

May 2011

# The SWPWO Leaflet



**Our Purpose:** *Southwestern Pennsylvania Woodland Owners (SWPWO), a not for profit association, is an organization of individuals interested in sound woodland management practices which encourage the diverse use of forests for timber production, wildlife habitat, watershed protection and recreation and to promote this multiple-use philosophy through education and technical assistance for the benefit of the membership and general public.*

## SWPWO May and June Events

**“Woodland Stream Quality: What Does it Mean?” will be Southwest PA Woodland Owners Next Meeting Topic.**

On **Tuesday, May 10, 2011, at 7 pm**, SW PA Woodland Owners (SWPWO) will meet at the Washington County Courthouse (100 W. Beau St) first floor meeting room. Jennifer Halchak from the Washington County Conservation District will speak about stream quality- what to look for and how it is measured. She will outline signs of a healthy stream as well as explain the terminology used in this science. This meeting is free and open to the public. Free parking is provided in the parking garage only at the Beau Street B-Level entrance at the base of the Courthouse.

On the following **Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 1 PM**, Jennifer Halchak will meet us at the “S” bridge in Claysville, PA (at the intersection of Route 40 and 221) for a field trip. She will demonstrate the procedures used to measure stream quality and identify the macro fauna and flora of the site. There is plenty of parking at this site but dress for the weather. Again, this meeting is free and open to the public.

**The Mysteries of the Forest Tour will be held on Saturday, June 11, 2011, 1:00 P.M.**, at the Burnham Woodlot near Old Concord, Washington County (south of Prosperity). Admission is FREE.

Michael DiRinaldo, the PA State Service Forester for Washington, Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties and Arlyn Perkey, U.S.D.A Forest Service-ret., will be leading the festivities. The field trip will be held on a Tree Farm near Old Concord in Washington County. The land owner is recognized as the 2010 Pennsylvania Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year. He has a band sawmill and attendees can observe logs being cut into boards. Educational programs will be offered that will interest both adults and children. These will include a leisurely walk in the woods, leaf and tree identification, discussions on the ecology of the forest, and the building of bluebird boxes. The Department of Agriculture’s “Pennsylvania WoodMobile” will also be present (*pending funding*). The WoodMobile is a traveling exhibit that provides information on the state's forest resources and the state's forest products industry. Refreshments will be served. More information or to R.S.V.P., please contact: Mark Fajerski, [mdfajerski@verizon.net](mailto:mdfajerski@verizon.net), or John Burnham, [burnhamjc@msn.com](mailto:burnhamjc@msn.com).

## Additional Upcoming Events That May Be of Interest..

Upcoming events from the Pa Forests Web Seminar Center are:

**May 10, 2011:** Conserving Working Forests, Renee' Carey, Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy.

**May 17, 2011:** Providing Quality Habitat for White-tailed Deer, Matt Ross, Certified Wildlife Biologist, Licensed Forester and Certifications Program Manager, Quality Deer Management Association.

**June 14, 2011:** Backyard Forestry, Jim Finley, Professor, Penn State School of Forest Resources.

All webinars are aired live at noon and again at 7:00 P.M. They are also recorded and can be viewed at a later time. For more information and to view previously recorded webinars, please visit the following website: <http://rnnext.cas.psu.edu/PAForestWeb/>

## Resting on a Snowy Branch

By Jesse Wise and Stacy Carroll

Ed and Nadine Obermiller, long-time SWPWO members, kindly shared the beautiful picture of a barred owl (bottom right) that they took at their new home in New Hampshire, where they moved to be closer to their son. Ed and Nadine still have a farm in Greene County and avidly read SWPWO's newsletter. Thank you for sharing, Ed and Nadine! In honor of your striking picture, here a few facts about barred owls...Barred owls have a 44-inch wing span and can be found all over the eastern U.S. Although they aren't always easy to spot, as they are mainly active at night, Barred owls can often be heard calling out what sounds like, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" They can also exhibit hoots, squeals and haunting calls that resemble human screams or laughter. In late winter, these calls are used to attract mates, along with a courtship dance, which consists of nodding, bowing, spreading their wings and shaking their heads. Once they mate they tend to find the same mate in following years. Barred owls often nest in hollow trees in areas near water where pine trees are present. They lay 2 to 4 eggs, which hatch in approximately 30 days. These owlets can fly by 6-weeks of age, but generally stay with their parents for 6 months. Once the young owls leave the nest, the parent owls generally go back to a solitary lifestyle. Barred owls eat a wide variety of prey consisting mainly of mice, moles, shrews, rats, but also including frogs, salamanders, snakes, crayfish, insects, slugs, and fish, all of which they swallow whole! When they fish for dinner, they wade knee-deep in water and catch fish with their feet. These fascinating creatures are themselves prey to only great-horned owls and humans.



## Mountains of Mulch and Excess Soil Are Killing Trees

(as seen in PA Forest Leaves Spring 2011)

By Robert McBride, Service Forester, PA DCNR

A strange phenomenon has emerged in the past ten years: homeowners, groundskeepers, and even nurserymen are adding enormous amounts of mulch to trees and shrubs of all sizes and ages!

Generally, mulch is a good thing. But consider how Nature does it. A walk in a woodland can be an eye-opener. The organic debris we see (i.e., leaves, twigs, and seeds) is strewn loosely across the forest floor. It is usually one to two inches deep – and never piled up against tree trunks. You'll notice you can see the base of each plant. Look for the "root flare," the distinct point near ground level where the tree-stem transitions into roots. That is exactly what we should see in our landscape trees.

Why should we see a tree's root flare? Why is deep mulch not a good thing? Why should mulch never be piled up against the stem? There are two primary reasons. First, the excess mulch will overdo its job, keeping the tree's trunk dark and moist. This softens and weakens the bark, encouraging rot plus insect and disease attack. The first sign may be bark cracking or peeling at the base of the tree.

Secondly, roots need to breathe. A plant and its root system are usually shaped like a wine glass on a dinner plate. The wine glass represents the tree and trunk we see above ground. The plate depicts the tree's root system. (You may have noticed this appearance when you've encountered a tree blown down by a wind storm.) About 80% of the tree's tiny feeder roots lie only ten to twenty inches below the ground surface, within four to eight feet of the tree trunk. Besides taking in moisture and minerals, roots also exchange gases – they breathe (respire) – drawing in oxygen to do their work. Things like standing water, fill soil, or mulch more than two inches thick make it nearly impossible for our plants to breathe. They are suffocating! Signs of plant root stress include smaller, fewer, or yellow leaves, dead or dying limbs, and extra little branches (watersprouts and epicormics) developing on the stem or at the base of the tree.

The solution to suffocation is to remove the excess soil or mulch, or drain the water away. Fortunately most trees are long-lived and forgiving. Dig down beside the tree trunk to locate the root flare. Remove any soil above this level – out to the tree's drip line. (You'll likely notice tiny white feeder roots have migrated up into the excess soil or mulch to find air.) Place a two-inch layer of mulch over this cleared area, keeping it two inches away from the trunk. Sunlight should reach the base of the tree; and air should be able to flow past it. Remove any loose or peeling bark; treat the exposed wood with a latex paint (this is a cosmetic effort to deter insects and disease from attacking. Never use alcohol or oil-based materials. They simply burn the tissue attempting to heal the wood.). Next growing season, your tree will likely thank you by putting out a fuller, greener batch of healthy new leaves.



*Example of improper "volcano mulching".*

Photo credit:

[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/\\_9zC8mncqBAVU/SDfuit4jddI/AAAAAAAAGcI/AM\\_UWPTL8\\_jed0](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_9zC8mncqBAVU/SDfuit4jddI/AAAAAAAAGcI/AM_UWPTL8_jed0)



***“...sugar maples being among the earliest to leaf out, with a luminescent light green, lemon-y tint.”***

Photo credit:  
<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/commontr/sugar.htm>

## **Walking in the Woods**

By Carl R. Douglas

Many times woods walking is a solitary pursuit and, thereby, an opportunity to give the imagination free reign. I sometimes try to view the land through Indian eyes: what did the Shawnee see when they walked this way, before settlers arrived and embarked on improvements? Or, what will be the resulting landscape 50 years from now when the Mar-celly is played out? The woods can lend itself to the long view.

When I am of a mind to look at detail a favorite pastime is to pretend that our friend Arlyn Perkey is along for the walk. I try to see the trees and other features from [what I take to be] Arlyn’s perspective. (That I am able even to contemplate this speaks to the number of field trips and talks he has conducted these last 11 years.) Arlyn claims to be from Iowa but you notice pretty quickly that his accent is Southern-tinged; he also enjoys a good laugh. From this, I derive the essential attribute of the tree man: he or she must be adaptable. If unable to laugh at himself and the vagaries of the natural world, he might as well make the best deal possible with the land agent, sling the golf clubs onto the pack horse and make the long trek to Boca to work forevermore on his short game.

And so I identify those oaks, sugar maples and cherries that show promise, or are in a promising location. This Spring I am cognizant (for the first time it seems) of the sugar maples being among the earliest to leaf out, with a luminescent light green, lemon-y tint. I note north-facing slopes, old fence lines, how a patch of woods is dominated by a certain species of tree then gives way, across an invisible line, to a different species. I see the barberry, year by year, gain a denser and more widespread footprint.

In truth, Arlyn’s is not the only voice I hear when coursing the trails. The wildlife guy will offer praise for the autumn olive and its’ berries, which are an excellent food source for birds and game. The mushroomer is not studying the canopy but directing discerning eye to the forest floor in an attempt to conjure the magical morel. The farmer is decrying the encroachment of the woods on his pastures and hay fields, and the gas man/geologist’s focus is way underground.

Which is to say: in the long run, nature will out, no matter what we do or do not do. We, shareholders in the Commonwealth, in a spirit of enlightened discovery are free to pursue our interests and joys on our land, in our time. We are in the Catbird seat as the new growing season, “stirring dull roots with Spring rain”, unfolds. Oh the wonder, the tragedy!

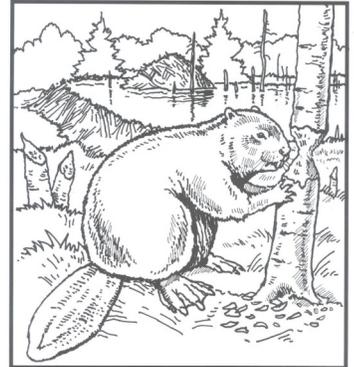
It sure beats golf.

## Sharing Forest Stewardship with Youth

By Jesse Wise

As discussed in the last issue of the SWPWO Leaflet, it's important to share forest stewardship with the next generation. Here are a few more ideas for how to accomplish the latter task:

- ✚ Bring all the children in your life to SWPWO's "Mysteries of the Forest Tour" on June 11<sup>th</sup>! For more details, see page 1 of this newsletter.
- ✚ Celebrate "National Walk in the Woods Day" on May 21<sup>st</sup> by taking children on a nice hike!
- ✚ Go online to: <http://paforestproducts.org/pennswoods/> and download any of the "Sustaining Penn's Woods" curriculum fact sheets, then read through them with your children.
- ✚ Go online to: <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=613673&mode=2> and download pages of the PA Game Commission Wildlife Coloring Book (left). Download the corresponding PA Game Commission Wildlife Notes and read to your children about the animals while they color their pictures. Wildlife Notes can be downloaded from: <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=596812&mode=2>



**Beaver**

Beavers cut down trees with their teeth. They use the trees to make dams and a house called a lodge. The beaver eats the bark and branches from trees. This busy rodent creates a wetland where many other animals can live.

## How to Choose the Right Consulting Forester

By Jesse Wise

As a new graduate from an SAF accredited forestry program, I have to say that I am saddened most by the fact that not all "professional foresters" are the same. Just as not all doctors are looking out for your best interest, not all foresters necessarily have your goals and aspirations for your land in mind. That said, in-line with the May 2011 issue of the SWPWO Leaflet where we discussed WHY you should use a consulting forester, I still stress that using a consulting forester when considering forest management is extremely important. However, we now need to talk about HOW to choose the right consulting forester for you.

For starters, make sure that they are working for you. For example, though a procurement forester working for a lumber mill may very well be a "professional forester" and should not necessarily be viewed as the big bad wolf, he/she should likely also not be hired as your consulting forester. This is because his/her main goal is most likely to procure timber for a mill for the lowest price possible; he/she is not working for you. Also, make sure your forester respects your interests and goals; if you love wildlife and want to create specific wildlife habitat while harvesting some timber, make sure the forester you choose is knowledgeable about such endeavors and supportive of your intentions.

In order to choose the best possible consulting forester for you, "interview" more than one. If they are willing, ask them to individually walk with you on your land and talk to you about your goals and options. Question them about their inventory methods and costs of services; remember, you get what you pay for, so don't automatically go with the lowest bidder! For example, one forester may charge \$500 for an inventory, while another charges \$2,000 for his/her services. However, the first of the two foresters may simply do a drive-by "windshield" cruise of your timber and sell it to the first interested buyer for their asking price (in which case you may have been better off to sell it yourself) **(continued on back page)**

**Submit newsletter comments, topic suggestions, events, and articles to:**

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*(please include SWPWO  
in e-mail subject line)*

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We're on the Web (and very thankful to Bob Daley for managing our website)!

See us at:

[www.cs.pitt.edu/~daley/swpwo](http://www.cs.pitt.edu/~daley/swpwo)

*for the most up to date information about our organization and connections to other resources to help you manage your woodlot!*

# How to Choose the Right Consulting Forester *cont.*

By Jesse Wise

*(continued from page 5)* while the second forester may inventory every section of your forest and carry out the activities discussed in the last SWPWO Leaflet article to ensure you are paid a fair, high stumpage price.

How are you supposed to know who to trust?! A good idea is to ask for references from past customers, and then CHECK those references! In addition, talk to neighbors and woodland owners that you know and ask them about their experiences and who they recommend. Your local PA DCNR Service Forester may be able to provide you a list of local consulting foresters, but just remember that they can't give you advice on who to choose. In short, shop around, check references, and in the end, choose the consulting forester who you feel is most willing to work with you to meet your goals and objectives for your land.

## News and Notes

The wood (and other parts) of an abandoned HOME and BARN in Aleppo Township (Greene Co) are available for FREE. If you, or someone you know, are interested in disassembling these structures for their materials, please contact Service Forester Bob McBride at 724-437-7983.

## Don't forget to mark your calendar with the Rest of the year's SWPWO Events...

**July 9: *Tour of the Appalacian Hardwood Center*** with Shawn Grushecky, (Assistant Director AHC )

Time: 1:00 PM Place: Morgantown, WV; Meet at 12:30 PM at Building #10, Greene Country Fairgrounds, Waynesburg, PA

**August 6 Field Trip: *A Walk In The Woods: What is a forester looking for when examining your timber?*** with Bob McBride, State Service

Forester for Fayette, Greene and Somerset Counties

Time: 1:00 PM Place: TBA

**September 7 Meeting: *The Habits and Habitats of the Furry Creatures in your Forest***

Time: 7:00 PM

Place: Building #10, Greene Country Fairgrounds, Waynesburg, PA

**September 10 Field Trip: *Recognizing the Signs of Macro-Fauna in Your Woods***

Time: 1:00 PM Place: To be Determined Meet at 12:30 PM at Building #10, Greene Country Fairgrounds, Waynesburg, PA

**October 22 Family Picnic with Woodland Field Day**

Time: To be determined Place: To be determined

**November 9 Meeting: *Options for Forest Land Gas Well Drilling***

Time: 7:00 PM Place: First Floor Meeting Room, Courthouse Square Building, 100 W. Beau Street, Washington, PA

**November 12 Field Trip: *Visit to Gas Well Forest Reclamation Sites***

Time: 1:00 PM

Meet at 12:30 PM at Building #10, Greene Country Fairgrounds, Waynesburg, PA

*\*\*google "SWPWO" to view our website and see event descriptions*