

Forest Commission Report

Once again as the annual Forest Commission Report is being written, there is much activity that has occurred on the Randolph Community Forest during the past year.

We are currently harvesting wood in the Pond of Safety Valley, with variable winter conditions being the operative theme. So far this winter season, we have not had the normal several weeks of below zero temperatures which really help to freeze the ground allowing for unfettered travel of logging equipment into defined harvest areas. That being the case, our forestry team is constantly monitoring operating conditions and adjusting our harvest activities to ensure the ground is adequately frozen for logging equipment to operate safely and always in consideration of the well-being of the forest.

As part of this winter's timber harvest, we are conducting a salvage cut in about 500 acres of higher elevation hardwood stands which were negatively impacted by the forest tent caterpillar outbreak of 2016-2018. The forest tent caterpillar is a forest pest that is native to New Hampshire and commonly feeds on the foliage of ash, birch, poplar, oak and sugar maple. In NH, sugar maple is the most common host tree during outbreaks of the caterpillar. Outbreaks can be dramatic and generally last 2 to 3 years. On the RCF, in some of our stands dominated by sugar maple, defoliation of between 75% to 90% was not uncommon in the affected areas. Following defoliation in the spring, trees respond by putting out a second set of leaves later in the summer. This causes stress on the tree as it tries to counter the damaging effects of losing its original set of leaves which have been eaten by the caterpillar. Normally the trees can survive a couple of years of this pest cycle with a minimum of die back or tree mortality. However, creating additional stress in the areas affected on the RCF was some very droughty weather conditions in the fall of 2016 and the fact that most of the trees affected were at higher elevations where soils are thinner and thus more vulnerable to dry conditions. That being the case, the mortality rate for the trees attacked by the forest tent caterpillar was significantly greater than average in the affected stands.

After reviewing the situation with our forestry team, the recommendation to conduct a salvage cut in the areas negatively impacted was approved by the Forest Commission. The good news is that by responding quickly to salvage harvest these trees, the quality of the wood has not significantly degraded as might have occurred if another year had passed. This wood will be marketed at its highest value providing income for the forest. As the forest regenerates it will provide wildlife habitat in the near term and timber products once again in the future. Thus, the miracle of the life cycle of the forest starts once again.

For more information on the Forest Tent Caterpillar visit <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/forest-tent-caterpillar-defoliation-north-country>

As for last winter's harvest activity, we cut approx. 2,000 cords of wood, with approximately 76% being hardwood pulp headed for regional paper mills, 15% hard wood pallet logs and the remaining 9% being primarily made up of hardwood saw logs.

At the annual town meeting last march, voters approved the addition of 205 acres to be added to the RCF. This parcel of land is located at the east entrance to the RCF and includes the logging road access which starts at the end of Jimtown Road in Gorham. The land is being purchased through a grant from the Randolph Area Conservation Opportunity Fund, at no cost to the taxpayers and is an important addition to the RCF. This transaction also provided important funding to support the town of Gorham's efforts to add approximately 2000 acres to their town forest and to place development restrictions on all of the land of the Gorham town forest, of which

approx. 2700 acres is located in Randolph as a part of the Ice Gulch watershed. Once both transactions are complete, the abutting town forests will encompass almost 17,000 acres of town owned land which will be permanently protected from development and available for timber harvesting, watershed protection, wildlife habitat and public access.

In April, the Community Forest, in cooperation with the Coos County Conservation District and the University of New Hampshire sponsored a training for forestry professionals in the use of a computer program titled Dirt to Trees to Wildlife (DTW). DTW is an online tool which can be utilized to identify opportunities to enhance wildlife habitats on specific tracts of land. DTW simply requires a user to pinpoint a piece of land by drawing it on a map. Then, behind the scenes, DTW identifies the soils on that land, the vegetation naturally supported by that soil, and wildlife habitats supported by each vegetation type. This information is compiled in a handy report to allow landowners and forestry professionals to make informed management decisions. DTW is based on decades-long work reflecting collaboration by soil scientists, foresters, researchers and wildlife biologists. It is largely funded by the U.S. Forest Service and through a significant grant from the Randolph Community Forest

In May, the RCF participated in a learning tour for members from the Washington and Montana State Chapters of the Nature Conservancy. Participants were eager to learn how our experiences in managing community forests could be utilized back home in their respective communities in the west. Part of the program was a discussion and tour of the maple tapping project on the Randolph Community Forest and how managing the woodland for timber revenue includes many opportunities for diversification beyond just cutting trees.

In August at our annual forest tour, approx. 40 attendees learned about the recent timber harvests on the forest and the correlation between good timber management and improving wildlife habitat. Our guest speaker, NH Fish and Game Biologist Jill Kilburn, gave a wonderful presentation on the life and comeback to the region of the sometimes-elusive pine martin. After the presentation at town hall, many participants headed out to the Pond of Safety Road with our forester to look at some current timber management activities and to discuss the wildlife habitat objectives of this work.

In other projects on the forest, we are excited to be starting the surveying and design work to upgrade water crossings which need improvement on the Pond of Safety Road. Through a collaboration between the Natural Resources Conservation Service, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Randolph Foundation we have identified four large culverts which, because of the way they were installed many decades ago, are prohibiting the natural passage of native brook trout, amphibians and wildlife from utilizing these structures to cross safely under the road. All of these culverts are large, i.e. 5 or 6 feet across and located on perennial streams. Replacing these culverts with short bridges or new bottomless culverts will re-establish these important fish, amphibian and wildlife passageways that have been blocked for well over 100 years.

The Forest Commission meets the first Wednesday of each month at 7pm at the town hall and the public is invited to attend. And don't forget the Annual Forest Tour which is held the first Saturday in August of each year.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Randolph Forest Commission
John Scarinza, Chairman

Walter Graff, Laura Brocket, Jeff Parker, Mark Kelley, David Willcox