

THE FOREST LANDOWNER #4/4
The Newsletter of the Wayne-Lackawanna Forest Landowners
Association
May 2007
Editor: Peter Wynne

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Wildflower Talk and Walk

Our May WLFLA meeting is this Saturday morning at Bob and Jean Smith's 99-acre property in Equinunk. Joining us will be amateur naturalist and photographer Jerry Wood for a slide show and a wildflower walk.

Wood, who retired from New York State Electric & Gas Corp., was born and raised on his grandparents' farm on Forked Mountain in Wayne County's Manchester Township and knows our area and its plant life well.

The day starts at 10:30 a.m, but you're welcome to arrive early. The Smiths say the coffee pot and tea water will be ready when you get there. Jean says she's keeping her fingers crossed that we'll have warm, clear day and, at the moment, the forecast is looking good. But if the weather doesn't cooperate, she says, Bob will crank up the heat in the garage.

Jerry has been photographing wildflowers with a 35 mm. camera and a set of closeup lenses for nearly 30 years and plans to present a slide show covering wildflowers from early spring through late fall and visiting a number of plants and environments, most of them found in our area.

After the slides, he'll lead the walk through the Smith property

in search of any spring flowers that might be in bloom. (With the rain we've had lately, there may also be some wild mushrooms to catch our attention, Jean says.) After the walk, there will be sandwiches and time to visit with one another.

To get to the Smith property from Honesdale, take Pa. Route 191 north approximately 15 miles. At the Lookout General Store, turn left on Hellmers Hill Road. Go up the hill approximately 2.3 miles to Lester Road (top of the hill). Make a left and follow Lester Road 1.3 miles. The driveway is on the left, but it's 1,200 feet long, so the house isn't visible from the road.

If you are coming from Equinunk via the Pine Mill Road, turn left onto Gills Hill Road going in the direction of Lookout. Go up hill and make a right onto Lester Road. Follow Lester Road 1.3 miles, and the driveway is on the left.

And if any of that seems confusing, Jean explains that Gills Hill Road and Hellmers Hill Road are the same thoroughfare. It just depends at which end you start. About midway through the name changes.

For reservations, you can call the Wayne Conservation District at (570) 253-0930. If you have questions, you can call Jean and Bob at (570) 224-4848.

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Wayne-Lackawanna Gas Lease Session
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Penn State Extension in Lackawanna and Wayne Counties is offering a workshop for landowners on natural gas leasing on Tuesday, May 8th, starting at 6:30 p.m. at the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Center in Mayfield.

The program will cover many of the issues a landowner should know about before signing a mineral lease. Hear from public and industry experts on typical leases, informed negotiating, and the process of gas exploration.

Exploration for natural gas in north-central Pennsylvania got rolling a half-dozen years ago, after the development of several highly productive gas wells in the Finger Lakes Region in a deep-lying geological formation called the Trenton/Black River gas play, which extends through Pennsylvania and down into West Virginia. Now exploration companies and others have begun looking our way to lease acreage and buy mineral rights from landowners.

A question-and answer-session will follow the May 8th presentation. The cost to attend the program is \$5, payable at the door. Registration is required. Call the Penn State Extension office in Lackawanna County at (570) 963-6842 to register or for more information.

The Lackawanna Heritage Valley Center is at 1300 Old Plank Road, on the south side of the Scranton-Carbondale Highway (old U.S. Route 6), in Mayfield. You can see the building from the highway, down in a little hollow.

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June Meeting at Roba's Tree Farm
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Mark you calendar for our June WFLA meeting, which will be at John and Sue Robas Lakeland Tree Farm on Pa. Route 247, just south of Pa. Route 107. The 200-acre tree farm produces evergreen, shade and flowering trees and is a progressive enterprise that has a land-preservation easement and includes many soil-conservation practices. The meeting is Tuesday, June 22nd, from 6 to 8 p.m. Please call (570) 281-9495 and let the folks at the Lackawanna Conservation District office know you're coming.

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Eastern Tent Caterpillar Update
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Ten days ago, Craig Olver sent the following:

"The Eastern Tent Caterpillars have started to hatch here in Beach Lake. Janet and I were out for our usual evening walk and, as a forester, I had to stop and check a low hanging Black Cherry branch for caterpillar egg masses. I found four egg masses in less than 30 seconds. One egg mass was fully hatched and another was starting to hatch. The caterpillars were about 1/32nd of an inch long and were already looking for food. This was not surprising to see, considering the warmer temperatures for the preceding 24 hours."

We've had a good deal of warm weather since then and, any day now, we'll start seeing tents in the crotches of small trees and at forks in larger branches. Last year brought the worst outbreak of Eastern Tent Caterpillars that anyone could remember, and that included people like entomologist Mark Ticehurst, who called it the worst he had ever seen. And he spent years working for the Pa. Bureau of Forestry.

Only time will tell whether this year will be as bad as or worse than last year, but Craig's report doesn't bode well.

Senate Panel Hears About Deer

Timothy D. Schaeffer, executive director of Audubon Pennsylvania, has advised the Pennsylvania Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee that over-browsing by deer has eliminated thousands of acres of habitat for birds and other wildlife and, after urban sprawl, this represents the largest single threat to such habitat.

Dr. Schaeffer made his comments at a late March "listening session" before the same committee that visited Wayne County in April. At the Wayne session, WLFLA members Craig Olver, Robin Wildermuth and Peter Wynne made presentations that included references to overbrowsing by deer and its effects on forest regeneration.

"The impact of deer on our forest ecosystem, the crop and forest products losses, the loss of life and property from deer/car collisions and the impact on public health from the incidence of Lyme disease carried by deer have all been documented, and the picture painted by these numbers is not good," Dr. Schaeffer said.

He noted that at a 2006 hearing, the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee was advised that each year in Pennsylvania more than \$78 million in property damage occurs in more than 39,000 deer/car collisions and that the incidence of Lyme disease, a debilitating and sometimes fatal illness spread by deer ticks, increased more than 9,000 percent between 1987 and 2004.

Regarding what he thought should be done, Schaeffer had the following advice:

- The first priority should be the restoration and maintenance of fully functional forest ecosystems, containing a full component of native biological diversity at all levels.
- Policy-makers and land managers should focus on the indicators of forest health, rather than the number of deer people are seeing, to assess whether our forests are recovering.
- Until data shows Pennsylvania's forests are recovering, it would be imprudent and irresponsible to further limit hunter effectiveness through restrictions on hunting such as shorter seasons and smaller antlerless allocations.

-- Legislators should support House Bill 550, sponsored by Rep. Hershey (R-Chester) and Rep. Tom Caltagirone (D-Berks), which would make it easier for the owners of farms and forestland to obtain deer removal permits. Sen. McIlhinney (R-Bucks) is considering introduction of a similar bill in the Senate.

-- The General Assembly, the Governor's Office and the Game Commission should identify and adopt a funding base that is more stable and equitable than funding derived almost exclusively from hunting licenses and timber sales on game lands to allow the DCNR and the Game Commission to shift from single-species management to ecosystem management.

Ramps Rampant

Ramps are rampant at the moment, at least up in the Wayne Highlands, and if you don't know what a ramp is, you've clearly never discussed this woodland delicacy with someone who was born in these parts.

"Ramp" is a regional name for a plant that's very much in evidence in our region this time of year. It's also called a wild leek and is a native American of the onion tribe. The plant grows in moist woodlands throughout the Appalachian Highlands.

The ramp has two or three leaves with light veining and purplish stems. These leaves are the largest of any of America's wild onions -- wide, flat, almost lance-shaped and each about 6 to 10 inches long. The bulb of the wild leek is cylindrical or slightly swollen and usually less than half an inch in diameter. Both leaves and bulbs have a mild flavor and rich aroma that recalls both garlic and onions.

Ramps are strictly springtime plants, what botanists sometimes call "forest ephemerals." The leaves usually reach full size by early May and have died back completely by July, when the plants send up umbrella-like bunches of little white flowers on stalks as tall as 30 inches.

Each flower can produce up to three little round berries, which give the plant its species name, *Allium tricoccum*. "Allium" is the Latin word for garlic, by the way, and "tricoccum" is an allusion to those three round berries.

Few Americans outside of Appalachia seem to know the term "ramp," which English country folk first applied to an Old World plant they also called "bear's garlic (*Allium ursinum*). That

plant was favored both for its flavor and its use in folk medicine. There's an old English rhyme that goes: "Eat leeks in Lide [March] and ramsons [ramps] in May,/And all the year physicians may play." Similarities in taste, appearance and growth habit between the Old and New World plants led early English settlers to apply the same name to both.

Eating ramps uncooked is a favorite folk way of consuming the pungent roots, which can also be used in any cooked dish calling for onions or leeks. It just takes a dozen or more of the diminutive wild leeks to equal one of the cultivated sort -- maybe 40 to 50 ramps to a pound.

Ramps often grow in huge patches, but they should be harvested and used with a degree of restraint. Of late, digging ramps has become a popular pastime, so much so in some areas that restrictions have been put in place.

The National Park Service, for example, banned the practice in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2002. And last year, ramp harvesters at the Nantahala National Forest in southwestern North Carolina had to observe new Forest Service rules on where and how to pick the plants and also pay a 50-cent-per-pound fee.

Handsome pictures of the ramp -- foliage, flowers and berries -- can be found at the website of the Connecticut Botanical Society:

<http://www.ct-botanical-society.org/galleries/alliumtric.html>

And if you don't have ramps growing wild on your property already, you can get information on how to get them started from the Center for New Crops and Plant Products at Purdue University. You can download the page if you click on the PDF "button" at the top righthand corner of the page. Here's the web address:

<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/ncnu02/v5-449.html>

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The "Mothman" Speaks
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Retired biologist John "Mothman" Laskowski was the speaker at our April meeting, and while the weatherman was threatening awful driving conditions (they never did materialize), the threat didn't dampen the enthusiasm or enjoyment of the twenty-odd members who turned up at the Heritage Valley Center for the presentation.

John brought in books, pictures, a TV set plus a video player and a stack of VHS tapes, mounted specimens and even a few live ones. He talked a good deal about moths, his specialty, and also about various wood-boring insects, an area he kindly chose to make his presentation more relevant to forest landowners.

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Arbor Day 2007: A Reflection
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For most of us, the word "arbor" brings to mind a wooden, open-work structure, standing in a garden and covered with roses or some sort of vine. But originally, it was the Latin word for "tree," and that's the meaning memorialized in Arbor Day, which was founded in 1872 by Nebraskan J. Sterling Morton. For all practical purposes, trees didn't grow in his home state back then, which made them very precious.

We have lots of trees here in Pennsylvania, but that doesn't make them any the less precious, especially these days when more and more people are moving out of cities into rural areas and replacing acres and acres of trees with acres of turf grass. And many additional acres are being cleared to make way for roads and parking lots and shopping malls. And the deer are munching on our seedlings, and the axis of evil insects (the Asian Longhorned Beetle, the Emerald Ash Borer, the wood wasp) is planning to invade, etc., etc.

National Arbor Day was last Friday, April 27th, and this year the WFLA let the date slip by without a formal observance. Arbor Day is a springtime thing, and there was still snow in shady spots around here last week, at least in the Wayne Highlands. There will be other years to plant a tree or two in a commemorative ceremony, as the WFLA did in 2006. Then again, as owners and stewards of tree-covered land, we can have "arbor days" every day of the year. -- P.W.

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Website Worth Visiting
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www.wfla.org

Type this "URL," as it's called, into your web browser, and you'll get to our very own Wayne-Lackawanna Forest Landowners Association website. Add the site to your favorites, and you'll always have quick access to information on how to reach WFLA

officers and a full schedule of our activities and meetings in 2007.

<http://www.mothman.org/links.html>

"Mothman" John Laskowski, mentioned above, maintains a webpage with links to sites related to moths and butterflies, including the "Butterflies and Moths of North America" data base, which is worth checking out now that the moth and butterfly season is really getting started.

<http://www.bbg.org/gar2/topics/sustainable/handbooks/treecareprimer/treehealth.html>

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden has just published a book on tree care that takes a holistic approach to the subject. The aim is to keep trees really healthy and to manage insects pests and plant diseases with the least invasive strategies possible.

As a promotion for the book, *The Tree Care Primer* by Christopher Roddick with Beth Hanson, the BBG has posted a summary of some of the volume's contents, which can be find online at the address above.

A lot of the specifics would be hard to put into practice in a forest, but certainly could be used with the trees around the house. And the concept of holistic care for trees is something worth thinking about. It's what modern forestry is really up to.

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Membership Dues for 2007

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WLFLA dues for 2007 are past due, and members who haven't yet sent in a check are urged to do so. A single, family or club membership with one vote (if something comes to a vote) continues at \$20 for the calendar year 2007. Checks payable to WLFLA may be sent to WLFLA, c/o Cathy Wendolowski, Treasurer, 2116 Laurel Hill Road, Clarks Summit, PA 18411

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Call for Contributions

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WLFLA members are cordially invited to send along by e-mail items they think worthy of inclusion in this newsletter. Comments, quibbles and downright disagreements are also welcome.