

WWIA News

Winter 2021



President's Message and Recent Happenings as the Pandemic Continues

By John Hilewick, WWIA President

I emailed the board of directors to ask how they felt about having a virtual meeting. Almost everyone was willing to try a Zoom-type BOD meeting in January or early February 2021.

Several board members suggested that if that session goes well, we'll work out any kinks in the process and then try for a virtual program meeting for WWIA members and friends.

I think both ideas are really good ones. Since there is little likelihood of things opening up safely in any broad manner for quite a while yet, these are our best options for doing the work of the association safely and for working to hold the group together during these very trying times.

Tony Quadro and the Westmoreland Conservation District staff have a good amount of experience in using virtual platforms, so WWIA and I will

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President's Report (cont'd)

lean on them for support in this endeavor.

The board members who responded all remain in good health so far. Bob McBride shared that he and his new bride enjoyed a very merry first Christmas and were looking forward to a great New Year. Congratulations to you and your bride, Bob! He also stated that they are looking forward to getting Covid vaccinations (as I bet most of us are).

It seems too early to email the formerly scheduled 2020 program presenters to reschedule their commitments with us for 2021 or possibly 2022. All Penn State and Center for Private Forest activities remain on hiatus until the pandemic threats are cleared. The WCD also continues with the suspension of all in-person meetings and activities. Both entities are exercising their virtual platforms to conduct business and present programming on a broad array of topics. It may be time for WWIA to try its hand at doing the same.

On a more personal note, the view out my kitchen window has included a growing number of white-tailed deer sightings. As we move into February and then March, when these animals habitually yard up, I expect greater numbers to show up.

One of my blueberry bushes took devastating damage during the rut from multiple buck rubbings, as the photo affirms. It will be a long road back to any berry production for this poor devil!



The poor blueberry bush that didn't have a chance against a rutting buck.

One really nice encounter with nature occurred in late November and then again in early December. On the bank below my little bandsaw hobby sawmill, I watched a male pileated woodpecker fly from one of my juniper trees to a walnut sapling with a lot of fox grapes hanging on vines. Man, those things are quite large!

It was a lot bigger than a crow and had a really unique call. I had never observed one before in all my 73 years. Lucky me! I guess it may have been in a migration mode. But no pics of that circumstance.

I do wish for everyone continued health and prosperity in 2021, and I pray for healing for the country at large.

The Forest: A Place to Find Healing

By Sasha Soto, PhD Graduate Student, Center for Private Forests at Penn State
Reprinted from the July/August 2020 PA Forest Stewards Newsletter

Have you ever thought about how incredibly privileged we are to be able to walk outside and see the trees? When we walk among woodlands, they rekindle our feelings of what it is to know love and compassion. When we seek something more than ourselves, when we need a sense of clarity, or a temporary escape, a blanket of trees awaits to comfort us.

When your mind cannot stop running and you are plagued with exhaustion or worry, go experience the stillness of a forest. When your stress is too much, and you cannot sleep at night, make a bed under the stars; be sheltered by the forest canopy.

On a cool and quiet morning, watch the forest awaken. Smell the fresh air. Listen to the rustling of the leaves and the birds' morning songs. Feel the softness of the wind as it hugs the trees. Touch the ground beneath you. Do you feel its energy? Observe the silence. What do you notice?

Take a slow and deep breath. Slowly release it. Drop your shoulders and release yesterday's energy, feel it escape your body. Open your mind, body, and soul, receive the earth's nourishment. Accept today's forest blessings.

As humans, we have a distinct privilege of caring well for our forests and experiencing the grace of their stillness and radiating energy. Observe and appreciate the intangible resources that forest ecosystems have gifted humanity through our



earliest beginnings to now. There are many incredible occurrences that can happen to a person's mind, body, and even spirit when they spend time in the forest. Studies have shown that forests nourish and can even repair our minds and bodies from the inside out [1-10].

Psychologists and physicians have documented positive trends in patients who spend a dedicated amount of time in the forest—patients suffering from cardiovascular problems, high blood pressure, pain, insomnia, anxiety, and even mood disorders [1-10].

Incredibly, scientists have noted an increase in immune system strength in those who have recently spent time in the forest. This is possible through exposure to anti-microbial chemicals released by trees into the environment. These individuals were observed prior to, during, and after spending time in the forest; results showed an increased presence of cancer-killing cells in the blood [7-8].

The Forest (cont'd)

Aside from the well-established benefits of fresh forest air, scientists have confirmed what traditional healers have known for centuries: direct physical contact with the forest helps people feel a sense of calmness and rejuvenation [1-6, 10-11]. The earth transfers magnetic and healing energy to the body, which creates a neuro-stimulating reaction and rewires our body's physiological responses [3, 11]. This magical connection with the forest is called "grounding," sometimes referred to as earthing, or forest bathing. This technique is becoming increasingly popular with psychologists and physicians.

The magical forest experience provides immediate results and includes decreased systolic blood pressure, cortisol levels, pulse rate, depression, anxiety, confusion, and fatigue [1-11]. Here is the great thing—anyone can experience it! It's simple: explore the forest, go for a walk, hang a hammock, watch the birds fly by, let your bare feet feel the forest floor, or whatever activity you enjoy most, experience it in the forest. With regular forest exposure, results can be life-changing.

This series (found [here](#)) will cover forest grounding techniques and tips for mindful practices to reduce stress, reconnect, rejuvenate, and heal yourself and your soul. Claims will be supported with scientific reports and traditional knowledge that has been carried down over the years. Please allow me to share my humble experiences as I attempt to spiritually connect with the forest.

I challenge you to follow me in my journey and I encourage your own personal growth. If you are comfortable, I invite you to share your experiences with others and spread awareness and appreciation for the healing properties of the forest. I hope you enjoy it and welcome your feedback. You can reach me at sds5876@psu.edu.

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American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation by Eric Rutkow

Reviewed by David Planinsek, Forester, Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of Forestry, Forbes State Forest

The United States of America is a nation blessed with vast forests. These forests have played important roles in our nation's history. In *American Canopy*, author Eric Rutkow examines how trees and forests have shaped our nation and how we as a nation have shaped, changed, and interacted with them.

The book's introduction recounts the fascinating 1964 discovery of the oldest known tree in the world, a Great Basin bristlecone pine, in the Wheeler Peak region of eastern Nevada. Rutkow then takes the reader on a journey of more than 400 years, from pre-settlement forests to England's ambition to establish the world's most powerful navy to the story of John Chapman (known by most as Johnny Appleseed), from the importance of forestry to the Allied victory in World War II to the modern environmental era.

These are only a few examples of the exciting subjects Rutkow explores in *American Canopy*. The book is packed with interesting information. Rutkow chronicles the significance of forests to our country's birth and development. This thoroughly researched and well-written book shows clearly that forests have always been and will continue to be a vital part of America.

This book is a must-read for anyone interested in either forestry or American history. I plan to keep a copy on my bookshelf for future reference. *American Canopy* will give readers a renewed appreciation for America's forests.

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Reviewed by Celine Colbert, Forester, Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of Forestry, Forbes State Forest

After hearing Robin Wall Kimmerer share her expertise in moss on the Ologies podcast, I was intrigued to pick up her latest book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*. There's certainly no denying we have a lot to learn about the world around us. This book shares some of the interesting natural relationships I never even thought to ponder, like how squirrels make maple syrup to survive the leanest part of the year and how salamanders use electromagnetic lines to reach the same vernal pool each year (and can live to be 18 years old!).

Braiding Sweetgrass is filled with many interesting nuggets like these. It ties in stories from Wall Kimmerer's own life, the lives of other scientists, and the lives of other native people carrying on a way of thinking that challenges so many societal norms.

She highlights the native values of sharing, taking only what you need, and treating a plant with the same respect you would a sibling. In one example that stuck with me, she explains learning the Potawatomi language, which treats nouns as living or non-living, much as Latin languages distinguish male and female. The closest comparison we have in English would be calling trees and moss "he" and "she" instead of "it."

Throughout the book, you will be driven to see the many ways in which the Earth is a generous gift giver and to think of ways that you can show your gratitude. If you are interested in deepening your relationship with the natural world, I recommend reading and meditating on *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

Showcase a Resource:

DCNR Lawn Conversion Program

Kelsey Miller, Lawn Conversion Program Coordinator

DCNR Bureau of Forestry

On our visit with landowners, Wanda points to places they used to pasture pigs, plow potatoes, and pick apples. The former farm, tiny by today's standards, fed five generations of her family. It's where she's lived all her life. Lately, she's wrestling with how to stay put and care for a place so special to her.

After purchasing the property from family in the early 1980s, Wanda and her husband, Tom, shouldered the responsibility for fallow fields, brambles, and wet areas. They bought a new John Deere lawn tractor to carve out a new way of life.

Tom brought home a pallet to drag behind the tractor. Wanda sat on the pallet and picked stones while he drove. They planted grass, and the expansive turf celebrated their pride and care for the property. Over the years, they spent thousands of dollars to demonstrate that they cared about their land.

After 32 years of the lawncare routine, Wanda laments, "We're tired and this giant lawn isn't doing anything. We want to do more than babysit our yard."

Now, with the help of DCNR's new lawn conversion program, Tom and Wanda are leaning into a change: embracing native meadow and forest instead of mowed grass. They've come to understand that these meadows and forested areas are different from the abandoned condition they worked hard to overcome.

This year, an independent contractor they've hired will kill acres of turf grass, and Tom and Wanda will no longer be shackled to their tractor each week.

In the fall, the contractor will seed native wildflowers and warm-season grasses, like brown-eyed susans and little bluestem, and incorporate patches for hardwoods. Over the next few years, their contractor will help manage weeds and make sure native plants can flourish.

With patience and stewardship, Wanda and Tom will have a verdant meadow, blossoming with colorful wildflowers and waving grasses. They'll also have their weekends back.

Soon the land that once fed generations of Wanda's family will nourish the wildlife they love. Tom has already built boxes for bluebirds and tree swallows to raise their own families. The couple look forward to giving themselves and the tractor a break and to letting their land be less beholden to expectations associated with turf.

In 2021, we have the tools, know-how, networks, and funding to rethink human spaces and their relationship to what's wild. With care, we can shift turf-dominated landscapes to ones that work with nature: feeding wildlife, cleaning water, and contributing to ecosystem functioning. But we need people like Tom and Wanda, who are willing to welcome a new vision for their land.

If you're ready to mow less, reach out to DCNR: RA-NRWoodsAndMeadows@pa.gov. Visit <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/Water/LawnConversion/Pages/default.aspx> to learn more.

Species Spotlight: Eastern Hemlock

Tsuga Canadensis

Reviewed by Celine Colbert, Forester, Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of Forestry

Hemlocks can be distinguished from other evergreens by their flat two-rank needles that are individually attached to the twig. They also have the smallest cone of our native evergreens, measuring only one-half to one inch long.

Despite the small cone, the hemlock can grow into a mighty tree. Some hemlocks grow taller than 100 feet and live for up to 1,000 years! Hemlocks are widely spread throughout Pennsylvania. They prefer cool, moist sites but sometimes grow on north-facing rocky outcrops.

Historically, hemlocks were harvested profusely for their tannin-rich bark, which was used to tan animal hides. Though Eastern hemlock is widely confused with poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), it is not poisonous. In fact, a nutritious tea can be made from the twig tips or inner bark.

The future of the Eastern hemlock is currently being threatened by the invasive insect hemlock wooly adelgid (HWA). To check your trees for evidence of this insect, look for a white cotton-like substance on the underside of the needles.

If your trees are infected, there are DIY and professional arborist treatment options. For the DIY option, look for an insecticide product that contains imidacloprid as the active ingredient and apply it around the base of the tree according to the product's label.



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