

Forest Management

by Sandy Walczyk, BHHT Forester

This past week has been hard on our forest - the late spring snowstorm , followed by rain and high gusty winds, blew over and broke a lot of trees. Such disturbances and damage are a normal part of the forest, but they also highlight how thoughtful forest management can help to create more resilient forests and preserve the ecologic and economic value of our properties.

Good forest managers understand why certain trees grow where they do, and how a forest will most likely develop over time based on soils, topography, climate and past management. They understand how removing certain trees will impact the growth of remaining trees, and the regeneration of new trees. They chose to remove certain trees, usually by harvesting, to improve the composition, structure and value of the remaining forest.

Trees compete for resources and overcrowded, stressed trees grow very slowly and are more susceptible to disease and infection. By “thinning” a forest and removing low vigor and diseased trees, we can create more growing space for healthy trees. Healthier trees are more resistant to pests and diseases and more resilient in the face of snowstorms, high winds, and a changing climate. Many of our coastal forests are also reaching old age and beginning to blow apart and fall down. If we selectively harvest some of these trees now, we can make space for the regeneration of new trees, and overtime we can encourage the forest to have a higher diversity of age and structure, which is very important for biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

With patience and thoughtful planning, there is no reason that forest management cannot protect soil and water resources, improve ecological health, and create a sustainable financial resource for a landowner. The owners of the Peter’s Brook property in Blue Hill did just this when they conducted a timber harvest on their land last winter. BHHT has an easement on this property which allows for timber harvest after review of a management plan by BHHT.

The forest at Peter’s Brook is mature but had little regeneration of young trees and had been gradually blowing apart for years. The landowners wanted to improve the structure and diversity of the forest by creating gaps in the canopy large enough to let young trees regenerate. They also wanted to capture some of the value of the forest before it blew over. The family has been working with foresters to manage their land since 1954, and they understand the value of planning and patience. After years of preparation with the company American Forest Management, and waiting for the right conditions to protect soil and water quality, the harvest was conducted last winter. Over the next few years, the changes to the landscape will soften as young trees regenerate and quickly fill in the openings in the canopy. New species of birds and other animals will use this new structure for food and nesting, and as more of the old trees die and fall down, a vigorous new forest will already be growing up beneath them.

Protecting land does not always mean preserving it from all human use, and sometimes the most effective way to protect a place is to sustainably manage it in a way that respects and improves the land while also providing the resources that we all need. Please continue to enjoy our forests, and all that they provide us, during this trying time.