

The Forest Speaks

Bringing Up Baby.....Trees

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New England forests have been manipulated by humans for centuries. But the most pronounced changes were brought on by settlers from Europe starting in the 1600's. By the early to mid 1800's, 70% of the New Hampshire forest land south of the White Mountains had been cleared, mostly for farming. Over the years, many farms were abandoned as settlers moved west, looking for new opportunities on richer farm lands. As with many forested areas in Southern NH, we see evidence of past farming on the Southeast Lands town forest property in the form of nearby old cellar holes and stone walls. As farms in southern NH were abandoned, forests reclaimed the fields and regrew with trees similar in age and species. The predominant species we find in the town forest are Eastern White Pine and various Oak species (Red, Black, Scarlet, and White), which grow well with full sun and are common in former field areas. One of the Windham Forestry Committee's goals for the town forest is to increase the age diversity and to ensure a constant influx of vigorous young trees. The art and science of establishing and tending trees and forests is called silviculture. Its purpose is to control the composition, health, structure, and growth of forest stands.

The Windham Forestry Committee is encouraging the proper management of our natural resources through sound silvicultural practices such as timber stand improvements, thinning, harvesting, and reforestation consistent with a Forest Management Plan. The planning all began with an inventory of trees on the town forest property, and a detailed Forest Stewardship Plan in 2012. This plan was written by a highly qualified, licensed NH forester who has experience working with municipalities. This 10-year plan addresses the town's interest in a multiple use concept for the land including recreation, wildlife habitat, soil and water conservation, and sound long-term timber management. The first step in achieving these goals was to mark trees on the property for thinning, targeting trees most at risk of decline for removal. This has now been completed following the prescribed method of good silvicultural practices. The advantages to the forest are more growing space for better quality trees and small openings in the forest floor with sun to encourage existing and new regeneration. Growth within these openings will encourage more dense vegetation such as low bush blueberry and other shrubby species, and tree seedlings and saplings to provide both cover and a food source for wildlife.

The next step in the process will be to invite logging contractors to bid on harvesting the marked trees. The Forestry Committee and our professional forester overseeing the project will be involved in choosing a contractor based on price offered, reputation, and ability to conduct the harvest in a conscientious and timely manner. Once a contractor is chosen, the Committee will have a better idea of when to expect the actual harvest operations to begin. Harvesting is likely to take 6-10 weeks to complete depending on the size of the contractor's business operation. Responsible timber management encourages the growth of quality trees that remain after the harvest, as well as the release of tree regeneration, in order to grow tomorrow's forest beneath the forest of today. Please keep reading our periodic articles and check our town web page for more information and updates.

www.WindhamNewHampshire.com/committees/forestry-committee

Submitted by the Windham Forestry Committee