

WWIA News

Winter 2019



WWIA to Celebrate Its 30th Anniversary with Dinner and Service Awards April 18

by Judith Gallagher

Jim Finley will speak on weaving the tapestry of conservation

If you'd like to celebrate Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association and socialize with woodland owners over a delicious dinner--and hear Jim Finley speak!--you won't want to miss the Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association's meeting on Thursday, **April 18**, in the J. Roy Houston Conservation Center (the Westmoreland Conservation District Barn) at 218 Donohoe Rd., Greensburg.

We'll start with a social half hour at 5:30 p.m., followed by a potluck dinner at 6:00 pm. Dinner is free, though we'd appreciate it if you'd reserve your spot to help us know how much food to order. You can call Sandy at WCD (724-837-5271) by April 5 to make your reservation. And we

Continued on Pg. 6

Inside this issue

30th Anniversary	1
Golden Eagles.....	2
Ames Wood Mill Tour	4
Backyard Workshop	7
Species Spotlight	8
2019 Calendar	9

Golden Eagles in Forbes State Forest

by Judith Gallagher

Our Fall newsletter was so filled with goodies that we had to bump the recap of the October WWIA program, so we're including it in this issue.

Cory Wentzel gave a fascinating talk about golden eagles. He explained that before 2006, scientists knew very little about golden eagles living in the eastern United States. When birders saw one, they thought it must have wandered in from out West.

But then the Eastern U.S. Golden Eagle Research Project, spearheaded by Dr. Todd Katzner with the U.S. Geological Survey, began tracking them. They wanted to determine where wind turbines would be the least risky for the birds. The research team trapped goldens with rocket nets to take samples and place GPS transmitters on them.

They figured out that about 5,000 golden eagles spend their summers in the big woods of Newfoundland, then migrate south to central and southwestern Pennsylvania for the winter. They funnel into the narrow corridor near Hawk Mountain and then fan out. Most spend their winters in the Appalachians, especially West Virginia, though a few hang out in Michigan.

"I've been a birder since I was six years old and I'm out in the woods every day, but I did not know golden eagles were spending their winters in our Pennsylvania mountains until I started working with this project," Cory said.

Cory is a forest assistant manager with DCNR, Bureau of Forestry, in the Forbes Forest District. Forbes State Forest covers more than 60,000 acres over six counties. In 2012, he volunteered to run a bait site with a motion-sensing camera to collect data.

To attract golden eagles, he needed a small clearing in a large forested area, where birds could see the bait from far above. And he needed to provide road-killed deer to entice them out of the sky. Like most birds of prey, goldens are susceptible to lead poisoning if they feed on deer with bullet fragments.

Over the next seven years Cory picked up nearly 200 road-killed deer and hauled them to his feeding station on top of Laurel Mountain, where the eagles spend their winter before migrating to breeding areas in the far north.



The first time, he staked out a deer on the edge of the clearing but saw no activity for four days. "I moved the deer to the center of the clearing and a golden eagle showed up in six hours," he said. Goldens usually do not land on the pile. They like to walk in. "When the sun shines on that golden dome, it almost blinds you," he said.

Forbes staff eventually found themselves maintaining three bait sites on Laurel Mountain, Chestnut Ridge, and Mount Davis. The project had 240 camera sites altogether from Alabama to Quebec. Cory viewed several hundred photos of not just eagles but the many, many other animals that were attracted by dead deer. He became able to identify individuals. He compiled a montage that he screened for WWIA.

"Coyotes question everything," he said. "It took two years before one would actually eat from the carcass pile and be photographed. But once the first one nibbled, game on." He has photos of coyotes and bobcats feeding side by side. Bears were even less trusting; it took four years to get a bear to eat frozen deer.

Turkey vultures would spread their wings to dry in the morning sun. Ravens would pick clean a mature deer in four days. Eagles may be attracted by the ravens' clamor. Bald eagles would feed with the ravens, but goldens like to be alone on the pile.

Cory saw one rough-legged hawk and many red-tail hawks. "I thought they were big until I saw goldens," he observed. Golden eagles are among the largest birds in the world, with a wingspan of nearly eight feet. Adults range from 33 to 38 inches in length.

Cory also showed a homemade video of capturing and processing a golden eagle in 2012. He was working

with Trish Miller, a research scientist. At 6:59 a.m. a female golden they had seen several times returned to the site. Trish waited until she walked to the bait and started to feed. Then she fired the rocket net. The eagle was three years old and weighed almost 13 pounds, though goldens don't reach maturity until age five.

"She was surprisingly docile, even with her huge talons a few inches from my face," he said. They put booties over the talons and riveted an ID band onto her leg. Then they attached the GPS transmitter between her wings.

Like many of the eagles who are too young to breed, she headed to West Virginia, possibly to scout new winter sites. In the spring she flew to Quebec. The next January she returned to Bedford County.

"Holding that golden eagle in my arms was one of the greatest experiences of my life," Cory said.

He showed more bait-site photos, including several of familiar-looking bipeds. "Humans are very curious creatures," he said. All of the bait sites were at locations that were far from public access. Nonetheless assorted people, sometimes on skis, poked around them and triggered the cameras.

The project ended in 2018 when the spread of chronic wasting disease among deer made it too risky to move their carcasses around. But Cory said it was well worth it. The study proved that a population of eastern golden eagles exists and yielded enormous amounts of data about their migration paths, seasonal habitat needs, and feeding habits. Altogether, 85 goldens were fitted with solar transmitters, which recorded the bird's altitude, speed, and compass bearing every 30 seconds. When they were far from civilization, the

Continued on Pg. 7

WWIA and Guests Tour Ames Wood Mill and Handle-Making Plant

By John Hilewick, WWIA President

The run-up to WWIA's tour of the Ames Companies' Champion Wood Mill and handle-manufacturing facility in January was fraught with an obsessive monitoring of the weather system moving into western Pennsylvania. The final computer model showed that we would likely be well on our way home before the freezing rain moved in. Luckily for us all, that's exactly how the weather panned out.

Driver Fred Lau and his three truckpool passengers arrived at the wood mill on Roaring Run Road in Champion at 8:51 a.m. Despite the threatening weather, thirty people turned out.

We were greeted by Patrick Cannin, the plant manager. Patrick began his remarks by thanking us and all the woodland owners in this area who sell his company lumber,

mostly red oak, that they can turn into sturdy handles for products like trowels, shovels, and sledgehammers. He said that the plant was beginning to increase its production of tool handles for the busy spring gardening season.

He then told us some of the history of Ames, which was founded in 1774. In 2014 the Ames Companies acquired the facility from Babcock Lumber Company (itself established in 1887). Patrick said Ames has substantially upgraded equipment to increase productivity and keep the mill competitive.

One upgrade is a Cleerman double-cut vertical bandsaw mill head rig that increases product yield because it is a thin-kerf unit that takes only about one-eighth of an inch in sawdust per cut. The unit's

optimizer settings guide the sawyer in opening each log on the face that will provide the greatest usable material yield from each log. That equipment is coupled with an optimizer laser re-saw to gain greater yield for handle squares from each sawn cant (partially sawn log).

Overall, it was a very interesting process to watch. In the dimension building, the Cleerman unit breaks the logs down into cants. A



merry-go-round conveyor system moves the cants to and through the circular gang re-saw unit. Then the rip-sawn squares go to optimizing lasers that cut off the unusable



portions of each cant-length handle square. (Some still photos and a bit of video depicting this activity can be viewed at www.westmorelandwoodlands.com.)

The group visited the log stockpile yard and viewed the machine that debarks logs before they enter the sawmill. We also visited the part of the dimension building where the rough handle squares are put through a dowel-making machine that dates to the late 1800s. This holdover from the early Babcock Lumber days is still the best machine for this process.

Last but not least, we walked through a storage building for kiln-dried materials. Pallets full of many thousands of processed dowels for handles and three sizes of rectangular wheelbarrow handles were awaiting final sanding and finishing before being shipped to Ames assembly facilities in eastern Pennsylvania.

The Champion lumber mill is very efficient. Ames processes plane-sawn lumber from outside customers from kiln drying through S2S surface planing. The dried shavings from those operations are used to fire the steam-heated dry kilns. The bark from the logs is sold to secondary processors, and the sawdust from the Cleerman mill is sold to a pellet-fuel manufacturer. Wastewood remnants from the cut-to-length operations and the unusable slab wood from the head rig are chipped up and sold to the pellet-fuel manufacturer. There's not much waste in this wood-processing operation!

I do believe that everyone who attended this field trip came away with a wealth of new knowledge and an appreciation of what an asset to our region the Champion Wood Mill is. Patrick invited us back for another visit in about three years, when he hopes to have the workforce back up to 75 people or more and to increase productivity even further.

“Patrick began his remarks by thanking us and all the woodland owners in this area who sell his company lumber, mostly red oak, that they can turn into sturdy handles for products like trowels, shovels, and sledgehammers.”



WWIA's 30th Anniversary (cont.)

always welcome side dishes and desserts that friends of WWIA bring to share.

After dinner we'll celebrate WWIA's history and honor its founders, its early leaders, and several people who have made significant contributions to the group and its mission over the past three decades. We anticipate renewing old friendships and reintroducing folks who have woodland interests in common.

A highlight of the evening will be a talk by Dr. James Finley on weaving the tapestry of conservation. As most WWIA members and friends know, Jim is Professor Emeritus of the Center for Private Forests at Penn State. He has been instrumental in organizing the Pennsylvania Forest Stewards program and keeping it going.

Jim explains, "We weave the tapestry by how our land, values, and legacy fit together with others' in caring for their land. We need to expand the conversation about conservation to encourage more people to consider their longer-term relationship with the land and the communities it supports."

Jim will also share his memories of giving a talk for WWIA in the early days and helping the organization find its feet.

The 30th anniversary gala committee members are Bob McBride, Rus Davies, Terry Gates, John Hilewick, Dianne Walter, Susan Caroleo, and JoEllen Bruno. They are planning a celebration that will give WWIA's first 30 years their due and jumpstart our next 30 years. They're researching the list of honorees and putting together a display of historic items and documents.

The event is free to WWIA members and everyone who joins or renews at the gala. It costs \$5 for nonmembers, who are welcome.

What's Your Favorite WWIA Memory?

We would love to hear your memories of some of your favorite WWIA experiences. If you'd like to write them up, email them to WWIA president John Hilewick at jandd.hilewick@gmail.com. Or you can call John at 724-925-1667. Every memory you share will contribute to weaving the history of WWIA.

Sustainable Backyard Workshop Coming to Murrysville

On March 16, 2019, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry will host “Making the Most of Your Piece of Nature” at Franklin Regional Senior High School in Murrysville, PA. This free workshop will offer information on sustainably managing your land and increasing the environmental benefits it provides. Area experts will present information on birds, wildflowers, stormwater management, and more. Local nonprofits and service providers will also be on hand to share resources available to help you. The workshop will be from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the high school auditorium. You can register and view a full agenda at yourpieceofnature2019.eventbrite.com. Or feel free to call 724-238-1200 for more information.



Golden Eagles (cont.)

transmitters just collected the data, but as soon as the birds flew into an area with cell service, it all spilled out.

Now that eastern states are aware they host golden eagles, their wildlife agencies manage for the birds. That means, in part, preserving their favorite kind of forests: high ridges and 75% to 90% forest cover, with big populations of turkeys, squirrels, and other prey.

Cory told the story of his golden eagle encounters so vividly that his listeners could almost feel the golden eagle in their own arms. His adventures reminded us that everything is connected and that the more we learn about any given species, the more reasons we have to preserve large swaths of unfragmented forests.

Species Spotlight: White Pine

Pinus strobus

By Celine Colbert, Service Forester



White pine is the most common pine tree in Pennsylvania. It is easily identified by its bundles of five needles, more than the two or three needles found on most other species. White pines are often the tallest trees in the woods. When you next look at a hillside, look for their green needles sticking out above the mixed hardwoods.

Their height and straightness garnered old-growth white pines a lot of attention in the 1700s, when trees were marked with an arrow identifying them as the property of the British Crown. These trees became the 100-foot to 120-foot masts the British Royal Navy needed to roam the seas. Later, colonists favored white pine for its tendency to produce clear, knot-free boards perfect for home-building.

White pines' value isn't limited to their wood. The needles contain five times (by weight) as much Vitamin C as lemons and can be used to brew tea or

can even be baked into cookies. The sap also has antimicrobial properties. It is said that the Chippewa Indians used it to treat infected wounds.

White pine is a tree species that is widespread and was heavily relied on as our country developed. It is the state tree of both Maine and Michigan, but perhaps its highest acknowledgment is the honoring of its pine cone and tassel as Maine's state flower.



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 2019. Member benefits include free entry to nearly all WWIA programs.

WWIA 2019 Calendar

March 21, 6:30 p.m. Alysha Trexler, watershed scientist/project manager at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, will discuss riparian buffers.

April 18, 6:00-8:00 p.m. WWIA's gala 30th anniversary recognition reception. The speaker will be Professor Emeritus James Finley of the Center for Private Forests at Penn State.

May 16 or 23. Foresters Mike DiRinaldo of DCNR and Tony Quadro of WCD will lead a walk and talk to view the treatment and mitigation of invasive plant species, deer impacts, and reforestation efforts on the Ann Rudd Saxman Nature Park next to the WCD campus. Program time TBD.

June 8, 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 ninth annual Forbes State Forest field trip and skills day.

June 29. Leslie Horner, Forest Stewardship Program associate at the Center for Private Forests at Penn State, will lead a workshop and field day focusing on woodland health and regeneration assessment at WWIA vice president Fred Lau's woodlot. Time TBD.

September 19, 6:30 p.m. Sandy Feather, an educator from the Penn State Extension Service, will discuss the spotted lanternfly and its spread.

October 17, 6:00 p.m. The annual WWIA potluck dinner and business meeting will be followed by a presentation on forest regeneration. Speaker TBD.

*Please check westmorelandwoodlands.org
for the latest information about program times and places.*

Westmoreland Woodlands Improvement Association

Membership Application and Renewal – Dues \$10 per year

Name: _____ Phone: _____

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c/o Westmoreland Conservation District

218 Donohoe Road, Greensburg, PA 15601

Attention: Tony Quadro

www.westmorelandwoodlands.org

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