

WWIA News

Spring 2020



The View from My Kitchen Window

By John Hilewick, WWIA President

Upon the arrival of spring one morning in March I was washing up some dishes in my kitchen sink and gazing out at the traffic on the state road below. The land on the other side of that road, prior to its present circumstance, had been productive farm fields. When we purchased our little piece of Eden in late June of 1980, the fields I saw out that same window were tilled and planted in field corn that was not yet knee high.

That was 40 years ago. Tillage of these fields was generally continuous from the mid-1700s to about 1990. Several different farmers rented the land from three successive 20th-century owners. Some years the fields were sown in corn, other years in soybeans. A few years, only a crop of low-grade hay was harvested.

After that the fields were left to lie totally fallow. I watched as the natural process of vegetative

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The View from My Kitchen Window (cont.)

succession occurred over just a few years. **Succession** is defined as “the natural series of replacements of one plant community (and the associated fauna) by another over time and in the absence of disturbance” in *Forest Stewardship: Terminology* (Penn State [Extension](#)).

The earliest replacements of plant communities after tillage ceased were various native and agriculturally introduced grasses. Then came the various forbs, like blackberries, raspberries, milkweeds, ragweed, and then whole stands of the goldenrods,



The invasive plants are greening up before the native grasses and plants.

just to name a few. After a time, woody-stemmed plants like the hawthorns, staghorn sumac and crabapples started to take hold on the edges of the fields.

As years went by, more woody-stemmed plants and vines appeared. Some of these were not native to the ecology, and in short order they began to show more dominance on the landscape of the old fields. These non-native plants are commonly seen as invasive.

In the spring, you can identify the invasives easily because they leaf out much earlier than the native species of trees and shrubs. I have identified the following woody invasive species. Japanese bush honeysuckle dominates the road edges of the old field directly across from my property. In addition, there are three specimens of a flowering ornamental tree I believe to be Bradford pear. Farther into that small field is multiflora rose, which in some cases climbs up into the hawthorns and other trees. Another invasive that is establishing thicket patches is privet. Beyond and between two continuously flowing little runs that bisect the other fields of the old farm, I saw substantial contingents of autumn olive, with more bush honeysuckle, multiflora and privet.

As I walked around the old fields, some steeper portions of which have become substantially wooded, I also identified oriental bittersweet vines, Japanese honeysuckle and a little bit of garlic mustard.

I was pleased not to find any colonies of Japanese stiltgrass, mile-a-minute vine, Japanese knotweed or tree of heaven.

Another positive circumstance on the old farmland is the natural establishment of a plantation of black walnut trees. It is in the lower corner of the smallest field, in an area that is low and stays damp most of the year. My presumption is that it came to be because of a big old parent tree that was right in the property line fencerow. Last year the parent tree was cut down as a part of right-of-way maintenance for a First Energy high-tension power line

In that plantation, you can see the allelopathic impact of the chemical substance juglone, which walnuts produce. Juglone is present in the roots, leaves, bark and fruit husk and remains in the ground for a long time to inhibit other plants that may be competitors in the trees' growing space.

As time continues to pass, unless the property owner undertakes some prescriptive actions, things will likely get worse from a forestry perspective.

As I mentioned, the one bright spot in this scenario of succession is the naturally occurring black walnut plantation. I would estimate it to be at least half an acre. Some appropriate tending by the owners could enhance the success and potential value of these trees. For example, they might remove the low-value competing trees nearby and carefully remove the lower branches of the trees that have grown large enough for this silvicultural practice.

“This would be a long-term proposition, since walnuts are generally slow growing.”

This pruning prescription would produce a bole (butt-log stem) that as it grows and gains diameter will become a stem with fewer or no limb scars (knots) and thus a higher-valued butt log when harvested. This would be a long-term proposition, since walnuts are

generally slow growing. So the realized value return would be 60 to 80 or more years in the future. That is just how the tree farming proposition works.



The walnut plantation is keeping invasive shrubs at bay in this area.

Coming Up: Four WWIA Programs

by Judith Gallagher

As you know, WWIA has had to cancel all of our planned in-person programs, starting with the March meeting. The speakers for all of these events have said they're willing to reschedule. When? Only the virus knows for sure. Our first concern is for everyone's health and safety.

When we are able to reschedule events, we'll post the details at Westmorelandwoodlands.org and we'll email notices to the media and the WWIA's Members & Friends list. We hope to be able to hold our fall meetings, but the ones we've had to cancel so far will likely not be rescheduled until 2021. Here's a small preview of what to expect then.

“Suppressing fire aggressively over the last century has resulted in significant ecological changes.”

Dr. Jesse Kreye on "Fire and Natural Resources Management." Jesse is an assistant research professor in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management at Penn State. He will discuss the ecological role of fire and the benefits of burning and explain Pennsylvania's law regarding the use of prescribed fire. Jesse has worked as a firefighter in both California and Minnesota.

He'll talk about how fire has played a major role in shaping many North American ecosystems, and how prescribed burning is being more widely used to manage these ecosystems. Suppressing fire aggressively over the last century has resulted in significant ecological changes as well as increased wildfire hazards. Many wildlife species that are on the decline depend on habitat structure and plant communities that are created by fire. Prescribed burning is conducted under specified environmental conditions within a predetermined area. Jesse's program was originally scheduled for March.

Kevin Yoder, conservation forester for the PA chapter of The Nature Conservancy, on forest carbon management and opportunities for landowners to get paid for sustainable forest management. Kevin will talk about how landowners can manage their forests to store carbon while also improving wildlife habitat and growing more timber.

One program he'll focus on that's being launched in Pennsylvania is the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP), a new way to mitigate climate change to a globally significant degree through America's family forests. The American Forest Foundation (AFF) and The

Coming Up (cont.)

Nature Conservancy (TNC) are working with leading U.S. businesses, state and federal agencies, other nonprofits, and America's 21 million family forest owners to capture and store more carbon to meet climate goals. The FFCP will help family forest owners offset the cost of needed forest management practices and offer an opportunity for income through carbon sequestration. Kevin's program was originally scheduled for April

Melissa Reckner, program manager at Penguin Court, the former Scaife family estate in Laughlintown. On this field trip, we'll view the conservatory, greenhouse, and former mansion site while learning about Penguin Court's history. Penguin Court and Thomas Road Farm comprise more than 1,000 acres of forests, meadows and open space; a spring-fed reservoir and pond; a 7,000-square-foot conservatory; and a 3,700-square-foot greenhouse. The Brandywine Conservancy is preserving the land and using its resources for community benefit. Staff care for the grounds; grow native plants for wildlife habitat, biodiversity, restoration and education projects; and offer programming to support education, best management practices and protection of the surrounding ecosystem. This field trip was originally scheduled for May.

David Planinsek, DCNR forester with the Laughlintown office of the Bureau of Forestry, will lead our tenth annual Forbes State Forest field trip and skills day. We don't yet know what the main topic will be, but based on the past nine years of Forbes field trips, it will both informative and inspiring. And it's always a wonderful opportunity to hike in several areas of Forbes State Forest with highly knowledgeable guides. Last year Dave was very ably assisted by forester Ralph Campbell. This field trip was originally scheduled for June.

WWIA's mission is to encourage good management of woodlands for aesthetics, timber, water quality and control, wildlife habitat, plant propagation, and recreation.

Our apologies for any inconvenience these changes in plans and uncertainties in scheduling cause you. May you and yours get through this difficult time with your health and your sanity intact, and may we see one another again soon (but not too soon for safety).



WWIA Members' Experiences in the Woods during Quarantine

We invite all WWIA members and friends to share their pandemic forestry experiences in this and the Summer newsletter. If you've taken some of this time to get out, enjoy, and appreciate our precious forests, drop us a note telling us about it. Email your story to the newsletter's editor in chief, Celine Colbert, at cecolbert@pa.gov.

Tell us your experiences or your thoughts on the pandemic and what it means for our forests or the natural world in general. To get the ball rolling, Janet Sredy sent us a note about her and her husband's April forestry project.

Janet and Raul won the National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year award from the American Tree Farm System in 2015. Their woodlands were chosen from more than 82,000 ATFS-certified sustainable forests throughout the United States.

Janet Sredy and Raul Chiesa, owners of Becketts Run Woodlands

We had a planned tree seedling planting for late April, which we were able to do because "Forestry and Forestry Support Activities" was listed as essential business in Pennsylvania. Remember: the current hot commodity, toilet paper, comes from trees. That's just one everyday example of the importance of our forests.

Musser Forests is open for business and providing curbside pickup. We ordered and paid in advance; they and we wore masks; our time there was very brief. The two of us were out every day for much of April, weather and personal energy permitting, planting our 700 tree seedlings.

There are many other families across Pennsylvania doing the same. We are grateful to be outside and doing God's work. Work that accomplishes good. Work that is very important and necessary, especially that which receives little or no recognition or pay.

The young family from Mt. Pleasant who lease our property for year-round hunting and trapping are now spending more time at our property. The three children, along with their parents, are tracking animals, identifying plants, and this week fine-tuning the positions of their blinds for spring turkey season. We take many breaks from our planting work and delight in watching them from afar.

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Showcase a Resource: My Land Plan

By Celine Colbert, Service Forester

Perhaps you've recently found yourself with more time to spend in your woods, or maybe the spring weather has you planning to get outside more and start some projects. Thinking about this, I wanted to showcase a resource we can use from home that can help us improve our record keeping about our forest management.

The American Forest Foundation has an online tool that I've found to be very easy to use and helpful. The tool is called My Land Plan. You can access it at www.mylandplan.org. It lets you create a map of your property, then choose from a variety of goals that you might have. Sample goals include "Improve deer habitat," "Make my land a great place to watch wildlife," and "Reduce my taxes."

Each goal has associated activities that you can choose for your property. With each activity, you can say whether you would like to do it or already have, record notes and dates, and even add photos or documents related to the project.

Other helpful elements include a journal section where you can save any notes about your experiences on the property and even attach images. In the journal section, a link on the left-hand side takes you to journal entries from fellow landowners who have chosen to share their entries. It's inspiring to see what other landowners throughout the country are working on and seeing on their land. Finally, there's a history section you can use to document the history of your property.

Scientists tell us that writing down our plans is a huge first step toward getting them done. Personally, I know that I could be a lot better at keeping records about the work I do to improve my woodlot, so I intend to use this convenient tool to improve that skill. I hope that you find it helpful as well!

We'd love to hear about tools or information sources you've discovered that help you manage or enjoy your woods better. Drop Celine a line at cecolbert@pa.gov.

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Species Spotlight: Eastern Redbud *Cercis canadensis*

By Celine Colbert, Service Forester

Washington, D.C., may be known for its cherry blossoms, but the city of Pittsburgh will soon be known for a native tree, the redbud! The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is spearheading a project to plant 1,500 redbud and complementary species trees along the rivers and viewsheds. This early-flowering tree will kick off spring in the city, while providing an early food source for pollinators.

The redbud is a native understory species found throughout the eastern part of North America, all the way from Texas to Canada. It prefers areas with moist rich soils and can be easily spotted in the spring, since its bold pinkish-purple flowers bloom before the leaves emerge.

Native Americans found many uses for the redbud tree. The bark was made into a tea to treat whooping cough. Cold infusions of the roots and inner bark treated fevers and congestion. An infusion of the bark was used to treat vomiting and fever. Redbud blooms are edible and high in vitamin C, while boiled twigs produce a yellow dye.



WWIA 2020 Calendar

September 17, 6:30 p.m. A program on how to handle stormwater and its effects. Speaker TBA.

October 4. WWIA's third annual **Walk in Penn's Woods**. Time and location TBA.

October 15, 6:00 p.m. The annual WWIA potluck dinner and business meeting, featuring the biennial election of officers and voting directors. Program to follow TBA.

*As schedules are likely to change now more than ever,
please verify that a program is
being held before you come to the WCD Barn.
Check westmorelandwoodlands.org first.*

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

Membership Application and Renewal – Dues \$10 per year

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

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

If you own property, how many acres do you own? _____ Approximately how many of them are wooded? _____

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
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218 Donohoe Road,
Greensburg, PA 15601

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