The Ohio Woodland Journal

Volume 26 • Number 2 • SPRING 2019

A PUBLICATION OF THE OHIO TREE FARM COMMITTEE

♦ Snowy Oak Tree Farm of the Year
♦ Bluebird Migration
♦ Sweetening Your Sugarbush
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On the Cover

Paul and Joanne Mechling’s Snowy Oak Tree Farm is Ohio’s 2019 Tree Farm of the Year. The Mechlings are stewards of 365 acres of woodlands in Ashtabula County, and have been in the Ohio Tree Farm Program since 1978. Shown are back row (left to right) daughter Sarah Loveland, son-in-law Marc Loveland, son Noah Mechling, and daughter-in-law Beth Mechling. Front row granddaughter Madison Loveland, Paul and Joanne Mechling, granddaughter Claire Loveland, and grandson Luke Loveland. The Snowy Oak story begins on page 18.
Spring is Here!

Have you begun preparing your list of woodland management action items for the year? Like any crop, proper woodland management takes active involvement, and the degree of involvement varies. We began active management back in 2001 by asking our forester for a written management plan.

Once we had this plan, we began doing timber stand improvement (TSI) work. Since we lived in Michigan at the time, we hired a TSI vendor to do our work in Ohio and we didn't do much after that. When we moved back to Ohio and retired, we began anew. The thought was to use federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds to catch up on the TSI needs and review the stands annually to keep on top of the invasive plant and grapevine control. The plan is also to move forward on other forest practices like crop tree release, oak regeneration, and some tree planting. We recently began using a TSI vendor and I try to work with him. There will come a time when I can’t physically do the work, and my intention is to hire it done. I want to continue to actively manage our woods one way or another.

We just received our next EQIP project map for 2019. We’ll be doing some TSI prep to prepare for more intensive oak regeneration on the tree farm. We’ll also have some walnut seedlings to replace. There is more honeysuckle foliar spraying for this year, with one stand to complete and several patches between fields. It is also time to update our forest management plan. It is great to be out in the woods!

A big group from your Ohio Tree Farm Committee attended the American Forest Foundation’s American Tree Farm System National Leadership Conference in Louisville, Kentucky. The highlight was watching Randy and Koral Clum receive the 2018 National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year award before the audience from around the country. I believe we had one of the largest contingents there.

Changes are coming in the American Tree Farm System. The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is interested in seeing more active sustainable management. They have introduced the concepts of Landscape Management Plans to reduce the time spent writing management plans, and WoodsCamp to help with marketing sustainable management (see Alan Walter’s article on page 8). The AFF is also working to support expansion of the Tree Farm Inspector base.
In addition, the use of certification is changing. During the time that states were asked to choose to be a certified or recognition state, the Ohio Tree Farm Committee chose to be a certified state—although certification doesn’t currently provide much benefit to woodland owners—so that we will be best prepared for the future. Now the AFF will allow the individual landowner to own a certified property or a recognition property. The AFF is also hiring regional staff to provide better support to the states. We have exciting times ahead of us. As we collaborate with other organizations, we have so much potential here in Ohio and across the country.

The Ohio Forestry Association Annual Meeting was very successful. Brad, Gayla, Denise, and company did a great job. A landowner track of speakers was added which drew additional landowners to the meeting. Cassie Ridenour and Chris Clark donated a Brad Perkins photo and Richard Malagorski donated one of his photos for the Art Print Raffle. Noah Mechling, Dan Castellucci, Jared Nicholson, Bryan Feicht, Justin Thompson, and Keith Daisher handled the art raffle, and Lori Conway and Jason Good won the art prints. The Sportsman’s Den supported our gun raffle of a Sig Sauer P365 Nitron Micro pistol and a Marlin Model 1895 rifle. Elizabeth Reeb and Jim Stafford ran this raffle, and Paul Helser and Allen Troyer won the guns. Gene Sipos and Elizabeth Reeb operated the silent auction. Thank you for all who helped, donated items, and bid on items. **One last bit of news** -- Ohio will be undergoing a third-party audit in 2020. This assures that the certification process is working properly, and will involve visits to several Certified Tree Farms. If you have questions about this audit, don’t hesitate to ask.

Finally, thanks to all for everything you do for woodlands in Ohio! Whether it is managing your woodlands, harvesting trees, managing trees, serving on the Ohio Tree Farm Committee or on an Ohio Forestry Association committee, being an inspector, selling equipment for woodland use, donating something for our silent auction, or participating in one of a myriad of other ways, **we appreciate all that you do.**

Contact Tom at (419) 423-3422 or tvmills74@gmail.com.

Hello! For my first Perspective article as Chief of the ODNR Division of Forestry, I want to share my appreciation for my predecessor and then let you know about some recent recognitions of outstanding Division of Forestry staff members.

I am grateful for Bob Boyles’ dedication to this division – he worked hard and cared deeply. Although he is greatly missed, we wish him all the best in this new chapter of his life – retirement. I am humbled and honored to serve as Chief; and I am also grateful for the passionate work that you do every day for the woodlands in Ohio.

Congratulations to two Division of Forestry staff members who received Conservation Awards this year from the Ohio Forestry Association at their annual meeting in Columbus. Forestry District 3 Manager John Kehn received the Outstanding Individual in Government Service award, and Project Learning Tree-Ohio (PLT) Coordinator Sue Wintering received the Outstanding Individual in Conservation Education award.

As District 3 Manager, John is the service forestry coordinator and state forest district manager for the northeastern Ohio region. He also works directly with landowners as a service forester for Portage County. Early in his career, John worked nine years for the

Congratulations John and Sue!
division as a service forester in east-central Ohio. He has also worked for the ODNR Division of Mineral Resources Management in their Salem, Ohio office, as a reclamation inspector. He is a graduate of The Ohio State University School of Natural Resources and attended the University of Montana and the National Hardwood Lumber Grading School. Previous employment included stints with the U.S. Forest Service, Coshocton County SWCD, and fifteen years at the former Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation in the Wood Procurement Department and then in chemical recovery in the mill.

Sue has served as the coordinator or co-coordinator for PLT-Ohio since 1994. PLT is a comprehensive environmental education program that helps educators incorporate learning experiences, for early childhood through 12th grade, that encompass the total environment: land, air, water, plants, and animals – including humans. PLT activities are correlated to state and national education standards. PLT uses the forest as a “window” into the natural world, helping youth gain an awareness and knowledge of the world around them, as well as their place within it. Sue was hired at the ODNR Division of Forestry in 2005. Prior to that she was self-employed and served as a program director with PLT. She was a teacher and program supervisor for the Diocese of Columbus schools, a volunteer on the Woodward Park Recreation Center community council, and serves on the Columbus Nature Preserve Advisory Council. Sue is a graduate of The Ohio State University with master’s and bachelor’s degrees in education/natural resources education, with additional course work at Ohio University, Ashland University, Kent State University, Miami University, and the University of Alaska.
In late February, eight members of the Ohio Tree Farm Committee and three guests attended the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) National Leadership Conference in Louisville, Kentucky to network with over 200 like-minded people from across the United States. The event was held at the century-old Brown Hotel (famous for inventing the “Hot Brown” open-faced sandwich) and featured five educational tracks on topics ranging from the ATFS database to effective marketing techniques for growing the Tree Farm program.

Over the past two years, ATFS has conducted many listening sessions to gather feedback on various proposals they’ve considered for how to grow the Tree Farm program without putting additional burdens on the volunteer inspectors and boards. They believe that the two most promising solutions are Landscape Management Plans and an internet-based tool called WoodsCamp, so many of the conference sessions discussed the results of piloting these programs.

Landscape Management Plans are developed by foresters to meet the Tree Farm certification requirements of a particular forest type over a wide region of a state (or states). This plan utilizes web-based mapping and GIS tools with hot links to reference materials, rather than producing a thick packet of paper to hand to the landowner. Instead, the inspecting forester is encouraged to just give the landowner a single sheet of paper listing the activities needed done to reach the plan goals.

WoodsCamp is a software program that is marketed via social media and keywords triggered by Google searches. If the person expresses interest in learning more about how to manage their woods, they answer a series of questions where they delineate their property boundaries and take a first cut at their goals. Additional layers of data are automatically pulled from internet sources, so that when a forester visits the property,

Change is a never-ending thing. Joe Puperi has been our Tree Farm Committee Program Administrator for about 15 years. He began when he was a service forester with the ODNR Division of Forestry. Along the way, he began his own business -- Advanced Tree Health -- a tree care business based in Findlay. Joe retired from the state and went full time with Advanced Tree Health and is very busy, so he has decided to retire as Program Administrator. Adam Beichler, consulting forester and Manager of the Wilderness Center in eastern Ohio, has agreed to take over. Adam recently served as an area chair for our Tree Farm Inspectors, so he is quite familiar with the program. Thank you, Joe, for all your service, and congratulations to Adam as you move into this new role.
much of the important information has already been entered electronically and the forester already knows the landowner’s interests and goals.

An important part of the conference (and the reason that so many Ohioans attended) was the presentation of the 2018 National Tree Farmer of the Year award to Randy and Koral Clum. Vicki Christiansen, Chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, presented a beautiful wooden marquetry display piece to the Clums in honor of their accomplishment.

The Kentucky Tree Farm Committee did a stellar job arranging many interesting optional tours, including the Kentucky Derby Museum at Churchill Downs, a tour of the Louisville Slugger baseball bat factory, and a Kentucky bourbon tasting tour. The Tuesday evening reception was at the Old Forester Distillery, the only operating distillery on a street which had over 80 distilleries before Prohibition. The facility showcases all aspects of the distilling process from fermenting the mash to manufacturing and charring the oak barrels onsite, to testing, bottling, labeling, and warehousing.

On the final morning of the conference, the Ohio committee members had a productive face-to-face meeting with the national leadership to discuss how and when the upcoming changes will affect our state operations.

Ohio was represented at this conference by Tom Mills, Tony Machamer, Brad Perkins, Jeremy Scherf, Paul and Joanne Mechling, Gene Sipos, Randy and Koral Clum, Linda Sims, and Alan Walter.
We are thrilled to share our program schedule for our eighth year of **A DAY in the WOODS** which is centered at the Vinton Furnace State Forest near McArthur. **A DAY in the WOODS** was launched in the spring of 2012, and since then, more than 125 natural resources professionals have shared their expertise at 60 events attended by nearly 2500 woodland owners and enthusiasts like you.

This year’s calendar offers eight **A DAY in the WOODS** events. We are featuring an opportunity to learn about the hemlock dominated ecosystems in the spectacular Hocking Hills, including a fun-filled evening learning about the critters that create a chorus of night sounds. On Saturday, September 14th, we are also offering our second **FAMILY DAY in the WOODS** which is free to the public and includes many educational and fun activities for kids of all ages.

- **Spring Edibles from Your Woods**  
  May 10th – Vinton Furnace State Forest

- **Tree and Shrub Identification**  
  May 24th (Bonus Friday) -- Hocking College

- **Woodland Critters: Non-game Wildlife**  
  June 14th – Vinton Furnace State Forest

- **Woodland Stewardship Opportunities**  
  July 12th – Vinton Furnace State Forest

- **Hocking Hills Hemlock Forests and Night Sounds**  
  August 9th – Hocking Hills SP—Camp Oty’Okwa

- **Timber Harvesting: Things to Consider**  
  September 13th – Zaleski SF – CCC Camp
◆ **Woodland and Wildlife Research**
  October 11th – Vinton Furnace State Forest

◆ **Winter Tree Identification**
  November 8th – Zaleski State Forest

*Continued on next page*
Most programs begin in the morning with a series of introductory presentations which are followed by afternoon sessions often including tours and practical hands-on exercises. Each program is taught by natural resources professionals from numerous partnering organizations. Sessions are informal and participants have multiple opportunities to interact with and learn from each other, the instructors, and other attending foresters, wildlife biologists, and natural resources experts. Your $12 registration fee also includes a wonderful catered lunch.

**A DAY in the WOODS** would not be possible without the support of our participants and our many partners including Ohio Department of Natural Resources (Division of Forestry and Division of Wildlife), U.S. Forest Service (Northern Research Station and Wayne National Forest), Ohio State University Extension, Central State University Extension, Pixelle, National Wild Turkey Federation, Vinton Soil and Water Conservation District, Ohio Tree Farm, Hocking College, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ohio’s SFI Implementation Committee, the Ruffed Grouse Society, and the Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative. ◆
To learn more, subscribe to receive updates, or download a copy of our 2019 A DAY in the WOODS brochure visit: https://u.osu.edu/seohiowoods.

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For information on joining the OFA or to find a Master Logger visit www.ohioforest.org

Check the Ohio Woodland Stewards Program of Ohio State University Extension website for upcoming classes at https://woodlandsewards.osu.edu
It was minus 14 degrees Fahrenheit as I was driving toward Athens to meet with consulting forester Stan Swierz, industry foresters Jason Good and Jared Nicholson from Superior Hardwoods of Ohio, and landowner Mike Milligan and his son Kevin. Our plan was to meet at Mike’s tree farm in Athens County and look at recent management activities there. By the time we gathered and started walking the recently harvested stand, the sun was out, there was no wind, and it had warmed up close to 0 degrees. It was a beautiful day to be in the woods!

What I was there to see and learn about was a timber harvest conducted solely on the premise of increasing the sugar content in maple trees in a sugarbush. This story started when Mike Milligan began purchasing wooded properties in a remote area of Athens County in 1999 and built that acreage over time to include 640 acres. Some of this acreage is classified as a Certified Tree Farm.

In the summer of 2014, Mike’s son Kevin started thinking about making a career change. What he had in mind was going into the maple syrup business, as the family forest was heavily stocked with sugar maple.

Kevin began tapping trees and making syrup in 2015. What he soon found out was that the sugar concentration in his sap was so low that it was taking 65-70 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. That also means that it was taking a huge amount of firewood to boil off all that sap water. Kevin started researching this issue with sugar concentrations, and learned that performing *crop tree release* on sugar maples increases their crown size and, over time, could get the sugar concentration up to a more normal 45-50 gallons of sap per gallon of syrup.

As with most maple-heavy woods, there were also many large beech trees present. Mike and Kevin started their crop tree release program by girdling many beech trees. Understanding that it would probably take three years to start seeing results, and five years to see good results, Mike continued with the work of building up their sugarbush. He purchased and installed a reverse osmosis system to help with de-watering the sap. He began hooking the taps up with a network of plastic tubing, and last year installed an electric vacuum system to aid in the speed and ease of sap recovery.

Wanting to expand the sugarbush from its current 40 acres, 2000 taps, and several miles of plastic tubing, Mike and Kevin started eyeing another section of their woods. They decided on another method of crop tree release for a new 66-acre area. They would conduct a commercial timber harvest, which would speed up the process of release and provide some income for other improvements to the business. They also decided to get a professional consulting forester involved to guide them through the harvesting process, so they gave Stan Swierz a call.

One of the first things Stan told the Milligan’s was that if their true goal was to improve the sugarbush, then he would mark the trees for removal and market the stand based on that goal, not on the highest log market value. This also meant he would work with a buyer and harvester to do as little damage to the residual stand as possible and leave the tree tops and roadways in a condition that allowed Kevin to continue access for the sugarbush operations.

Stan contracted with Superior Hardwoods of Ohio to purchase and harvest the trees. Foresters Jason Good and Jared Nicholson from Superior brought in one of their best harvesting crews and worked with Swierz to orchestrate the timber harvest that I was walking through on this beautiful winter morning. I was seeing a timber harvest conducted on steep ground in a very wet year that not only met the goals of the landowners,
but was done as well as I could have imagined. They removed 583 trees (approximately 9 trees per acre) totaling 134,680 board feet, made up mostly of tulip poplar, red oak, hickory, white oak, and basswood. You could walk through the harvest area and easily see the crown space that was opened for the sugar maples to expand into.

This story is really about a forest landowner’s specific goals, and the coordination and cooperation of the foresters, loggers, and timber purchasers to meet those goals. I can’t wait to check back in with Kevin Milligan in a few years to see how this crop tree release affected the sugar concentration in the sap from this new section of the sugarbush. ⚫

For more information, see Milligan’s Maple Products at www.milligansmaple.com.
Many theories about bluebird migration have been propounded, but most of the conclusions reached indicate that if there is, indeed, an annual migration of bluebird, it is largely a local phenomenon with birds moving from those areas where they are seen during the nesting season to more protected, and wooded, areas for the winter months. In addition, it has been found that the birds move generally in response to the winter availability of food sources. Our purpose here is to examine this “migration,” and, in so doing, help to better understand the preferred winter habitats of these birds.

Any basic biology text will tell you that all living creatures on the Earth have but four basic needs for survival: food, water, shelter, and living space. During the summer months, those needs of eastern bluebirds are met in very familiar short grass habitats (i.e. suburban and rural yards and open space). The breeding season habits of eastern bluebirds are well known and are presented in dozens of excellent books on the subject. Summer food sources have also been well-documented.

Summer shelter is found in several locations. Of course, the nesting female is afforded shelter in human fabricated nest boxes or in natural cavities in trees, stumps, wooden fence posts, and the like. The male seeks roosting shelter in trees adjacent to the nesting site. It is this practice which makes the presence of a tree near the nest box such an important criterion in nest box site selection.

In the context of the breeding season, living space depends on the competitive nature of the territories which are established by the males of each pair. Anyone who has ever been a bluebird trail manager is familiar with this basic aspect of bluebird biology.

Migration

Sometime in August, depending on where you happen to have your trails, things begin to change—dramatically. As the nesting season draws to a close:

- Shelter is no longer generally sought in the nest boxes. Final fledgings from the box have taken place. There seems to be no interest, whatsoever, in the nesting process.
- Competition for nest boxes and territorial domination is reduced or eliminated.

Distribution of the Eastern Bluebird. Populations in the northern part of their range (salmon/breeding on map) are entirely migratory, spending winters in the southeastern U.S. or Mexico. Seasonal movements of local Ohio populations are described by the author. Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML25035631)
• Food sources begin to change. Insect pupation takes place at a greater rate and caterpillars are no longer a mainstay of the high protein diet. While adult insects continue to be plentiful, fruits and berries become the basis of the fall bluebird diet.

• Local sources of water often dry up in August and September. Backyard birders lose interest in filling bird baths and the bluebirds find themselves searching out new water sources for early fall.

• “Family” groups of bluebirds are formed from adults and fledglings. These groups tend to form into flocks and stay together during the fall and winter months. It is not clear if all birds within the flocks are related. The birds take on a communal aspect in their movements from one place to another. Fewer and fewer individual birds are seen as this pattern develops.

As all this is taking place, a reduction in the number of daylight hours is occurring. This “triggers” significant changes in the body chemistry of the birds. This certainly is responsible, in part, for the development of the local migration patterns which take place. Of course, individual birds within these groups respond in different ways to these stimuli, and some of the birds will make a true migration out of the area.

Equally important, as all these natural developments are taking place, bluebirders bemoan the absence of their “blues” from those areas in which they are accustomed to seeing them. In their minds, the birds have truly migrated and they will not expect to see them again until spring. They generally think “their” birds are spending the winters in the relative comfort of Alabama, Georgia, or Mississippi.

**Winter**

Sometimes it takes nothing more than a late fall field trip from a local nature center or the Christmas Bird Count to introduce new bluebirders to those areas where their blues are spending the winter. Even a casual

*Continued on page 26*
Paul Mechling’s interest in forestry and conservation was passed to him from his maternal and paternal grandparents and his parents—all farmers, anglers, hunters, trappers, and conservationists who had a strong land ethic. Paul grew up planting trees and making wildlife-friendly areas on the family farm in Perry County. He and his brother Mark own this farm—75 acres of it being an Ohio Certified Tree Farm, of which 50 acres has been in the family since 1808.

Paul and Joanne moved to Ashtabula County in 1974 to start his veterinary practice and to continue Joanne’s teaching career. They did not even own a house when they saw a “for sale” sign on a 30-acre parcel that was part reverting agricultural land and a clear cut woods. After some forestry practices, the couple enrolled the woods in the Ohio Tree Farm Program in 1978.

A busy and expanding veterinary practice, Joanne’s teaching Vocational Family Consumer Science, and a growing family kept them busy, so they didn’t purchase any additional land until 1997. Since then, they added 12 more parcels to bring their woodlands in Ashtabula County to 365 acres. These parcels were all high-graded for the timber, rut-filled, grapevine infested, and otherwise poorly managed.

Their woodlands have management plans written by their then-ODNR service foresters Mark Popichak and Mark Wilthew, and since updated by son Noah Mechling—forestry consultant and an Ohio Society of American Foresters Certified Forester. They are Ohio Certified Tree Farms with the American Forest Foundation, and accordingly inspected every five years to verify sustainable forestry is being applied. Practices include grapevine and invasive species control, crop tree release, and woodland road maintenance with water bars, culverts, and gravel-lined stream crossings. With the onset of the invasive emerald ash borer, the larger white ash trees were pre-salvaged.

Wildlife enhancement is extensive. Brush piles are constructed while doing timber stand improvement projects. Standing dead trees are left for nesting cavities. Two areas comprising six acres of pollinator habitat were established for monarch butterflies and pollinating insects. Warm season grasses have been established in three areas comprising nine acres, which are maintained by prescribed burning. Legume and grain—buckwheat, sunflower, millet, sorghum, and oats—food plots are planted annually on five acres to help the wildlife during the long northern Ohio coastal winters.

With the source of an average of 130 inches of snowfall annually, the opportunity arose for the creation of four ponds with a total of 11 acres for aquatic life.
Paul and Joanne Mechling’s Snowy Oak Tree Farm—Ohio’s 2019 Tree Farm of the Year

of surface water. The ODNR Division of Wildlife enabled the establishment of three other areas containing 11 acres of wetland conserved and protected permanently in the Wetland Reserve Program. Of course wood duck boxes provide nesting for the local waterfowl population. Besides vibrant wildlife and timber resources, Snowy Oak Tree Farm is prime maple syrup producing woods, where the Mechlings have harvested maple sap for 22 years.
They tap up to 3000 sugar maple trees annually and boil another 1500 taps for neighbors. Depending on the weather, their annual goal is 1000 to 1500 gallons of syrup production. Income from maple syrup is reinvested into the tree farm for forestry management and conservation projects.

Snowy Oak Tree Farm has been used extensively to demonstrate conservation to the public, maple syrup producers, wildlife enthusiasts, and tree farmers. Paul’s seven terms on the Ashtabula County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors has helped him promote the many aspects of land stewardship at their tree farm and at other opportunities across the state. The couple has hosted many sugar house tours, maple woods demonstrations, and sponsored an annual pancake breakfast to promote the health benefits of pure Ohio maple syrup. Snowy Oak is the setting for high school Envirothon contest training, Boy Scout tree planting for the Forestry Merit Badge, FFA tree planting projects, the Ashtabula County Leadership class, local officials’ tours, and tree farmer mentoring.

Paul and Joanne have participated in several “Fly-Ins” to represent the national public affairs committee of the American Forest Foundation to lobby Ohio’s U.S. Representatives and U.S. Senators on conservation issues in the federal farm bill. Paul has testified in Ohio on state house and senate bills regarding conservation and forestry issues.

Paul has served in numerous other local, statewide, and national organizations, including as chair of the Ohio Tree Farm Committee (2014-2015); governor appointments to the Ohio Forestry Advisory Council (ODNR Division of Forestry) and the Ohio Wildlife Council (ODNR Division of Wildlife, currently council chair); and several professional veterinary and national conservation organizations. Paul and Joanne have been recognized for their efforts by several entities, including the ODNR Division of Wildlife Conservation Award, induction into the ODNR Division of Forestry Forest of Honor, and the National Wild Turkey Federation-Conservationist
How did Paul and Joanne’s Ashtabula County property become to be called Snowy Oak Tree Farm? The rapidly growing northern red oak is one of the dominant species there, plus the annual snowfall is significant—hence the name.

Paul’s Conservation Philosophy
“My parents and grandparents instilled a strong conservation ethic in our family. Our responsibility is to continue this land ethic in our children and grandchildren through conservation education and action.” The Mechlings adhere to Aldo Leopold’s philosophy that “Conservation occurs when we have harmony between man and land.”

of the Year. They were recognized in 2018 for the Ohio Conservation Farm Family Award based on their forest and wildlife practices.

Paul and Joanne credit fellow Ohio Certified Tree Farmers as their inspiration and mentors; among them Dick and Carolyn Potts, Walt and Donna Lange, Jack and Janet Sweigart, Gailen Maxwell, and John Schmidt—all former Ohio Tree Farmers of the Year.

2019 Tree Farm of Year Tour
September 21, 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Please save the date, and look for directions and a map forthcoming in the Summer OWJ. For a video of the Mechling Family Snowy Oak Tree Farm, check this YouTube link: https://youtu.be/Rllpg_TDiUs.

Article by Greg Smith with information and photos from Paul and Joanne.

Continued on page 24
Meet Our Advertiser:

American Electric Power

What is ReCreation Land?

Tracy Simons, Programs Specialist, AEP ReCreation Land
Childhood memories of family campouts, fishing for "the big one," and the smell of campfires as they drift across the campgrounds are what come to mind when you think of American Electric Power’s (AEP) ReCreation Land. Nestled in southeastern Ohio, ReCreation Land is currently owned by AEP’s subsidiary Ohio Franklin Realty, LLC.

This land was strip mined for its coal by Central Ohio Coal Company then reclaimed by planting millions of trees, adding campgrounds, and allowing the land to be used as a public recreational area — free of charge. ReCreation Land encompasses about 53,000 acres in Morgan, Muskingum, and Noble counties, and is a special area for those who love the outdoors. But how did it all come to be?

ReCreation Land created

As you stand at the lookout at Parksite E–Windy Hill on SR 83 northeast of McConnelsville, you can almost hear the “Big Muskie” dragline excavator as it tracked across the landscape removing the overburden and unearthing the rich coal beneath the surface. The picturesque landscape today of rolling hills with forested areas in the distance beckon to the photographer, hunter, and outdoorsman. The occasional call of a red-tailed hawk can be heard in the distance, and the view is stunning. The ReCreation Land was created as an outdoor public recreational area by Ohio Power (now AEP) as a symbol of environmental stewardship, and thousands of people visit each year to enjoy the beauty and serenity of the outdoors.

Ohio Power opened the first 5,000-acre tract of land for public hunting, Avondale Wildlife Area, in 1959 through a cooperative agreement with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife (DOW). By 1961, due to mining practices at that time, many lakes and ponds had been formed. These bodies of water were stocked by the DOW with various fish species including bass, bluegill, channel catfish, pickerel, and muskies, and was opened to the public that year. Today, ReCreation Land is still in a cooperative agreement with ODNR, and accessible bodies of water are stocked with catchable catfish.

Early in 1963, Ohio Power expanded its recreational facilities and added two campgrounds for the public to use free of charge. This area was named ReCreation Land and today contains four campgrounds with approximately 290 campsites, an equine area with miles of horseback riding trails and camping, over 700 small lakes and ponds, and 28 miles of the Buckeye Trail.

Benefiting the community

There's nothing like the excitement of a child when they catch their first fish, or the sheer joy on the face of a senior from an extended nursing facility out for a day of fun, fishing, and food. ReCreation Land has been enriching individual’s lives through recreation in the outdoors for years. This is made possible by partnering with the community, local businesses, and government offices.

ReCreation Land hosts several programs, events, and outdoor educational learning opportunities every year.

Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs is a prime example of a community coming together to promote fishing, family, and outdoor recreation as an alternative to using drugs. This fishing derby is held annually at no charge to the public. It is made possible through the generosity of the local community and individuals that volunteer their time and resources. According to the Environmental Education Foundation, environmental education helps build critical thinking and relationships skills, helps foster leadership qualities, and makes school subjects rich and relevant.

One of the most rewarding events held on ReCreation Land is the Wheelin’ Sportsmen Hunt. This event offers disabled sportsmen the chance to hunt turkey and participate in various activities throughout the weekend. Wheelin’ Sportsmen is hosted by the National Wild Turkey Federation, and promotes sportsmanship, education, and most importantly, disability awareness.

From the first load of coal that was removed in the 1940s, to the millions of trees that were lovingly planted by the first foresters, and the creation of public recreational areas that have been a part of many lives over the last several decades, American Electric Power’s ReCreation Land will continue to be a pillar of the surrounding communities. Whether you are looking for a place to make memories, clear the mind, or enjoy what nature has to offer, ReCreation Land may be just what you are looking for.

Facilities on the ReCreation Land are free of charge; however, a recreational user's permit may be required. For more information, visit https://www.aep.com/recreation/areas/recreationland, or call AEP at (740) 962-1205.

Photos courtesy of AEP
The annual Tree Farm of the Year Tour is at the Mechling’s Snowy Oak Tree Farm on Saturday, September 21, 2019 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Parking will be at the Pierpont Fire Hall, and visitors will be shuttled to the tree farm. Food and beverages will be available to purchase. At least 20 professional foresters will be giving guided interpretive tours. Come prepared for a day of hiking—rain or shine. Make a weekend of it—explore local wineries, covered bridges, scenic rivers, and excellent fishing.

Since 1974, the Mechling Family has planted over 140,000 trees on reverting agricultural fields on their Ashtabula County properties. Some of the species include:

**Hardwoods**
- red oak, white oak, swamp white oak, pin oak, gobbler sawtooth oak, cherry bark oak, Bimundors oak (English oak x white oak), black cherry, pecan, tulip poplar, and black walnut

Tree protective tubes have been applied to 15,000 oak trees.

**Conifers**
- White spruce, black spruce, Norway spruce, white pine, hemlock, larch, and bald cypress
Connecting Kids to Nature

Nature is a great teacher and getting kids outside to learn and play is good for their brains and their bodies. Try this outdoor activity from Project Learning Tree® - it’s safe, fun, and educational!

**Bursting Buds**

In early spring, the tiny, bright green leaves of many trees burst forth. Where do the leaves come from? How do they form? In this activity, children will find the answers to these questions through observation and research.

The Spring is a wonderful time to go outside. When walking through a wooded area, take a moment to draw attention to tree twigs and branches. Have children search for buds and then choose a single twig to study. Have them:

- Hold the branch for examination
- Point out the different features they can see
- Gently split open a bud and examine the leaves tucked inside

Explain that tree twigs have different identifiable parts. Children could use a digital camera--or sketchbook—to record what they see. Back indoors, have children draw a picture of their twig and then use the internet or a tree identification guide to label the different parts.

Finally, ask children how they think buds change into leaves. One week later, go outside again to the same tree so children can see the change.


Can you identify the terminal bud; side bud; leaf scars; bud scale scar?

**Did You Know?**

By the time a tree’s leaves drop in the fall, its leaves for the next spring are already formed. Tiny leaves, stems, and sometimes flowers are located in packages called buds. Buds are made of tough scales that form a waterproof case. In spring, sap rises from the roots to the branches; the scales fall off the buds; and the tree’s leaves, stems, and flowers unfurl and grow. During the summer, the tree begins to develop new buds for the following year.

**Make Learning Fun!**

For more activity ideas and materials:
- Attend a PLT workshop: www.plt.org/ohio
- Contact your Ohio PLT State Coordinator:
  Sue Wintering, plt@dnr.state.oh.us, 614-265-6657
- Visit shop.plt.org

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© Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. Adapted from Activity 65: Bursting Buds from Project Learning Tree’s PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide.

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Do this word search puzzle to discover some components of a branch. Look below for the answers.

| R S K R A B U D |
| C E N R T T I |
| N L W A O I H W |
| R A N O R D A M |
| O C H M L S E H |
| H S L E A F T F |
| T A B T W I G Z |
| M P W S P F E Y |

Previous season’s growth

Answers: bark; branch; bud; flower; leaf; node; pith; sap; scales; scars; shoots; thorns; twig
Sunday afternoon drive in the country can produce an amazing amount of new information as to where the bluebirds are located during the winter months. In our area, it is not uncommon to see flocks of fifteen or more bluebirds emerging from heavily-wooded areas even in the coldest parts of the season.

It is so simple—in reality, what has taken place is that the birds have migrated from the open, unprotected fields and grassy areas of their summer nesting to the relative safety of the deep winter woods for shelter, food, water, and protection from avian predators. They have a much better chance at survival during the winter by moving into the shelter and protection of the wooded areas. Why? Berries and fruits remaining from the summer season are available in abundance in wooded areas. Vine tangles and thickets offer protection from diurnal avian predators such as Sharp-shinned and Cooper’s hawks (see OWJ Summer 2018). Shelter from the bitter cold and penetrating winter winds is found in abundant tree cavities for roosting. Communal roosting in these natural cavities is common during bitter cold winter nights and on those days when foraging is not practical. Pine and spruce plantations, together with thick, viney/brambly understories, offer wind protection during prolonged cold spells and stormy periods. Within the woods, the birds can respond quickly to dramatic weather changes by selecting from a variety of areas offering maximum protection.

In many places, all these features are found in the moist bottomland areas so common along rivers, streams, and creeks. Bottomland areas are made-to-order for these winter migrants. Likewise, water is almost always available for their needs, many times just from seeps or springs leading into the main watercourse.

But, best of all, house sparrows and starlings have moved to their winter quarters as well. Farmsteads, feedlots, granaries, and sheds provide a ready food source and shelter for these alien pests who wreak such devastation on bluebirds during the rest of the year. This, then, frees up the cavities in dead trees for the use by the bluebirds during their sojourns in the woodlands.

Bluebirds as . . .birders

Many bluebird trail managers maintain boxes during the nesting season per se, and then pack it in after the last box is cleaned in August or early September. Nothing is done in the field after that time until box cleaning and trail preparation in the spring. And that regimen is at the heart of the problem for those who do not know where their birds have gone during the winter months.

If you want to know where your bluebirds are during the winter, become a bit of a naturalist and a birder and search out those areas surrounding your trail which are most likely to be hospitable to overwintering bluebirds. You don’t have to hike the wilds or plan for extensive campouts. You don’t even have to go heavy on the Swiss Miss. Most of this exploration can be done from the comfort and warmth of the front seat of your family car.

Even though the major activity takes place in the interior of the wooded tracts, the birds still come to the edge of the woods to forage. They continue to be drawn to the familiar electric line perches which they have used during the summer season, and that is where you are likely to see them. And don’t forget your ears, because the beauty of their warbling song, especially during the winter months, can be the best indication of the winter presence of your migrating blues.

This article first appeared in the Bluebird Monitor: Winter 2017-2018; Ohio Bluebird Society, and adapted with permission. The Bluebird Monitor is available online at ohiobluebirdsociety.org. Learn more about this and other bird species on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website at https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Bluebird/.
Dean Sheldon’s Lasting Legacy

Ohio Tree Farm 370 began in the early 1950s. The original 56-acre location was on the Lake Erie shoreline just west of Huron in Erie County – at the site of the first automobile roadway to the Cedar Point resort. At that time, the property was known as Sheldon’s Folly. ODNR Service Forester Jack Basinger assisted Dean’s father with a management plan and Ohio Tree Farm Certification.

Some 25 years later, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources acquired that property in the Sandusky Bay region and the adjacent 300-acre marshland and barrier beach. That entire property was then dedicated as Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve in 1980. It has grown to encompass wetlands and preserve land of 472 acres unique to the south shore of Lake Erie, and the preserve is known for its undisturbed shoreline, abundant spring flora, and migratory bird sanctuary.

Because no timber harvest could take place on the preserve after that, Tree Farm 370 was moved south into Ripley Township, Huron County where it remains active today. Extensive reforestation of the 30-acre farmland and construction of five ponds for wildlife took place immediately, with a sizable Christmas tree plantation added. Timber stand improvement has been accomplished. A permanent conservation easement was placed on the property through the Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

A founding member of the Firelands Audubon Society and the Ohio Bluebird Society, Sheldon has contributed to the literature of this latter group in its significant, nationwide conservation effort. Professionally, he has been associated with city and regional planning and government in Illinois and Ohio. Beyond that, he has been an instructor of resource conservation at joint vocational schools in Erie and Ashland counties (the Ashland County-West Holmes Career Center/JVS Natural Resources Program was a recipient of the ODNR Division of Forestry’s Forest of Honor in 1989 thanks to instructors Dean Sheldon and Tom Kruse). Additionally, he has been an active participant in all aspects of Scouting in north central Ohio.

For his enthusiastic dedication to and promotion of natural resource conservation, Dean Sheldon, Jr. was inducted into the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Hall of Fame in 2008. His father, Dean Sheldon, Sr. was posthumously inducted in 1969.

Learn about Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve at http://naturepreserves.ohiodnr.gov/sheldonmarsh
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East Central Ohio Forestry Association

The East Central Ohio Forestry Association celebrates its 35th anniversary this year with 129 members.

The East Central Forestry Association was founded June 12, 1984 with the original three trustees being Charles R. Pearson, Robert Wagner, and John Childers. The principle office of the ECOFA was in Carrollton, Carroll County, Ohio. The first official meeting of the membership was held on July 11, 1984 with 11 original members present.

The four purposes of the ECOFA were set forth to be:

1) To encourage through education and demonstration a sound program for multiple use of forests, woodlands, and wildlife habitat;

2) To provide education, information, and technical assistance to members and others interested in the planning, management, and use of forest resources;

3) To encourage the prudent use and management of woodlands through sound forestry practices;

4) To acquire, by gift, devise, purchase, lease, or otherwise, such real or personal property as may assist in the promotion of purposes of the corporation and to hold, manage, maintain, display, lease, sell, or convey such real or personal property in such manner and at such time as the Trustees of the corporation may determine.

ECOFA ended 2018 with 129 members. The organization has been one of the most active local forestry associations in the state. Members come from several area counties, but currently have their monthly meetings at the Dover Public Library. Members include landowners from Tuscarawas, Summit, Medina, Harrison, Carroll, Belmont, Jefferson, Stark, and Guernsey counties as well as neighboring counties.

Its success over the years can be attributed to our local service foresters being very active with the organization, interested and involved members, a dynamic mix of skills and interests among the membership, and speakers at the monthly meetings that reflect the interests of the members.

For information, call (740) 439-9097.

Northwest Ohio Woodland Association

The NWOWA meets four times a year, and the second meeting of the year was Saturday, March 30 at the ODNR Division of Wildlife office in Findlay. The meeting included the usual secretary, treasurer, and other committee reports along with updates from the Ohio Tree Farm Committee and ODNR service foresters.

The program was Woodlands and Taxes. Barry Ward – Director, OSU Farm Tax School, discussed woodlands and income taxes via a teleconference in conjunction with Daniel Bartlett – Service Forester, ODNR – Division of Forestry who discussed Ohio Forest Tax Law and CAUV.

One surprise opportunity was a joint gathering with the Muskingum River Woodland Interest Group on May 4. Several MRWIG members from eastern Ohio traveled to northwestern Ohio to see Gall Woods and Kitty Todd Park in the Oak Openings Region.

The next meetings include: Sawmill Operations – July 20, from 9:30 am to noon, and Managing Your Woods – October 12, from 9:30 am to noon at the Don Ruffing farm.

For more details on the Northwest Ohio Woodland Association and future meetings contact Keshia Krout at (419) 424-5004.
**Southern Ohio Forestland Association**

Pictured is John V. Schmidt (left) receiving his 97th year birthday cake at our Christmas party in December. John is one of the founding members of SOFA, and the only member of our group to have received both Ohio Tree Farmer of the Year (1988) and National Tree Farmer of the Year (1989) awards.

We’d like to share our SOFA meeting schedule and encourage new folks to join us at our meetings, potluck suppers, and farm tours. Much useful information is shared and great camaraderie is enjoyed.

- Join us May 9 for The Chestnut Tree
- June 22 is a Saturday Christmas Tree Farm Tour
- July 11 for Backyard Bird Feeding
- August 8 is our annual planning meeting
- August (TBA) Kids Day at Buckeye Furnace
- September 12 for Ohio State Forests Update
- October (TBA) Kaldmo Farm Tour
- November 14 is Open Mic/Photo Contest/Camp Canopy Fund Auction
- December 12 is the Annual Membership Meeting and Christmas Party

Check www.ohiosofa.org for further updates.

**Northeastern Ohio Forestry Association**

The year started with a new NEOFA president. Mitch Cattrell took over for Mike Lanave who served our organization for six very successful years. Mitch and his wife Kathy have been NEOFA members for nearly 15 years. They are certified tree farmers with woodlands in both Jefferson and Columbiana counties.

In addition to our winter meetings on ticks, Lyme disease, and barn preservation, NEOFA hosted a first aid certification course for our members. We had 15 members learn new CPR techniques, how to use an AED, treating a bleeding wound, and splinting broken bones. We were also given suggestions on what to stock in a first aid kit while in the woods, all pertinent training for anyone in the woodlot slinging a chainsaw.

Plans are underway now for our summer tours. Check us out on Facebook for monthly meeting topics. April was our annual banquet meeting and May will be our last monthly meeting until September. Meetings are at 7:00 pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month at the Mill Creek MetroParks Farm in Canfield.

For more information about NEOFA, contact Mitch Cattrell at mitchcattrell2@aol.com, or by phone at (330) 429-9734.
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