



2023/24 Fall/Winter Newsletter



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Greetings from the Executive Director

The Fall/Winter newsletter is my favorite, as it comes on the heels of several events and engagements with you. This year is no exception. So many thanks to all of you who supported FSF during Erie & Crawford Gives this summer, and to all who attended our annual dinner event and field conference. You have no idea how much your engagement energizes and sustains this organization, but know that it makes a difference.

I also want to highlight how much I love the image on the cover, not just for the smiling faces but for all that it represents. It was taken during Jim Finley Stewardship Day in August, and the crew is politely tolerating my camera before they comb the perimeter of a 15-acre deer enclosure fence to figure out where a handful of deer have gotten inside. They have an important job, which also happens to be a poignant metaphor for our work; a few hours of tromping through mud and brambles and a handful of repairs later, they will have protected the future forest from becoming a deer's next meal.

The remaining pages of this newsletter will tell you about some big opportunities that FSF has been offered in the form of two grants, both of which will directly fund forest conservation. Once completed, these projects will

Cover Photo, left to right: Guy Dunkle, Frank Zalik, Tyson Johnston, and Carmen Testi, are the "deer fence" crew, working along Stony Hollow Trail at Caldwell Creek and the adjacent forest during Jim Finley Stewardship Day.

be impactful and lasting. We have a lot of work yet to do in the year ahead, but with these awards we have hopefully overcome some larger hurdles towards protecting these lands.

Finally, it was my great pleasure to sit down with Ray Blystone and Chris Peters recently, to bring their "Loving the Land" story to you. You may recognize Ray from years of demonstrating horse-logging at our annual conference, but that was just a tiny window into all of the meaningful work that he has done in the woods for FSF.

As we enter our 20th year, these contents give me so much hope and excitement for what is ahead. Most of that hope is centered towards you - I hope that you will continue to engage with FSF, volunteer your time and energy when you can, and join us in bringing these newest projects across the finish line for lasting impacts they will have on the land, surrounding communities, and beyond.

Warm wishes of the season to you all,

Annie Maloney

FSF Welcomes New Directors!

Cheryl Zalik brings to FSF both business savvy and a passion for birds, having owned and operated Wild Birds Unlimited in Erie alongside her husband, Frank, for 30 plus years before their retirement. The Zaliks live near Cambridge Springs, PA and enjoy exploring the region's many natural areas and working to ensure their protection. In addition to her new role with FSF, Cheryl serves on the board of the Cambridge Springs Public Library.

Kirk Johnson lives in Edinboro, PA, where he keeps bees and tinkers in his blacksmithing and carpentry workshop. Kirk is a retired Pennsylvania Game Commission Gamelands Maintenance Supervisor. He has previously served on the board of Goodell Gardens & Homestead and volunteers with Ducks Unlimited, Edinboro Lake Watershed Association, and the Boy Scouts. Kirk enjoys hunting, fishing, and "anything outdoors that keeps me moving!"

Our board members volunteer a great deal of time and skill alongside the staff to move FSF's mission forward. With the help of Cheryl, Kirk, and all of the Directors, we look forward to accomplishing a great deal in the year ahead on behalf of our region's forests.



Learning Together at FSF Events



In September, FSF hosted the annual *Friends of the Foundation Dinner* at the Iroquois Club in Conneaut Lake, PA, and the *Loving the Land Through Working Forests Conference* in Blooming Valley, PA. Both events featured presentations, meaningful discussions, and lots of fun!

1: Guy Dunkle (pictured) and Pat Maloney co-host a conference presentation about tree-felling and skidding logs with horses.

2: Buck, one of the horses on the demonstration crew, basks in the sunlight.

3: Attendee Vincent Wojtyna practices his foraging skills during one of the conference program sessions.

4: A full panel discusses how sustainable forestry can be adapted to meet a variety of management objectives, such as creating bird habitat, reducing invasive species, supporting community uses, and sequestering and storing carbon.



5: A group of attendees, with Rich Bowden (left) and Brian Donahue (right) in the lead, tour Blooming Valley Forest to learn how FSF uses Femelschlag small group selections to create structural diversity.

6: Smiles and sunshine at the *Friends of the Foundation Dinner* at the Iroquois Club in Conneaut Lake, PA.

7: During October's statewide *Walk in Penn's Woods* day of festivities, FSF led a group along the forest and ponds that can be enjoyed from Stony Hollow Trail near Caldwell Creek in Grand Valley, PA

8: Hard-working volunteers at August's *Jim Finely Stewardship Day* accomplished a lot at FSF's Caldwell Creek Watershed Conservation Area properties. The group mended a deer fence, cleared brush from a fishing access area, installed signs, and painted walk-through gates on the Stony Hollow Trail.



FSF Selected to Receive Pennsylvania's First USDA Community Forest Grant Award

The Foundation for Sustainable Forests has been selected by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service to receive Pennsylvania's first Community Forest Program grant.

The \$251,000 award will be used to establish a community forest in Cambridge Twp, south of Cambridge Springs, through the purchase of 98 acres of woodland from Northwestern Rural Electric Cooperative Association (REC). Under FSF's ownership, the property will remain on the local tax rolls and be a carefully managed working forest that the public can enjoy for non-motorized recreational uses, such as hiking, bird-watching, and hunting.

"We at Northwestern REC are excited to be a part of this opportunity. The co-op takes pride in being a locally owned and operated electric distribution company. The communities we serve are the same communities we raise our families in," says the co-op's Director of Communications, Amy Wellington. "Several locals and many of our employees have enjoyed walking and hunting on the property for over 20 years. It will be wonderful to see this forest flourish with a carefully choreographed maintenance plan drawing even more visitors to the land."

Under the stewardship of FSF, the property, to be known as Northwestern REC Community Forest, will be an ecological, economic, educational, and recreational asset for the local community.

A Visioning Committee will be convened later this year with representation from local residents and regional stakeholders. Their input will shape the



Community Forest Management Plan, a requirement of the grant, and ensure that the project addresses the needs and hopes of the local community.

As a program that has primarily funded projects in New England and the Pacific Northwest regions since its inception in 2008, FSF is excited to bring this program to the Commonwealth to explore the community forest concept here in Penn's Woods.

Look for updates on the project's progress in 2024!

Above: A tributary to Kelly Run in the French Creek watershed runs through the property.

Below Left: The proposed site spans both sides of a dead-end road, providing walking and driving access to the forest.

Below Right: During a visit from USDA coordinator Neal Bungard in July, Guy Dunkle describes the forest condition and future plans for its management to some of our project partners.



FSF Receives State Award to Conserve 851 Acres

A \$1.2 million grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) has been awarded to FSF to conserve roughly 851 acres of forestland in Crawford and Venango Counties. Funding for the project, titled “Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities in Northwestern PA”, comes from a variety of sources, including the Keystone Recreation, Park & Conservation Fund.

DCNR is the primary source of state support for Pennsylvania recreation, parks, and conservation initiatives. In recent years, this support has allowed FSF to conserve over 1,000 contiguous acres of primarily forested land surrounding Caldwell Creek in Warren County.

“Pennsylvania’s local parks, trails, and natural areas create many opportunities to be active outdoors,” said Tom Ford, director of DCNR’s Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. “They define our communities and make them places where people want to live, work, and play. Our grants help our local partners meet the vision they have for their communities and regions.”

FSF is honored to have been selected to receive funding for this impactful project, which will lead to the acquisition and conservation of four properties that will be carefully managed as working forests while also providing recreational opportunities to the public, such as hiking, camping, and hunting. Look for more information about the project and updates in 2024!



Volunteer with FSF!

Sharing your time as a volunteer is a great way to support the Foundation. As a volunteer, you can improve conserved lands through stewardship projects, get the word out by representing FSF at events, or contribute a story to our newsletter. The possibilities abound!



Call 814-694-5830 or email info@forestsandpeople.org to be added to the volunteer opportunity email list.

Wendy Kedzierski paints a new walk-through gate on the Stony Hollow Trail during Jim Finley Stewardship Day.

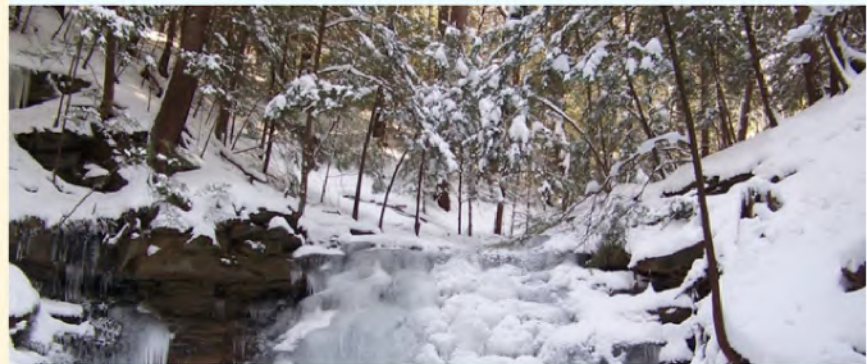
Our Woods & Waters Film Series

Two evenings of short films cohosted by



Friday, Jan. 19, 6:30 pm,
Virtual Zoom webinar

Friday, Feb. 23, 6:30 pm,
In-person, location TBA



For more information, visit foundationforsustainableforests.org/events/

Loving the Land - Landowners Tell Their Stories

*Many individuals play important roles in forest management, yet they are mostly unseen by the nature of their work. With a career as a horse-logger and then log truck driver, **Ray Blystone of Cambridge Springs** is one of them. Here, Ray and his life partner, **Chris Peters**, discuss his life and career in the woods. Written by Annie Maloney*

Ray Blystone began his career as a horse logger when he was about 40 years old. Working for Troy Firth, those early days were memorable. His first job was among the grape vineyards of North East, PA. “We were cutting huge tulip trees and skidding them down the hill looking out at Lake Erie, and I remember thinking ‘I have died and gone to heaven!’” recalls Ray with a laugh. “After that, my next job was by a swamp near Crossingville, and that was...bad,” he continues with a smile. The upside of the Crossingville job, though, was a stray dog hanging around the landing. Ray remembers sharing his lunch with him on the second day, “and that was that!” For the next 14 years, “Red Dog” was Ray’s loyal companion, camping with him at job sites and napping in the horse trailer.

A sign of someone for whom working with animals comes naturally, Ray rattles off a list of his teams over the years – Dick & Tom (Belgians), Deck & ‘Ator (Percherons), Billy & Brutus (Belgians), Mike & Jackie (Percherons), and Mike & Max the Mule. The latter pair skidded logs at FSF’s Loving the Land Through Working Forests Conference in 2013, which was attended by famed author, environmental activist, and farmer, Wendell Berry. “Wendell was surprised I was working a mule with a horse,” muses Ray. “Mules have more stamina and are stronger, but I don’t care for their personality as much. I’d rather work with horses.”

According to Ray, working with horses all day is “peaceful. Very, very peaceful.” Having always worked alongside a cutter to fell the trees while he skidded them out of the woods, he recalls “once they were done cutting and gone for the day, that was nice.” I find this last comment especially amusing since my husband Pat was Ray’s cutter for several years.

As a horse-logger, it often made more sense to stay overnight on the job site during the week, rather than trucking the horses long distances morning and night. For Ray, this was part of the allure of the job. “How



Ray holds a 2013 issue of Farming Magazine, where he was featured on the cover alongside Wendell Berry.

could you possibly beat living in the woods with two horses and a dog?!” Ray exclaims. “It was awesome.”

Ray’s love for being in the woods didn’t begin at 40. From a very young age, Ray and his family would take walks, hunt, cut firewood, etc. “My grandfather, James Campbell, was a big influence on me,” he recalls. “He also left me my first piece of woods.” Ray also credits his mother, Rebecca, for cultivating his love for the outdoors. “She loved to take us (Ray and his three siblings) for walks in the woods, pointing out wildlife like newts, toads, and frogs to us.” If you are fortunate enough to know Ray, then you likely know how much the peace of the woods means to him. As a case in point, his life partner Chris quotes Ray’s recent declaration while family was visiting to hunt: “I’m

going to the woods in New York because nobody yells at me there!” And, if you know Ray, you are right to imagine that he said this with a huge smile on his face.

Today, Ray is following in his mother’s footsteps, sharing his love of the outdoors with nieces, nephews, and Chris’ grandchildren. Chris recalls how Ray mentored three of her grandchildren through their 6th grade leaf projects. “Ray took them out and taught them to name each tree by the bark as well as the leaves, and they still remember!” says Chris, proudly.

We are chatting at the couple’s home near Cambridge Springs, a log cabin they built themselves. It began with a thinning job - spruce and pine - near Sandy Lake. Guy Dunkle marked the timber and Ray skidded the logs. With just a tractor, high lift, and family and friends on hand to help shave the logs, the cabin began to take shape. Ray describes the process with enthusiasm, “We laid those logs up, turning each one [to alternate the large and small ends as they stacked them], and by the time we got to the top, it was within an inch of being level!” The logs were green, so the couple lived in the improved basement for four years while the log walls shrunk six inches in height. Once the logs had dried and settled, they continued the build.

The whole project began in 2009. When I ask when it was completed, Ray and Chris quickly declare “It’s not!” and laugh. From where I sit, it is as warm and sound a home as any; it has stunning 44’ spruce center supports, hickory cabinets, and some natural-edge panel walls adorned with deer and other mounts, antique

snowshoes, baskets, etc., and a wrap-around porch.

Through his work, Ray has been involved with FSF since the beginning. Not one for the spotlight, he was a somewhat reluctant ambassador, offering skidding demonstrations at the very first conference and for many more after that. Ray enjoyed teaching people about the horses, but the year his brother also brought a team he didn’t mind taking a back seat. According to Chris, Ray greeted attendees with a quick “Bernie, you’re in!” and hastily drove his team away, leaving his wide-eyed brother to narrate.

About ten years ago, feeling the cold of the winter more sharply than he used to and ready for a change, Ray decided to buy a log truck and give hauling a try. While it did not compare to being in the woods with Red Dog and his team, many can attest that he was good at it; his prior experience made him an asset at horse-logging landings, and he was able and willing to negotiate tougher access roads.

Ray retired in July, and is not looking back. After working in other woodlands all those years, he is glad to finally be able to steward his own, starting with a harvest this winter. He will continue to be in the woods, walking, hunting, and mentoring grandkids, grandnieces and nephews to be as comfortable and skilled a woodsman as he is. Here at FSF we already miss him, and can only hope that some hard-working young folks will decide to follow in his footsteps with a career in the woods, but they have some very big boots (and hooves) to fill.

Below left: Ray stands with his team of Percherons, Deck and ‘Ator (short for Flight Deck and Aviator), during a horse-logging demonstration. ***Right:*** Ray and Chris stand on the porch of the log home they built.



*Protecting forested land &
supporting rural communities
through working forests*



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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

Jan. 10 - FSF's 20th Anniversary Potluck
Woodland Lodge, Grand Valley, PA - 5:30pm

Jan. 19 - Our Woods & Waters Film Series
Virtual via Zoom Webinar - 6:30pm

Feb. 23 - Our Woods & Waters Film Series
In-person, Location to be announced - 6:30pm

May 5 - Lynn Firth Spring Wildflower Walk
Location to be announced - 1:00pm

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

*Jim Bock (left) and
Ron Kustra (right)
sharpen a brush cutter
while making
improvements to a
public fishing access
along Caldwell Creek
during Jim Finley
Stewardship Day.*

