspen-jumped. From a property that cost \$24,000 to purchase, Troy received \$15,000 for “cutting out the junk”. When he returned in 1978 for another thinning, he was able to pay off the property in full.

At this point I make an offhand comment that “it seems like you are all about the numbers when it comes to McLaughlin Run”, implying that what Troy values about the land is in the economics. Troy has spent his lifetime working in, walking in, and observing forests. My

remark is an unfair summation and, rightfully so, he is quick to correct me: “It is much more than that, much more, but the economics are just what makes it work.” More on that later.

The history of McLaughlin Run property is noteworthy in that it is believed to have been virgin timber until World War I. Walk the woods today and you can still see enormous white pine stumps, whispers of the towering canopy they once formed, which were cut ca.1919 when a lumber company owned it.

A later owner put in a portable mill in 1946-47 and cut all of the residual giants of the 1919 harvest- “the neighbor at the time, Jim Halfast, could have bought the whole property for \$300 after that”, adds Troy. So, the regeneration of trees from that early 20th century cut is now today’s overstory, and since then- Troy leans forward for emphasis- “they have *never* been high-graded.”



Troy & Lynn Firth at McLaughlin Run on their wedding day



Reaching new heights because of YOU!

In August, FSF received a total of 181 gifts - our highest level of engagement *ever*— to raise over \$34,000 in donations and matching support on Erie & Crawford Gives.

THANK YOU!

These funds are being applied to impactful new land conservation projects in the months ahead— stay tuned!



Thinking back to forest condition in the 1960's and 70's when land was cheap, Troy laments the comparison to today's forests. "Forests [like McLaughlin Run] were everywhere then, and that is what today's woods should look like! But, nearly everywhere else [has been] abused. McLaughlin Run should be *average* timber, not the exception."

And this idea brings me back to Troy's former comment about "making it work." McLaughlin Run is living proof that there is financial gain in *not* abusing the timber in a forest, all the while improving its overall condition.

And what is the overall condition at McLaughlin Run? To hear Troy talk about the forest is near poetry, but those of you who know Troy know that this side of him is not often seen. The overstory is uncharacteristically tall for other forests in the area, and has a strong presence of "knock-your-socks-off cherry", as Troy likes to describe it. In fact, those "knock-your-socks-off cherry" trees bore witness to Troy and Lynn's wedding on January 30, 1988. Today, a large boulder in the woods marks the spot where they were married. As befits Troy's personality, he was back to work in his sugarbush by that afternoon, though later that year he and Lynn honeymooned on a 400-mile canoe trip down Alaska's Noatak River.

And what of the future of McLaughlin Run? Troy intends for the property to be owned and managed by the Foundation for Sustainable Forests after his passing, and expects the organization to maintain his same high standards of care.

To say that Troy and Lynn thought about this a lot is an understatement. The Foundation for Sustainable Forests exists because of their careful planning; they secured their own conservation legacy by founding the organization to



A white pine stump hints at the giant forest that once stood at McLaughlin Run in the early 20th century.

make sure that forests like McLaughlin Run would still be around in another 100 years and beyond.

When I ask Troy to reflect on how he has managed McLaughlin Run these past 49 years, he humbly replies, "I did a pretty good job here". "I don't know if there is a better piece of timber in northwest PA or not", he muses with a shrug, "There are probably some equals around somewhere". As one of those whom Troy has charged with carrying forward his mission to conserve and care for forested land in the region, I certainly hope so.

Troy Firth has lived his whole life in Spartansburg, PA, and has worked in the forest as a sugarmaker and forester for over 50 years. He and his late wife, Lynn, founded this organization in 2004, and they have donated over 750 acres of forested land for conservation across northwest Pennsylvania to date.



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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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 21 - Woods & Waters Film Series (Virtual)

February 25 - Woods & Waters Film Series (Virtual, with the possibility of a hybrid in-person/virtual offering—stay tuned for more information)

COMING THIS SPRING!

**Lynn Firth Spring Wildflower Walk
Spring Potluck**

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

Below: Doug Tallamy presents "The Nature of Oaks" at the September conference

