



Spring 2022

the Forest Steward

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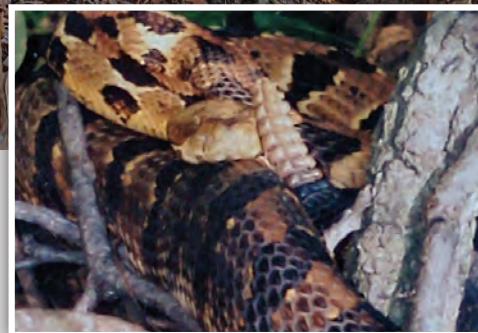
*Land trusts and the
Forest Stewards Guild:
protecting land with
stewardship in perpetuity.*

*The use of horses to skid logs during a harvest is part of a multi-faceted approach to sustainable forestry at the Foundation for Sustainable Forests.
Photo by: Guy Dunkle*

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**Forest Stewards
Guild**
putting the forest first



This native rattlesnake is a resident at an easement property, and a consideration for management. Photo by DALC. All photos in this edition are credited to the article's respective organization, unless noted.

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Ancient Bur Oak in Green Lake, Wisconsin. Approximately five feet in diameter. Photo by: Brenda Mittelstadt

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The rise of land trusts and their protection of 61 million acres (larger than the state of Minnesota!) is one of the big successes of the conservation movement. Since the early days in the 1980s, land trusts have become more sophisticated and effective as they have increased in number, diversity, and land holdings. Much of the initial focus was on protecting land from development through fee-simple or easement purchases. It is now clear that simply protecting these lands from development isn't sufficient to maintain the integrity of ecologically important places. The changing climate can rob a protected forest or grassland of the very species that make it special. Invasive species do not respect property lines and can easily overrun a site, degrading habitat and other values. The need for land trusts to steward their properties makes partnership with Guild members a natural fit. Guild members are attuned to the goals of protecting all values including recreation, wildlife habitat, connectivity, healthy forests, clean drinking water, long-term legacies for future generations, and more, while actively stewarding the forest. Where members of the Guild have been connected to their local land trusts for decades, you can see the beneficial effects in their local forests and communities today.

This *Forest Steward* highlights how Guild principles support land trust goals. The Tar River Land Conservancy in North Carolina shows how well-executed timber harvests can

fit into land preservation goals. Wisconsin's Driftless Area Land Conservancy shows how easements and recreation can connect the community to stewardship, and how forest stewardship is key to success even on lands with a mix of forested and non-forested habitat types. The Foundation for Sustainable Forests is directly focused on working forests and how they can support rural communities and ecosystems in Pennsylvania. The Cranberry Lake Foundation takes a similar approach of combining silviculture with alternative revenue streams as they educate their Washington community about sound stewardship practices. Across the landscape, the demonstration of ecological forestry is a pivotal way that land trusts magnify their impact.

One of our hopes for the Guild's next 25 years is to do more to support land trusts and continue to strengthen the Guild's national presence and land trusts' local presence in cooperation toward a broader, landscape-scale benefit for all. In many cases, this may be as simple as connecting a land trust with Guild foresters working in their neighborhood. We will continue to look for ways to strengthen the natural link between land trusts and the Guild.

Meanwhile, we hope you'll enjoy this read and that it inspires continuing conversations about land trusts and forest stewardship. Stay tuned for more Guild opportunities on this subject this year, including a Lake States Guild Gathering in August!

■ Putting a Trust in the Guild

Written by Mark Mittelstadt, Founder and Board member of the Driftless Area Land Conservancy, Wisconsin Owner of Blue Ox Forestry Svc, Inc.

The Driftless Area Land Conservancy's purpose is to maintain and enhance the health, diversity and beauty of Southwest Wisconsin's natural and agricultural landscape through permanent land protection and restoration, and improve people's lives by connecting them to the land and to each other.

The Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) has protected nearly 8,000 acres across 50 parcels in the years since its founding. We provide field trips, landowner workshops, and incorporate public engagement as much as possible on lands we protect. DALC and the Guild are exploring how we can help each other in Wisconsin's driftless region. We will be co-hosting a Guild Gathering at DALC's Spring Valley Preserve near Madison this August.

A protection role and a stewardship challenge

People drawn to land trusts are usually seeking permanent protection for their property. Land trusts like DALC can provide this through legally binding conservation easements, which transfer with the land to any new owners.

By the nature and longevity of trees and ecosystems, good forestry must continue over many decades and the careers of several foresters.

Land trusts have the right and obligation to approve or modify management practices on easement properties and a legal basis to prevent unacceptable practices that could set progress back by a century or more. Perpetual funding of monitoring and defense are built in, with an insurance policy through the national Land Trust Alliance to prevent or address any violations.

Although many land trusts are not primarily about forestry, they often become involved with forests as part of the lands they protect. If a land trust does not have a forester on staff or seek forestry guidance, it can result in neglect, lost opportunities, or in prohibitions which unintentionally make forest stewardship difficult. DALC benefits from having a forester on the Board, to quickly get answers and examine the forests under easements.

How Guild collaboration with DALC is shaping up

The Guild is putting the forest first, with responsible management and foresters. People drawn to the Guild are seeking like-minded colleagues and examples of well-managed woodlands. Many are discouraged by the forestry-as-usual practices that we see too often. I joined the Guild because I saw the conviction for good forestry.

DALC and the Guild are coming together in 2022 to provide local

Guild members with further understanding of conservation easements through a showcase of one project, called the Spring Valley Preserve. This 300-acre project south of Madison coalesced thanks to the persistence of a local conservation advocate, the commitment of a conservation-minded donor who is an outdoor enthusiast driven to protect and restore land, and DALC, a land trust with the ability

to own and manage land. The property features a variety of habitats, from wetland to oak savanna, and our emphasis is on restoring it to a more natural oak-based fire managed system, with plenty of opportunity for public education and recreation. We are engaged in an inventory, are developing a plan, and have started restoration activities, including volunteer days. My experience as a forester has helped with understanding the ecological history of the forests, recognition of pre-Euro-settlement oaks, planning, and the significant value and sale process for trees that we want to remove. The project is 1.5 years old, and we have already partnered with

the International Mountain Biking Association for their expertise on trail-building, not only for bikes. Local school districts visit for service-learning days starting this spring. Members of the Ho-Chunk Nation are involved in telling the story of the history here, and we are exploring engagement from today's Indigenous community members and perspectives.

At the Guild Gathering, we'll discuss restoration, land use, community engagement, and how land trusts and the Guild can work to help each other. I see it as one kick-off for how Guild members in the area can provide basic understandings of the role of forestry and forests to land trust boards and staff. I'd like to foster opportunities for the Guild to provide template forestry plans or language for easements, more detailed assistance on specific properties, and a proactive connection and aid between Guild foresters, local land trusts, and state organizations like Gathering Waters and the national Land Trust Alliance. We hope to start a regional list of Guild members who are interested and available to work with land trusts and their landowners at this event.

For land trusts without a forester in their organization, a nearby Guild member might be the key addition for future success.



Restoration burn at DALC's Erickson Wetland in Argyle, WI.



Working forests and the Foundation for Sustainable Forests

Written by Annie Maloney, Executive Director, Pennsylvania

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Foundation for Sustainable Forests Founder and President, Troy Firth, stands in his log yard at Firth Maple Products.

Conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote, *“The only progress that counts is that on the actual landscape of the back forty.”* That rings true here in Pennsylvania, where more than seventy percent of forests are privately owned, and most are 20 to 200 acres in size. To make landscape-level strides in forest health, resilience, and habitat diversity, we must remove barriers to conservation-minded stewardship of smaller parcels.

The Foundation for Sustainable Forests (FSF) is a land trust with a working forest focus. It is our mission to protect forested ecosystems and support rural communities through working forests, to raise awareness of the importance of conserving intact forested ecosystems, and to highlight sustainable forestry practices for the benefit of the land. Our founder, Troy Firth, set guiding principles for FSF and Aldo Leopold sums it up well: *“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”*

Unfortunately, high-grading is the region’s predominant forestry practice. This creates forests that are less able to recover after a disturbance and that lack age and species diversity, jeopardizing the health of plants, wildlife, and the entire future forest. FSF counters this practice through “worst-first” forestry, which encompasses the stems, site, logging equipment, and local markets within a conservation footprint.

In contrast to high-grading, selecting the “worst” trees to harvest and leaving the healthiest to thrive and seed the understory, improves the overall ecological condition and economic value of the forest over time. Creating some small gaps with group selection in areas of healthy, advanced regeneration results in an uneven-aged mosaic of species composition, structure, and habitat. Take a walk in a forest managed this way and you will quickly see signs of resiliency – species and age diversity, tree health, and well-developed, native regeneration.

Thoughtful management may be core to forest health, but for many landowners, the greatest perceived barriers to practicing conservation-based management are cost and time. In an essay featuring FSF author Wendell Berry wrote, *“A forest, kindly used, will outlive unimaginably any of its trees.”* In a commodity-driven landscape, how then does the average landowner afford “kind use”? Moreover, how can they manage a forest to thrive beyond their own tenure as stewards, in keeping with the far longer “life span” of the forest itself?

The way trees are harvested is a critical component of thoughtful management. FSF contracts logging crews who are skilled in directional felling and use horses to skid the logs. Both practices significantly reduce residual damage and soil compaction. Horse

crews allow us to do lighter, lower intensity thinnings and still receive revenue. The lower cost of mobilizing horse crews compared to machines is conducive to agility across multiple parcels. Changing sites in response to timber markets or weather changes can be done for the benefit of the land without compromising net returns.

Also important is the site preparation that takes place before a single tree is cut. Brush cutting, managing invasive species, and deer management are labor intensive and costly, but they ensure that the introduction of light to the forest floor will encourage desired regeneration. A key consideration is pay structures for logging crews that support non-commercial stand improvements. This helps ensure both economic sustainability and the desired ecological outcomes.

Site diversity makes the economics and sustainability of this approach function. Having drier sites in which to work during the ever-lengthening mud seasons reduces damage to the forest floor. We can reserve the wetter sites for the frozen winter months or mid-summer drought periods. Access to diverse species of trees enables us to respond to fluctuations in the timber markets. FSF is fortunate to have a portfolio of parcels under its management, but most landowners only have one or two. One approach to this problem is the development of woodland stewardship networks, in which neighbors take a cooperative management approach to stewarding their forests.

Access to low grade timber markets is critical to being able to practice “worst-first” forestry and achieving conservation-based outcomes. Without markets, the cost to most landowners is unrealistic.

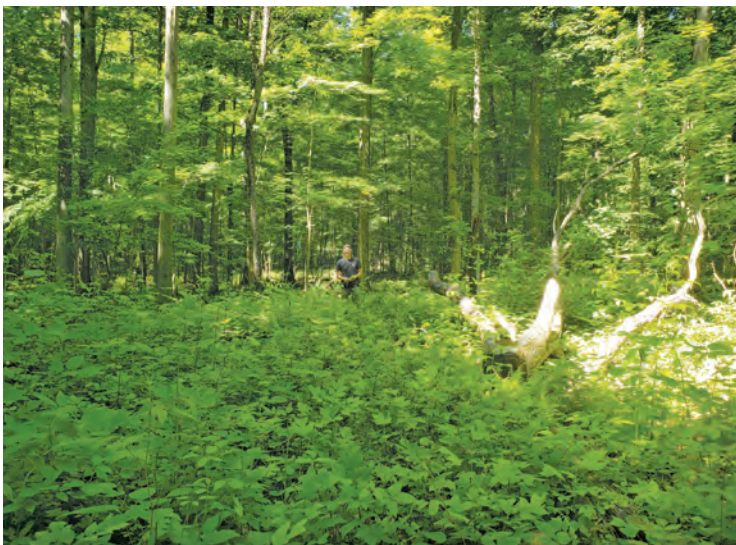


Encouraging age and structural diversity are key tenets of FSF's stewardship. Both increase habitat diversity and overall resilience in the face of stressors such as disease and extreme weather events.

Northwestern Pennsylvania boasts mills that specialize in pallet wood and other low-grade products.

Counterintuitive to some, the longer a forest has been under our stewardship, the better developed the mid- and understories are, and the shorter the harvest cycle becomes. When the future forest is present and ready to grow, we can harvest overstory trees as they reach their biological maturity.

All of these considerations underscore the complexity of landscape-scale forestry across multiple small parcels. When navigated successfully, always with an adaptive and long-term eye, thoughtful management can be both accessible and beneficial to landowners, while the collection of healthy, resilient “back forties” benefits the ecosystem.



Dr. Steve Latta of the National Aviary stands amongst dense, native regeneration in a small gap created in a mature forest. His team has begun a multi-year study of how FSF's forestry affects forest bird diversity and nesting habitat.

A Case Study in Managing for Multiple Values

Written by Matthew Provencher, Secretary and forester of the Cranberry Lake Foundation, Washington

The Cranberry Lake Forest Education and Research Center, managed by the Cranberry Lake Foundation (CLF), occupies 720 acres of forests, streams, wetlands, and lakes located a few miles northeast of Shelton in Mason County, Washington. The mission of the Foundation is to provide community education focused on school-aged children but also including adult learning. This is a location for research projects, to showcase sound stewardship practices, and provide income for these activities and the maintenance of the property through active forest management. The Foundation's bylaws stipulate that the property must remain a working tree farm while providing for these other values.

The Foundation was formed by tree farmer Kenny Frank, in 1993. Kenny's early purchases were cut over land that he meticulously replanted and tended. In the early 1950's, he and his wife Kitty turned their attention to ensuring the Cranberry



Stand before and after treatment. Initial stand density is 400 tpa. Post treatment is 190 tpa, with small prescribed gaps and a few no harvest areas.

Continued on page 7.



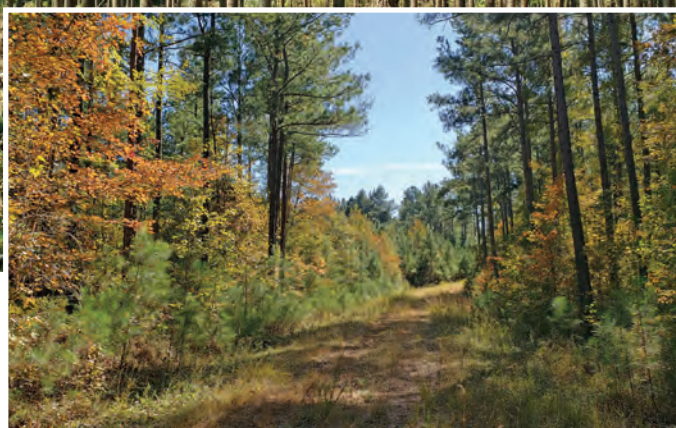
Tar River Land Conservancy

Written by Derek Halberg, Executive Director | North Carolina

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Top: A Loblolly pine stand thinned under supervision of Dave Halley of True North Forest Management. Prescribed burns will promote browse and cover for game and nongame wildlife.



Center: When not used during land management activities, this forest access road will be open for public hiking. Signage will inform visitors of upcoming and past management actions.

The Tar River Land Conservancy (TRLC) was founded in 2000 and is one of twenty-three land trusts across North Carolina. Serving an eight-county region between the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area and the Virginia state line (the Triangle), TRLC's mission is to protect land from development.

In the early years of TRLC, we acquired conservation easements which were mainly working lands easements on farms and timberland, and “no touch” riparian conservation easements along streams inhabited by federal endangered species. During the Great Recession, when land prices and philanthropic dollars for conservation plummeted, we shifted to acquiring lands in fee simple. We reasoned that if TRLC was ever going to buy and manage land, the best time would be when land was cheap and the “value-added” benefits of endangered species recovery, environmental restoration, and public access on TRLC-owned land could be woven into our fundraising

pitches and grant proposals.

This strategy largely paid off in the last decade. TRLC owned just 530 acres in 2012 and now owns 5,600 acres spread across seven counties. About half of this land is off-limits to commercial forestry or agriculture due to deed restrictions, land conditions, or presence of endangered species. The balance is acreage that was leased farmland and semi-managed timberland, mostly planted or old-field loblolly pine stands.

Where applicable, we've continued to keep agricultural and hunting leases in place. This generates modest income for TRLC, but more importantly, fosters connections with local farming communities. In a similar spirit, TRLC has cautiously developed forest management inventories and plans for a handful of properties and has completed commercial timber sales on two tracts in recent years.

While well-executed timber harvests are valuable tools in managing Southern yellow pine stands to achieve multiple objectives,

undertaking timber cuts on land trust-owned property presents risks not faced by most private landowners. Land trusts must carefully consider the perception of donors, neighbors, and the public at large when designing forest stand prescriptions.

To help guide us, TRLC hired consulting forester and long-time Guild member Dave Halley. We retained Dave after seeing his management of several properties protected by TRLC-held conservation easements. We've settled on a forest management approach that I describe as “a lighter touch on the land” than a typical landowner might take: smaller harvest units, longer rotations, erring on side of shutting down when conditions are wet, promoting hardwoods and shortleaf pine in lieu of loblolly pine where appropriate, preserving wider riparian corridors and wetland buffers, and requiring more robust access road repairs after logging ends. Most importantly, we've placed conservation outcomes and values above income generation.

The Triangle of North Carolina is one of the fastest-growing regions for residential developments, which creates both a challenge and an opportunity to engage the public. We plan to allow public hiking access into one “Stewardship Forest” as a case study and use forest access roads as part of trail networks. Interpretive signage will educate visitors about management activities.

To set the stage for forest management, we've hosted hikes for community members, local officials, and funding partners to learn about the TRLC's plans for active forest management. Where our plans have called for reforesting buffers to protect water quality, volunteers have helped plant trees over the last three winters, resulting in seven acres reforested along streams that feed a municipal drinking water reservoir.

In the future, we'll host demonstration tours for landowners, foresters, and biologists to see the results of our approach – the good, the bad, but hopefully not the ugly. We'll adjust our plans as science, public sentiment, and riskiness dictate. Fortunately, time is on our side. TRLC's conservation properties are protected "in perpetuity." We have the luxury of taking a measured approach, reflecting as we go, and ultimately thinking of the benefits decades into the future.



Top: On several TRLC-owned tracts where active forest management is planned, TRLC staff are working with consulting forester Dave Halley to develop Forest Stewardship Plans, outlining a broad range of management objectives. Where appropriate, Dave has enrolled TRLC's properties into the American Tree Farm System.



Volunteers plant seedlings in Granville County, NC. TRLC's Forest Stewardship Plan called for reforestation of portions of fescue hay fields near Dickens Creek that feeds a nearby municipal drinking water reservoir. Photo by: Sam Upchurch



Students walking across the CLF wetland boardwalk.

Lake property they loved would never be developed. The result is our Foundation, set up as a non-profit managed by a local, Mason County board of directors.

The forests growing within the Foundation vary in age from one to over 100 years old. From roughly the 1970s to the 1990s, several dozen acres were devoted to growing tightly spaced Christmas trees. Remnant old trees from the 1700s dot certain portions of the property – likely left as seed trees during the Christmas tree days.

The Foundation has moved to a variable density thinning (VDT) model. Any large clearcuts in excess of more than a few acres are typically to treat some underlying forest health issue, such as conversion of Christmas tree species to species more appropriate to the location. Generating income is a secondary goal to increasing structural and species diversity in areas of monoculture or single ages/canopies.

Our focus on structure and habitat as opposed to revenue means we have explored other sources of revenue that align with our goals. A cell phone vendor recently approached us about placing a communications tower in one of our final larger clearcuts. It's located quite a distance from our namesake lake and its associated critical wetlands. The monthly income will augment our timber harvest revenue and reduce the pressure for more intensive harvests, while taking up less than ¼ acre.

The Foundation is also moving forward with an easement with Forest Carbon Works (FCW). FCW allows small forest landowners access to the carbon market and can provide much-needed non-timber revenue for landowners. For landowners who primarily manage with non-timber objectives in mind, the reduction in timber harvest that results from the easement has minor impact. And importantly, we are still able to stay in compliance with our bylaws and any applicable tax laws that may require timber harvest.

These may seem like atypical partnerships to highlight. However, the revenue they provide will allow us to continue with a VDT model. We can focus on creating a diversity of tree species and forest structure, while producing a forest that is well suited to be resistant to future threats, and continue to meet our educational goals.



Address Service Requested

Guild events address key needs in 2022...

You can be part of legacy and demonstration forests, carbon and climate innovations, and community building! We look forward to seeing you! Find event details online at <http://www.foreststewardsguild.org/events>.

■ **Fire Adapted Ecosystems and Working Forests**
June 24 at Berea College forest, Kentucky

Berea College has practiced forest management for over 100 years. On the Cumberland Plateau, these forests are historically fire-adapted. Discuss how fire management compliments forest management here, and why both are important.

■ **Land Trusts and the Guild: Stewardship in Perpetuity**
August 26 in New Glarus, Wisconsin

This Guild Gathering in Wisconsin's driftless region will focus on opportunities for connection between land trust staff and forest stewards at a unique conservation parcel. We will explore and discuss goals for ecological integrity alongside community engagement and recreation in the early stages of management planning.

■ **Northwest Innovative Forestry Summit 2022**
September 30 - October 1 at Pack Forest in Eatonville, Washington

This Summit is a venue for regional learning, exchange, and ongoing cooperation to implement ecological forest management strategies. This year's focus will be on connecting the future of our forests & communities.

Check our event webpage often for new opportunities. Your financial support and participation in these events is what makes them possible. We welcome your offers to host a Guild Gathering, highlighting good work and important topics in this community. Please email membership@forestguild.org with your ideas.