

Forestry ^{The} *Source*

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Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters Committee Holds Field Tour in New Jersey

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This past spring, the Cooperative Forest Management Committee of the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters (NAASF) held its 2012 meeting in Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 14–17 to discuss forest stewardship plans and get a first-hand look at their implementation on the ground in the southern part of the state.

So, with an invite to tag along from Bob Williams, CF—a consulting forester and presenter for part of the field tour—I met up with the tour participants on the morning of the 15th in front of a garage on a cranberry farm owned by Lee Brothers Inc.

The group had just come from a presentation on pygmy pines, fire ecology, and northern pine snakes given by Walter Bien, a professor at Drexel University, and it traveled to the Lee property to hear presentations from New Jersey Forest Fire Service personnel before heading out into the field.

Typically, the committee's field tours are to state-owned lands; however, in New Jersey, stewardship plans are written by foresters like Williams working to meet the objectives of private landowners, such as the Lee family.

"We started working with Bob Williams about 15 years ago, when we started putting together a management plan for our woodlands," Lee Brothers Inc.'s Stephen Lee told tour attendees. "The woodlands are important to us, and their management is something that my family has been doing for a long time. Typically, with cranberry growers in New Jersey, if there are 100 acres of cranberry bogs, then there needs to be at least 1,000 acres of woods surrounding them as a watershed protection area. In



Among the stops on the recent field tour of private land in New Jersey was this 300-acre clearcut that, today, features a variety of eight-year-old pines.

our own case, we have about 120 acres of bogs and roughly 2,000 acres as watershed."

In addition to their acreage, the family also has what Stephen Lee refers to as "very strict land use controls" that govern what he and his family can do on their land. The restrictions, which were put into place by the New Jersey Pinelands Commission (a state agency that oversees the management of nearly one million acres of predominantly pine forest surrounding the Lees' farm), limit their "permitted uses" to "blueberry and cranberry growing, forestry, and beekeeping."

With forestry as a permitted use, they got to work implementing the management plan Williams wrote for them.

"We wanted to be more proactive in the management of our land," Lee said. "We wanted to learn as much as we can, so we could do some harvesting in an area where we had a severe forest fire. It had not regenerated well, so we did a

clearcut. We left some standing trees, although there weren't many good trees left, and we did a variety of treatments—single-drum chopping, double-drum chopping, drum chopping plus a disc harrow, no chopping—to see what was the best. Then we planted a variety of seedling types that we got from a variety of places. We wanted to see what various trees would do, and we had a very good response."

The Lee family did not, however, get a good response from the local environmental community, which objected to their forestry operations.

"Some of the environmental groups in New Jersey didn't think that was a good idea that people were cutting trees down, and they began to organize against the process," Lee said. "They bought our neighbor's farm and, as part of the fundraising effort, produced ads with photos of our forestry operations and captions that read, 'Don't allow this to happen in the pines!'"

To the Lee family, the harvest operations were an investment in the family property.

“There was no net cash-out. We did all the drum chopping ourselves, we did the discing, we did the fertilizer, we did the herbicide treatments, and now we’re into the thinning—all at our own expense,” Lee said. “If you’ve been to business school, then you know that’s not exactly a positive return on investment. But we’re doing it because we think it’s the right thing to do.”



Tour attendees visited a harvest site in a 900-acre stand of Atlantic white cedar in Burlington County, New Jersey, where a blow-down occurred on part of the site and other areas are in decline due to the presence of an unnamed type of *phytophthora* root rot.

And so, despite the one-two punch of an active environmental community opposed to tree cutting of any kind and state and federal agencies whose regulations are, in Lee’s words, “driving forestry out of New Jersey,” the Lee family, with Williams’s help, continues to manage its forests.

In fact, just before he was to speak to the tour group, Williams learned that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Forest Service and the Pinelands Commission had just approved his most recent stewardship plan for the Lee property.

“We had no problem getting our first permit, and we amended that permit to do 300 acres of clearcutting. Yet, because of the resulting controversy, when that plan expired the Pinelands Commission convened a committee—the Pinelands

Forestry Advisory Committee—to develop new forestry standards. I took part in that and, by the time those came out, I had to write a new stewardship plan for this property. That plan was approved today,” said Williams. “This is a big, big day for us.”

Out in the Field

“This is a unique thing you’re seeing here,” Williams later told the tour group at the site of that 300-acre clearcut. “You’re seeing a forest that is being restored and forest practices that, while

natural regeneration. At this site, Williams told the group about the variety of treatments he performed on the site, including triple-drum chopping to break up the dense root mat, an herbicide application, and controlled burning. He also discussed how, in addition to the trees, the area is and continues to be home to an understory with a diverse native plant community and several endangered species, including northern pine snakes, tree frogs, and endangered red-headed woodpeckers.

Finally, Williams brought the tour attendees to three sites on the 15,000-acre farm of Bill Haines, the largest cranberry producer in the state of New Jersey, where he showed them stewardship plans completely different from those on the Lee property.

The first of these sites was a 120-acre parcel of pitch pine–scrub oak forest. Before planting, different plots within the site received different site prep treatments (single- and double-drum chopping) and herbicide treatments. Now there is a diverse understory throughout the parcel. Fiber removed from the site was “flail chipped,” composted, then screened to produce a high-quality potting soil–like material. Prescribed burning had been performed on the parcel six weeks earlier. The goal is to improve the overall tree quality and produce saw logs and the potting mix.

Next was a harvest site in a 900-acre stand of Atlantic white cedar. A blow-down occurred on part of the site and other areas are experiencing a decline due to the presence of an unnamed type of *phytophthora* root rot. Williams’s silvicultural prescription is to clearcut, apply an herbicide, and then allow the site to naturally regenerate from the seed bank (assuming deer aren’t a problem). The goal is to get a sustainable net gain of cedar, meaning that, by the end of the year, if 25 acres are cut and of that amount only 20 were cedar, the landowner would gain 5 acres. The work is being paid for by the sale of the logs.

Finally, Williams led the group to a stand of four-year-old trees on a site that had been partially planted with shortleaf plugs (70 percent) and partially left to

common elsewhere, typically aren’t done here. When we site-prepped here, it looked like the beach. It was all white sand, and I can remember planting trees and thinking, ‘Oh, my, if this fails I’m out of business.’”

But it didn’t fail. What once looked like a “beach” is now thick with trees and native shrub species. On one side of a firebreak is a sea of eight-year-old shortleaf pine that, in Williams’s words, are “doing really well.” He plans to start pre-commercial thinning soon and then begin controlled burning two or three years after. On the other side, are slightly taller pitch-loblolly hybrids of the same age that have already been thinned.

Next, Williams led the group to another site on the Lee property, a 500-acre management area featuring a mix of planted native species as well as some

regenerate naturally (30 percent). It also featured some mature pine trees left during harvest and hardwood snags that resulted from a prior outbreak of gypsy moth. The objective on this site, said Williams, is to grow high-quality short-leaf saw timber.

According to Aaron J. Lumley, assistant state forester and district forester-nursery supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and chair of the Cooperative Forest Management Committee, the field trips are designed to give foresters from across the region some insight into how

forest stewardship plans are implemented in states throughout the northeastern area—an 18-state region that stretches from Minnesota south to Missouri and then east to Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio and on to West Virginia and Maryland.

“The field trips are set up to showcase forest stewardship in the northeastern area, discuss the successes and pitfalls that can be involved in doing good stewardship on the ground and with writing the plans, and really introduce foresters from other areas to what’s going on in that state,” he said.

Showcasing active landowners work-

ing with the stewardship program and demonstrating success and results from active forest management was Williams’s goal as well.

“The point of the tour was to show the potential of the forest’s productivity on all levels—from ecological enhancement to timber productivity,” he said. “It’s always great to have landowners show off their successes and, of course, it’s always important for foresters from different regions to get together and share ideas and experiences in the interest of moving forestry ahead.”