



# CFA NEWS

Winter 2021

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# CFA NEWS

Winter 2021

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# From the President's Desk-

By: Mike Porter

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Welcome to Winter in the Catskills. Today I want to talk about our unique position in life as owners of forest land in the Catskills. We can be thankful that we own land here in the Region because we are relatively safe from Forest Fires, Tornadoes, Hurricanes and Earthquakes. When

we look at what is happening around the world we should feel very thankful that we do live here. We might have to deal with the occasional flood, cold spell, snow storm. heat wave or wind but these can be mitigated so they are not as critical to our safety. That said, there are some issues that can be problematic to forest owners. We have been impacted by diseases and pests attacking our chestnut, elm, ash and hemlock. Insect pests regularly experience population explosions throughout our area with Forest Tent Caterpillar and Gypsy Moths being most common. There are several other organisms that might become threats to our forest's health that we should be made aware. Spotted Lantern Fly (SLF) and Asian Longhorn Beetle (ALB) are a couple that come to mind with the SLF being relatively new as a threat to us. It seems that foresters and land managers have, for now, contained the ALB to its recent locations.

We can be thankful for all the foresters, scientists and land managers who are working around the clock to keep our forests as safe as possible. There are things we can do as landowners to contribute to



forest health. Keeping abreast of developments in our region and asking questions of those experts will help determine what actions we can take on our own forest land. When we have a garden, we weed and cultivate it to keep unwanted plants and pests at bay. We do have to do the same thing with our forest land. It is a monumental task even on a small parcel of land, especially, if you want to do the work yourself and save some money. When there are things to do, think small and do a few simple things as you have time or can afford it. When something seems too big for your skills, hire a professional to help out. This is where CFA comes into the picture. Our staff members have the skills and equipment to take care of many of the issues you might be facing.

When you look at your forest, realize that if you do nothing to it over time, it will change as succession progresses. In other words, if you like your forest the way it is now, you have to work to keep it that way. Whatever your forest, there will be rapid changes as the shade intolerant species are overtaken by more shade tolerant species. If you like the

young forest, you have to keep it young by removing the trees that might shade out your preferred forest population. If you want to encourage more permanent species to colonize, you really don't have to do anything except wait until the tolerant species germinate and grow up through the canopy.

30 years ago, we had a forester come and look over our 17 acres and give us an idea of plans that could maximize the value and usefulness of our forest. We were directed to remove certain trees to make room for the more desirable species in our woods. We took the advice and made several thinning cuts to get started. This year, as in the last few years, we have been paying attention to some of these recommendations again, and are cutting firewood in areas we previously worked, continuing to follow the guidelines given by the forester. It is pretty interesting that what we are cutting now were simple small stem trees at the time of the visit. The first cuts were not very fruitful as the trees were very small and didn't contain much volume for firewood. Today's cuts are producing much more per stem than if we had left them as dense



as they were when we bought the property. Also, what we are now leaving behind are quite straight and limb free harvest quality trees.

Our first major cut, 33 years ago, was in our Scotch Pine plantation where we harvested the logs for our homemade log cabin. We had to be careful to cut only trees that were large enough in diameter to make good cabin wall logs. It was quite a task to find enough of that quality. We also cut and let lay all dead and dying individuals (about 50% of the plantation was dead or dying). They were self thinning because of their Shade Intolerance. This left ample room for the remaining trees to grow nicely. Today, I am harvesting some very nice specimens of Scotch Pine for use in building material for other projects as I now have a bandsaw mill. There are still some pines that will not amount to anything but it is expected, as there is still some density and other species are growing and succeeding in squeezing the pines out.

This is where the firewood harvest is beginning I am cutting Red Maple, Sugar Maple, White Ash, Black

Cherry and some Black Birch for firewood. When we bought the land there was very little hardwood in the parcel, now the hardwoods are nearly dominating the stand. Things have changed over the years we have owned and managed the land. Change will continue despite our best efforts to maintain our Black Cherry and Red Oak, as the more shade tolerant species are squeezing these desirable trees out. To help combat this loss I am releasing oak and cherry to give them more light, expecting they will thrive with less competition for the sunlight.

I have been doing a broad scale removal of White Ash because of the EAB and am using most of the smaller stems for firewood. There are some larger stems that will find their way to the sawmill where I will, hopefully, create some nice lumber for furniture or other projects. Again this is taking advantage of a condition in the forest that will, and is, causing wholesale change. Even Dutch Elm Disease has impacted a small part of my harvest plan, as last year, I harvested an American Elm that was growing well until it died of Dutch Elm Disease two years ago. That was the only Elm



on the property. It was a sad day. The plus is that the elm will return as some type of furniture in the future once I make a decision on what to build. The negative is that there is no more Elm on our property like most other parcels in the region.

We are experiencing an “invasion” of American Beech now that is potentially choking out other more desirable species. When we bought the property there was one Beech tree on the property. Now, through its insidious ways, it is showing up in most sections of our property and is dominating. Becky and In are trying to control it with a judicious application of Roundup to each stem we cut off. Initial indications are that it will work but with much more effort put into the task. Similar problems with Striped Maple and Black Birch are showing up. I am choosing to culture the Birch as it makes good firewood and may make nice lumber once allowed to grow. The Striped Maple is suffering the same fate as the Beech, except that the stems make great walking sticks for our quinquennial Family Reunion. So I have to manage for small stems to continue to grow to supply the sticks. These

management techniques are necessary to achieve our goals for the property and forest.

When we bought the property in 1987, we took stock of what was there and as time progressed we noticed that in spite of our work the forests changed in not so subtle ways. Observations have shown that bird populations are changing as the trees are going through their succession, despite our attempts to stall succession in parts of the property. We can only hope that any of the problems mentioned in the opening will somehow be minor and not really affect our forest trees much. The weather seems to be a major part of the impacts but has not really affected the trees in terms of damage. An occasional blowdown happens, occasionally a tree dies from being shaded or as with the Elm, is impacted by something outside of our control.

We can all look at our forest land with the same eye by learning about what is in the woods, what the character of the trees will be and determine if the outcomes will be in line with our list of goals.

Have a great holiday season, enjoy the winter and be safe.



# Director's Message - Forest Arboriculture

By: Ryan Trapani, Director of Forest Services

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“If we’re going to have an intelligent conversation, then we’ll need to first define the terms,” says ArborMaster’s President & CEO – Ken Palmer. I recently spent 3 days in CT with ArborMaster learning new techniques on how to climb and safely rig material from trees when performing pruning and removal practices. ArborMaster educates Tree Workers and Arborists for 25 years. The people there are not only knowledgeable and proficient in tree work and arboriculture, but also good teachers. To be a good teacher, it seems some prerequisites are knowledge and experience on your subject-matter. However, a good teacher seems to be one who is well-disciplined, and is organized in their equipment, thoughts, and communication of information to others. Even better seems to be those teachers that are just as susceptible to learn something from others as they are to teach something; They may be the best in my experience. However, Ken’s opening statement cannot be overstated. A good educator should carefully and diligently “define the terms” so that concepts and practices are better understood.

And this brings me to what we do at the Catskill Forest Association (CFA). Unlike other organizations, CFA serves a largely abstract demographic – trees, forests, and the people that live in between them. In comparison, the Ruffed Grouse Society, Ducks Unlimited, Wild Turkey Federation, or the National Deer Association are relatively explicit in who they serve. But the forest? The trees? The implications of a “forest” are many. What’s a forest? How big is a forest? Size of trees, species, age, etc.? Associated wildlife? Forest owners are as diverse as trees and forests, making matters more complicated or “abstract.”

## **Arboriculture & Forestry**

For CFA, the problem lies in finding an accurate term to describe what we do. For instance, “Forestry” remains to be defined as “the science, art and profession of managing forests.” While “Arboriculture” as “the cultivation, management and study of individual trees, shrubs, vines, and other perennial woody plants in



dendrology and horticulture.” But there really isn’t a term that clearly combines the two. For general use, “Arboriculture” mainly takes place in urban areas or population centers where trees, people, and their property interface; Sometimes this is referred to as “Urban Forestry.” On the other hand, “Forestry” mainly takes place in more “rural” settings, where typically an economy exists for the management of “forests” as a whole. Typically, Foresters use “Silviculture” to influence trees and meet goals. Silviculture includes cutting practices or really the management of sunlight upon trees to influence both present trees and their regeneration, etc. to meet a wide variety of goals (wood, wildlife, diversity, health, etc.). While the terms may



not have changed, forests and the people responsible for them have, and CFA serves, both.

### **A New Term Emerges From the Forest**

The Catskill Mountain and adjoining river valleys – Schoharie, Susquehanna, Delaware, and Hudson – appear as predominantly one large forest if seen aerially. However, on closer inspection, ownership is much smaller than one might believe. Average parcel sizes are somewhere between 10 and 20 acres throughout the mountains. Although there are larger private landowners, with some owning 1,000 plus acres, and state-owned landowners including parcel sizes over 50,000 acres. Some of the larger private parcels remain within families that previously operated commercial farms, mostly dairies. As farms became less viable in the latter half of the 20th century, land became a liability to own for rural land uses and was sold in many ways. The least amount one could sell was via easement or partial sale of their development rights in lieu of tax savings; Many of these easements were bought up by New York City (watershed). However, many lands were parceled and sold to the State of New York, City of New York, or privately to city residents seeking refuge from a busier life elsewhere.

In other words, the Catskills are a mixed bag. While the more “rural” arm of tree management – or Forestry – has been set back by cost increases on rural land uses overall, it still does exist. For example, a market for timber remains throughout the area, and timber management is still in demand by private forest owners who are normally served by private Consulting Foresters. In general, rural land uses are more preoccupied with land management as a whole – or on a larger scale – rather than individual plants. On the other hand, the more “urban” arm of tree management has also been extending its roots recently into the mountains. As more hunting camps and bungalows are converted into full-time residences, there will be more interface between people, property, and trees, and this is where “Arboriculture” comes into play. Since full-time residences mostly occur on smaller parcels, they seem more likely to focus on individual trees outside their home. Concerns may include a tree potentially posing a safety hazard to their home, or the loss of a

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singly sentimental beautiful tree.

Of course, these are all generalities, and people, trees, and the land they reside on cannot fit neatly into one of these two camps – the rural side of forestry or the urban side of arboriculture. They are often in between. For instance, someone who may have just moved up to the Catskills on 15 acres may absolutely be concerned about trees falling on their home and take advantage of CFA's FOREST CONSULTATION PROGRAM to make an assessment. It may be recommended to remove tree(s) if they are deemed unsafe. Or perhaps they can save the sentimental tree via pruning and/or cabling (to prevent splitting) via CFA's TREE CARE: CABLING PROGRAM. However, this doesn't mean that their interest stops at hazardous trees near the home and never wander further into the yard-scape and beyond into the forest. The same person who wants trees cut or planted near the house for safety or aesthetics, may also want trees cut, planted, or pruned to meet concerns surrounding wildlife habitat, forest health, biodiversity, firewood, timber, maple syrup, etc. Is this arboriculture? Is it forestry?

Once we leave the immediate space near the house, the same person may have common interests with many Foresters in the 3 to 30 acre-range of forests surrounding them. Forestry – or forest management – often includes some sort of forest cutting, or silviculture where we venture away from single tree arboriculture and lean towards applied ecology. But is it totally? I mean sometimes CFA is in the “woods” but we're simply cutting around a few oak or hickory trees to release them from competing maple trees. Is this arboriculture? Is this forestry? Perhaps it is something new. Is it “Forest Arboriculture?” A new term for a new demographic of forest ownership. In any case, the forest keeps changing as we do. We're just trying to adapt and do the best we can to serve both. We just need to first, redefine the terms. Regardless, we feel that a little bit of management on many properties, will add up to positive impacts across that seemingly contiguous forest. As a member of CFA, you can take advantage of our field programs that serve trees in this “Forest Arboriculture” setting.



# THE GREAT MILL BROOK BLACK CHERRY WINDFALL OF 1845

By: Mike Kudish

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One of the most impressive tracts of original (or first growth) forest in the Catskills is surprisingly close to a town road. The headwaters of the Mill Brook, its valley, and its road are quite remote and therefore were not settled until the 1850s and 1860s; this is late for most of the Catskills where settlement was 75 to 50 years earlier. The State of New York acquired this tract, at the north base of Balsam Lake Mountain, into forest preserve in 1900. It was too far from a tannery to be easily barked and had not been logged.

I've been bringing groups of people in to see the tract for years, and each time a group is brought in, we explore and map the tract a little farther in from the road. What is also impressive about this tract is that it contains not one or two species of large old monarchs but seven: eastern hemlock, sugar maple, red maple, beech, yellow birch, white ash, and black cherry. The largest diameter hemlock in the Catskills that I've measured is here at 48 inches d.b.h. (diameter at breast height) and, from a core, about 270 years old. Hardwoods up to and over a yard in diameter are common.

In this tract are black cherries (*Prunus serotina*), concentrated in two groves but also widely scattered throughout with one monster 44 inches in diameter. The upper grove in the southeast corner of the tract (see map) has 14 trees with diameters of 20 to 41 inches (median 27), and about 175 years old according to my best estimate from overall Catskills black cherry growth rates and ring counts from broken trunks and limbs. What is remarkable is that when plotted on a map, this upper cherry grove is not of an irregular shape as one would expect, but a rectangle 220 feet long by 67 feet wide, oriented from west to east.

Because black cherry is only moderately tolerant of shade compared to the surrounding very shade-tolerant hemlock, beech, and sugar maple, there must have been a disturbance to set them off: an opening in the canopy. A human clearing before settlement is almost impossible, and there is no evidence of a forest fire. The most plausible explanation is a windfall (also known as a blowdown) by west-to-east straight-line winds known as a *derecho*; tornadoes are very rare in such rugged terrain. If the cherries are now 175 years old and reaching

maturity, the windfall must have occurred about the year 1845.

The lower grove, in the northwest corner of the first growth tract, has 25 cherries also about 175 years old, ranging in diameter from 21 to 34 inches, with a median of 29. Does this lower grove, also a rectangle, suggest a windfall from the north? I've estimated the dimensions as about 450 feet from north to south and 150 feet from west to east, but a careful measurement is still to come.

Do both groves date to the same storm on the same day? Probably not, but it's possible. It's more like two different storms a few years apart.

For you Adirondack history buffs, the 1878 W. W. Ely Map of the New York Wilderness and the Adirondacks (published by G. W. and C. B. Colton Company of New York City) indicates the great windfall of 1845; it runs north 73 degrees east (true bearing) from near Moosehead Mountain northeast of Sevey's Corners to 1.5 miles east-southeast of Derrick. This area is at the south end of Saint Lawrence and Franklin Counties in the Towns of Colton, Piercefield, and Altamont (now Tupper Lake), 10 miles northwest and north of the village of Tupper Lake. The windfall was 14.5 miles long by 1/6 of a mile wide. Not one but two ponds in its path were named after it: Windfall Pond.

Could it be? Could the two black cherry windfalls in the Mill Brook tract date from 1845 and be from the same storm as the Adirondack windfall? It's hardly likely, but one can think about it.

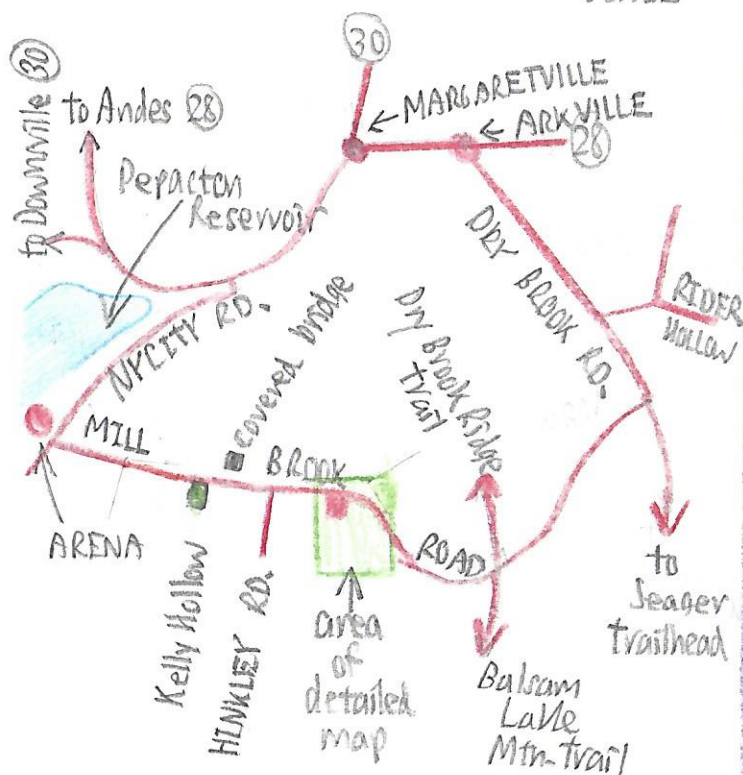
## WHO IS MIKE KUDISH? A RE-INTRODUCTION

Michael Kudish has been a CFA member almost from the organization's origins in the 1980s. He was first introduced to CFA members in 2008 by then CFA Director, Jim Waters, in a series of articles entitled "Mike's Corner: Observations by a Forest Historian". Since, Mike has been writing for each issue of the CFA News on forest history and forest ecology. He completed his Ph.D. thesis, *Vegetational History of the Catskill High Peaks*, at the New York State College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse exactly fifty years ago this year. He had been returning to the Catskills almost every following summer to continue mapping the forest. In 2005, he "retired" as Professor Emeritus from teaching forestry courses at Paul Smith's College in the Adirondacks to settle in the Catskills. Continued study of our region's forest history is now full time.



# THE GREAT MILL BROOK BLACK CHERRY

## LOCATOR DIAGRAM (NOT TO SCALE)



Parking area coordinates:

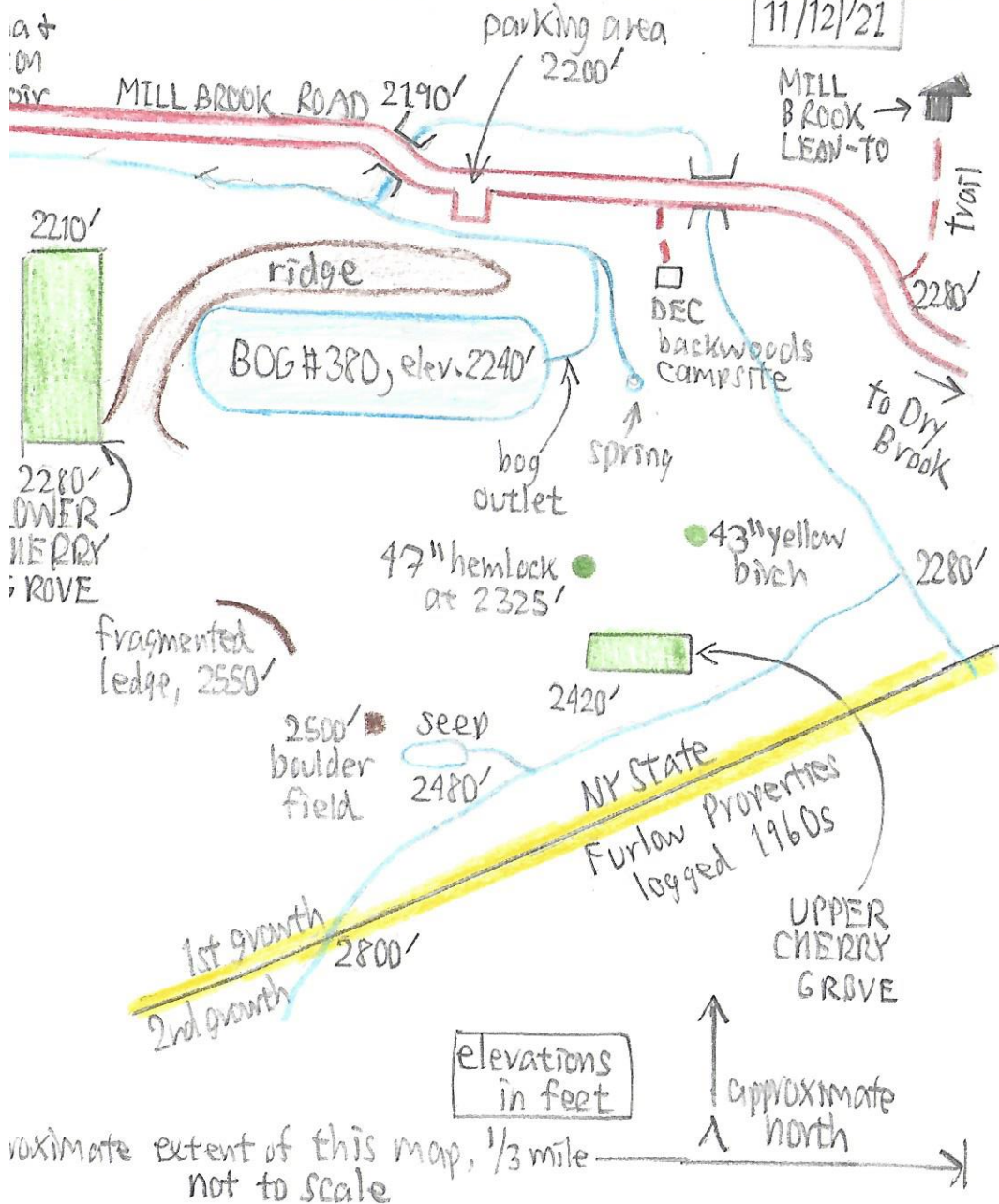
42° 03' 58" north  
 74° 35' 35" west  
 or 1.50 miles from,  
 and N10° E of,  
 Balsam Lake Mtn.  
 fire tower

← approximate

# UPPER WINDFALL OF 1845

Michael Kudish for Winter  
2021-2022 CFA News

11/12/21





# Journey to a Young Forest

By: Gerry McDonald

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In early 2018, my wife and I attended the NYFOA Capital District Chapter's annual winter gathering where Tim Russell from the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) was the guest speaker. Tim spoke about managing forestland for improved deer habitat and the Young Forest Initiative. The general idea was to cause a disturbance in an otherwise mature forest setting to create patches of early successional habitat. Tim discussed how the change in habitat can create food and cover for not only deer, but many other birds and small mammals including rabbits, grouse, and woodcock. He discussed the various techniques for assessing and controlling unwanted vegetation, what to cut and what not to cut and cutting techniques.

I used to hear grouse drumming in springtime, but I had not heard any in the past several years, so this sounded like an interesting idea. I thought about the patch of young aspen trees I can see out my window where I used to often hear grouse and how that really grew up in the past 25 years. The connection between the absence of grouse

and the loss of good grouse habitat from the lack of young forest made sense.

I spoke with Tim after the presentation and gave him my contact info. That spring, Tim called, and we scheduled a walk of the property to look at possible areas to create a young forest. I suggested we focus on a 5-acre area on a dry flat stocked with mostly stunted oak as a potential site. Tim mapped out 5 acres and connected me to the folks at a National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). There was funding available for projects like this but there was a process. I first needed to update my 1995 Forest Management Plan (FMP) and have the proposed area inspected and approved by a NRCS biologist. When I initially met with the biologist, she suggested a different area that was not so "high and dry" for the cut. We agreed on an area located at a lower elevation and was definitely wetter. The chosen area was primarily stocked with white pine with interspersed oak, hickory, maple, big tooth aspen and other hardwoods including several big "wolf" white oak trees. At the time we did not identify any invasive species of concern. We marked out 7.7 acres on a mostly flat area and some of the adjacent east facing hillside.

With the funding approved for an update of my FMP in 2019, I

hired a NRCS certified forester. She identified 16 distinct stands on our 125 acres of forested land and included the 7.7-acre area designated for the early successional forest management plan. My forester also recommended pre-commercial thinning on an additional 20 acres of mostly white pine that qualified for cost sharing. With the updated FMP completed, my application for funding to implement the early successional FMP was approved in 2020.

The early successional forest management plan was specific in its requirements: the work was to be done between November 1 and March 31; no heavy equipment causing soil disturbance allowed in the work area; chop and drop methods were to be used to remove 85% of the canopy leaving 10 to 12 nut and fruit trees per acre (primarily oak and hickory and cherry if present); all woody stems and debris to be left in place to create dense cover that would limit deer browsing and protect the soil while new growth got started; retain existing snags and create new snags by girdling trees; and hinge cut trees where possible to create quick shrubland habitat. NRCS provided me with a list of contractors who would do this kind of work. My first call was to the Catskill Forest Association located in Arkville NY and after

my conversation with John McNaught, my mind was made up. I was confident that John had experience doing these cuts and their fee seemed reasonable for work involved. I provided John with a copy of the plan and the requirements for the cut and we signed a contract and scheduled the work for the first week of December. Prior to the work, John, the NRCS biologist and I met and walked the area, putting up copious amounts of flagging to delineate the area and making clear the expectations of the work plan. During this walk, I noticed quite a few buckthorn trees in the understory of the proposed cut, they were easy to spot since they were the only trees with green leaves. To limit the spread of buckthorn in the area, I spent a couple afternoons in November cutting the buckthorns and stump treating with concentrated glyphosate. December 1 arrived and on schedule, John McNaught and his partner Ryan showed up to start the cut. I was amazed at the rate these 2 men worked. They completed the cut in 3 ½ days. The place looked like a hurricane had hit and my wife nicknamed the area "Hurricane Ridge." The second week of December, the NRCS biologist performed her inspection and approved the work as conforming with the plan requirements.

I've had mixed feelings

since the cut was completed. Some of the trees that now lay on the ground are trees that I've watched grow over the past 25 years, a few relatively straight stemmed oaks that might have been of timber quality in another generation or 2. Lots of 10" to 20" white pine stems and crowns now litter the ground, and it is nearly impossible to get through the cut area in most places. On the bright side, I've seen the damage deer browsing has caused to oak and maple regeneration throughout the property and I've seen where oak and maple saplings have been able to "get up" in the canopy shadows of overturned trees. I look forward to observing the successional march of habitats in the cut area, watching to see what wildlife moves in and to see the procession of the decay organisms breaking down the woody debris in hopes that Hurricane Ridge turns to a nicely stocked hardwood forest if I'm around long enough. I hope to provide updates on the changes I see as time rolls on. Stay tuned.







Aspen regeneration 1 year later

# The Meaning of Evergreen

By: Zane Lawyer

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The mood always seems to turn after that first September frost. A readiness begins to set in. Calls are made, lists are drawn up, a million little things are suddenly gathered, taken in, and stored. All manner of outfitting, replacing, and provisioning begin falling under that uniquely North American ritual called winterization. By the time all the trees have gone bare, and the late turning oaks and beeches give the valleys that look of bronze, thousands of homes have been converted into 24-hour factories for the wood furnace.

My own readiness means gearing up for a second winter of pruning apple trees at CFA. A new handsaw, leg gaiters, gloves, a few hand-warmers cached in the truck, and a much-needed pair of prescription sunglasses on order (snow blindness is no joke) is everything I'll need to face the elements. Another means of readiness no less important involves adjusting my body to a now familiar range of motion—the day in and day out trudge through the snowpack, the back-and-forth movement of the saw blade at work in a limb, the full-bodied clamber up a tree to make that necessary reduction cut. The theme running through it all is a growing mental preparedness—an acclimation.

By analogy, apple trees make their own adjustments for winter survival but do it in a way that highlights just how divergent these long-lived, woody perennials are from us animals. Instead of gearing up they shed off. Instead of getting loose they harden. All growth is suspended in a process that began all the way back in mid-summer, long before leaf drop in autumn. The increasing length of night around this time, imperceptible to us at first, prompted most trees to begin slowing their growth and undergoing numerous physical and functional changes as they readied themselves for the big freeze.

Two of the biggest threats to the survival of a tree during the winter months (and mine for that matter) are low temperatures and lack of liquid water. The organ most vulnerable to winter exposure on a tree is the one it grew last—the twig. Unlike the larger branch from which it extends out into the world, the twig has had precious little









time to develop bark enough to prevent injury and desiccation. Faced with no good options, the twig enters a period of bud dormancy in an effort to conserve its energy gains from the spring.

The tree is banking on that bud, and it will suspend all other operations to protect its investment. That's because the dormant bud contains next seasons shoot enclosed by a pattern of modified leaves called scales unique to each species. For most species such as maple, beech, oak, and pine they overlap like shingles on a roof. Rarely are they lacking altogether, as with magnolia, sumac, and viburnum. Like a tight winter jacket, they act to keep the soft germ tissue inside from drying out and losing heat. Next time you find yourself out in the cold, warm yourself with the knowledge that each species has evolved their own strategy to protect their assets.

When we make a pruning cut we are looking to promote the trees best investments. Every twig is an investment of energy, water, and time. Some investments pay off in the short-term like height and width, others produce diminishing returns until they are eventually shuttered like the lower branches shaded out over time, and some pay off in the long-term like flowers and fruit. Proper pruning helps to spread those dividends out where they are most needed.

In a word, dormant twigs and buds are as good as fingerprints for identifying species since they hold their features throughout the season. The base of the twig is visible as rows of last season's scales that have been pressed and fused together creating a bud scar. The twig that emerged from that bud in the spring might also have small, sometimes warty, patches called lenticels which help to diffuse oxygen and nitrogen to the tissues beneath.

For broad-leaf or deciduous trees, a feature unique to each species is the leaf scar that remains when a leaf detaches. During winter acclimation, trees begin drawing the energy-storing products of photosynthesis out of their leaves in a process that secures reusable ions, molecules, and proteins. Chief among these are sugar molecules (some converted from starch) used to lower the freezing point of the dormant cells. Much like salt on the roadways, sugar combined with water at concentration creates a solution that stays liquid at low temperatures. Once withered the layer of cells between the twig and the stalk become walled off and a few strands of vascular tissue are

all that holds the leaf to the shoot before cleaving away. Above or beside this woody stamp sits the dormant bud that matured and set when twig growth peaked in summer.

Species like American beech, hornbeam, and some oak hold onto their leaves for longer during acclimation and sometimes even into winter until eventually breaking off in spring (pin oak is famous for this). Instead of falling away the stalk remains alive while the leaf withers to a bronze hue (as in white oak) or the color of straw (as in beech). This condition—called *marcescence*—is more noticeable in younger trees and suggests some useful adaptation.

Though named by experts, scientists do not yet agree on what it's an adaptation for. Some interesting guesses: that it might deter animal browsing of the twigs and buds, that they might protect the buds from drying out, and that it may act as delayed mulch for species growing on infertile sites or those prone to drought. My own two-cent theory is that it acts to provide shelter for overwintering birds or squirrels that may help to disperse its fruit come next fall. The next time you're out in the woods in winter you might notice it and hazard a guess yourself.

No tree keeps its leaves forever. Even evergreens appear to do so all year round but actually shed their older needles selectively each season. What makes these ancient species like pine, spruce, fir, and hemlock look so fresh and enduring in wintertime is that they puncture the harsh landscape with symbols of impending renewal. No doubt some of this symbolism colors our tradition of harvesting and lodging them in our den every year. But may the buyer beware, there is no better Christmas tree for needle retention than firs. Long after New Year's Day you'll find this regal species lying in state along the roadway keeping its promise.

I'll propose 'evergreen' to be anything we return to again and again. Whatever is repeatedly brought home to us as natural, exciting, and true. Winter creates a spirit of readiness in all creatures with work to do. That's evergreen. Some phenomena of the forest are easier to name than to explain for certain. That's evergreen. Trees will always need our care, maintenance, and attention. That's evergreen.





# The Lone Ginseng

By: Ryan Trapani, Director of Forest Services, CFA

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About 14 years ago, a friend was kind enough to reveal where American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolium*) grew wild in parts of the Catskills. In general, it seemed that the mysterious plant roughly grew around 2,000 feet (plus or minus) and on north-facing slopes. Although rocky areas, the “site” for ginseng was normally good. In Forestry, “Site Index” refers to a tree’s ability to attain a specified height over a given amount of time, normally 50 years. Tall-growing trees included sugar maple, basswood, ash, and sometimes red oak. Tall growing sugar maple not only indicate a good site, but also calcium-rich soils. Sugar maple is also “picky” about its site. For instance, sugar maple cannot tolerate poorly drained areas near swamps, nor can it handle dry ridgetops. Forest tent caterpillar defoliation – for this reason – seems most severe on ridgetops where sugar maple is already stressed. Sugar maple isn’t the only plant that prefers well-drained calcium-rich soils. Many of our woodland perennial flowers also do – Dutchman’s breeches, trillium,

wild ginger, blue cohosh, squirrel corn, white baneberry, to name a few. In other words, on well-drained, calcium-rich sites located on mid-slopes and upper hollows, the timber is tall and the forest floor’s carpet thick and diverse.

The areas we hit up for ginseng were mainly in the northern and western Catskill Mountains. Sometimes we struck out, and sometimes we found a bunch. It was fun just “hunting for shang.” Once familiar with ginseng’s whereabouts, I naturally thought about similar areas in southern Ulster County – where I was more familiar with – that might also hold ginseng; One area quickly came to mind. It contained some of the tallest trees I knew of – sugar maple, basswood, red oak, and even yellow poplar. Yellow poplar is more of a “southern” tree but demands what southerners might call “cove forests.” These coves are well-drained and rich for growing trees and ginseng. After all, the southern Appalachians have their fair share of ginseng too. Surprisingly, I never found one ginseng plant. I had searched high and low on that side of the mountain. However, I think I

know why.

### **Beyond their Reach**

A few years ago (2018), I was at a member's property who lives in the area which includes that tall timber, but unfortunate ginseng-desert beneath. Some of his trees are so tall they might have 3 or more logs in them. A "log" is measured as 16 feet of straight and clear branch-free stem or trunk. Unfortunately, the forest floor there is also clear. Almost nothing grows barring NY and hay-scented fern – two plants deer don't seem to touch. By this time, I realized why I was missing ginseng in the southern Catskills. For some reason, deer browse-pressure was higher there than in the western/northern Catskills. Despite good sites for growing plants, the deer were having their way with browsing plants, especially ginseng.

In any case – on this member's property – my mind wasn't yet completely closed off to finding the plant. And there it was. Hidden beneath a cliff was one lonely ginseng plant the deer did not bother to climb and find. Although ginseng wants to grow in this area, it has been just about

extirpated. I remember the plant felt weak, most likely the result from years of deer browsing its leaves and berries and relying on its diminishing root system's reserves.

Well, fast forward to this fall (2021) and once again I visited this same member's property. Since then, he had fenced off the area to protect the tiny plant from deer. Let's just say that this plant was no longer tiny; It was one of the largest growing wild ginseng plants I have ever seen; I just knew they liked this site. It had berries and had also been spreading little ones up and down the cliff-side. Now that deer browse had been eliminated, ginseng was spreading on this great site.

The above is anecdotal. However, West Virginia's Jim McGraw & Mary Ann Furedi (2005) have confirmed deer impacts on ginseng. At first, they too believed it might be from poaching or over-harvesting since the plant is so valuable. In comparison, roughly 45% of plants were impacted from deer browse, while harvesting impacted about 0.45 to 3.04%. After monitoring 7 populations of ginseng plants every 3 weeks during the growing season for

5 years, they confirmed that when deer browse is reduced by 50%, only then can it grow at about 2.1%. If deer browse is to remain the same going forward in most areas, ginseng – along with other understory plants – may unfortunately be extirpated in the next 100 years or less. More specifically, the researchers found that deer really like to browse on adult ginseng plants, which is unfortunate since adult plants are most responsible for perpetuating the species. They found that browsing varied more by deer population compared to differing years. In conclusion, they recommended that deer browse must be reduced by 50% to achieve growth in ginseng populations.

### **Indicator of Forest Health**

Ginseng is a special plant mainly because of its medicinal attributes. Some just like to “hunt” it or sharpen another woodsman skill. To me, ginseng may serve as the “canary in the coal-mine” or indicator of a growing problem; One test of whether forests are being mis-managed. A healthy ginseng population indicates a healthy forest understory, just as a healthy brook trout population indicates a healthy mountain stream. Since

ginseng is a perennial that never grows beyond the deer browse-line, it is highly vulnerable to herbivory. It seems that where ginseng remains, are areas where browse-pressure is lowest and site quality adequate. However, ginseng – I’m sure – “would like” to grow beyond their deer refuges. The ginseng that our member protected from deer was recently aged. After counting the number of stem scars on the plant’s rhizome (root neck), he lost count after 50 since the “lines” were so tightly spaced. Who knows, maybe this ginseng is 100 years old and was saved just in time. Call CFA or your Forester on what you might do to make your forest “healthier” today.



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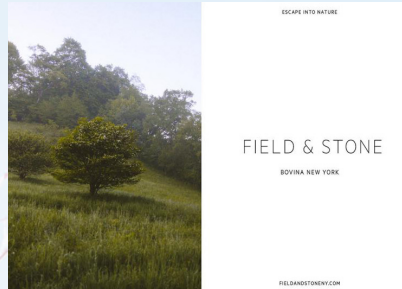
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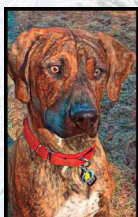
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Jeffrey Keiter Landscape Architect  
jeffkeiter.rla@gmail.com  
(917) 723-8810



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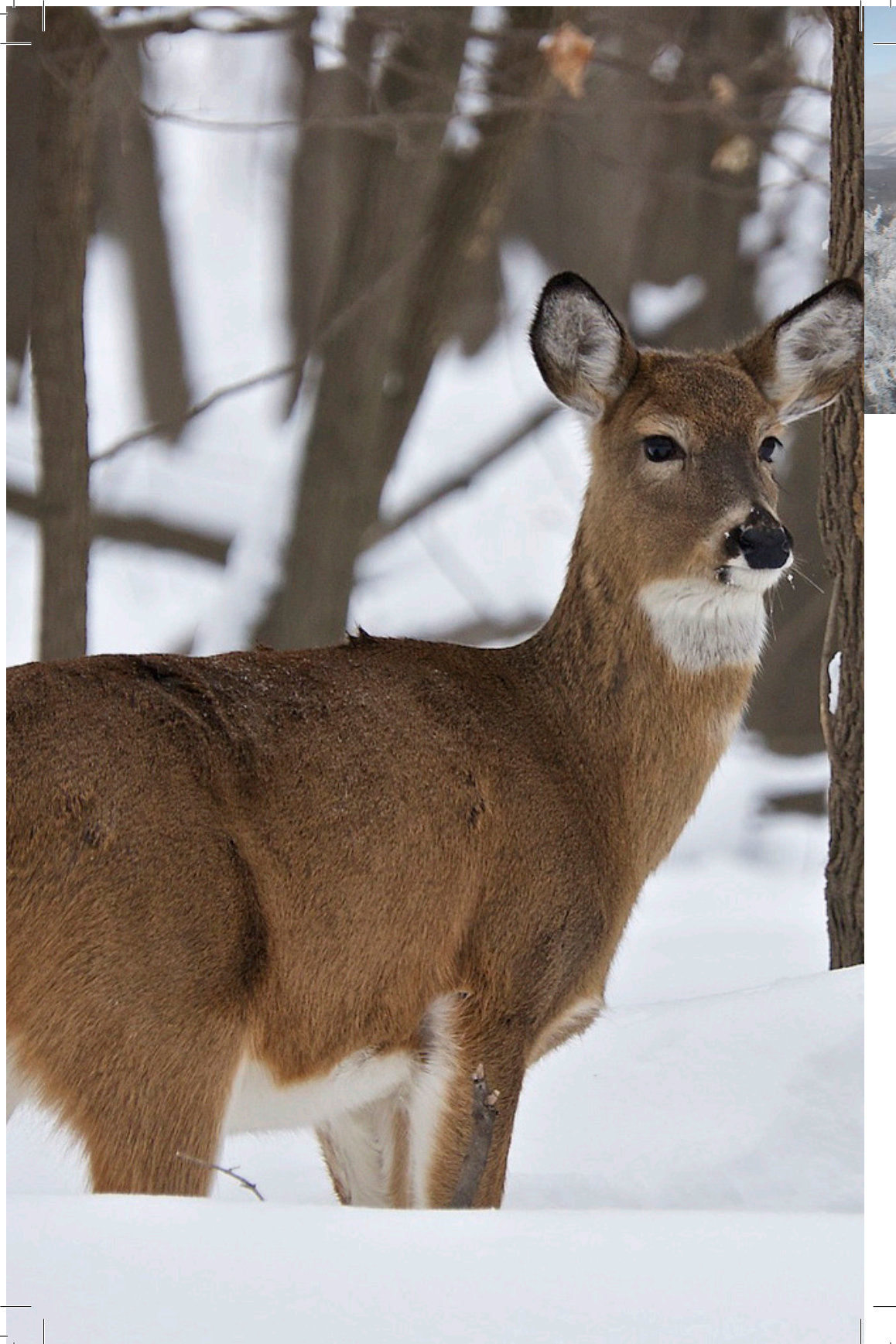


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# Programs & Services

Learn more at [catskillforest.org/programs](http://catskillforest.org/programs)

Program	Description	Time
Consultations	<i>One-hour property visits by field staff to help you learn about what your property holds</i>	All Year
Apple Tree Pruning	<i>Pruning helps keep apple trees healthy and improves quality and quantity of yields</i>	Jan. - March
Apple Tree Grafting	<i>A horticultural technique to help bring old, neglected trees back to fruition</i>	April - May
Forest Bird Program	<i>High-Nesting Bird Boxes for ducks, owls, etc. and/or Canopy Bird Feeders that protect against squirrels &amp; bears</i>	All Year
Invasive Species Management	<i>Care for trees against invasive insects, and care for forests against invasive plants</i>	May - Sept.
Portable Sawmill Program	<i>We bring a state-of-the-art portable sawmill directly to your property and mill your logs to lumber, on the spot</i>	Spring - Fall
Property Mapping	<i>Custom property maps highlighting the property features you want to see</i>	All Year
Tree Care: Cabling	<i>Preserving large-sized individual trees with structural defects.</i>	Spring - Fall
Tree Care: Structural Pruning	<i>Establish dominate leader for tree structure.</i>	Spring - Fall
Tree Planting	<i>CFA will find prime placements for up to 3 trees</i>	Spring - Fall
Wildlife Habitat Management	<i>Forestry practices to help improve your woodlot for wildlife</i>	All Year



## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Become a member at [www.catskillforest.org/membership](http://www.catskillforest.org/membership) or send a check/cash with this application to:  
Catskill Forest Association, Inc. PO Box 336, Arkville, NY 12406.

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TOTAL ACRES: \_\_\_\_\_ FORESTED ACRES: \_\_\_\_\_ POND [ ] STREAM [ ] RIVER [ ]

### CATEGORIES (PLEASE CIRCLE)

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Events free or discounted; CFA News Subscription; CFA Member Property Sign; Access to CFA Programs	SAME AS BASIC + 20% Discount on Services; CFA Totebag
BUSINESS (\$200)	SUSTAINING (\$500)
SAME AS BASIC + 10% Discount on Services; CFA Website Listing; Email Referral Advertisements; Free Booth at Forest Festival	SAME AS BASIC + 30% Discount on Services; CFA Backpack

### ADDITIONAL DONATIONS

GENERAL OPERATING FUND	\$
ENDOWMENT TRUST FUND	\$
SCHOLARSHIP FUND	\$

Total Amount: \$\_\_\_\_\_