CATSKILL FOREST ASSOCIATION, INC.

CFA NEWS

Fall 2023

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CFA NEWS

Fall 2023

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From the President's Desk: Fall 2023

Mike Porter, CFA Board President

In preparation for CFA's Fall 3-day workshop entitled "So You Want to Build a Cabin", I have been reviewing all the material I used or wrote about in the time I built our cabin in the woods. The following are excerpts from an article that appeared in a short-lived periodical published in Roxbury in the early '90's. Enjoy and get ready to build a cabin of your own.

In 1987 we, Becky and I, began our search for land for our log cabin retreat. Our search ended on Dingle Hill in Andes as we found a lot that had all we needed. The land was blessed with about 5 acres of 30 year-old Scot's Pine, an excellent spring and a sheltered southern exposure. Our design and plans began to formulate as we determined what our cabin would include. The dimensions would be 18' x 24' with a 12' x 12' bedroom off the rear. We were not planning on electric or running water so it had to be small, to be lit by propane and heated with wood. The close proximity of the spring would make it easy to carry water to the cabin when needed.

When we began the process of building the cabin we had prepared the site by hiring a bulldozer to flatten out a spot and a hole drilling rig to dig the 20-some post holes for the cabin piers. Our equipment centered around a chainsaw mill (Alaskan Mk III), 5KW generator, 1946 Willys to act as skidder and boom truck for moving logs, extra chainsaws to do sizing, and various hand tools including draw knives for peeling logs and an old 1/2" drill to do the required drilling of the logs. We did have a level and also used a garden hose level to get things started on an even keel.

Our plan was to cut, skid out, mill, and peel each log as we began the building process. Since we were using fresh cut (green) logs, each level

had to be free to shrink according to the ratio of 3/4" per foot of log height.

We secured each course of logs to the one below it with rebar placed in holes drilled with the old drill. Each log was also locked in place by splines placed between the end of each log and corresponding door or window frame. Ends of each course of logs were nailed together with 12" cabin spikes to hold them together as they were built.

As we began the task of building, it was apparent that we would not be able to do this simply as a family. We enlisted the help of family and a few young friends who became invaluable helpers. Becky's father was a carpenter and my brother, Rick, was a prime builder for Alta Log homes so their advice and encouragement were key to our success. In a nutshell, no one believed we could get this done before winter set in so we had a challenge. We did finish and have everything "dried in" by Columbus Day. So there, those of you who know.

The Alaskan Mill was just what we needed as it was easy to set up and reasonably quick to produce the dimensioned logs we needed on a daily basis. Keys to operating the mill were: a special ripping chain, a straight guild to make the first cut on each log, and patience. We could produce enough milled logs in one day of milling to make one course of logs on the cabin. After making a first cut on all logs ready for the day's build, we could set the mill to the desired thickness and make the final cut of each one to ensure that each course of logs was exactly the same thickness. Once each log was milled to size, we set out peeling each one with a draw knife. Here it was truly a family affair as the kids and Becky all participated in getting them peeled.

It took a few courses of trial and error to get a plan for correctly measuring each log and cutting it to size on the saw horses prior to placing the log on the cabin. The measurements required making a "center" line and doing all measuring from that line. The corners, once practiced,

became easy to do so that all logs put in place would fit properly. Each log course was lined with a thin strip of fiberglass insulation to keep out air and bugs. To this day, this fiberglass is the only material between our logs. Some corners have been spray foamed and the ceiling has fiberglass insulation or rigid foam sheets to help keep heat in and cold out. Our goal was to build 14 courses of logs of either 6" or 7" thickness. We ended up doing 13 courses as the height was getting to be unmanageable with our Willys boom truck.

The last course was built with gaps above windows and doors to allow for shrinkage as the logs dried. Loft floors and roof lines were also set up with space to allow for shrinkage around the chimney. Windows and doors were installed in spaces left in the log construction for them to fit. We used windows, glass doors, and hand built doors for all openings. A chimney large enough to accomodate a 6" flue was built and a stone floor was constructed to house our wood stove.

Holding the cabin together at the top of the walls, we used 20' aspen logs anchored across the rooms and raised the roof from those logs. Our roof was a standard dimension lumber roof with plywood and shingles since it would have taken too long to cut the roof rafters with the Alaskan mill. Once things were closed in, we could begin finish work. Finish work included closing in the gable ends, putting a finished floor in and an insulated ceiling. We added a kitchen: gas stove, sink that could carry our little water out to a dry well, gas lights and a propane refrigerator. It should not be surprising that with these amenities we can be very comfortable in all types of weather. I built a bed in the style of "Twin Peaks" lodge from the TV show by the same name, we put furniture in and it is like home to this day.

Looking back on the 35 years since we first started this adventure there are very few things we could do different. We did add a porch roof on our deck when the roof needed replacing a few years ago but not much else

has been changed. Right now I think it would have been good to use different posts for the cabin to be built on as the old phone poles we used then are now beginning to rot and need to be replaced. We still have no electric but when needed have a generator. Our water continues to be carried from the spring except for a small amount pumped to a storage tank for washing hands and dishes in the sink. When you consider that we spent $5,000 on the original construction and have put in about $2,000 in a new roof and a little maintenance, we made out pretty well back then.

As Becky says, "We have more hours than dollars in this escape." Our kids are now grown and return to vacation here once in a while so it continues to give us all the pleasure we thought it would.

Fewer Deer

Ryan Trapani, CFA Director of Forest Services

It isn't too often that I get to "shock" an audience that I'm presenting to. I'm not saying the subject matter—at least to me—is boring, but I wouldn't argue that it's completely surprising or electrifying. After all, I'm normally talking about trees near one's house or the forest behind it and these are something we encounter every day. We live in a landscape dominated by trees. However, there seems to be two topics—or rather statements I often make—that really do shock the audience. One is something I recently wrote about due to the recent fires in Canada. Contrary to popular belief, fires were far more common in the early half of the 20th century than the last 40 years or so throughout most of the United States, but that is another article. The other shocking topic relates to a subject I have written about for years and one we all should be familiar with—the white-tailed deer. But still, the almighty white-tail never disappoints, and continues to surprise us. It is after all, my favorite animal of the forest. So here we go again on deer. You ready? Wait for it.

There are in general, fewer deer now than 20 or 30 years ago. I hear you screaming right now. I can feel your penetrating eyes stabbing my words. I must keep this article to less than 1,200 words so I'll try to simplify it as best I can. For those of you that hunt and are older, this might not be as surprising. You may have remembered or heard about seeing 30 or more deer routinely in fields near your house around dusk back in the 1970s, 80s, or 90s. My neighbor remembers seeing 40 or 50 deer in the large fields near Boiceville in Ulster County. I wasn't around in the 1970s but do remember seeing far more deer where I grew up on "the flats" of the Wallkill near New Paltz in the 1990s.

Fast-forwarding to the present day, and I can hear the readers' report on numbers of deer near their homes. "I see deer every day." "They eat all my plants." "I have to fence off everything to keep those forest rats away." One seemingly kind old lady walking her dog in Gardiner stopped me one morning after hunting. She was disappointed I didn't have any luck. "They eat everything; I wish you would have gotten one."

So, who is right? Were the hunters of decades ago wishing for or imagining more deer? Are today's homeowners, gardeners, and landscapers imagining all the impacts from deer browsing their plants? Are we not hitting deer all the time with our cars and seeing them near the house and roads more often?

One More Shocker—Fewer Deer with More Impact

Here is one more shocker before I try to explain why there are fewer deer. Despite there being fewer deer today, the plants near our house and in the forest are being impacted more than yesteryear. The answer lies in the changes that have occurred in the landscape, or forests. From field to young

forest to older forest. These changes directly correlate with—and I would argue cause or impact—deer numbers and their impacts. To this day, we underrate the most phenomenal change in the eastern United States and its impact on our environment. To me, it's farm abandonment.

Farm abandonment occurred at different times or decades depending upon where you're located. In general, better farmland has been abandoned more recently than poor quality farmland. When farmland is abandoned and is no longer used to grow vegetables or keep livestock, its energy can then be transferred to "wildlife." In the northeast, it doesn't take too long for abandoned fields to revert to shrubs and trees. This young growth provided excellent cover for small mammals, ground-nesting songbirds, and deer. In general, a decade or two after farm abandonment provides excellent habitat for deer. For instance, many dairy farms were abandoned in the Catskills in the 1960s through the 80s. Deer numbers—according to NYS DEC data—peaked in the 1990s through the early 2000s—depending on where you are. Despite more hunters decades ago in these areas killing deer, numbers of deer continue to fall. The reason is again, habitat. Poor habitat is more likely to indirectly "kill" wildlife than hunters directly killing them.

Young trees eventually succeed to older trees or forests. The shady condition from older forests continues to reduce food and cover for deer on the forest floor up to 5 feet. In other words, there is just less food for deer in maturing woodlands. The population reduces over time by does (female deer) giving birth to fewer deer. Instead of having triplets or twins, she may only have one fawn. If we add in black bears, many fawns are also predated by them too. However, these fewer deer numbers unfortunately don't always mean less deer browse or impacts to plants in the forest. Since fewer plants can grow beneath shady understories, fewer deer can keep up. Only plants the deer don't like to eat are left behind; these may include hay-scented fern, American beech, Japanese barberry, Japanese stiltgrass, New York fern, etc. Even if you don't care about deer, you might want to know about their impacts on plants in the forest. When deer are hungry and remove or influence plants growing up to 5 feet in the forest, they are influencing all other animals that need this vegetation for food and cover. This is what makes deer a "keystone" species.

More Deer by You Might Not Mean More Deer Overall

"Yeah, but I see a lot of deer." You probably do. But again, the answer goes back to habitat. If we were to assess your house more objectively in the landscape, or the road that goes by it too, we might gain insight into why you're seeing so many deer. Your house, the road, and the powerline nearby normally have more sunlight which allows younger plants to grow and a place for deer to seek cover in or eat. In other words, humans are disproportionately

seeing most of the deer in the landscape since "the best" habitat for deer is near where we live. Deer are not equally distributed across the landscape.

For reference, forests with the fewest deer occur where farms were either abandoned the longest time ago or perhaps never farmed and therefore have some of the most mature woodlands. Examples of this would be Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) 3A in the higher elevations of the Catskill Mountains which includes the state-owned Slide Mountain Wilderness Area. Even though this area has the fewest deer in the area, there remains a deer browse issue. Areas that have the most deer in the state include those that have had recent farm abandonment, scattered housing developments that offer younger—though expensively planted—growth, or an assortment of farms, fields, young and old forests. The latter is probably the most preferred by all and can probably be found in western NY where agriculture mixed with forests is more significant in the landscape. Though deer browse occurs just about everywhere, the Catskills and Lower Hudson Valley Region has some of the worst deer browse impacts on forest regeneration, and I would argue it's from maturing forests that are no good for deer coupled with the lack of hunting, but another article. In short, hungry deer lead to barren forest understories and angry homeowners missing their expensive plants, when homogeneously old forests dominate the landscape.

Conclusion

In conclusion, deer numbers seem to be most impacted by habitat. Impacts from deer-browse upon plants can be mitigated by enhancing quality habitat (i.e. diversity of forest-ages), and increasing hunting/predation pressure. Fencing is the surest way to protect forest regeneration or landscaped plants near homes from deer, but is expensive. Natural predators probably helped keep deer numbers "healthier", but human predation has probably been the most significant for millennia on deer, since they are a staple food. Habitat—to me—is most important. After all, we had more deer in the past with less browse-pressure since habitat was better from accidental abandonment of farms that produced a flush of young plants and forests. The question is how deliberate we will be in managing deer and forests going forward, especially in areas that are culturally urbanizing and less familiar with rural ways of life, like forestry and hunting.

www.catskillforest.org

Limestone Floras in the Sandstone Catskills?

Michael Kudish, Forest Historian

Yes! The Catskills interior bedrock geology is predominantly sandstone, with some shale, mudstone, siltstone, and conglomerate. Yet there are two places in the Catskills interior with calciphilic (limestone-loving) plants that occur only at these two places, the nearest sites being in the limestone areas of the Ashokan Basin and the Hudson Valley – some 40 to 50 or more miles away.

The two places are Pakatakan Mountain and the leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*) site near Kelly Corners.

Pakatakan Mountain

The northwest spur of Dry Brook Ridge that rises above Margaretville is called Pakatakan Mountain. CFA used to bring our spring wildflower walks here about 10 to 15 years ago because of the high diversity. It is on state land.

Because of the unique flora, this site has attracted many groups over the years including the Torrey Botanical Club as early as 1903, in the 1930s and again in 1960. Geologists and soils scientists from New York State Museum and DEC have visited the site in the last fifteen years or so, as well as the New York Flora Association.

The forest is the usual northern hardwoods (sugar maple, beech, yellow birch, with some hemlock), but in addition includes northern red and white oaks, shagbark and bitternut hickories, American chestnut sprouts, black birch, slippery elm, and one remnant mountain laurel population. The tree species diversity is so high here that it might be one of the best places to bring a college dendrology (tree identification) class. Many of the herbs at Pakatakan are those that we find commonly in seeps and springs under sugar maple, white ash, and basswood, but in addition are herbs that occur nowhere else in the Catskills interior:

Adoxa moschatellina, muskroot.
Camptosaurus rhizophyllus (now *Asplenium rhizophyllum*), walking fern.
Collinsonsia canadensis, stoneroot or horsebalm.
Cystopteris bulbifera, bulblet fern.
Thalictrum dioicum, early meadow rue.
Uvularia grandiflora, large-flowered bellwort.

But why? How did these plants get here? I've been puzzling over this for decades. I think that the reason may be a combination of three factors:

First, the nearby Native American village of Pakatakan on the

flood plain of the East Branch Delaware River will explain why the oaks, hickories, chestnut, black birch, slippery elm, and mountain laurel are here: from millennia of repeated burning (see the many articles in past CFA News issues I wrote on the Catskill Burn Index).

Second, the presence of some lime in the sandstone ledges, as confirmed by geologists, can explain the unusual array of calciphilic herbs and ferns.

Third, we need an element of chance and a long period of time for these plants to "find" Pakatakan. Over the 15000 years since deglaciation, birds, wide-ranging mammals, and people could have brought some seeds in, while fern spores could have blown in by the wind. On normal sites where the sandstone has no lime, the calciphilic species might have arrived but not survived, but here in this "abnormal" site, they did.

Leatherwood Site Near Kelly Corners

This site is located on the ridge between the East Branch Delaware River and its tributary, the Batavia Kill, northeast of Kelly Corners. It is 4.4 miles air distance from the Pakatakan site. Lime is in the sandstone bedrock here, too.

The main attraction of this site is one calciphilic species that occurs nowhere else in the Catskill interior: it is leatherwood, *Dirca palustris* (not to be confused with another and unrelated shrub, leatherleaf, *Chamaedaphne calyculata*). The nearest reported stations for this shrub are at the Ashokan Center and the adjacent Hudson Valley. When members of the New York Flora Association learned about the site, they had to come and see it. With permission of the land owners, and accompanied by them, we visited the site in July 2023.

The calciphilic species at the Pakatakan site are absent, although the common seep and spring species under sugar maple are present. The floristic diversity is very high and impressed the New York Flora Association members.

This site has a few of the burn species that occur up and down the East Branch Delaware Valley: northern red oak, shagbark and bitternut hickories, black birch, and maple-leaved viburnum.

Is Morris Hill The Connection?

Between the Pakatakan and leatherwood sites is Morris Hill, a ridge which parallels the East Branch Delaware River on the east. At the south end of Morris Hill, along the Bush Kill, are the CFA offices in Arkville. At the north end, Morris Hill is bounded by the Batavia Kill.

I wondered if there were any kind of lime in the sandstone on

Morris Hill, i.e. a connection between the Pakatakan and the leatherwood sites. In other words, are there any places on Morris Hill where any of the Pakatakan calcium-loving plants species and leatherwood exist?

I looked through my notes of about a half dozen field trips all over Morris Hill made over the years and found none. This hill has typical northern hardwoods and hemlock. In addition, it does have some Native American burn species, concentrated more at the south end, but none of the calciphiles found at the Pakatakan and leatherwood sites. On Morris Hill are northern red and white oaks, shagbark and bitternut hickories, American chestnut sprouts, black birch, several mountain laurel, and wintergreen.

A Conclusion

The floras at the Pakatakan and leatherwood sites are unrelated and not connected. Both have isolated pockets of lime in the sandstone. Complicating the floras of both sites are the populations of burn species created by Native Peoples over the millennia; these are not necessarily lime-loving species. Throw in an element of chance seed and spore dispersal over a period of more than several thousand years and we end up with these current unexpected "abnormal" floras.

LIMESTONE FLORA SITES IN THE SANDSTONE CATSKILLS

Michael Kudish

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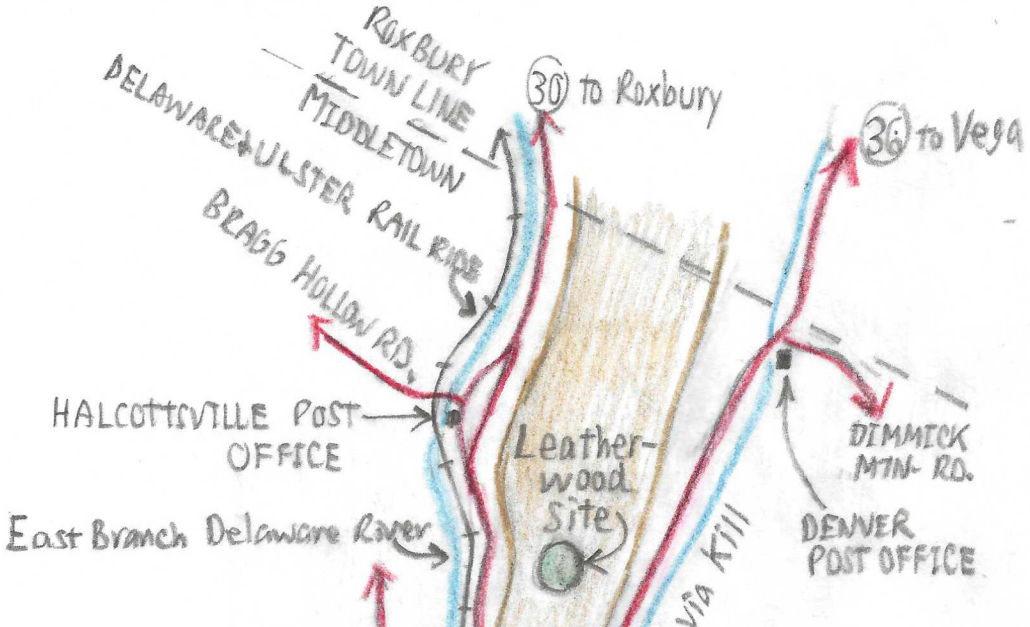
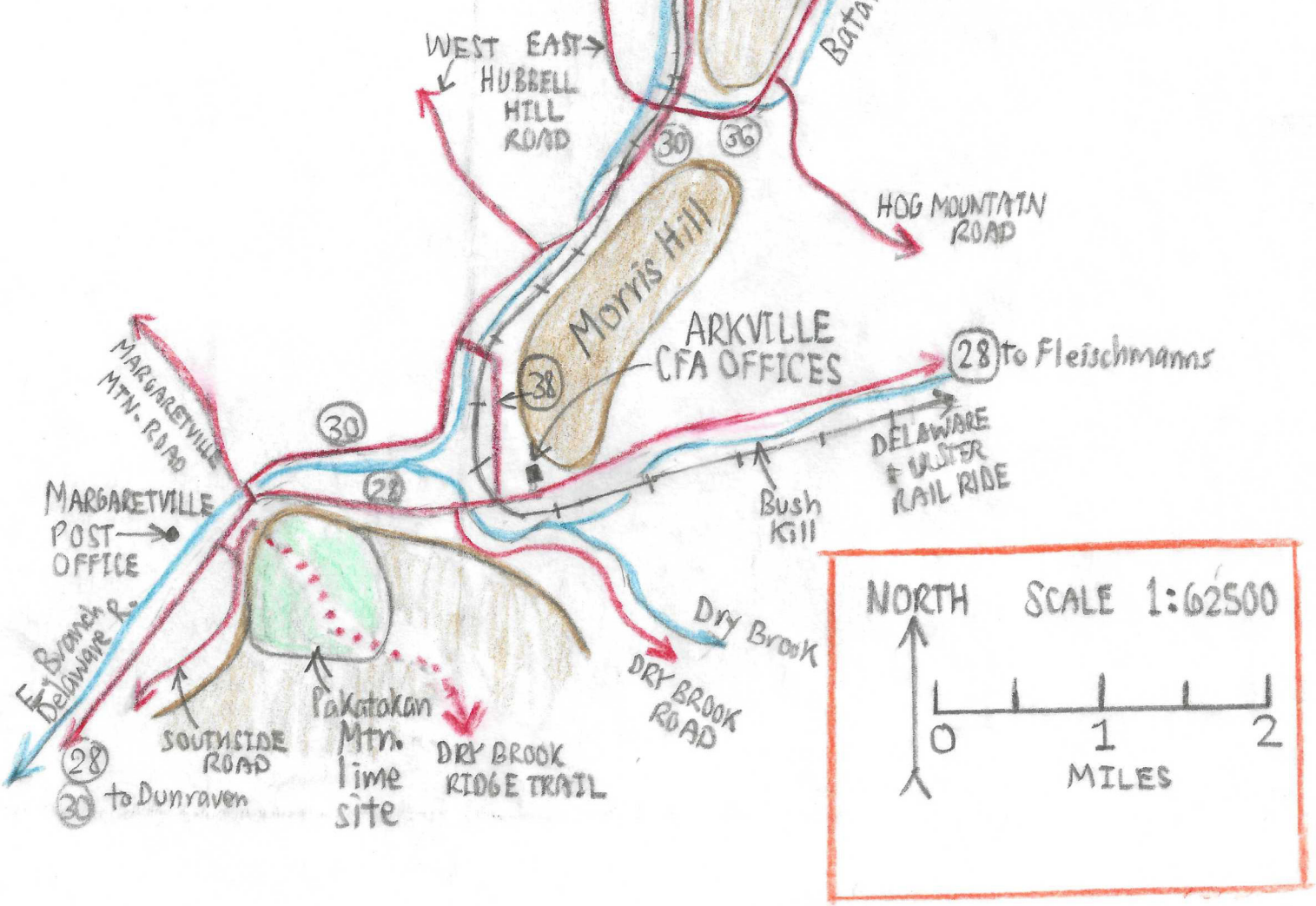



WEST
EAST
HUBBELL HILL ROAD
30
36
HOG MOUNTAIN ROAD
Morris Hill
ARKVILLE CFA OFFICES
38
28 to Fleischmanns
MARGARETVILLE MTN. ROAD
30
28
MARGARETVILLE POST OFFICE
DELAWARE & ULSTER RAIL RIDE
Bush Kill
Dry Brook
DRY BROOK ROAD
East Branch Delaware R.
SOUTHSIDE ROAD
Pakatakan Mtn. lime site
DRY BROOK RIDGE TRAIL
28
30 to Dunraven
NORTH
SCALE 1:62500
0
1
2
MILES

Catskill Woodsman Education Series

presents

So You Want to Build a Cabin?!

November 3rd - 5th

Do you want to learn the simplistic, basic processes of building a log cabin with simple tools? This class will give you from A to Z steps to build a cabin from your own trees, or ones you purchase.

This is a multi-day **MEMBERS ONLY** class to provide instruction to build a cabin of your own in the woods. Each participant will receive instruction and hands-on experience in selecting trees, cutting them, processing them to become cabin logs, and constructing a cabin-like structure (woodshed) on the property. Detailed instruction and participation will be given to each participant in moving trees to the work site, using a chainsaw mill, bandsaw mill, peeling tools, measuring and shaping tools, and construction techniques to complete a "green-built" cabin. Lifting and moving logs up to 8 feet will be required.

Game of Logging Level I is a prerequisite to offer complete time to learn all aspects of the construction.

Day 1 will include chainsaw maintenance, sharpening, and safe use. Also included will be a visit to the cabin and a review of construction techniques and tree selection.
Day 2 will include chainsaw mill and bandsaw mill operation and set-up. Also, trees will be selected, cut, and delivered to the work area. Logs will be prepared for milling and milled.
Day 3 will include techniques to construct the cabin. Each participant will measure, lay out, and cut logs to length and proper shape. Once done, construction will commence with each participant practicing and completing as many logs as possible towards completion.

To sign up, and for more information on what to bring & how to prepare, visit our website at: www.catskillforest.org/events

Obese Trees of the Catskills

John MacNaught, CFA Forest Program Manager

Catskill Forest Association hosted a woods-walk titled "Old Growth Forest Hike" led by Dr. Michael Kudish, Forest Historian, in June this past summer. Here we hiked through one of the old growth forests of the Catskill Mountains located within the Balsam Lake Mountain Wild Forest in northern Ulster County.

If you've never been on a forest hike with Dr. Kudish, then you've tragically been missing out on the wealth of regional forest history knowledge Dr. Kudish has to offer. We immediately learned about some historical land use history of the region and why the stand of trees we were within was of importance. The following article is a summary of the hike, as well as some educational facts and my personal thoughts on old growth forests, first growth forests, 'obese trees' as Dr. Kudish calls them, and the importance of each.

Old Growth vs. First Growth Forests: What's the Difference?

Old Growth Characteristics: According to Dr. Kudish – and many foresters, ecologists, and the like would agree – old growth forests in the Northeastern United States reach this status somewhere around 150-200 years of age. At this stage the dominant overstory trees average at least this age or older. Why is 150-200 years significant? It's because by this time the forest has reached a climax state of succession where nearly all the pioneer trees in earlier succession have been outcompeted by the most shade tolerant few. Here those trees would be American beech, yellow and black birch, sugar and red maple, and eastern hemlock replacing trees like black cherry, aspen, paper birch, etc. without a trace. An old growth forest is often described by its 3-4 species primary composition (beech-birch-maple-hemlock).

Old growth forests often contain vast structural diversity of the understory and mid story plant species unless other pressures are in place like excessive deer browse, etc. The last notable characteristic of old growth forest is the abundance of course woody debris on the forest floor from the accumulation of dead and dying trees over time.

For our hike we began walking through a hemlock stand adjacent to the road where we parked. These trees had been aged via core sampling by Dr. Kudish and revealed their age between 150-180 years old or so. To much of our surprise they were not large in diameter. Most around 20" diameter at breast height (DBH) or less.

First Growth Characteristics: As we learned from Dr. Kudish, first growth forest is one that is largely untouched by man, and certainly untouched by commercial activity (logging, farming, tan bark, acid wood, maple syrup, etc. industries). These are areas of a forest that might have been inaccessible, like a rocky ledge face of a hillside, or the upper peaks of a mountain top, or a steep ravine leading to a mountain stream, or possibly an area that was settled after these industries had dissolved from the Catskills and therefore escaped the impacts associated.

Dr. Kudish explained the history of the forest where we stood. We were standing in the upper elevations of the Upper Millbrook Valley. This specific area wasn't thought to be settled until the mid-end of the 19th century. The opposing south facing hillside of the valley showed obvious signs of agricultural influences like stone walls and a large conifer plantation within the old fields post farm abandonment. The hillside where we stood was north facing, wet, steep, and very rocky terrain, less suitable for agriculture. There was never a tannery in this valley nor an acid factory, so the trees were spared from harvest by chance here. This tract of land was purchased early in the land acquisition for the Catskill Forest Preserve of the early 20th century and therefore escaped timber harvest.

Old Growth vs. First Growth Forests: When Do We Have Just One?

First Growth but not Old Growth: From the previous definition of first growth forest, one might assume that the trees are ancient. This is often not the case. For example, the upper elevations of the Catskills (many of the

mountains above 3,500 feet in elevation) contain primarily balsam fir or red spruce forests around the cap of the peaks. These tree species typically don't get old (under 80-100 years of age) and especially not at the peak of a mountain where short growing seasons and harsh weather events stress, break, and kill trees regularly. The forest has escaped large disturbances by man and is first growth, but no individual tree is very old.

Old Growth but not First Growth: These forests are more easily stumbled upon. It can be a stand of trees deliberately managed within an old city park (ex. NYC Central Park), or a group of trees at the top of a pasture left for shade for livestock back in the 1870s. They contain old trees but usually a landscape managed for another purpose specific to human use.

I recently walked a sugar bush with 200-year-old sugar maple trees throughout. The forest contained old growth trees but was clearly managed for the purpose of maple syrup production. This forest was groomed and selected for sap producing, large-crowned sugar maple trees and competing vegetation and trees had been harvested out over time. This is essentially a 200+ year old ag operation. Not to take away from the impressiveness of an old sugarbush. To me this forest type is equally as awe inspiring as an old growth + first growth forest is.

Old Growth vs. First Growth Forests: When Do We Have Both?

Old Growth and First Growth: Here, the trees have reached their climax successional species composition and lack any large-scale disturbance by man that we know about. Dr. Kudish has mapped somewhere around 100 sq. miles of forest in the Catskill region that is both old growth and first growth. He believes this is likely nearly all of it.

On our walk we were standing in one of the largest tracts of old growth/first growth forest in the Catskills. I mentioned earlier that most of the trees were not large in diameter. That surprised many participants on the hike that day. The trees here can tolerate such slow growth rates due to short growing seasons and lack of sunlight that it can take decades just to reach more than a foot in diameter. In other cases, the same tree species in more favorable sites can accelerate to ½" diameter of growth per year in full sunlight. These were some of the largest trees in the forested stand measuring over 40" DBH.

Obese Trees of the Catskills

What fascinates most people is when a tree reaches diameters far greater than the average of the rest of the trees on the landscape. For me I take a second look when a tree is around 35-40" DBH within an old growth forest and 50" plus on a yard, field, forest edge, park, a forest in earlier succession from recent farm abandonment, or other area with nearly unlimited sunlight.

Below is an image of Dr. Michael Kudish walking in front of a 76" DBH red oak amongst a forest of young trees in a recently abandoned agricultural field. Estimated age of the tree is 135 years or so. As large as it is, this tree is neither old growth nor first growth. It's just plain obese from unlimited resources!

On our walk Dr. Kudish explained that the largest trees within the old growth forest stand were bigger but not necessarily older than the trees surrounding. We climbed up a steep hillside to the first 'obese tree' as he coined them. This one was the largest hemlock of the stand measuring that day at 47.7" DBH. It somehow gained a competitive edge throughout its lifetime and was able to grow a larger crown hence gather more sunlight than its surrounding cohort causing it to grow double in diameter. We then moved directly east of that tree and located a 42.8" DBH yellow birch tree.

Before ending the hike Mike brought us to the edge of Bog #380 as he coined it in his research and his book titled 'The Catskill Forest: A History'. We spoke of the research he has done through core sampling the peat bog. Someone on the walk asked what the forest would have looked like throughout time and Dr. Kudish explained that it likely has not changed significantly in the past 13,500 years or so to what it is today. The samples he has collected of spores and other deposits in the peat of the bog indicate the same species composition has been present since soon after the glaciers receded.

Looking into Bog #380

Other notable features of the walk that day was the finding of a laid-up stone arch used in the production of maple syrup long ago. Dr. Kudish gave this human influence into the first growth forest a pass as it was on such a small scale and did not appear to change the forest composition.

Lastly, we visited a stand of black cherry trees north and west of the bog. This was of importance as cherry require full sunlight conditions to sprout and grow. These trees were mostly over 30" DBH and Dr. Kudish had thought they could have been the result of a historic storm event around 1840. The storm event knocked down acres of Adirondack Forest at the time and Dr. Kudish wondered if the same event could have resulted in the disturbance that allowed the black cherry to sprout. The timing and the age of the trees seem to line up.

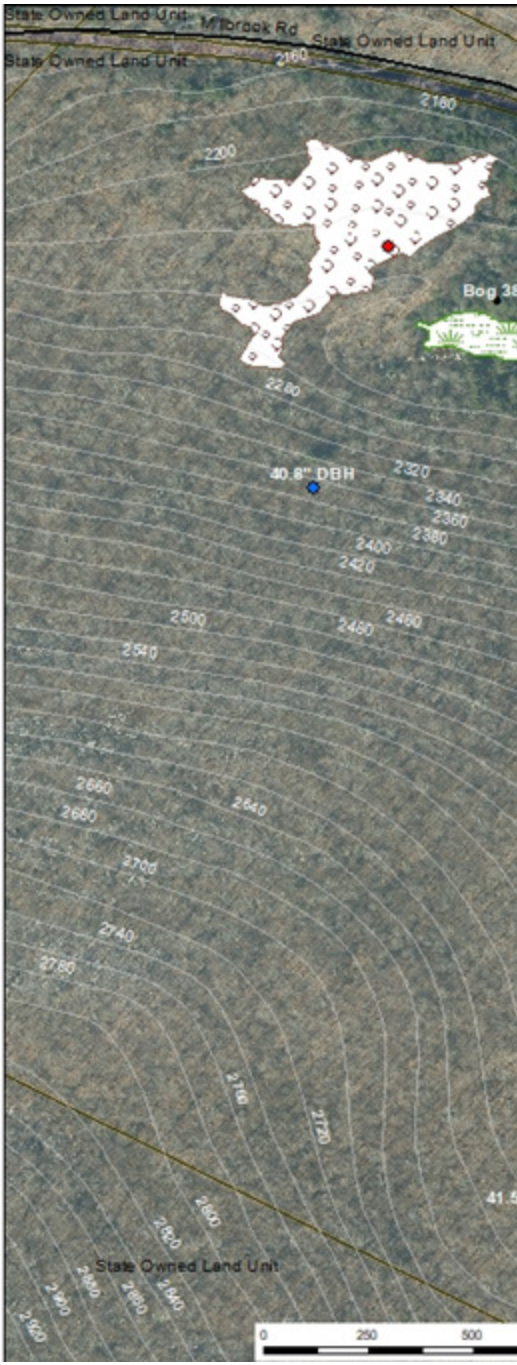
I was intrigued by this forest so much that I returned with my diameter tape and a GPS unit twice in the following weeks after our hike with Dr. Kudish. I decided I wanted to explore the old growth forest more and find more large trees. Below is my map of the day. Most notable to me was the finding of a 43" DBH black cherry tree (dying), a hemlock 46.2" DBH like the "Kudish obese tree", and a sugar maple measuring 41.5" DBH. I also delineated bog #380 and the stands of black cherry trees on that hillside.

Old Growth
+
First Growth
Large Diameter
Trees by Species

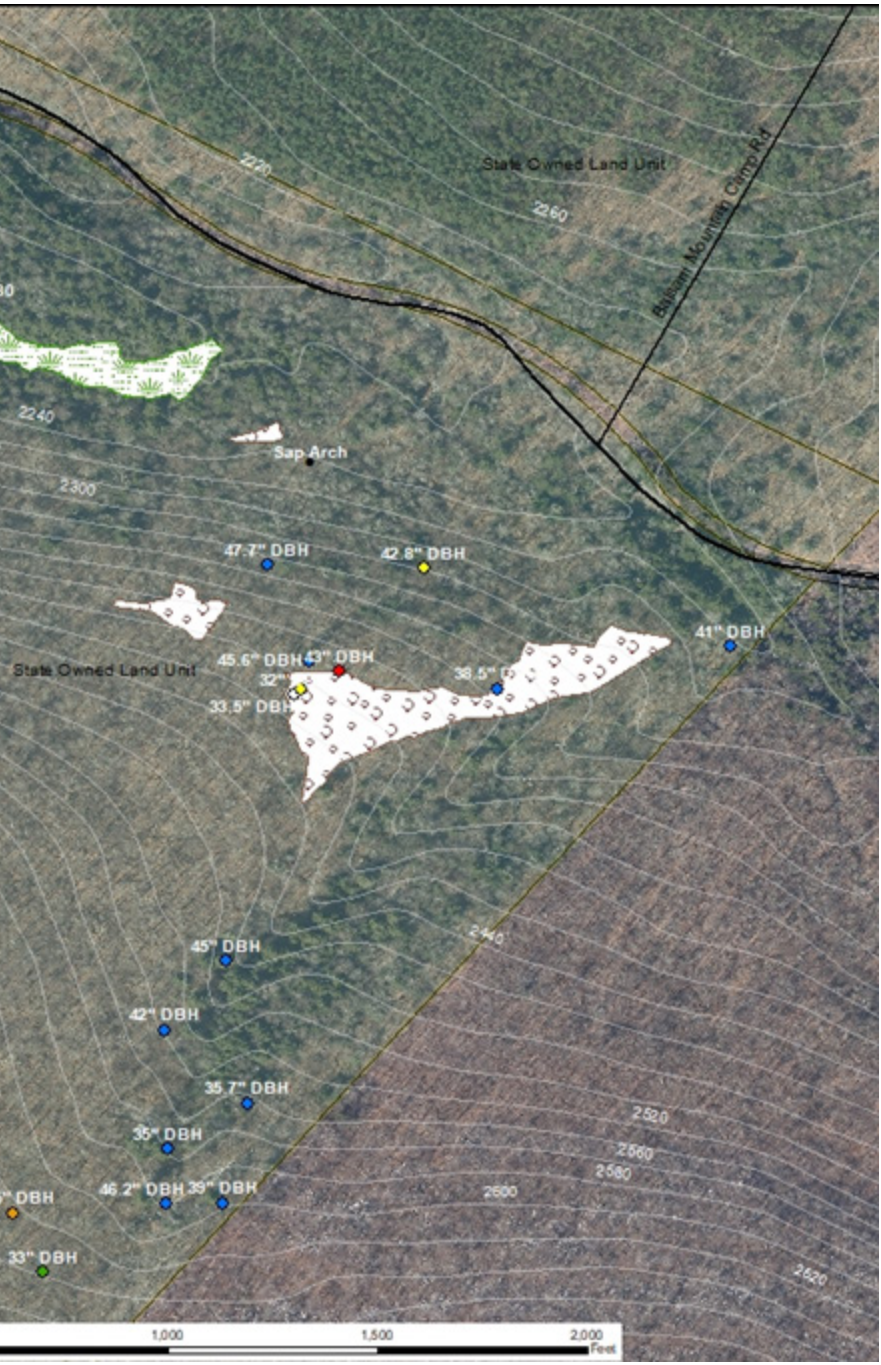
Town of Hardenburgh
County of Ulster
State of New York

N
W E
S

- State Owned Land Parcel
- Black_Cherry_Stands
- Bog_380
- Basswood
- Black Cherry
- Hemlock
- Sugar Maple
- White Ash
- Yellow Birch



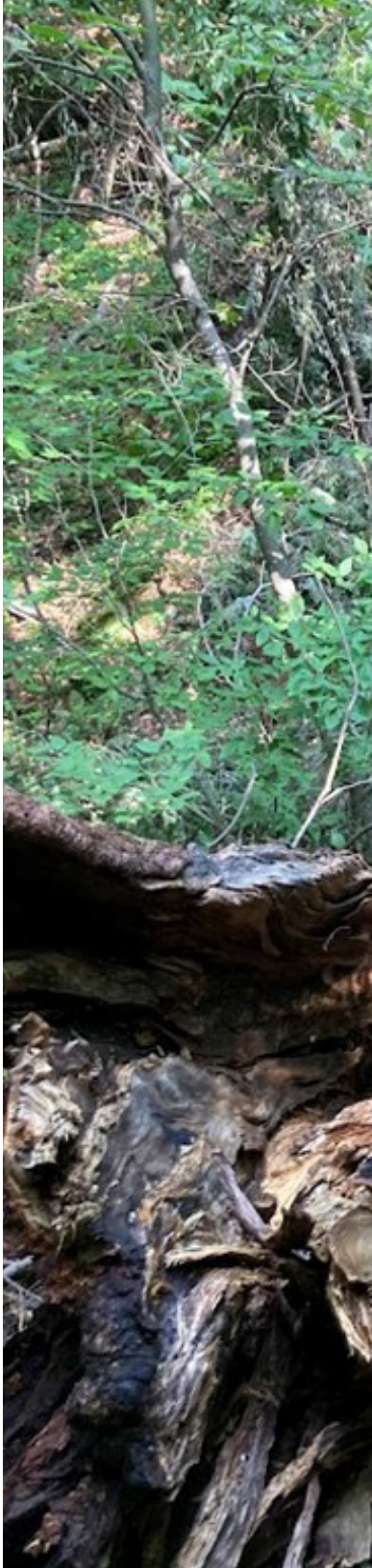
Catskill Forest Assoocation
Summer 2023


State Owned Land Unit
Balsam Mountain Camp Rd
2220
2260
2240
Sap Arch
2300
47.7" DBH
42.8" DBH
41" DBH
45.6" DBH
43" DBH
State Owned Land Unit
32"
38.5"
33.5" DBH
2440
45" DBH
42" DBH
35.7" DBH
2520
35" DBH
2560
2580
46.2" DBH
39" DBH
2600
33" DBH
2620
1,000
1,500
2,000
Feet

To me a tree over 35" diameter in the forest is a more impressive sight to see than a 50+" diameter tree in someone's yard or long lost in the forest as a result of farm abandonment. The latter is still quite impressive and a sight on its own, but one must appreciate the struggle of life amongst competing trees in the forest setting. The likelihood of that seed sprouting in that spot under the right conditions to grow is slim. There is a constant battle for sunlight, battering of wind, trees falling around and damaging others. It's amazing to think about the struggle. The following excerpt from the poem "Good Timber" by Douglas Malloch says it all for me:

> "The tree that never had to fight
> For sun and sky and air and light,
> But stood out in the open plain
> And always got its share of rain,
> Never became a forest king
> But lived and died a scrubby thing."

When I returned for my second trip to collect data on these trees and map their coordinates one of the obese hemlocks had fallen in a thunderstorm the night before. It had measured 45" DBH. The hole it left in the forest showed an almost unnatural flood of sunlight amongst the surrounding leaves. I couldn't help but imagine if this might give life to the next behemoth that fills its space. Maybe in 150 years or so another forester will stand in awe as I once did looking at a 45" DBH hemlock that is only but a seedling today.



The Path Less Wandered

Zahra Bellucci, CFA Education Forester

Something about the end of summer and the commencing of fall stirs up my inner explorer, and I become overwhelmed with a stronger-than-usual urge to wander the forest. Wandering is one of my favorite ways to be in the forest. These types of adventures are slow and aimless, only taking on direction as I discover interesting things to examine or sounds to investigate, with no guide or trail to tell me where to go. This also provides the chance to walk through relatively undisturbed land where hardly anyone else goes. I carry a map and compass, but only to set me on my path at first, and then again when I'm ready to head back to civilization.

Once I begin, it doesn't take long to surrender my full, undivided attention to my surroundings. The forest is a stimulating place – even areas that seem the most "mundane" or that you've seen a thousand times can have something new to offer if you're patient and attentive. This time of year, when there is still lingering summer heat but the days are shortening, with nights that are cool and wet, the forest is abundant with edibles which makes wandering all the more exciting. This is when summer edibles like raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, and chokecherries overlap with early autumn offerings like staghorn sumac, black elderberries, ginseng, and a whole host of edible mushrooms.

On one of my most recent wanderings, although not specifically intending to find any of these things, I trekked through the forest with a watchful eye. The weather was mildly warm, with clear blue skies and a

slight breeze. The previous few days had been either rainy or humid, so the forest was still damp beneath the dense shade of the maple, birch, beech, and occasional oak trees. I had decided to bushwack through a small compartment of public land near where I live, and on the map, there showed a stream that began somewhere in the center of the compartment, and made its way down to a dirt road bordering the edge of the land. I decided to steer my way towards that stream and follow it down. I meandered through leaf litter, ferns, brush, and a marshy area filled with a brilliant display of Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*) that was, of course, humming quietly with the sound of bees at work. Just past the marsh, I flushed a small family of grouse out from under a cluster of honeysuckle shrubs and watched as they fluttered up into the trees to flee.

Not long after I had been walking, and about 50 feet before I had reached the top of the stream, I unexpectedly found one of the best forest edibles of all: golden chanterelles.

Chanterelles are often found in moist, hardwood forests, nearby forest streams or seasonal drainages – exactly where I had been standing. There are many species of chanterelles, but golden chanterelles—whose common name can refer to a number of different species, including *Cantharellus cibarius* and *Cantharellus flavus*—are the most commonly sought-after wild culinary delight. A quick search into the etymology of their name tells that "chanterelle" comes from the Greek *kantharos*, meaning "cup" or "vase". As they mature, chanterelles often become more funnel (or cup) shaped – to me, a forester, they remind me of the distinctive vase shape of the elm tree. I've been told that in Polish, they are called "*kurka gryzb*" which translates to "hen mushroom," also in reference to their appearance. Their bright, golden-yellow caps are easy to spot amongst the leaf litter of the forest floor, growing as individual mushrooms or sometimes close together in groups of two or three.

In fact, it was after climbing atop a large boulder and scanning my surroundings that I was able to spot the first patch. At first, I spotted only a few, but as I skirted along a narrow deer trail, finally crossing the stream, I noticed dozens more beneath a group of ironwood (*Ostrya virginiana*) trees. For a moment, I stood to observe with surprise. I hadn't set out to search for chanterelles, so it was even more delightful to stumble upon an entire patch accidentally. Some were impressively large – almost the size of my hand. As I bent down to take a closer look, I saw that many had already been nibbled on by slugs. To find the good ones, you have to look carefully, as they're often sheltered beneath rocks or still hiding under the leaf litter. I collected a few into the small pack I was carrying, and left the rest, taking the time to examine a few of the slug-eaten ones up close.

Although they appear to be gilled, chanterelles actually have "false gills" – lines beneath their cap that resemble gills, but are actually more like forked ridges that run down into the stem. When broken open, the inside of the stems are solid and white. Another lookalike species, the false chanterelle, has a hollow stem and true gills. On a true chanterelle, when you try to detach the cap from the stem, the false gills will often peel down the stem instead of coming right off with the cap as with true gills.

About a week or so before this outing, I found a much smaller patch of chanterelles on the private land where I live. Those chanterelles were growing along a stone wall under a mixed forest of red oak, sugar maple, and white ash. This particular stone wall was parallel to the base of a steep hill, where the ground was slightly more moist from catching drainage from above. They also seem to like previously disturbed areas, or places where old farm roads or cow trails once were. Often, I see them directly in the center of a hiking trail, and especially along herd paths blazed by deer.

Shade, moisture, abundant organic matter, and days of drenching rain followed by days of humid summer heat equals perfect conditions for fruiting. They smell faintly fruity and sweet – like apricots, some say, or fresh pumpkin. In any case, the aroma is pleasant and appetizing. To me, their flavor is nutty, sweet, and little bit peppery, with a pleasing melt-in-your-mouth quality when sauteed. They also make a fantastic addition to a good steak. This is exactly what I did with mine. It can't get much better than wild foraged mushrooms, butter, and a steak from a cow raised within a ten mile radius of your home. At the time of writing this, it's been over a week since I had that meal and I'm still thinking about it.

I felt lucky to find so many, and satisfied that my time wandering proved to be time well spent. Since they're ectomycorrhizal—forming relationships with the roots of nearby trees and plants—they evade human cultivation and can't be grown and sold in the same way that other culinary mushrooms like shiitake and oyster are. This means that if you want chanterelles, you have to get out and wander – making them a true gift of the forest.

Urban Society vs. Rural Cultural Traditions

The Real Crisis in the Forest

Robert R. Williams, Certified Forester

For many decades, urban society and its "illusion of preservation" has continued to obstruct and suppress our rural communities and their use of the land and natural resources. We are seeing the elimination of a cultural heritage in our time.

In southern New Jersey by government legislation, 1.2 million acres of the landscape has been reserved and protected in what is designated as the Pinelands National Reserve. This reserve includes all aspects of the land ownership both public and private.

The primary reasons for designating the Pine Barrens for protection was to perpetuate and sustain the unique ecological natural heritage and the Indigenous local cultural heritage.

We understand the essential need to sustain and conserve the ecological integrity of the land and the natural systems it supports.

Our urban policymakers understand little about the need to conserve our cultural heritage, which includes both tangible and intangible heritage assets, that the local people inherited from past generations.

Whether intended or not, this policy of an environmental priority approach has all but eliminated one aspect of our cultural heritage, which is forestry. The region's local people traditionally used the forest to provide a living for themselves and used the wood products produced on the land.

Over the decades, the importance of sustaining our historical cultural human resources has never been given any serious consideration or discussion.

In the early eighties, the government stressed the need to sustain and conserve the cultural heritage of the Pine Barrens. This concern was so important that social contractors were hired to interview and record local Pine Barren residents to have them explain what specific things they did to sustain themselves and their desire to keep their sense of "place" in the woods.

Yet when I bring this subject up, I'm asked what cultural heritage has to do with forestry regulations. My answer: everything.

Interviews with local folks included many cedar landowners, wood cutters, and sawyers. They all owned their land, cut their trees, and had their sawmills to sell culturally linked forest products to boat builders, clammers, fisherman, and historic home restorers, among other uses. As this effort to document and develop policy to sustain the cultural and natural history of the region continued, the important role these woodsmen played in sustaining the unique character and ecology of this region became clear.The forest use played a major role in the creation of the very environment of the Pine Barrens.

It was so important that by 1987 the New Jersey State Museum, the State Council on Arts, and the State Historical Commission opened the largest exhibit ever mounted at the museum featuring four men who were fully devoted to the traditions and the environment of the Pine Barrens. Yet the future of these traditions remained a concern.

Initial forestry practice rules and regulations subjected forestry efforts to onerous land planning rules similar to a housing development. By the early 1990s many families had simply gone out of business while a few tried to supply their mills with imported wood from Canada or New England. The acquisition of the large, forested parcels by federal, state, county, and local governments and land preservation trusts – none of which support active harvest of wood – simply starved the local mills of their needed wood resource, and the decline continues today.

Our southern New Jersey wood cutter/sawyer culture is almost gone. At the beginning of the creation of the Pinelands Reserve, the state documented more than 50 sawmills and operations across the Pine Barrens. I have watched as our forestry infrastructure with its 300-year history simply fades away falling into the "illusion of preservation." The original planners for the Reserve had it right: there should be a balance between people's use of the forest and protecting the unique biodiversity that resulted from 300 years of their activities. Yet I see little hope for any of the few remaining sawmills to survive. How are things looking in your region of the country?

Robert R. Williams is a certified forester and is the owner and founder of Pine Creek Forestry LLC. He can be contacted at bob@pinecreekforestry.com

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Wolf Hollow Camp
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(917) 497-7670
www.wolfhollowcamp.com

Upcoming Events

Visit catskillforest.org/events to register

Sept 9th

Tree Planting Demonstration
10am to 1pm
Bovina Center Montessori

Oct 21st

Backyard Bird Feeder Talk
10am to 12pm
Margaretville, NY

Oct 21st

Mushroom Log Inoculation
2:30pm to 5:00pm
Big Indian, NY

Dec 3rd

Wreath-Making Workshop
10am to 12pm
Margaretville, NY

Dec 9th

Deer Processing Demonstration
10am to 1pm
Delhi, NY

Programs & Services

Learn more at catskillforest.org/programs

Program	Description	Time
Consultations	*One-hour property visits by field staff to help you learn about what your property holds*	All Year
Apple Tree Pruning	*Pruning helps keep apple trees healthy and improves quality and quantity of yields*	Jan - March
Apple Tree Grafting	*A horticultural technique to help bring old, neglected trees back to fruition*	April - May
Forest Bird Program	*High-Nesting Bird Boxes for ducks, owls, etc. and/or Canopy Bird Feeders that protect against squirrels & bears*	All Year
Forest Farming Program	*Use agroforestry to manage your property affordably & sustainably by learning to cultivate non-timber forest products*	Fall - Spring
Invasive Species Management	*Care for trees against invasive insects, and care for forests against invasive plants*	May - Sept.
Portable Sawmill Program	*A state-of-the-art portable sawmill brought directly to your property to mill your logs to lumber, on the spot*	Spring - Fall
Property Mapping	*Custom property maps highlighting the property features you want to see*	All Year
Tree Care: Cabling	*Preserving large-sized individual trees with structural defects*	Spring - Fall
Tree Care: Structural Pruning	*Improve tree structure by establishing a dominant leader*	Spring - Fall
Legacy Tree Program	*Prime placement for up to 3 trees on your property and education about proper planting and installation*	Spring - Fall
Wildlife Habitat Management	*Forestry practices to help improve your woodlot for wildlife*	All Year

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(845) 586-3054

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Catskill Forest Association, Inc. PO Box 336, Arkville, NY 12406.

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MAILING ADDRESS: _____

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PROPERTY ADDRESS: _____

_____

PHONE: _____ **EMAIL:** _____

TOTAL ACRES: _____ **FORESTED ACRES:** _____ **POND** [ ] **STREAM** [ ] **RIVER** [ ]

CATEGORIES (PLEASE CIRCLE)

BASIC ($75)	CONTRIBUTING ($175)
Events free or discounted; *CFA News* Subscription; CFA Member Property Sign; Access to CFA Programs	SAME AS BASIC + 10% Discount on Services;
BUSINESS ($200)	**SUSTAINING ($500)**
SAME AS BASIC + 5% Discount on Services; CFA Website Listing; Email Referral Advertisements; Free Booth at Forest Festival	SAME AS BASIC + 15% Discount on Services;

ADDITIONAL DONATIONS

GENERAL OPERATING FUND	$
ENDOWMENT TRUST FUND	$
SCHOLARSHIP FUND	$

Total Amount: $_____