



130 Austine Drive, Suite 300 Brattleboro, VT 05301 802-257-7967 windhamwoodlands.org windhamwoodlands@gmail.com

WOODLOT TIPS

SUMMER 2022



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the Summer Newsletter.

I am happy to report that the Association is in good shape financially, thanks to the generosity of our nearly 300 members.

We have been able to approve two scholarships this year!

The board has approved our 2022-2023 budget which we will present at our annual meeting in September.

(Please read our invitation on page 9)

Donations to The Scholarship Fund and to The Halsey Hicks Fund

We would like to acknowledge the following members who have generously contributed to our two funds. They gave a total of \$2930.00.

Robert W. Adams
Michael Baram
Alan Binnick
Carl M. Boyd
Dennis J. Buckley
Michael Deftos
Barbara Evans
Don and Linda Furman
Helen Greene
William Guenther
Geordis and Suzanne Heller
Thomas and Susan Herson
Munson Hicks
Eve Hochwald
Christian Kearn
Ann Kerrey

Margaret McDonald
David Matt
Greg and Connie Moschetti
Neal H. Pulse
Barbara Profcher
Donald and Flavia Polensky
Tom Prunier
Martha Rabinowitz
Bill Schmidt
The Scott Farm
Diana P. Sidebotham
Lee and Diana Todd
Frances Uptegrove
Geoffrey VanKirk
George and Joan Weir
John Widness
T. Hunter Wilson

This is added to the \$3160 donated by others who chose to remain anonymous for total gift donations last year of \$6090. An impressive total.

Our thanks to all who donated.

Summer Newsletter Forest Update:

Sam Schneski, Windham County Forester

Spongy Moth Defoliation –

We indeed saw some spongy moth defoliation in southeastern Vermont this spring. The hardest hit area in Windham County seemed to be the Rockingham/Saxton River region. The good news is that almost all the trees affected were able to re-leaf. We did not have the necessary wet and humid spring that would have helped establishment of the fungal pathogen *E. maimaiga* and viral pathogen LdMNPV. Both pathogens kill Spongy Moth caterpillars.

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) -

Several new EAB detections were found by public reporting and trap trees used by the Green Mountain National Forest staff in previously unconfirmed towns. The new detections were found in the towns of Williston, Pownal and Somerset. Towns with an expansion of the infested area include Somerset, Jamaica, Stratton, Wardsboro, Hinesburg, Charlotte and Shelburne. If you are a forest landowner, homeowner, forester, logging contractor, municipality, and/or utility professional in an infested area, you should evaluate the options available to protect ash trees and immediately implement Vermont's "Slow the Spread" recommendations. For additional resources including managing ash in your woodlot or around your home, or Use Value Appraisal guidance, check out the resources available at VTinvasives.org.

Deer Exclosure Project –

The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR), the Vermont Land Trust (VLT), and University of Vermont Extension (UVM) were awarded a grant through the U.S. Forest Service. One of FPR's roles in this grant is to build 14 deer exclosures on municipal forests throughout Vermont. These deer exclosures are just one part of a larger grant which focuses on community forest demonstrations, documentation of pre-existing projects for demonstration, resource development, and education. The sites where the exclosures have been erected were chosen for their public accessibility.

In Windham County I worked with Dan Healy from Long View Forest and Dan Tyler, the Director of Public Works in Brattleboro, to put an exclosure on the Pleasant Valley Watershed Forest that Longview manages. The deer exclosure is designed to exclude deer from a small area of regenerating forest. Where deer populations are high, the absence of deer browse within a deer exclosure can result in faster rates of growth of woody vegetation and greater species diversity compared to areas outside of the fence that are accessible to feeding deer. The exclosure visually demonstrates the effect of deer browse on biodiversity and forest regeneration.

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These impacts can have implications that inform forest management strategies, hunting considerations, and more. Town forests provide a unique and valuable opportunity to educate the public and landowners about the effects of deer browse. The enclosure is 20' x 20' x 8' and is expected to have a 10-year lifespan, requiring minimal maintenance. An aluminum sign accompanies the area that explains what the enclosure is and has county forester contact information.

One major hurdle on this property is the presence of invasive plants. Longview has done a good job treating some of the most heavily infested areas mechanically but as most in the natural resource profession know, it won't be anywhere near as successful as if they were to use appropriate herbicides. Since it's a town watershed the town would rather not use herbicides.

The enclosure can be found by driving Sunset Lake Road out of west Brattleboro to Gulf Road. Park at the gate at the end of Gulf Road and hike the road north. The second trail on the right will bring you to the deer enclosure in a patch harvest done by Long View Forest 5 years ago.



WOODCUT OF BRINDLE BERRY (RUBUS BRINDLE)



The Black Birch are Coming!

By Bill Guenther, Windham County Forester (retired)

Windham County is a true melting pot in both its people and its variety of different trees. The species composition of our forests in Vermont can be quite variable and are typically based on numerous factors, some natural (such as climate, soils, elevations and aspect) and some caused by humans. In Southeastern Vermont, we have a most interesting composition of species mix. There are a number of more southerly species that just barely come far enough north to make it into Windham County (especially some of the oaks and hickories), while a number of more northerly Boreal species, such as paper birch, white spruce and black spruce, are found within Vermont's southeastern most county. Windham County happens to be where a number of these northerly and southerly species composition mixes occur, which gives us a rich variety of different types of trees.

Black birch (also called sweet birch), has been part of our county's forest, but the major change is that the percentage of black birch has greatly increased in Windham County. Why??

Deer browsing in the last 30 years or so, has consumed the seedlings of many of our most valuable timber species- sugar

maple, red oak and white ash, which also happen to be a favorites to deer as well. For some odd reason, not fully understood, black birch appears to be nearly browse-proof. Even though black birch is closely related to its cousin, the yellow birch (of which the wood is almost identical) deer do not seem interested in it, but they will heavily browse the yellow birch, which has the same wintergreen aroma, when one breaks a twig.

The eastern half of Windham County, which is lower in elevation, supports a very prolific and vibrant black birch population. In my 32 years as county forester, I noticed a decided shift in many of our woodlots which were seeing a species conversion away from red oak, sugar & red maple and white ash, to more and more black birch. I'm convinced that this big increase in black birch is due to deer over browsing the species more palatable to them. This gives the sweet birch less competition with the ability to increase their numbers throughout our region. Also black birch can produce voluminous amount of seed, which are tiny and can be easily wind dispersed.

Comparing black birch to yellow birch is like comparing red maple to sugar maple. Black birch and red maple tend to be much shorter lived than their cousins (sugar maple & yellow birch) and are both prone to disease problems. Years ago, black birch and red maple sawlogs

did not bring much at the sawmill, however in the last 20+ years or so, this has definitely changed and landowners can now receive a good stumpage price for their good quality black birch.

Back in 2006, when I did my biennial logging, we cut the first sawlog since my forest management project started in 1988. This tree was looming over my shed, so being a potential hazard, we harvested it. That single tree with 4 short logs in it brought in \$144. The butt log met the specs for a veneer grade and that log price was \$800 per MBF (thousand board feet) and that was 16 years ago. From a financial standpoint, growing good quality black birch is a very worthwhile endeavor.

With our change in species composition, we find that many areas that have seen timber harvests in the last 25 years or so are now regenerating to thickets of black birch. We foresters have often touted that landowners should not go against Mother Nature by planting or promoting species that are “off site.”

This plethora of black birch now represents a great opportunity for some high quality timber management. Now we'll assume a landowner has decided to manage the black birch for sawlogs and veneer logs. What should our approach be?

One of the first considerations may be that it creates regeneration too dense with its prolific seed production. I often came across impenetrable thickets of black birch you literally could not walk through. While we often want to see lots of regeneration, this species can create such dense cover, that when we have a heavy snow or ice storm (these are certainly more frequent as we see our climate shifting) it can cause the new seedlings & saplings to either be broken off or bent over, ruining them for future log production.

If you want to get real intensive, it can be helpful to go into these thickets with just a pair of loppers and do some early thinning, to reduce the potential for snow load damage. Since the young trees are essentially the same age, cut the shorter stems giving the taller ones more growing space. A good size to do this practice (called “cleaning,” is when the stems are about 0.5” -1.0” in diameter.

In past issues, we have talked about the concept of “Crop Tree Release” (CTR) where trees to be favored for retention have their crowns released by giving 5-10 feet of growing room between trees crowns by felling or girdling the lower quality stems. This practice which is a thinning focuses only on specific high quality trees that need more “skyspace” to grow faster to larger diameters. This

increased growth space, allows a tree's crown to expand horizontally, which will typically result in increased diameter growth.

The crown is divided into four quadrants or "sides." If only one side of the crown (25% of the crown's circumference) is released and now free to expand horizontally, there will be just a slight jump in diameter growth, but releasing 3 or all 4 sides will typically give you an increased rate of diameter growth.

If we want to produce valuable sawlogs or even veneer quality logs, you want large diameters and logs with no defects such as knots or canker wounds (caused by a *Nectria* fungus). A smooth, perfectly straight log is what we aim for. For hardwood species, a minimum diameter of 10" (measured on the small end of the log and inside the bark) is needed to meet specs for a sawlog.

The value of the log goes up exponentially as the diameter increases. For example a 10" diameter log with no defects might bring, say \$200/MBF, even though it is a smooth, straight good looking log. Most mills reach their highest price at around 18"-20" for the log diameter. An 18" diameter perfect log might bring as much as \$1,500/mbf. Why the big difference for just a few inches? The 18-20" log will usually yield a lot more knot-free lumber, which has a far higher value than those boards with

lots of knots that are considered defects. On the 10" log, when sawing it in the mill, you will typically hit knots much faster with very few boards being clear lumber, as compared to the 18"-20" log.

So we can see from this analysis, that if we want to increase our value in black birch logs, we would benefit far more from the fastest growing trees. So now we'll go back to the CTR discussion.

Dr. Jeffrey Ward, of the Connecticut Ag. Experiment Station does some great practical research on forestry matters. He published a research study that gave us lots of data on how black birch can grow much faster, if the trees are given more growing room using CTR. Typically we do not thin stands until they are 10 inches or more in diameter, due the trees being mostly very low value. But Jeff Ward showed that working with much smaller diameter trees and doing non-commercial (no products removed) CTR thinnings, can increase growth rates to very high levels.

The results of his research show that black birch in the "small pole" category (4.6-7.5 inches at diameter breast height-4.5' above ground level) produced an annual diameter growth rate that can be **doubled** by using Crop Tree Release. Without any release, a 4.5" stems will require about 55 more years to reach sawlog (12" in diameter measured outside the bark) size. Whereas, if this

small pole stand is released, it would only take 25 years to reach sawlog size !!

Perhaps the most important aspect of this research was that if you wait until trees are above 12-13 inches to do this thinning, the growth response will be far less than thinning in the smaller diameter stands.

It can be very satisfying to work in these young pole sized stands knowing that you will see a rapid response in your thinning efforts. Doing these non-commercial CTR thinnings can be time consuming, but worth the effort.

In closing, we've seen how black birch is greatly expanding its numbers in

Windham County and also that it is a tree with value. Crop Tree Release thinnings can offer huge benefits in growth, basically cutting in half the number of years until the tree reaches sawlog size.

If you have some young dense stands of black birch, it would be worth your effort to conduct these types of CTR thinnings. To get the best growth rate, you should release at least 3 "sides" of the tree, or 4 sides to get the best growth response.

This article is a brief summation of the research and should anyone have more questions, please feel free to e-mail me at billg@sover.net .



Name the tree contest !

Name this tree and win a free membership for a year !

Send your answer to
munson.hicks@gmail.com.
The first correct answer wins.

Notice of Annual Meeting

Hear ye Hear ye Hear ye !

The Windham Regional Woodlands Association will hold its 2022 Annual meeting on Saturday, September 10th at the Davis Pavilion in the Townsend Dam recreation area. (Rain date September 11th)

At 9:30 there will be a “walk and talk” led by Townsend State Forester, Tim Morton. This will be about an hour and a half tour, or relatively easy walking but with a stream jump, so wear appropriate clothing and tick repellent etc. It will focus on forest management, ancient roads lost in the 1927 floods, some old remaining structures, some large trees being left alone for the future etc.

At 11 o’clock at the Pavilion there will be a talk about the dam itself, its history, the West River watershed and current uses.

This will be followed by the presentation of the two new scholarships being awarded for the upcoming year.

We will then have our Annual Meeting with reports to the members and the presentation of the upcoming budget for the year.

We will then have a short quarterly Trustees meeting.

This will be followed by a BYO lunch and get together. There are two grills there and we will provide charcoal fires and utensils for those wishing to grill hot dogs or hamburgers.

To get there, take Route 30 north (or south) to the Townsend Dam. Cross over the dam on the road atop it, then right into the Recreation area, past the beach to the first (Davis) Pavilion. Parking is available. There are bathrooms and drinking water on site. The Pavilions have picnic tables under cover, but if you would like something more comfortable, bring cushions or folding chairs.

We hope to see lots of you there!

Windham Regional Woodlands Association
130 Austine Drive, Suite 300
Brattleboro, VT 05301-7040

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2022 Summer Issue

Mission of Windham Regional Woodlands Association

WRWA is a non-profit association of woodland owners and managers, members of the wood products industry, and other interested parties in the Windham County Region who advocate both sustainable management practices and the enjoyment of forests and their ecosystems. In support of these ends, WRWA offers educational opportunities for all age groups. Areas of interest include: biodiversity; clean air and water; cultural and historic resources; fair and equitable taxation of woodland; forest products; recreation; scenic beauty; and wildlife habitat. We recognize that these concepts are continually evolving and therefore will strive to consider the most current thinking and values regarding them.