



# 2025 Fall Newsletter



*Protecting Forested Land and Supporting  
Rural Communities Through Working Forests*

## Greetings from the Executive Director

Greetings in this season of Thanksgiving. Just yesterday, I was planning to write on the topic of lingering autumn leaves and trees taking their slow, deliberate turn towards winter dormancy... and then awoke to ten inches of fresh snow. I love a good plot twist!

In the spirit of Thanksgiving, I want to express my gratitude to all of the presenters, sponsors, and attendees of our *Loving the Land Through Working Forests* Conference and Annual Dinner in September. What a powerful weekend that was. Troy's McLaughlin Run Forest, illuminated by golden sunshine and an early glimpse of fall colors, set the stage for a wonderful array of presenters and topics. On the facing page and on page 7, you can see photos with captions acknowledging all of the people who comprised this year's memorable lineup.

Ethan Tapper's keynote presentation at the Annual Dinner, alongside his words of inspiration to open the conference the next morning, were more resonant, poignant, and timely than I ever could have imagined. Many of you have since expressed the same. Let's hear it for extroverted foresters, willing to exit the woods long enough to spread powerful messages of hope and resilience!

Reflecting on the weekend, all we learned, and its impact on our mission overall, I offer sincere thanks to Bennett Gould and Cheryl

Zalik, both of whom put a great deal of time, energy, and heart into planning for those events, alongside several invaluable volunteers.

As we move into the remaining weeks of 2025, our team is focusing attention on urgent forest conservation efforts - eagerly awaiting decisions from potential funders, and continuing conversations with visionary landowners who would like to see their forests protected long-term. It is in this spirit that I humbly ask that you consider including the Foundation for Sustainable Forests in your end-of-year giving plans. Your support is a gift that is "regifted" to the region many times over - through healthy forests, sustainable forest livelihoods, and outdoor spaces the public can enjoy.

I wish you and yours a warm and lovely holiday season. Thank you for all that you do to support the Foundation for Sustainable Forests. Sincerely,

*Annie Maloney*



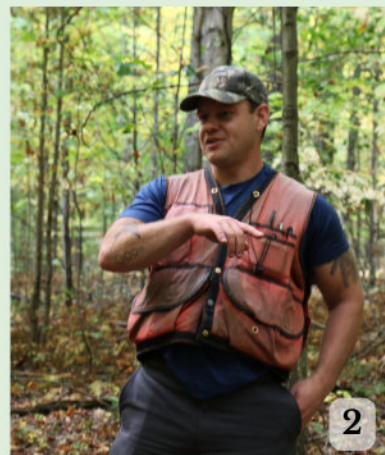
*Please join me in thanking Bennett for his good work in coordinating the Loving the Land Through Working Forests Conference weekend.*

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*Cover Image, right to left:* Troy Firth leads a walk through his McLaughlin Run Forest, followed by Jane Reilly, Bill Benedict, David Snyder, Wayne McCartney, and others, during the 2025 *Loving the Land Through Working Forests* Conference in September.

# Loving the Land Through Working Forests Weekend



In September, FSF hosted its Annual Dinner and *Loving the Land Through Working Forests* Conference. The sessions and keynotes were a celebration of forest stewards and the need to conserve and thoughtfully manage healthy, intact forests. We are thankful to all of our presenters, volunteers, attendees, and sponsors for making this memorable weekend possible!

1 & 3) FSF's Troy Firth leads a large group through McLaughlin Run Forest, the first forest property he ever owned and managed himself. Exceptionally tall cherry trees are a trademark of the site. 2) Author and forester Ethan Tapper also visited FSF's Blooming Valley Forest for a forestry tour with FSF's Guy Dunkle and Annie Maloney. 4) Mark Kirk of the Watershed Conservation Research Center leads a discussion along McLaughlin Run on the importance of protecting stream integrity during a timber harvest. 5) FSF's Pat Maloney describes felling practices aimed at minimizing damage to the surrounding forest. 6) Sand County Foundation's Lance Irving gives a presentation on their important work nationwide and the significance of Troy's Pennsylvania Leopold Conservation Award. 7) Susan Stout, retired USDA Forest Service researcher, guides a walk and discussion about forest resilience. *Photos continued on pg. 7*

# Scenes from the Field



October 5th was the statewide “Walk in Penn’s Woods” event. FSF’s offering was held at the 262-acre Sparta Sportsmen’s Community Forest near Spartansburg, PA. Led by FSF’s Troy Firth, the walk was a gorgeous exploration of the forest, accompanied by a rich historical account of the area. From the old horse-drawn tramway to haul oil barrels and the Climax locomotive track that ran through the property, to the first murder recorded in Crawford County nearby, Troy’s love for history shone through! We also discussed the site as a long-time sugarbush, and visited a small grove of healthy white ash trees, considered “lingering trees” in the wake of the emerald ash-boring beetle outbreak that ravaged the rest of the ash trees at the site.



## The Gall of the Wild

Have you seen these golfball-shaped leaves in an oak tree or on the ground and wondered what made them? Sometimes called an "oak apple," these leaf formations are the result of an oak gall wasp laying eggs inside an oak leaf. As the eggs develop, the leaf grows into a sphere that protects the wasp larvae. There are many species of gall-forming wasps, each creating different sizes and shapes of galls. Oak apples blend in during spring and early summer with a green apple color, but turn brown and often drop to the ground in late summer and fall once the developing wasp has emerged. We found this oak sapling with eight galls at Gentle Bear Run in Jackson Twp., Venango County!



In October, Northwest PA Woodland Association (NWPWA) hosted a tour of Greenfield Basket Manufacturing in Little Hope, PA. Greenfield produces over 80 styles of handmade baskets using poplar, beech, and other wood sourced from local suppliers, occasionally including FSF. Logs are processed into veneer, then cut into strips that make up the baskets. Thank you to NWPWA and Greenfield Basket Manufacturing for organizing the tour!



# Loving the Land - Landowners Tell Their Stories

## The Liebenguth Family

It was the worst vacation that Garrett, 13, and Carla, 11, had ever had. They made sure to inform their parents, John and Norma Liebenguth, of this during the drive back to their home in a suburb of Pittsburgh.

The scene of the crime, er “vacation”, was their 80-acre woodland southwest of Tidioute in Forest County, Pennsylvania, which they affectionately call “The Land”. The family had just spent the week there building a picnic shelter that John had designed during a flight to Hong Kong, where he was traveling for his job at the time. Now, they were putting his design to use, including purchasing lumber in Tionesta and transporting it back to the land in a truck so heavily laden that the whole family had to pile up front so that the front wheels could touch the ground.

Despite Garrett and Carla’s backseat reviews, the picnic shelter was an exciting step for John and Norma. Three years prior, in 1997, they had purchased The Land, seeking a retreat to the wilderness away from the bustle of greater Pittsburgh, and a place to make memories with their family. After researching (pre-internet) over 50 properties within a two-hour radius of their home, they first visited The Land one snowy November day. They packed the kids in the car and located the property using compass coordinates.

As they hiked the property, they noted mostly young forest and beautiful views of the mountains. The visit made an impression; months later, they closed on the property.

Then, the snow melted. The place was a trash heap. They found pieces of an old fire truck. There was an abandoned school bus. The steep uphill drive had a steady stream of water running down it. As Norma describes it, “The kids thought we were crazy.” “It was a good thing the snow was there when we viewed the property; it was a blessing that we bought it.”

The more I talk with John and Norma, the more I agree that their decision was indeed a blessing. Few people are as well-equipped as they are with the vision, work ethic, grit, and yes, stubbornness, to clean up the site as they did, and to continue to steward and enjoy their rustic, off-grid retreat today, nearly 30 years later.

Both John and Norma have strong connections to nature dating back to their childhoods. Norma’s father was a hunter, and they would visit the same area and camp there when she was young. John had a grandfather who hunted, and a mother who loved being in the woods. John and Norma met in journalism school and have built upon the legacy of their respective families ever since, backpacking and camping extensively together, and even choosing to spend their honeymoon on a backpacking adventure in Montana’s Absaroka Beartooth Range.

In their early years of owning The Land, their road map was clear: Clean up the trash. Put a switchback in the driveway to stop the runoff erosion when it rained. From there, they made brush piles for wildlife, cut a hiking trail, and built and installed several bluebird nesting boxes. Over the years, they planted over 80 trees – white oak, black cherry, black walnut and others. Bears tore down a lot of tubes, but overall, they found the planting to be more successful than they had anticipated. Beyond that, as Norma describes, “we thought we shouldn’t be doing anything, that we should just leave it alone.”

(Continued on page 6)



*Norma and John beside an unusual natural feature at The Land - a united tree and boulder.*

*Also noteworthy is Dawson Run, a tributary to the Allegheny River, which winds its way through the property.*



## The Liebenguth Family, *continued*

That mentality would eventually change. In winter of 2017, after seeing a mention in the Tionesta newspaper, The Forest Press, they attended a Forest Landowner Conference hosted by the Woodland Owners of Clarion - Allegheny Valley (WOCAV). It was their first foray into actively managing a woodland to address issues such as invasive plants and species-specific pests. They left the conference with the general feeling of “Wow, we should be doing stuff.”, recalls Norma.

Then, along came Bob Slagter, who you may recognize as a recently retired member of FSF’s Board of Directors. As John describes without hesitation, “He changed our lives.” Bob resides in the same Bradford Woods community, and a neighborhood wine-tasting event was their first exposure to his sense of humor, where they overheard him describing one variety as tasting “exactly like motor oil.”

It was Bob who encouraged John and Norma to look into the Pennsylvania Forest Stewards Program. 100 hours of pre-work and two training weekends later, and 21 years after that fateful snowy day when they first visited The Land, they became volunteer Forest Stewards. As I chatted with them, both John and Norma’s eyes lit up when they talked about the program, and about Bob. They conveyed so much gratitude and appreciation.

In the years since, John and Norma began to undertake bigger stewardship projects on The Land, while simultaneously becoming more involved with WOCAV until its dissolution in 2022. They worked on their own to knock back the autumn olive on the property, and began a courageous attempt to control the Japanese barberry and multiflora rose before enlisting the help of Ecological Field Services. To date, they have successfully treated nine acres for invasive plants, with more work to be done.



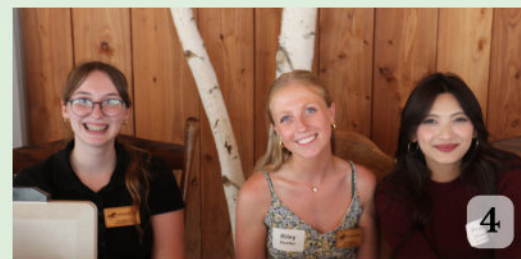
*The third generation celebrates The Land with a hot chocolate “Cheers!”*

Today, three generations of the Liebenguth family are making memories on The Land, with the addition of Garrett’s and Carla’s spouses and five grandchildren, ages 4-10. Though the family has made some additional improvements, most recently constructing small cabins to accommodate their growing family, they have retained the wild and rustic character of the place. Besides the cabins and the infamous picnic shelter, there are no other utilities or amenities, excepting a rental porta-a-john that Norma initially gifted to John for his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The Liebenguths also credit Bob Slagter with helping them to start thinking in earnest about their forest’s future. This year, the Liebenguth family made the decision to donate a conservation easement on the property to the Foundation for Sustainable Forests, along with ownership of the timber so that FSF may practice their ecological and restorative forestry approach there. In partnership with FSF, the family will continue to steward the forest, while also making new memories on The Land.

Garrett and Carla both acknowledge the significance of this property in their lives and that of their families. As Carla eloquently describes, “We’ve enjoyed many celebrations, milestones, and unforgettable (both gorgeous and very wet) camping

# Loving the Land Weekend Continued...



1) Ethan Tapper gave the keynote presentation at the Annual Dinner, delivering a message of thoughtful insights and hope for all those who steward forests. 2) Thank you to The Titusville Mill for providing a beautiful and fitting venue for the Annual Dinner! 3) *Left to Right*: John, Garrett, Norma, and Carla Liebenguth at the Annual Dinner, where they were recognized for their protection of “The Land.” 4) Many thanks to these student volunteers from Allegheny College, Samantha, Riley, and Pakriti, who helped the weekend run smoothly! 5) Conference day brought golden sunshine and early fall colors. 6) Horses, King and Power, demonstrated skidding logs during the conference. These are powerful, literal, workhorses who patiently worked alongside the program sessions.

weekends with friends and family, as well as solitary times to reset. I feel the same sense of awe as I did as a child while seeing a garter snake in a wood trestle, salamanders in damp leaves, unique fungi, and infinite starry skies.” Of the impact of The Land on her children, she says “From their first splashes in the river, sticky marshmallow nights giggling with cousins, to scattering a beloved pet’s ashes, we’re honored to be anchored as a family by The Land.”

Garrett reflects that “The Land taught me the importance of hard work in cleaning up dumpsters of trash, then the value of preservation once all the junk was cleaned.” He believes “there is a lasting effect the land carries with every guest that has visited. It is a great place to clear your mind and get grounded again from all the hustle of everyday life.”

One thing that stands out to me is that many of the Liebenguths’ activities on The Land are tied to

milestones and celebrations – the 30-yard dumpster rented as an anniversary present to clean up the trash heap, a picnic table for Norma for Mother’s Day, and the birthday port-a-john, to name a few. It is a testament to their sense of humor, of course, but also their commitment to this land and their role as stewards. I hope you will join me in celebrating the addition of this newest milestone, the protection of their land via conservation easement.

On behalf of the Foundation for Sustainable Forests, I want to convey our gratitude and appreciation to the Liebenguth family for their hard work and vision, and look forward to being their partners in stewardship. As John puts it, “The Land is more than recreation. The Land is a sacred place.”

*Prepared by Annie Maloney in collaboration with John and Norma Liebenguth. Would you like to share your story? If so, please let us know!*



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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 and resilience.*

## Upcoming Events

**Nov. 21 - FSF and National Aviary Guest Presentation  
at Presque Isle Audubon Society**

7:00 pm @ Tom Ridge Environmental Center,  
Erie, PA or via Zoom

**Jan. 16 - Our Woods & Waters Film Series (Virtual)**

6:30 pm - Live Webinar

**Feb. 20 - Our Woods & Waters Film Series (In-person)**

6:30 pm - Location to be Announced

*Celebrating*  
— 10 YEARS —

## Save the Dates! Our Woods & Waters Film Series

**Friday, Jan. 16, 6:30 pm, Virtual Webinar**

**Friday, Feb. 20, 6:30 pm, In-person**

For more information, visit:  
[foundationforsustainableforests.org/events/](http://foundationforsustainableforests.org/events/)

Co-hosted by:

