

Women and Their Woods

Information for Women Forest Landowners in Pennsylvania
Issue 4, Winter 2011

A Successful Educational Retreat

On a colorful fall weekend this October, twenty-one women landowners headed out to Camp Susque in Trout Run, PA for the inaugural *Women and Their Woods Educational Retreat*. Most attendees hailed from Pennsylvania while others made the trip from New York and West Virginia. The four day educational retreat was facilitated by Allyson Muth, Forest Stewardship Program Associate at Penn State University, Amanda Subjin, Stewardship Coordinator for the Delaware Highlands Conservancy, and Nancy Baker, Pennsylvania landowner.

Attendees were selected through an application process focused on women who would be willing to attend the retreat in order to become mentors for other women landowners across their regions. The women bunked together, shared meals, and learned in group settings through dynamic and fun hands-on workshops and field trips. We were fortunate to have presenters representing diverse organizations such as the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Penn State University, USDA Forest Service, Oregon State University and the Pennsylvania Game Commission.



Attendees and presenters at the 2011 Women and their Woods Educational Retreat.

The Retreat was the culmination of a series of prior workshops and events across the state. In 2008, the Delaware Highlands Conservancy realized that due to demographic trends, increasing numbers of women are becoming the owners and managers of forestland. Because women landowners often feel they lack the knowledge to make informed decisions about land, the Conservancy, in partnership with the USDA Forest Service at Grey Towers, began offering educational programs targeted to women forest landowners, and *Women and Their Woods* was born.

Post-retreat, participants are building on the momentum of their experience and employing the knowledge they have gained to increase education about the value of forest land and sound stewardship practices among other women forest

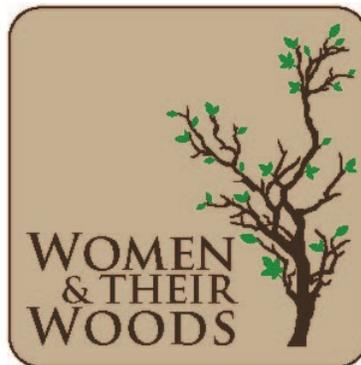
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The Women and Their Woods program is administered by Penn State Forest Resources Extension and the Delaware Highlands Conservancy with support from the Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program, US Forest Service at Grey Towers, and PA DCNR Department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

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

We need your Email Address!

Like so many other conservation minded organizations, we are hope to conserve resources by communicating with you through e-mail.

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

...Continued from page 1

landowners in their communities. The Conservancy and Penn State University will continue to provide educational outreach to the women mentors and support them in creating their regional *Women and Their Woods* groups.



PA DCNR Service Foresters demonstrate tools used for prescribed fire.

"It was a wonderful experience, I rushed back to Heron Hill and shared my information with three fellas who help me on the property. I was a mine of information, just discovered. I was happy to meet my group." Phoebe Shaw, enthusiastic landowner



Attendees learn tree identification and sample black birch tea and sumac-ade.

Plans are underway to offer a follow-up event in the spring and a second retreat next fall. Applications for the 2012 retreat will be going out in the spring. In the meantime, you can view photos of the retreat by visiting the Delaware Highlands Conservancy's Facebook page. And if you'd like to hear more about the event, listen online to Kara Holsopple's NPR radio story at www.alleghenyfront.org; search *Women and Their Woods*. For a taste of the event, try Nancy Baker's recipe for Hermits.

This recipe is from Trudy Porter of Great Spruce Head Island, Penobscot Bay, Maine; a grand lady of 100+ years. I modify these by using butter, candied ginger, 1 cup golden raisins and 1 cup walnuts. In addition, I bake them on parchment paper; they release better that way yet still do not spread too much. If I can get these to turn out on the Great Spruce Head Island big Queen Atlantic wood range with birch and spruce in the firebox, you know they are pretty easy to make in your home oven! ~Nancy Baker

HERMITS

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| 1 cup brown sugar | ½ cup milk |
| 6 Tablespoons margarine (or butter or other solid fat) | ½ cup molasses |
| 2 Tablespoons oil | 2 Tablespoons candied orange peel, or lemon peel, citron, etc. |
| 3 cups sifted all-purpose flour | ¾ cup raisins |
| 1 teaspoon cinnamon | ½ cup chopped nuts |
| ½ teaspoon salt | |
| 1 teaspoon soda | |

Cream sugar and shortening plus oil; add sifted dry ingredients alternately with milk and molasses. Add raisins, nuts, etc. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes on a 12"x17 ½" pan in 3 strips; grease under each strip only. Cool and cut into bars.

Using Stories to Get to Values: Being an Engaged Mentor

Allyson Muth, Forest Stewardship Associate, Penn State University

Pennsylvania's private woodlands are a lasting legacy of Penn's Woods. Seventy percent of the state's forestland is held by individuals, families, hunting clubs, and other private entities. Many of the trees we see around us and enjoy are there because someone has a personal affinity for the land, its trees, and a commitment to caring for them. Yet, when approached by a resource professional or starting a journey to understand what she has, the first question a landowner is often asked is: "What are your objectives for your land?" This question takes a landowner away from her feelings for the land to a more practical place and can create a disconnect between the owner and informational resources. Skills in listening to a landowner's stories can help you bridge this disconnect.

When reaching out as a peer volunteer to another landowner (trying to help them understand their land, options, and alternatives to improving its care), start with understanding what they value about their land – what they like, love, what is meaningful. Next move to understanding their concerns and their long-term plans, their hopes and dreams. Only then should you offer to help translate "where they are" to "what they and their land can become."

Start with trust. As a landowner reaching out to other landowners, you have an automatic "in." You are someone like them who has been in their situation and who can share practical experiences with similar challenges. You automatically start the interaction in a more trusted position than an outsider or expert.

Practice engaged listening. Realize that as someone tells you a story, your facial expressions, nods, murmured words are contributing to how that story is being told. Both your non-verbal and verbal reactions support or deny what you're hearing and can imply judgment. Be aware of your reactions. Your job is not to judge, but to help someone share what's important to them.

Seek a deeper understanding of the other person's life experiences and of their experiences with their land. Ask them to share their story. Your initial question could be, "Tell me a story about a memorable time when you were on your land." Ask follow up questions: "What happened next? How did you react to that?" Draw out all the elements of the experience. Don't ask why they did something. "Why" invites justification; you want description. Listen carefully to what they tell you. People tend to emphasize what is important to them: you'll hear repeated themes, recurrent words, and aspects of the story that demonstrate what has meaning and what they value. Sometimes relating the story helps them to articulate it for themselves – a self-reflective moment of understanding. Find out what they know, love, and what is most important to them. And then, and only then, talk to them about how to improve, enhance, ensure the sustainability of their land in that context. If you begin this important dialogue about their land's future with an understanding of their values, the foundation upon which outreach and education depend is more authentic, more precise and concrete.

People own land for a variety of reasons. Our approach to helping them understand what they have and how to sustain it must be tailored to each person's story. The act of telling the story to an engaged and interested listener will help to make values explicit for the teller, and articulating for themselves and others what is most important to them about their land will serve to enhance their connection to it. Our responsibility in promoting good forest stewardship is to help maintain and enhance that connection so that stewardship of the land continues beyond us. Start with a story. The story and the relationship built during its telling will set the stage for a meaningful interaction between

It Takes a Village to Raise a Tree Farmer

Susan Benedict

When my father passed away in 2006, as his Executrix I thought I had things under control. Then my family voted me manager of our forest and suddenly I wasn't so sure.

Dad left us in better shape than many forest property estates. We had a family limited partnership that had been operating for several years prior to his death, and he had a will. We had a PA forest stewardship plan and were working with the plan. We had a consulting forester who was doing and continues to do a fantastic job helping us manage our forest. We had a logger who prided himself on doing an excellent job of timber harvesting. Before he died, Dad and I discussed management of the property, so I knew his wishes going forward.



While I was honored that my family trusted me to manage not only Dad's estate but also the property, I felt concern over my ability to do so. I realized I needed more information on forest management to properly care for the property our family holds dear.

So I began to educate myself in forest management. I researched forest management on the Internet. I discussed my questions and concerns with my forester. I joined the PA Forestry Association and the National Association of Woodland Owners and subscribed to their magazines. I attended Penn State's Centre Region Forest Landowner Conference and subscribed to *Forest Leaves*. It was in *Forest Leaves* that I found out about the Woodland Owners of Centre County and joined them. I learned about forest certification, and with the help of our forester, we became an American Tree Farm System Certified Family Forest. I subscribed to *Tree Farmer* magazine. I met with our DCNR service forester who provided me with excellent information about various subjects, and continues to do so. I took an online course for forest landowners. I joined the Quality Deer Management Association and learned about deer herd management and the importance deer herd management plays in forest management. I became a trained PA Forest Steward. But more important than all of these, I kept a promise to my Dad and walked our property. I became familiar with its wildlife, its water and its trees. I found beautiful spots and new wildflowers and learned about vernal pools and butterflies and literally found the home for my soul.

As I reflect on becoming a tree farmer, I realize how blessed I was that Dad had things set

...Continued on back page

If you go down to the woods tonight...

Andy Wilson, School of Forest Resources, Penn State University
Forest Leaves, Winter 2005, Volume 15, No. 3

Take a walk in a Pennsylvania woodland on a winter's day and you could be forgiven for thinking that it has been deserted, with most birds fleeing the cold northern winter, leaving behind only chickadees, woodpeckers, and a handful of other hardy year-round residents. By night, in contrast, winter is one of the best times of the year to find those elusive and enigmatic nocturnal hunters: the owls. Seven species of owl breed in Pennsylvania and all of them stay around through the winter, protected from the cold by their thick plumage. Deep snow, however, may pose problems for these magnificent birds. Rodents which are the main prey of most owl species, are protected from their aerial predators by the blanket of snow. Winters with prolonged snow cover, therefore, may cause some owls to starve or press them to move further south to escape the severe weather.



Eastern Screech Owl

Mid- to late-winter is a busy time in the owls' calendar for they breed early in the year. Winter is a time for owls to claim a territory and defend it from intruders, which is why they are particularly vocal at this time of the year. Owls are known to defend their territories with vigor; large owl species may even prey on smaller owls to reduce the competition within their territories. One of the main limitations for owls is the availability of nest sites. Whether they be cavities in trees, rock ledges, old bird of prey nests, or old buildings, these nest sites are in short supply. By breeding early, owls are able to claim these nest sites ahead of competitors and ensure a head start raising their young which could be in the nest for a couple of months or more.

The most common owls in woodlots are the Great Horned and Eastern Screech Owl. The Great Horned Owl stands almost 2 feet tall and usually uses old nests of other large birds such as hawks, eagles, or herons but will also nest in natural tree or cliff cavities. Retaining trees with old nests will increase the chances of attracting this impressive bird to your woodlot. In contrast, the Eastern Screech Owl is very small weighing just 6 ounces. This species nests in tree cavities, either natural or old woodpecker holes. Retaining standing dead trees is therefore vital for this and many other bird species.

All owls feed mainly on rodents and play an important role in limiting potential pests such as mice, voles, and rats. However, in an increasingly tidy countryside, suitable hunting grounds for owls are becoming limited. Grassy strips around woodlots are favored hunting grounds for owls, especially the ghostly looking Barn Owl, sadly now a threatened species in Pennsylvania. A loss of suitable nest sites in old barns and dead trees may also have contributed to Barn Owl decline. This species takes readily to built owl nest boxes which are vital to Barn Owl conservation efforts for this species in some areas.



Barn Owl

Owls are exceptional hunting machines. Their hearing and sight are far more acute than a human's, while their soft plumage allows them to fly silently through the night undetected by their prey. The fact that they are nocturnal and rarely seen adds to the aura of mystery surrounding them. Owls are top predators, relying on a healthy food chain below them to provide sufficient prey through the year. As such, their presence in woodlots should be the source of great pride for this indicates that a complex community of woodland wildlife occurs there. Why not take a walk in your woodlot on a calm evening during late winter and see if you can hear the distinctive calls of territorial owls?

Quick Reference Guide to the Owls of Pennsylvania

Species	Where found	Length (inches)	Description	Voice
Barn Owl	Rare, lowland farmland and woodland edges	16	White below pale brown above	Shrieks and hisses
Eastern Screech Owl	Fairly common, gardens and woodlots	8.5	Small and stocky, patterned gray or reddish brown	Descending tremulous whistle
Great Horned Owl	Fairly common, woodlots, towns and gardens	22	Large, gray with barred under parts. Ear tufts	A deep hoot, repeated several times
Barred Owl	Fairly common, forests and wooded swamps	21	Brown above with pale spots, pale with streaks below	A strong hoot "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all"
Long-eared Owl	Rare and secretive, pine plantations	15	Intricately patterned gray-brown. Ear tufts	A deep hoot repeated every 3 seconds.
Short-eared Owl	Rare, nests on grasslands. More common in winter	15	Pale buff-brown. Often active during day	Usually silent. Has a low triple hoot
Northern Saw-whet Owl	Rare, woodland with dense under story	8	Small with large head, white "V" mark on face	Low whistled toots, twice per second

...Continued from page 3

up to ensure smooth management transition at his passing. My promise to him to walk the property and learn it was inspired as it gave me a deeper appreciation for the uniqueness of the property and the breadth of knowledge required to manage it properly. I continue to look at information from many different sources. You never know where you will find that critical tidbit of information to help you make an important decision. Finally I have been very blessed in the people I have come to associate with through the various forestry organizations I joined. People in the forest community are a breed apart. They are knowledgeable and helpful. The friends I have developed in this special “village” have brought a new richness to my life and have helped to “raise” this tree farmer.

Susan looks forward to working with the Women and Their Woods network to help others learn more about managing their land. She is the General Partner at Beartown Family Limited Partnership and manager of a certified Tree Farm in Centre County, Pennsylvania. In September 2011, she was recognized as the Landowner Stewardship award winner in the Chesapeake Forest Champion contest. Susan and her family, husband Leroy, three sons, several brothers and their families, are very active promoting forest stewardship. Susan writes letters, heads the Centre County Natural Gas Task Force, has testified in DC in support of the Farm Bill, hosted countless field days for scouting programs, presented lectures on intergenerational land transfer, and is very active in myriad forest stewardship groups. Her family’s property contains the headwaters of Beech Creek, an important tributary for the Susquehanna River.

- **INSIDE**
- **A Successful Educational Retreat**
- **If You Go Out In the Woods Tonight...**
- **It Takes a Village to Raise a Tree Farmer**
- **Using Stories to Get to Values**
- **Nancy Baker’s Famous Recipe for Hermits**

Women and their Woods Newsletter



Delaware Highlands Conservancy
serving New York and Pennsylvania
P.O. Box 218 Hawley, PA 18428-0218

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