

# Women and Their Woods

Information for Women Forest Landowners  
Issue 7, Fall 2012

## Forest Landowner Perspective: From Camping to Organic Farming

*By Shary Skoloff, Pennsylvania/New York Landowner*



*Shary working on the farm.*

As far back as I can remember, the woods have held an irresistible allure for me. **It was the 100 acres of forest, along with 100 acres of pastures and cultivatable land, that captivated my husband, Gary, and me forty-five years ago and led to the impulsive purchase that changed our lives.** From our original intent to camp and simply enjoy the natural habitat of the overgrown old dairy farm in Susquehanna, PA, we poured our hearts and souls, not to mention physical work, into developing what

is now a certified organic produce farm with a 60-member CSA and presence at two farmers' markets.

The land, along with another 100 acres of hayfield, woods, and berry bushes 2-1/2 miles up the road in NY, is preserved under a conservation easement donated to the Delaware Highlands Conservancy in 2007.

We don't "manage" our woods, but maintain their natural state as a sanctuary for birds, bear, deer, and many small mammals and plants, a wildlife corridor adjoining 10,000 acres of PA state game land. All we remove is fallen limbs and downed trees for firewood.



*A portion of the woodlands on the Skoloff's property.*

For the first few years, we camped at the edge of the woods while starting to reclaim the

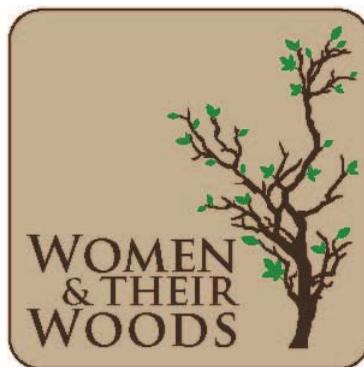
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The Women and Their Woods program is administered by Penn State Forest Resources Extension and the Delaware Highlands Conservancy with support from the Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program, US Forest Service at Grey Towers, and PA DCNR Department of Conservation and Recreation.

For additional information, please contact:

Allyson Muth  
Penn State Natural  
Resources Extension  
(814) 865-3208  
abm173@psu.edu

Amanda Subjin  
Delaware Highlands  
Conservancy  
(570) 226-3164  
conserve  
@delawarehighlands.org



Throughout our region, women are increasingly responsible for the stewardship of private forestlands. Women landowners require accurate information and relevant knowledge about available options for managing their properties.

Women and Their Woods is a dynamic, fun, and informative program that teaches women to effectively care for their lands. Women and Their Woods emphasizes conservation stewardship and the value of intact forestlands and instills in women landowners a sense of confidence in their abilities to meet the challenges of forestland ownership.

We hope you find this newsletter helpful. Please contact us for further information on how to be involved.

**SAVE THE DATE!** May 9, 2013 - **Women and Their Woods** In-Service Training, before the 2013 Private Forest Landowners Conference, May 10-11.

**We need your Email Address!**

As conservation-centered organizations, we want to conserve resources by communicating with you through e-mail.

Please send your email to [conserve@delawarehighlands.org](mailto:conserve@delawarehighlands.org) and specify if you would like to receive our mailings electronically or continue to receive hard copies in the mail.

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The "candelabra" tree on the Skoloff's woodlands.

land, build farm infrastructure, and remove rocks, rocks, and more rocks for our first garden. From the beginning, we also hiked through the woods with our infant daughter aboard Gary's back, to be joined a year later by a second daughter and a dog.

After several years of tenting, we built a small log cabin near one of the two streams that meander through our woods and fields. A more recent addition affords woodland vistas, with a tree-house-like master bedroom, overlooking surrounding tree-tops and mixed hemlock and hardwood forest across the stream.

During our daughters' youth, when they weren't helping with garden work, animal care, and haying, they and friends were free to explore the woods, build thatched forts out of fallen tree limbs and grasses, catch salamanders and toads, and learn to identify wildflowers, mosses, ferns, fungi, and other woodland flora and fauna. They grew up with a love of and respect for nature that we shared as a family and that they have passed on to their sons. It's a joy

to watch our grandsons playing in the same streams and woods that their mothers enjoyed as children.

I've also loved solo woodland walks and horseback rides, finding a nurturing solitude that balances life in a crazy world. For me, time in our woods, especially with my camera, is a meditation, as it is for Gary when he is piling fallen limbs into "habitats" for small wildlife and raking leaves for compost.

With our property preserved as a working farm/agricultural and environmental education center, we envision programs to help remedy "nature-deficit disorder," so responsible for environmental degradation. Trees are the keystone, for all of life depends upon the oxygen/carbon dioxide cycle that would not exist without them.

### **PLAN TO ATTEND THE 2013 PRIVATE FOREST LANDOWNERS' CONFERENCE**

May 10 & 11, 2013, Altoona, PA

Penn State's Center for Private Forests and partners are hosting the first-ever comprehensive conference for private landowners in Pennsylvania, whether you own 5 or 500 acres. This meeting is about learning and coming together as a community. Explore topics on woods, wildlife, water quality, conservation options, taxes, timber sales, invasive species and many more, and visit informational and resource displays and demonstrations. To learn more, visit: <http://ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forest-conference>.

## 2012 Women and Their Woods Educational Training and Retreat



*Norma describes the drawing of her property during a cognitive mapping exercise led by Nancy Baker.*



*In the classroom and dining space at Camp, participants share stories about connections to their land.*



*Participants hear from PA DCNR Service Forester Chad Gadsby and Foresters Brian Laudermilch and Rich Pepich about two fenced harvest sites within the nearby State Forest.*

This year's annual Women and Their Woods Educational Training and Retreat was held September 27-30 at Camp Susque, Trout Run, PA. **Twenty-one women from across the mid-Atlantic states participated in indoor and outdoor class activities and field trips to nearby state forestland over the course of four days.**

For more information about the retreat, visit <http://extension.psu.edu/private-forests/women-and-their-woods>.



*Margaret Brittingham, PSU Wildlife Biologist, takes participants on a walk around Camp property to view some of the local wildlife.*



*DCNR Asst. District Forester Joe Dotzel describes how a gas pipeline was installed to cross a stream within the State Forest.*



*Learning how to use a dichotomous key to identify a white ash with Jane Swift, Education Specialist with PA DCNR.*

# Women of the Woods

By Susan Benedict

*Women of the Woods* hold a unique role in today's society. In an era of urbanization, we are becoming a repository of ecological knowledge. We seek to partner with our land to promote healthy sustainable woodlands. We are natural nurturers and will pass our knowledge to the next generation. But let's face it: We are a bit different from our more urban sisters.

My WOW education started early. I was five when Dad took me with him on a dove hunt. I did ok with the sitting still part, but apparently my pale skin was visible to the overflying birds so Dad smeared me with mud to make me less visible. He got his limit of birds after that but it was hard to explain to my horrified mother (not a WOW) how I could have gotten so dirty.

I progressed in my outdoor education to hunting, fishing, farming and logging. I prospered in this environment but I began to realize I was a bit different from my peers at school, college and finally from other mothers once I had kids. I decided to embrace these differences and celebrate being a WOW.

By now you might be wondering how you can tell if you are a WOW. Footwear differences are very obvious - WOW dislike high heeled shoes because 1.) We can't figure out how to walk in them properly and 2.) We don't want to break an ankle and have to stay out of the woods till it heals. We are ecstatic that Red Head FINALLY makes snake-proof boots in women's sizes. We own waterproof sneakers and hiking boots and snow packs and have more wool socks than nylon stockings

Clothing is another area of difference. We WOW tend to have more field pants, shirts and down clothes than other women and yes - we even have a favorite camo pattern. Mine is Mossy Oak New Break-Up. We have an assortment of ball caps with various conservation organization logos and at least one from a chainsaw manufacturer.

Sometimes I feel I lead a dual life. A few years ago a good friend of mine gave me a Prada wallet for an early Christmas present. I found myself pulling it out of my camo hunting jacket to pay for gas during deer season. The female clerk gave me a very weird look.

Sometimes you wonder where you went wrong. Once I needed porcupine quills for a craft project. I realized how different I am from non-WOW when my husband proudly presented me with a road killed porcupine - and I was thrilled! Other women get jewelry or candy - I'm happy with road kill.

## Here are some other indications you are a confirmed WOW:

- You own a chainsaw but not a manicure kit
- You have eaten something made with acorns
- You are the only one at your monthly girls night out that has a pocket knife to cut your food
- You have tick repellent in your car



# Planning and Planting for Climate Change

By Nancy G.W. Baker

Unless you live on a different planet, you probably are not surprised to learn that July 2012 was the hottest month ever recorded in the lower 48 states. July's heat was no fluke. It was part of the warmest 12-month period ever recorded in the United States; over 27,000 high-temperature records have been broken or tied so far this year. As Jake Crouch, a climatologist at the NOAA's National Climatic Data Center, told The New York Times, "This clearly shows a longer-term warming trend in the U.S., not just one really hot month."

Penn State University's Dr. Michael E. Mann suggests: "The time for debate about the reality of human-caused climate change has now passed. We can have a good-faith debate about how to deal with the problem ... But we can no longer simply bury our heads in the sand."

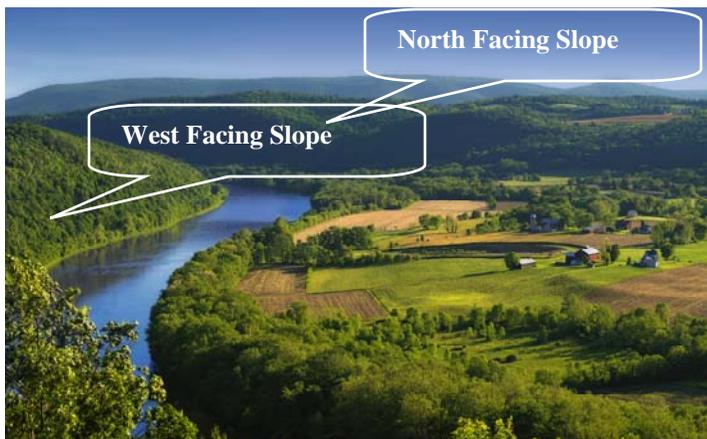
## How does all this translate to stewardship of your forest?

Unfortunately, the time is past when one could simply leave a forest alone and expect it to thrive on its own. With a warming climate, a "hands-off" attitude is now a recipe for disaster; we need to get into our woods, give them their annual physical, and design a plan of preventive medicine for their future.

In the case of my northern Pennsylvania woods, I know that my land is changing and warming. My family's tenure on this Bradford County land extends over 150 years: there are tales of  $-35^{\circ}$  F winters, killing frosts in every month, and struggles to grow Silver Queen Sweet Corn with its frost free requirement of 92 days. Now my neighboring maple syrup producers are having a tough time predicting sap flows, summer starts with a fit in March and ends in an erratic snowstorm in October, I've an invasion of hemlock wooly adelgid (which would be controlled with low winter temperatures), white ash decline on sites that are parching in summer heat, and a veritable explosion of deer ticks. A warming, more erratic climate forecasts additional stress and a changing composition in my woods over the next 80 to 150 years. "What to do?"

I begin by looking at the forests that cover the river hills along the Susquehanna River. The river meanders, deeply entrenched, a mile or so from our land. We've always been treated to double peaks of fall foliage in our part of the northern tier. The north-facing slopes, cooler and moister, are covered with hemlock, sugar maple, beech, black and yellow birch. They turn a dramatic red, orange, and yellow against the dark green hemlocks during the second week of October.

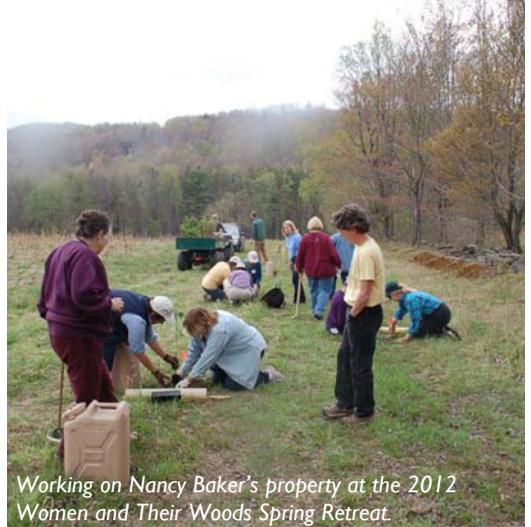
The south and west-facing slopes are warmer and dryer, covered with a variety of oaks and hickories; their dramatic moment comes two weeks later when they imitate a gorgeous Belgian tapestry of russets, deep pinks and gold. Although it's not right on the river, my land has both north and south facing slopes. There are several elements of concern; here's what the "doctor" proposes:



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First is a section of south-facing woods, land which was cleared and then pastured until the 1940s when it was allowed to follow natural succession. Dominated by white ash, this once robust young wood is now in declining health. Stressed by drought, subject to ash wilt, it's waiting for the coup-de-grace of Emerald Ash Borer. Its newly opened canopy allowed a generous helping of invasives to gain a foothold, but they have been controlled using EQIP funding. Now, what to replant for a future forest?

There is some good young northern red oak regeneration here; 1939 aerial photos show a remnant patch of large red oaks in an adjacent stand. How about looking to those south facing slopes just down on the river for inspiration? And also to oak-hickory dominated forests 100 miles or so to our south? Plus, we ought to try to create a more diverse forest which might be more resilient to future change. The prescription? Let's supplement the oaks, shagbark hickory and maples already there.



Last fall we caged (and cut) 475 current red, white and chestnut oak seedlings to encourage straight resprouts; they're already knee-high. This spring we've planted species which might have been in the original forest: red oak, chestnut oak, swamp white oak, cucumber magnolia, basswood, serviceberry, American mountain ash, most from more-southerly nurseries. In addition, we planted more southerly species: mockernut hickory, red hickory, bur oak, yellow poplar, black gum, persimmon, flowering dogwood; we will try to add black oak and butternut when seedlings are available. Expecting the loss of hemlock, we've added clumps of Meyer and Norway spruce, but we're looking for Pitch/Loblolly hybrid pines.

Our stands of north/east-facing woods are of greater age than those above. Already beech, yellow birch, ash, sugar maple and hemlock show signs of trouble. With warming temperatures, trees at the southern edge of their range are both stressed and more susceptible to pests. Hemlock wooly adelgid, beech scale and winter moth are all temperature dependent invasive pests of forest trees and will likely be more prevalent in these woods as they move north with warming temperatures. In addition, temperature stressed trees are more susceptible to native nuisance species such as sugar maple borer and armillaria root rot. If these trees and woods are to survive, they will need to be protected from both native and non-native pests. I can start by waging war on garlic mustard which interferes with the mycorrhizal fungi so necessary to the health of these north-facing forests. And our forester and I have begun the initial conversation about treating individual trees with systemic pesticides. I'm not thrilled with this; it's expensive and like many medicines, there are side-effects. But unless I maintain the forest over my two trout streams, both the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems will suffer.

Like any good steward, I'm looking to the future of the patient. The prescription is increased diversity, defense, and planned resilience. Time, 100 years plus, long after I'm gone, will tell if the medicine works.

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- You actually sort of like the smell of bug spray
- You have more pictures on your phone of tree anomalies, wildflowers and wildlife than your kids or grandkids
- You know what a trail camera is and are considering purchasing the new black-out model
- You carry a compass because sometimes GPS doesn't work under the tree canopy
- Your monthly magazine subscriptions include Tree Farmer and QDMA
- You know what QDMA stands for (and NRCS, WHIP and EQIP )
- You like to look at deer but consider them an invasive species to be controlled
- Your first aid kit includes a blood clot packet - because you can envision a situation where a big band aid just isn't gonna cut it
- Your personal library doesn't have the latest *New York Times* Bestseller but does include a tree identification manual, a wildflower book and the whole Forest Stewardship Series
- When your girl friends ask you what you've been up to, their eyes glaze over at the mention of your latest forestry treatment which you continue to explain in excruciating detail
- You skip a workshop on how to decorate with flowers but attend one on chainsaw safety
- You consider a ball cap a hair styling aide
- You would rather go for a walk in the woods by yourself than go to any mall

Let's face it - we are different from typical women - but who wants to be typical anyway?

**Let's celebrate being Women of the Woods!**

- INSIDE**
- Forest Landowner Perspective: From Camping to Organic Farming
  - Women of the Woods
  - Planning and Planting for Climate Change
  - 2012 Women and Their Woods Fall Retreat
- Women and Their Woods Newsletter



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P.O. Box 218 Hawley, PA 18428-0218

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