

WWIA News

Spring 2018



Message from the President

By John Hilewick, WWIA President

WWIA's Board of Directors met Tuesday afternoon, May 22, for the second time in 2018. All officers and all but one voting director were in attendance. All but three associate directors were able to make the meeting. Our treasurer, Tony Quadro, provided his written report, and the president reported on the status of membership numbers.

For the eighth annual Forbes State Forest field trip/tour and skills day, the BOD decided to offer members and guests the opportunity to order a boxed lunch from the concessionaire at Laurel Hill State Park. Information about how to sign up for a prepared lunch will be included in the message that will soon be sent out by email and postcard announcing the Forbes field trip. We all think this plan will be a great way for us to enjoy the outdoors and learn from one another as we break bread together. Those who do not want to order a boxed lunch are welcome to bring their own.

Many, many additional items of business were handled at the BOD gathering. We decided to seek a candidate for the unfilled ninth voting-director position, to upgrade some of our methods of keeping track of membership records, to work to grow our membership, to organize a WWIA Walk In Penn's Woods on October 7, 2018, to formalize February 2019 as the 30th anniversary of WWIA, and to hold a special event to celebrate our 30th year and recognize the group's founders and organizing members.

We also worked on a myriad of ideas for 2019 programming topics and presenters. As additional progress is made, we will keep you informed and encourage you and everyone you bring into the fold as participating members for WWIA's next 30 years!

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Some Personal Timberdoodle Encounters

By John Hilewick, WWIA President

Long ago I encountered timberdoodles (American woodcocks) along the bank of the Big Sewickley Creek at my family's old homeplace below New Stanton, under the spreading branches of a mighty American sycamore about nine feet in diameter right on the streambank. The ground was covered with the fallen leaves from this very, very old giant. The ground under the leaves and the heavily sodded grass that I mowed all summer was an extremely rich sandy alluvial soil that was always full of earthworms and other soil critters of all kinds. A best site for worm digging for fishing and nary a stone, no matter how deep down I dug.

That American sycamore tree was so huge that I had to take a 16-foot wooden extension ladder down there to get up onto that first horizontal limb. Once up there, I could barely get my arms around it! That limb had to be at least 16 inches in diameter.

Sadly, that remarkable specimen was lost to development in 1986 when Super Value bought my father's property for its access road and bridge over the Big Sewickley Creek to the new one-plus-acre grocery warehouse. The tree was destroyed in the process, even though it was well upstream from any bridge abutments or wing walls.

In my youth, the creek running past that sycamore was always shallow with a hard bottom. At normal low flow it was only a couple of inches deep. It was the place to cross to get to the piece of woods that lay between the creek and the PRR Southwest Branch spur line. That 20-plus acres of bottomland/wasteland/swampland hunting was always good for big woods rabbits and ring-neck pheasants, which would fly in there

as a refuge from the fields and other cover areas where they experienced more hunting pressure.

On a late fall day after school, I headed to that sanctuary space. I was in the sycamore leaves, about 40 feet out from the trunk of the tree, when something *exploded* out of the heavy mat of dry brown leaves and straight up into the mostly bare branches. Its flight path wobbled this way and that as it negotiated its way across the creek and landed in the heavy brush on the other side. It literally put me back on my heels because it exploded up just a pace or two from my lead foot. Never before in my young life had I ever experienced anything even close to that first encounter! The whole episode lasted only a few seconds. Needless to say, I was not able to get off a shot from my dad's 20-gauge double-barrel Stevens. I did not even know if I should shoot at whatever it was. My dad had always taught caution as the best hunting habit.

Two evenings later, I was *ready!* I followed the same basic path across the bottom with gun at the ready as I stepped into the dry leaves. Again I was startled, this time by two birds, in front and beside me. Same flight pattern. Which one to shoot at? The closer of the two? I brought the gun to bear somewhere I thought it might wobble up/ across in front of the front sight button. *Bang!* That bird kept going. *BANG*, the full choke-front trigger. Both birds were now out of sight! The adrenaline rush was in full surge. I don't think I was at all close to achieving a harvest, but I never forgot those experiences! I did flush the birds a couple of more times that fall, but my dad and I had determined that I would not shoot at them anymore. They seemed to

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Westmoreland Woodlands Members Attend Timberdoodle Flutter

By John Hilewick, WWIA President

On a brisk Thursday evening in mid-April, six hardy WWIA members gathered at the large parking lot on the corner of Camp Run Road and PA Route 381 in Donegal Township, Westmoreland County. They were there to try to see American woodcocks (timberdoodles) perform their sky dance during their courtship displays. Total attendance was around 45 people of very diverse interest groups.

This free public workshop was organized by the Forbes State Forest District staff to highlight their ongoing woodcock habitat management project. It was led by assistant district forester Cory Wentzel. Field tours of managed sites and explanatory discussions were conducted. Woodcock, ruffed grouse, and some other bird species need early successional (young forest) habitat to be successful in nesting, brooding, and raising their young. Both these species are in decline due to a lack of such habitat across the broader woodland landscapes/ecosystems of their historic ranges.

Collaborators and tour guides from DCNR, Bureau of Forestry, a habitat biologist from the Wildlife Management Institute, and the regional biologist from the Ruffed Grouse Society all gave tips on ways to enhance forest and shrub habitat in fields and forests to attract greater diversity of wildlife.

Financial support for this 240-

acre habitat project in the Mountain Streams Division of Forbes State Forest was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. California University of Pennsylvania led the habitat work and monitoring program, the PA Game Commission assisted with the project management plan, and the USFWS, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provided equipment support.

Although I was not able to see or hear any of the timberdoodles do their thing, other folks with better hearing and positions in the observation areas did say that they heard the male birds' mating song and saw the aerial displays (sky dances) of several specimens. Who am I (a non-seer and severe tinnitus sufferer) to dispute their word? In any event, it was a most enjoyable evening of interaction, learning, woods walking and camaraderie. I'm glad that I dressed for brisk weather, complete with my blue polypropylene longjohns!



Urban Forester: Best Job Ever

by Celine Colbert, PA Dept of Conservation and Natural Resources

As a follow-up to Bob McBride's article on service foresters in the Fall 2017 issue, I'd like to share a little on the life of an urban forester. I think I have the best job ever, since a substantial portion of it revolves around talking to people about trees. What could be better?

Most of the time, a borough manager, homeowner, or shade tree commissioner calls my office asking something along the lines of "My street trees need to be replaced. What species should I use?" Or "I have this construction project planned. How do I protect the trees at the site?" Or "There are trees that community members are concerned about. Are they at risk"? We typically set up a time to meet and I get to talk to them about why their trees are important and how we can plan to best take care of them.

In addition to responding to regular inquiries, I get called on to give talks and teach lessons. As part of a DCNR initiative, I was asked to teach tree identification to a group of prisoners at Rockview's Forestry Camp. I was excited to be a part of the program, which would teach marketable career skills to the men who would be released within the next few years. But I couldn't help worrying that they would take me seriously; I have anything but a dominating presence. I planned to

take them for a walk around the grounds, as tree ID indoors is limiting. Would they stay together in a group? Could I keep them engaged? To my surprise, those prisoners were one of the best groups I have ever led. They retained the information covered and asked questions, wanting to know more. It was one of the most rewarding experiences I've had in my very rewarding career.

Another unique project I was able to coordinate was a street tree inventory of New Kensington. We tapped into the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps program and had 10 high schoolers work for a week and a half to map, measure, and record the trees in the public right-of-way and the parks. The students went from not being able to identify any trees to easily



Urban Forester *(Cont'd)*

distinguishing the many species we came across. They ended up recording over 1,000 trees!

In the spring and fall, tree planting season arrives and I get the chance to really get my hands dirty. The Bureau of Forestry is a partner of the TreeVitalize program, which offers communities grant funding to plant trees. I meet with communities and nonprofits as a part of the application process to choose sites and species that will work well, so by the time planting season comes around, we're ready to gather volunteers and get the trees in the ground. Often we use balled-and-burlapped trees weighing several hundred pounds, so it's not an easy job. Despite that, it is incredible rewarding to see community members come out and take initiative to make their hometowns a little greener. Planting days are some of my favorites and well worth the sore muscles that follow.

Throughout the year, I also partner with different groups to hold workshops and events dedicated to educating community members about the value and proper care of trees in the places where we live and work. If you ever have a question about your yard trees or are interested in upcoming workshops such as Tree Tenders training, feel free to give me a call at 724-238-1200. I'm always glad to talk trees!



“The Bureau of Forestry is a partner of the TreeVitalize program, which offers communities grant funding to plant trees.”

WWIA Facebook

Keep up-to-date with the latest programs and blog posts by following the WWIA Facebook Page. Find the page by searching @WestmorelandWoodlands or clicking [here](#). While you're there, feel free to ask a woodland question. The answers will be featured in an upcoming blog post!

Looking For *Ilex Opaca* (American Holly)

WE NEED YOUR HELP.

Dr. Cynthia Morton, WWIA's January speaker, is currently funded through the DCNR to examine wild versus cultivated populations of *Ilex opaca*. This species has been collected only about 35 times in PA and is mostly likely more abundant than the records show. If you have wild populations of American holly on your property, please contact her at mortoncm100@gmail.com.

After the January program, three WWIA members contacted her. On April 16, Dr. Morton visited the properties of John Hilewick, Ben Kudrick, and Jeff Parobek to collect tree leaf and stem specimens for genetic testing. Time will tell what the test results reveal!

In 2008 Dr. Morton and Phil Gruszka, director of horticulture and forestry at the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, compared the level of genetic variation in London plane trees already existing in the Pittsburgh area with trees of the same species available from three commercial nurseries. The genetic diversity was far greater in the older urban tree samples than in the nursery samples, indicating that the nursery industry has been selectively cloning to produce new trees.

Morton and Gruszka were funded by the Garden Club of Allegheny County to conduct similar studies on red maples in 2016 -17 in order to examine the amount of genetic diversity within and among the Pittsburgh wild areas, USA nursery, and Canadian nursery maple trees. They found that the wild plants, naturally grown from seeds in the wild, were genetically diverse. The nursery plants had

low genetic diversity and were most likely clonally propagated.

While cloning trees is in itself a benign practice, doing so on a mass scale can drastically reduce the genetic diversity of urban forests. A greater understanding of urban tree genetic diversity will allow policymakers, city planning and environmental agencies, and the nursery industry to improve practices for maintaining a robust tree landscape for the future.

Urban forests in the United States are estimated to contain about 3.8 billion trees valued at \$2.4 trillion. Billions of federal, local, and private dollars are being spent annually on management, labor, and the trees. Studies that help us understand urban tree genetic diversity as an issue of vulnerability and examine the long-term impacts of that diversity on the sustainability of the urban environment will help cities remain rich in trees. Those trees will provide aesthetic qualities as well as its environmental benefits, such as reducing summer cooling costs, sequestering carbon, intercepting airborne pollutants, and reducing stormwater runoff.



Timberdoodle Encounters (Cont'd from Pg. 2)

be too rare and few in number.

My most recent encounter with a timberdoodle was early in the afternoon in late fall of 2016 on the old Fulton Farm property. I was out for a woods walk along the edge of a north-facing hillside, a former crop/hayfield across the state road from my home. The bird burst up and out from a leafy little clear space under the overhanging boughs of a large hawthorn tree. It must have been in a stopover during its southern migration. From the sound it made and its flight pattern, I knew immediately what it was. I whispered, "You devil, you got me again!" I did a little arithmetic in my head. It had been 53 years since I'd last seen this little bird. What a thrill it still is!

Reminder to WWIA Members

To renew your membership, please make your check out to WWIA and send your dues to Tony Quadro, Westmoreland Conservation District, 218 Donohoe Rd., Greensburg, PA 15601. Act now and you'll pay only \$10 for 2018. Member benefits include free entry to nearly all WWIA programs.

WWIA 2018 Events Calendar

June 9, 9:00 a.m. to about 2:30 p.m. Jessica Salter and David Planinsek, DCNR foresters working out of the Laughlintown office of the Bureau of Forestry, will lead our eighth annual Forbes State Forest field trip and skills day.

June 21, 6:30 p.m. Leslie Horner of the Center For Private Forests at Penn State will discuss forest regeneration.

September 20. Celine Colbert, a DCNR forester, will lead a field trip on "Tree Identification." Site TBA.

October 7. WWIA will sponsor a walk as part of the second annual statewide Walk in Penn's Woods. Details TBA.

October 18, 6:00 p.m. The annual WWIA potluck dinner and business meeting will include biennial elections and be followed by a presentation by Cory Wentzel, assistant district forester in the Forbes State Forest District. Cory will discuss golden eagles and share video footage of these great birds as they stop over at feeding stations in Forbes on their way to breeding areas in the far north.

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

Membership Application and Renewal – Dues \$10 per year

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

New Member () or Renewal () Date: _____ Email Address: _____

Make check payable to

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

Mail to

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

c/o Westmoreland Conservation District

218 Donohoe Road, Greensburg, PA 15601

Attention: Tony Quadro

www.westmorelandwoodlands.org

Westmoreland Woodlands
Improvement Association

c/o Westmoreland Conservation District
218 Donohoe Road,
Greensburg, PA 15601

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