



2023 Spring / Summer Newsletter



Inside this Issue:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| 2 | Executive Director Remarks | 5 | Conservation Spotlight: Hubbel Hill |
| 3 | Snapshots | 6 | Loving the Land, continued |
| 4 | Loving the Land Story:
David & Margaret Yasenchack | 7 | Impact: Erie & Crawford Gives |
| | | 8 | Upcoming Events |



Greetings from the Executive Director

Mid-summer is upon us: the woods are bustling with fawns, fledglings, and all manner of new growth, and the smoky wildfire haze has subsided for the time being at least. We at the Foundation for Sustainable Forests have also been bustling- with projects such as Hubbel Hill (p.5) and others nearing completion, and participating in and hosting many crucial conversations about strategic conservation initiatives our region.

While these discussions have not always been comfortable, I am thrilled simply by the fact that they are happening, and that they involve diverse stakeholders. I am also energized by the common refrains: the community is proud of the region's critical habitats and natural resources, recognizes the value of protecting them, and sees active land stewardship as a means to that end.

The latter point about stewardship is one of the main tenets of FSF's work; as we approach our 20th year of conserving and stewarding the land, it is wonderful to see conservation-minded forestry being recognized and encouraged.

The upcoming *Loving the Land Through Working Forests* field conference in September is designed to continue the conversations of recent months, including a panel discussion that will explore how diverse goals can be met together using the right combination of forestry activities. Knowledgeable folks, such as uneven-aged forestry researcher Tara Keyser of USDA Forest Service and invasive plant management expert Ellory Troyer of Ecological Field Services, will team up to form the panel. Earlier in the day, Brian Donahue of Brandeis University will familiarize us with "community forests" and how the concept can be applied to our region. At FSF, we are keenly interested in this and are taking steps to introduce community forests into our own work.

Registration for the conference and Friends of the Foundation Dinner is now open, and we hope you will attend (see insert for the full program lineup).

Please enjoy the contents of this newsletter and the impact that your support made possible. Then, be sure to mark your calendars for Erie Gives (Aug 8) or Crawford Gives (Aug 27-29), and your gift will keep the momentum going!

With gratitude,

Join the crew on

Jim Finley Stewardship Day

Friday, Aug. 25, 9am-3pm

Caldwell Creek Conservation Area, Grand Valley, PA

RSVP by Aug. 23 by calling (814) 694-5830 or at:

foundationforsustainableforests.org/events/



SNAPSHOTS OF THE SEASON



The Foundation for Sustainable Forests had a vibrant spring and start to summer! Here is a sampling of what we've been up to:

Left and cover: The Master Gardeners of Chautauqua County toured First Forest in June to learn about sustainable forest management.

2nd row, left: In very early spring, attendees of our vernal pool walks observed fairy shrimp, salamanders, and frogs. Photo by Issy Lawrie.

2nd row, middle: Volunteers & conservation partners installed interpretive kiosks at fly fishing access areas along Caldwell Creek.

2nd row, right: A tulip poplar sapling pops with early spring green, while regional and national conservation partners in the background discuss trends and critical conservation concerns while touring an FSF site.

3rd row, left: The National Aviary field team, including Nancy Ransom (pictured), is well into its third year of studying birds, like this wood thrush, at Blooming Valley Forest.



3rd row, right: A large *Sparassis*, or cauliflower mushroom, graces the forest floor in one of FSF's Erie County woodlands.

Bottom row: With Cecile Stelter (kneeling) as our guide, we counted nearly 20 ephemeral species during the Lynn Firth Wildflower Walk at Erie National Wildlife Refuge's Trolley Line Trail, including squirrel corn (*middle*) and jack-in-the-pulpit (*right*).



Loving the Land - Landowners Tell Their Stories

David and Margaret Yasenchack live near Cambridge Springs, PA. Margaret practices veterinary medicine at the Cochran Veterinary Hospital. David practices the craft of timber framing, often using trees gathered from their own forested land as well as the land of his clients. Written by Bennett Gould, David, and Margaret.

It is often said that people “don’t build things like they used to.” David and Margaret Yasenchack are an exception. The couple behind David Yasenchack Timber Framing and Design has spent 25 years constructing homes, pavilions, studios, and barns across the country using traditional timber framing designs and techniques. Unlike conventional light framing, which uses repetitive small members (such as 2"x4"s) fastened with nails and braced with OSB or plywood, timber framing employs large posts and beams connected by mortise and tenon joinery and secured with wooden pegs. “In most living spaces the wooden structure is out of sight, behind wall and ceiling finishes, whereas timber frames are most often exposed and reveal the structure at work around us,” says David. “Most everyone knows timber framing if they’ve ever looked up and around in any 19th century barn.”

When Margaret and David met in the late ‘90s in Ohio, David had recently purchased a portable bandmill. As the timber framing business came to fruition, several clients had their own woodlots and were eager to use their own trees in their timber frames. Those early projects helped set the course for David’s forest-to-frame process. Margaret says, “The sawmill allowed more creativity. There were more curves and live edges and different species going into the frames, and a high degree of engagement and collaboration with clients.”

David and Margaret married, had two children, Sawyer and Isobel, and in 2004 purchased a 100-acre forest of their own near Cambridge Springs, PA. “The land,” says David, “was a game-changer for my work.” Over the course of more years than initially imagined, the couple built a barn and a timber framed home. Margaret says, “Moving the workshop and our family from Ohio to this beautiful place and into a home of our own making was a long road.



David and Margaret pause for a photo along one of many hiking paths in their woods.

I still pinch myself; we’re very fortunate to live here.”

In 2006, the Yasenchacks met Guy Dunkle, who introduced them to “worst first” forestry. “It was a simple idea that intuitively made sense to us,” says David. Margaret adds, “At NWPWA events and FSF’s field conferences, I gravitate to the bird or wildflower workshops, but the times I’ve attended Troy Firth’s forestry walks I’m struck by the humility of the approach. The Foundation’s philosophy doesn’t pretend to know the whole of the forest. That speaks to me.” Under Guy’s guidance, the Yasenchacks completed several harvests with the aim of improving their forest’s health. “These interactions have certainly matured my thinking around tree selection for building materials,” says David.

Continued on page 6

Unique shapes, live edges, and mortise & tenon joinery are hallmarks of David's design in TLC's new outdoor classroom. Photo by Leo Glenn.





Forested Headwaters of Critical Wetland Habitat Conserved!

In May, the Foundation for Sustainable Forests acquired Hubbel Hill, 20 acres of forested land in Wayne Township, Erie County. This property is comprised of forested land and tributaries to Hubbel Run, and is in close proximity to the Wattsburg Fen Natural Area conserved by Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and Titus Bog, which is co-owned by Presque Isle Audubon Society and Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

Hubbel Hill will be conserved in perpetuity as a working forest which the public can access for passive recreation such as hunting and hiking. It also affords the opportunity to collaborate with our partners and neighbors to foster the health of critical wetland habitats downstream; as well as the broader French Creek watershed.

FSF looks forward to embarking on the long-term stewardship of this land, with a special focus on native regeneration in the understory and improving the riparian ecosystem along Hubbel Run's tributaries. Funds from this year's Erie & Crawford Gives campaigns will support this project, and so we are asking you make an impactful gift to Hubbel Hill, which will benefit by association its downstream waterways, wetlands, and French Creek.

You are cordially invited to

Friends of the Foundation Dinner

Friday, Sept. 15, 2023

5:30pm Social Hour

6:30pm Dinner and Keynote

Iroquois Club
Conneaut Lake, PA

Loving the Land Through Working Forests

Saturday, Sept. 16, 2023

8am to 4pm

Blooming Valley Forest
Woodcock Twp., PA

We hope you will join us!

See the enclosed flyer for additional details,
or visit foundationforsustainableforests.org/events/

Continued from page 3

In 2021, Guy connected David with The Learning Center (TLC), an independent K-8 school in Meadville, PA that emphasizes hands-on, experiential learning. TLC staff wished to build an outdoor learning space. Together, David, Guy, and TLC's Simon Camp, Chris Glenn, and Director Dana Hunter Yeager created a plan to build a timber framed outdoor classroom using trees sourced from the school community. Aspects of the project's design and construction would be incorporated into the curriculum and student experience. The frame's assembly and raising would be accomplished by hand in a cooperative effort. These project qualities earned grant support from Green Mountain Energy's Sun Club.

The conversion from trees to logs to timbers was demonstrated at the school last fall. Students gathered around a birch tree at the edge of the school's play area where FSF's Guy and Annie described why it was appropriate to harvest and use in the classroom frame. Shortly after, all 80 students yelled "TIMBER!" in unison as the tree was felled with a ground-shaking thump. In a game of tug-of-war against the tree, the students worked together to drag two birch logs across the schoolyard to David's portable sawmill. In a swirl of sawdust, they watched the tree become a beam. "I expect that day lives clearly in the minds of the kids," says David.

A true celebration of Pennsylvania's hard and soft woods, the classroom features 17 native tree species. These include: white pines harvested from an Allegheny College-owned forest, an American chestnut salvaged from a TLC's parent's yard, locust and oak pegs, apple and beech braces, and larch flooring. A wind-thrown walnut tree was donated by an unaffiliated community member who wished to support the project as well.

Over the winter, David worked on joinery for the beams in his workshop, while students made over 100 pegs that secure the mortise and tenon joinery. TLC instructors taught the older students how to shape the octagonal, tapered pegs using a shaving horse, drawknives, and spokeshaves. The older kids then passed down the instructions to the younger students. For many, it was their first experience with a sharp edge tool. Each student made their own peg and burned their initials into the end.

This May, students, teachers, parents, and builders gathered for the classroom's raising. Students hammered in the first ceremonial pegs. A gin pole was rigged with block and tackle to assist in lifting the heavy bents safely, and also to maximize



Careful coordination between volunteers lifting timbers and pulling ropes was needed to raise the assembled bents into place. Photo by Leo Glenn.

the number of students and parents who could help. After the bents were raised and secured, David's crew parbuckled plates to their positions atop the posts, then placed king posts, struts, ridge beams, and rafters. Despite the large crew, the steady rain, and the complexity of the assembly, it all went according to plan. Margaret says, "I've seen many raisings. There were a lot of moving pieces to this one, and the cooperation among everyone was amazing."

"The forest-to-frame process creates challenges to be sure," says David. Lumber acquisition that begins with standing trees in various woodlots requires significantly more time to procure and

process than purchasing commodity lumber and sheet goods delivered to the job site. The differences in aesthetic outcomes, however, are discernible and long-lasting. Often, unique trees provide unique structural elements that become compelling aspects of a living or working, or in this case, learning space. Also important is a client's heightened feelings of ownership after participating, indeed laboring, in the process. To cap it off, the raising provides memorable experiences of collective accomplishment. David adds, "Even the shyest of folks will step forward to drive a wooden peg."

We are so fortunate to know and be able to learn from supporters like David and Margaret. Their work celebrates the sustainable timber economy and educates a new generation of students who may



Volunteers enjoy their accomplishment and comradery after working shoulder-to-shoulder to raise TLC's new outdoor classroom. Photo by Leo Glenn.

someday work within the region's industry. This project genuinely embodies FSF's efforts to balance the needs of forests and people alike. And, frankly, it was a lot of fun!

Special thanks to the Yasenchacks for sharing their story. Would you like to share your story? If so, we would love to listen! Please contact Bennett Gould: bgould@forestsandpeople.org or (814) 694-5830.

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and our legacy.

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The Foundation for Sustainable Forests is a 501(c)3 charitable organization dedicated to conserving and stewarding working forests, and promoting forestry practices that enhance health, resilience, and habitat diversity across the region.

Upcoming Events

Aug. 8 - Erie Gives Day

Visit eriegives.org



Aug. 25 - Jim Finley Stewardship Day

Caldwell Creek Conservation Area, Grand Valley, PA

Aug. 26 - Protect Woodland Streams Tour

*Hosted by the Northwest PA Woodland Association
Slagter Cabin, 344 Stoney Hollow Lane, Grand Valley, PA*

Aug. 27-29 - Crawford Gives Days

Visit crawfordgives.org



Sept. 15 - Friends of the Foundation Dinner

Iroquois Club, Conneaut Lake, PA

**Sept. 16 - Loving the Land Through
Working Forests Conference**

Blooming Valley Forest, Woodcock Twp, PA

Oct. 1 - Walk in Penn's Woods

Stoney Hollow Trail, Grand Valley, PA



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