

The Forest Steward's Journal

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The MISSION of the Forest Stewardship Foundation is to “educate and inform landowners, natural resource professionals and the general public about the science and ecology of forest lands, the many values derived from forested lands and the principles of sustainable forest land development.”

DISCLAIMER: As in the past, we again advise that this information is submitted for your interest only. The Foundation's mission, as indicated above, is to “educate and inform”, not to advocate or persuade. The Foundation takes no position, either endorsing or opposing, approving or disapproving, any of the assertions or arguments in the contributed information.



From the Chair

Can it be possible that the Montana Forest Stewardship Workshop program is getting ready to celebrate their 25th anniversary! I first heard about the program in 1993 and took the course in 1994 as a landowner and to become an instructor. Little did I realize what an influence it would have on me and the forest landowners of Montana. This is the time I met our own board member, Gary Ellingson, who was the workshop program coordinator for MSU Extension Forestry at the time. Gary along with the MSU Extension Forester, Bob Logan, had put together one of the first “coached” courses for forest landowners in the country and the success of their efforts continue to this day. Gary has continuously served as a valued member of the board.

My first workshop was also where I met several graduates of the very first stewardship workshop. They spoke at our workshop to tell us about the newly formed Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation (MSF). These gentlemen had been shocked to hear that because of funding difficulties the workshop program might not continue. They had organized the MSF as a way to raise funds to make these workshops available in the future. Fortunately that day of no funding never came to fruition, but in the meantime the MSF has been there to support the workshop program in whatever way we can. This has included financial support in lean years, teaching aids, publications, etc. While we actively pursue development of supplemental educational efforts for forest landowners we remain strongly committed to maintaining the integrity of the wonderful Montana Forest Stewardship Workshop program.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank board member Glenn Marx for the outstanding job he has done the past few years as editor of The Forest Steward's Journal. Glenn is remaining on our board, but our newest board member, Clyde Robbe, will now step in and assist as our interim editor. Clyde is a recent graduate of the Forest Stewardship Workshop and he and his wife Meg reside in Butte. They are actively involved in the management of their forest property near Eureka, which has family ties since the year 1929. Having known Clyde and his family for many years, I know that he will continue to pursue the excellence that our readers have come to expect.

Ed Levert, Chair

Montana Log Market Update – *Times They Are A-Changin'*

By Gary Ellingson, Northwest Management, Inc. October 22, 2015

As the Bob Dylan tune goes...Times they are a-changin' and so goes the Montana log market. Unfortunately for many the times recently changed for the worse. Sawlog prices dropped significantly in the 3rd and 4th quarter of 2015 catching many landowners, foresters, and loggers by surprise. The downturn resulted in some landowners curtailing active logging operations and postponing other planned fall harvests as sawmills were forced to drop prices for delivered logs. Fortunately, demand for post and pole material and pulpwood remains steady and prices are in relatively good shape. *See “Log Market Update” on page 2*

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Sawmills were forced to quickly respond to several market factors including low lumber prices, a reduced demand from offshore markets for lumber (notably weakened demand in China), and a strong US dollar which makes the US attractive for lumber importers such as Canada. A further concern is the recent expiration of the Softwood Lumber Agreement (SLA) between the US and Canada. There is fear that vast supplies of less expensive Canadian lumber may flood the US market as a result. The SLA was designed to “level the playing field” between Canadian and US lumber producers. Under the existing SLA, The US may not petition with the US Department of Commerce related to softwood lumber imports for one year. In other words, if Canada should decide to flood the US market with softwood lumber there is little US companies can do about it. Typically the companies might seek tariffs or trade restrictions.

Canada’s softwood timber supply comes primarily from lands owned by provincial governments where stumpage prices are set through administrative processes rather than through market competition. Essentially the stage is set for Canada to export cheap lumber with no penalty. This may be tempered by the fact that some large corporations own sawmills in both countries and the benefits to improving profitability on a mill in Canada might be offset by reduced profits in the US. Also, Canada will need to keep in mind that they will eventually need to come back to the bargaining table and the US is one of their better long term lumber export markets. In either case the bottom line is sawlog markets are down for the time being. The news on the pulpwood side is slightly better. Prices and demand are both relatively steady. Post and pole manufactures are still seeking raw material and paying good prices to secure inventory.



Commercial thinning near Libby

Close to home we have seen nearly all sawmills reduce shifts and lay off workers. Many loggers are scrambling to find enough work to keep their employees and equipment working due to curtailed or postponed projects. If you have a forest improvement project that requires use of logging or road building machinery, now is a good time to get in touch with your local logger who might be interested and available to do the work on an hourly, per acre or bid basis. In times like this even small projects are a help. Work you might consider getting accomplished could include road maintenance, wildfire hazard reduction, slash disposal, road construction, snow plowing, or harvesting stands comprised primarily of pulpwood or fencing material. There seems to be a decent firewood market so harvesting decadent dead timber might be another option.

Hopefully delivered log prices will improve in the coming months. If not it will certainly be very tough times for everyone who depends on strong log markets to implement sound forest stewardship practices and stay employed.

How Do I Handle My Logging Slash?

By Ed Levert, Certified Forester

So, you are the landowner and you are going to have a timber sale. One of the basic questions that is going to come up is “How do I handle the logging slash?” But, before you can answer that question you must ask, what are my objectives with the timber sale? Am I going to do a commercial thinning or do I want to open up the stand enough so that I will get good regeneration? And, of course, you must also be thinking about the fire hazard you are creating and how far do you need to go to reduce it to a manageable amount.

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Let's start with doing a commercial thinning where you do not want regeneration. One of your options may be to use a cut-to-length system where the trees are cut and processed into products in the woods. The resulting slash is then placed as a “mat” where it is walked upon by the harvester and the products are removed over these same mats by a forwarder, which is like a small mobile logging truck. The resulting compacted slash mat is now in a form where the fire hazard is greatly reduced and you have maintained the majority of your nutrients on site in the form of needles and branches. These mats will disintegrate quite rapidly.



Log forwarder near Eureka

This can work just fine, but what if you have limited landing space and/or you are concerned with removing the biomass from the site, particularly the nutrient rich needles and branches? With today's utilization you can end up with piles that are so compacted that it is hard to get them to



Slash piles near Columbia Falls

burn. One solution to this dilemma is to have the skidder backhaul the slash to the site and leave it on the skid trails so you have reduced the size of your piles and you have returned the valuable biomass. Don't forget that if you don't have enough large woody materials on the site, you may want to have large cull logs and bigger limbs backhauled also. If you have steeper skid trails subject to erosion you might want to scatter your slash here too. If a backhaul isn't going to work or is not needed, make sure the logger keeps the piles small

enough so that the slash will have a chance to dry out prior to burning. In my opinion you can get by with larger piles if you have larger

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materials and the piles don't get packed down during the piling. If you want to increase your success with burning, try covering all or a part of your pile with kraft waterproof paper or plastic (don't forget to remove the plastic prior to lighting). Another frequent concern is for the non-merchantable smaller trees that may be in your stand that need to be removed because of the fire hazard or competition with a new stand. They too can be cut by the harvester, particularly using a “hot” saw that turns a cutting blade much like a buzz saw. Once these trees are cut they can be hand piled or piled with an excavator.

I have just touched on the slash disposal issue, and I assure you there are many other alternatives and considerations that need to go into the plan of how to handle your slash. My recommendation is that you find a reputable forester and or contractor who has experience with these questions.

SAVE THE DATES:

The Joint Montana Forest Landowner Conference and State Meeting of the Montana Society of American Foresters will be Friday, April 15th 2016, in Helena, MT at the Red Lion Colonial Inn.

On Saturday, April 16th, a “Ties to the Land” Workshop will also be held at the Red Lion Colonial Inn.

Please watch for registration information to be posted on our Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/montanaforeststewardshipfoundation>

The Battle for Bats

**Lorin Hicks, Wildlife Biologist, Plum Creek Timber Company
and
Nathan Schwab, Senior Bat Ecologist, Tetra Tech
November 23, 2015**

It seems everybody has an opinion about bats. Some see them as a harbinger of evil and a threat to their health. Others are fascinated by bats as the only flying mammals on the planet. The truth lies somewhere in between fear and fascination, but facts confirm that the 1300 species of bats in existence represent a remarkable and valuable group of animals. Facts also indicate that bats are in trouble and have become the focus of much attention lately, as a disease called White-nosed Syndrome (WNS) has been killing them by the millions in North America.

Bats are truly the “night shift” in our skies and provide several important ecological functions. Bats consume their weight or more of insects every night (over 500 mosquitos per hour), including some of our most damaging agricultural pests. They are also important pollinators and spreaders of seeds in both the tropics and our southwestern deserts. Only about 1% of a bat population harbors rabies, and the average life span of a bat is 20 years. No matter if it is fact or fiction, bats capture our imagination. The Latin name for the silver-haired bat, a common species in our area, is *Lasionycteris noctivagans*, which translates to “night wanderer”.

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is caused by a fungus with a complicated sinister name (*Pseudogymnoascus destructans*) that was inadvertently brought by humans from Europe and was first documented in New York state caves with hibernating bats in 2006. WNS has spread rapidly across the eastern and midwestern states and now can be found in over 27 states, most recently Nebraska. WNS is spreading west via migrating bats and on the clothing of cave explorers. WNS induces dehydration which causes bats to behave strangely during winter, including flying around during daytime

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(presumably searching for water) and clustering around entrances of caves and other hibernation areas. Bats infected with WNS die as they run out of stored energy during prolonged winter activity. By 2012, 6 years after discovering the disease, WNS had killed more than 6 million bats in the Northeast and Canada. Recently an experimental technique developed with a common bacterium has been shown to inhibit the growth of the fungus and reverse some of the effects of WNS in bats as part of a small study in Missouri. The Northern Long-eared Bat (NLEB), one of 11 species of North American bats known to be susceptible to WNS, has experienced an 80% population decline over its range. The NLEB was officially listed as threatened throughout its US range in May of this year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

With WNS moving west, and one affected bat species already federally listed, attention has turned to how maternity roosts and overwintering habitat might be affected by land management activities such as timber harvest. Very little is known about bat species using forests in the inland NW, because attention has been focused on caves where bats hibernate in large groups. One method to determine the species of bats occupying an area is to use acoustic monitoring technology which can record the high frequency echolocation calls of passing bats. The structure of these calls are unique to individual bat species and computer software programs are available that can identify and compile occurrence of bat species recorded in the field. The instruments available now to record acoustic bat data are very portable and can withstand our winters while continuing to record overwintering bats that briefly come out of hibernation to drink water.



Silver-haired bat



California myotis bat



Hoary bat

(Photos provided by Nathan Schwab)

Plum Creek, F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company, and Stimson Timber Company have teamed up to install acoustic monitoring stations on their property west of Kalispell in an effort to document the diversity of bat species using SFI-certified managed forests in Montana.

The results have been impressive. Over the last 2 years we have documented the presence of 11 of the 15 species of bats known to be present in Montana using managed forests in our area. Moreover, many of these species are susceptible to WNS in other parts of their range where they overwinter in large communal cave and old mine roost sites. The acoustic monitoring stations have recorded bat activity in temperatures as low as -18 degrees centigrade (0 degrees Fahrenheit) passing over open water in rivers to drink during brief breaks in their hibernation.

Encouraged by the diversity of resident and migrating bat species using our managed forests, we became interested in knowing more about what types of forest habitats bats are using late in the season as winter hibernation closes in. Very little information is available on this aspect of bat biology, because there are few large caves in western Montana where bat hibernating habitat (called “hibernacula”) are usually located. To investigate this topic, we turned to radio telemetry and tracking resident bats back to the specific forest structures where they likely spend the winter.

During late October and early November, we attached tiny radio transmitters to the backs of bats captured in nets strung across streams where they forage for insects at night. The transmitters are the size of a small bean and are attached with surgical cement where they stay on the bat for the 14 days the transmitter operates. Each bat transmitter has a specific frequency which allow us to locate the bat from up to 2 miles away. With portable receivers in hand, we can hike to the specific location bats are spending their days in diurnal roosts.

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From this work, we have learned some very important and interesting things about late fall/early winter roost selection by bats. First, bats select a variety of individual structures in the forest to roost in. These include dead and live trees left in riparian areas and steep rocky hillsides, as well as cracks in rock faces and rock outcrops within and above managed forests. By inserting temperature probes into the cavities and cracks when bats are found, we discovered that these “micro-habitats” indeed buffer the daytime highs and night time lows in air temperatures surrounding the site. In addition, we have documented that bats continue to reoccupy the same daytime roost sites day after day, sometimes flying miles away to forage on open, slow flowing streams with an abundance of insects and returning to the same roost site before dawn.

The results of this work suggest that managed forests support a diverse population of bat species that use very specific forest structures provided by design in riparian management areas and available by default in certified managed forests. Because bats in our area tend to hibernate individually in these forest structures, their susceptibility to WNS which is currently devastating communal hibernating bat populations may be limited. This gives them a fighting chance in the “battle for bats”.

Ties to the Land – *A New Understanding*

By Clyde Robbe, Forest Landowner

In the spring of 2015, my wife and I had the opportunity to participate in a “Ties to the Land” workshop in Helena, Montana, hosted by Kirk and Madeline David. The intent of the lively, yet thought-provoking workshop was to lead individuals and families through the often times painstaking task of ensuring thoughtful, and hopefully smooth, transition of forest land from one generation to the next. Little did I know that a new understanding of what “ties to the land” meant would not come to me until several months later. Prior to and while sitting through the workshop roundtable exercises and discussion, my mindset was that ties to the land meant you had a birth right or “inheritance” type of tie to the land. For that matter, wasn’t that how my wife and I ended up with our timber land? More to come.....

Located in northwest Montana, approximately 6 miles southeast of Eureka, sits our small forest of 40 plus acres, and, along with a brother’s immediate adjacent parcel of the same size, represents what is left of nearly a section of coniferous forest acquired by great grandparents in 1929. The purchase primarily reflected the saw log value of the Douglas fir, western larch and ponderosa pine on the property, though eventually a central, log structure homestead was established and permanent residence maintained complete with livestock and gardens. Through the years and several generations later, the original property has been parceled out in a not-so-organized fashion, sometimes handed down amongst heirs as inheritance and sometimes through nominal purchase agreements. No real rhyme or reason seemed to be placed on the transition from generation to generation, at least that would maintain the integrity of the forested property, until my father made that attempt with his 120 acre parcel in the early 1990’s through a living trust. By this time, all of the other “Robbe family” ownership had been given up.

Though we never formally lived on any part of the property as kids or young adults, my three siblings and I were never so far away that we couldn’t participate in the fall Christmas tree harvests and occasional recreational junkets that the property became known for in later years. Our parents eventually built a new home near the site of the original homestead (which had been demolished and burned in the 1970’s due to safety reasons) and continued small, rotational timber sales, the Christmas tree harvest, and Christmas wreath crafting to supplement income during their retirement years. But unfortunately, as created by the trust, a problem was developing.

After the loss of our parents in 1999 and 2004, decisions had to be made regarding how to handle the trust. Though the intent of the trust was obvious, i.e., our parents wanted the property to be maintained and appreciated by family members for generations to come, it left little direction on how the beneficiary trustees were to manage the trust. The trust was created by our parents, with questionable legal assistance, and included virtually no participation or comment from the beneficiary trustees during its development. The result---not all beneficiary trustees had interest in the property consistent with the original intent. Some reflected on the property and continued to use it with interest and values consistent with the family lineage, while others saw it as merely an inheritance with monetary value or as a challenge that only created unsolved

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problems going forward. None of these viewpoints was necessarily wrong, though each did reflect upon how we ended up in the “trust situation” to begin with, through a birth right, an inheritance, and varying degrees of “maintained ties to the land.” Though living trusts may be appropriate for some families and situations, without proper planning and communication between all beneficiary trustees, I would imagine more trusts than not end up in similar situations as our own.

In 2006 the trust was dissolved through mutual agreement of all beneficiary trustees due to a lack of support for maintaining the original trust intent by a majority. Fortunately, value in the trust properties, which included both residential and timberland attributes, allowed a brother and myself to hold onto much of the forested land via the minor subdivision process. And by luck or Devine intervention, during the subdivision process and ultimate trust distribution, a nephew and his family moved into the area for a work assignment and were able to purchase our parents’ home and some adjacent acreage.

Jumping forward now to a warm day in July, 2015, as my nephew’s two older sons (ages ten and thirteen) and I sat on the edge of one of the old Christmas tree roads having our lunch, we discussed the on-the-ground work we were engaged in. They had ventured “up the hill” from their house (my parents’ prior home) to assist with some thinning in an overgrown Douglas fir “thicket.” The day before, we had tackled a juniper patch that was crowding out everything on a knoll adjacent to our small recreational cabin. On this day, we found ourselves discussing the value of opening up the canopy to let the light reach the forest floor, where along with the removal of the numerous saplings and smaller trees, grass and shrubs could benefit and thrive to help nourish the resident whitetail deer and late winter mule deer populations. Wildfire risk was being reduced as well. We had taken before and after photos (which added some great fun to our efforts!), with the young men standing in the same position for each, so they could quickly see the ground cover impacts they were making. The place where we were sitting had exposed mineral soil, so we discussed the need for tree seeds to have access to that type of disturbance or ground cover to allow proper germination in the reforestation process. Though our discussion did not get too in depth, I could tell from their attentiveness and questions that they were starting to see why it might actually make a difference for us to spend time working in the forest, and hoping they would take away the things we shared on this day to apply to the forest around their own home. Perhaps most importantly, they were fostering their own desire to maintain the health of the forest. Could it be this is how “ties to the land get started?”



Thinning project – before



Thinning project – after

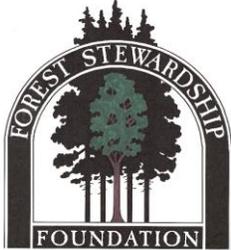
Later that evening, I had time to ponder the past couple days’ efforts and to reflect back on the “Ties to the Land” workshop that my wife and I had attended in the spring. I recalled that sitting around the workshop tables that day were families, parents and their children, siblings, discussing what the “family land” meant to them. Though due to a tragic accident a few years earlier, our own son could only be with us in spirit, we understood what our family property had meant to each of us, and how thanks to hunting, Christmas tree harvesting, wood cutting and general recreational use, we had all developed our love, respect and “ties to the land”. It was something we talked about and wanted to preserve.

If maintaining the family forest and land is important, perhaps we can all learn something from Montana cowboy artist Charlie Russell when he said ...”Guard, protect and cherish your land, for there is no afterlife for a place that started out as Heaven.” Does this describe your property? Then work with it, talk about it, enjoy it together, and begin to plan accordingly, before the land attributes you have grown so fond of slip away from future generations.

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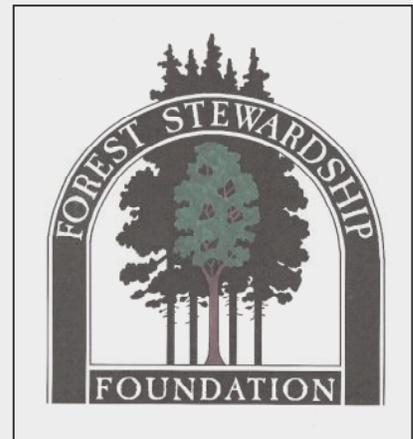
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Should you join the Forest Stewardship Foundation?

By joining us you become a part of a small but energetic organization that gets things done. We are all volunteers, but since 2011 we have been able to co-sponsor the Helena Landowner Conference and several "Ties to the Land" workshops. We have also contributed, as funding is available, to MSU Extension Forestry to help fund stewardship workshops. Plus, twice a year we publish and distribute over 1,200 Forest Steward's Journals.



We know money is tight, but our dues are still only \$25. We currently have 106 members so you can do the math and see that we don't have much of an operating budget once we publish and mail the Journal. Your membership and contributions mean a great deal to our continuing success. Please note the membership application envelope attached and join our organization.

If you appreciate what our foundation accomplishes and would like to give a gift membership to a friend or another forest landowner, please check us out on our Facebook site. It isn't difficult to get on our site and download the gift certificate, and we think the information you will find is well worth your time.

<https://www.facebook.com/montanaforeststewardshipfoundation>

Thank you sincerely for your help.

Ed Levert, Chair