



National Association of  
Conservation Districts

# Maine Conservation Districts Make Good Use of Demonstration Forests

*Last October, the Maine Association of Conservation Districts received the prestigious "Austin Wilkins Forest Stewardship Award" for the forestry activities of their districts. Named after one of Maine's largest contributing professional foresters, it is the only award in Maine that recognizes stewardship of the working forest. Read on to learn why the Maine ACD deserves this award.*

In Maine, demonstration forests located in York, Oxford, Somerset, and Piscataquis counties, depict best forestry management practices, active timber management, forest ecology, and responsible stewardship, while also providing educational tools for students, private woodland owners, and professional foresters.

By melding the past and present, demonstration forests reveal stories of historical events and the individuals whose inspiration and/or land donation led to their establishment. For some founders, the plan was to move a step beyond simply using sustainable forestry practices to providing proof of concept via demonstration to other Maine forestland owners.

## Sid Emery Demonstration Forest, York County

In 1947, wildfires swept through Maine over the course of several weeks burning more than 200,000 acres and forever altering some towns. Large parts of forest and agricultural land in Southern Maine were destroyed, amounting to 55,000 acres. Much of the land was abandoned and the State took it over.

For 39 years, Sid Emery, a soil and water technician with the York County Soil & Water Conservation District (YCSWCD), planted many thousands of seedlings to reforest the burnt earth. Emery was largely responsible for creating the 140-acre demonstration forest in Lyman, Maine, that bears his name. "Along with District Supervisor Alden Gile, the Sid Emery Demonstration Forest was truly a labor of love. Both spent many thousands of volunteer hours planting trees, managing trees, cutting trails, and planning," explained Melissa Brandt, Executive Director of the YCSWCD.

The district forest management plan focused on planting white pine, several red pine plantations, and doing research on how quickly the land would recover and how the new plantings might be impacted by insect

pathogens after the fire left the soil in poor condition. In 2019, the district completed a cut-to-length timber harvest as an option for forest landowners to consider.

The Sid Emery Demonstration Forest incorporates best forestry management practices for the production of forest products, as well as putting in culverts, corduroys, using portable skidder bridges and infiltration trenches, and provides for other multiple uses of the property including recreation and wildlife habitat.

According to Brandt, the greatest value of the demonstration forest to the community is that it provides a way to learn about the value of a forest management plan and what best forest management practices look like on the ground. "The 1947 fire was so devastating that for years folks did not want to take down any trees. That past is still present in the minds of many. The Sid Emery Demonstration Forest shows that, with best practices, it can still feel like a forest, but you can harvest and the forest will thrive."

## Tenmile River Demonstration Forest, Oxford County

Oxford County, too, was devastated by the Great Fire of 1947. Today, the physical scars of the fires have been largely erased or hidden beneath layers of younger soil, yet lingering evidence of the conflagration remains.

The area that is now the Tenmile River Demonstration Forest was acquired by the Oxford County Soil and Water Conservation District (OCSWCD) in the early 1950's, through the donations of local landowners. Today the Tenmile River Demonstration Forest consists of 327 acres on the Brownfield/Hiram town line in southwestern Maine.

The Forest is bordered by Tenmile River, a pristine, free flowing stream on the west side, and Round Pond, a freshwater marsh/pond on the east side. The habitat diversity on the property is impressive for such

a relatively small forested land tract including a red and a white pine plantation, pitch pine/scrub oak, northern red oak/beech upland forest, six different types of wetland habitats including a kettle hole bog, inland waterfowl and wading bird habitat, and vernal pools.

Forty acres of the original parcel were replanted with white and red pine in the late 50's and early 60's with the intent of providing income for the district as well as serving as an example of wise forest management. "The fire sterilized the soil," said Merle Ring, retired State Forester and District Board Member. "In some of the 'hot areas,' you can see the pines are not doing as well."

Educational programming on the site and interpretive signage explain the District's efforts to improve the timber stands, promote regeneration of pine, protect water quality, conserve and protect soil, conserve special wildlife habitat, and encourage compatible recreational activities.

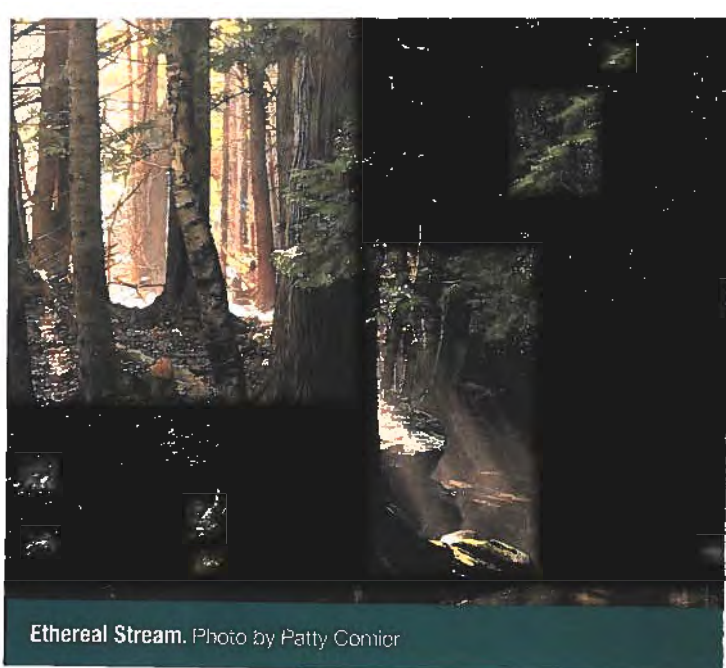
The District implements important habitat conservation as well by protecting the riparian habitat of the streams and rivers it encompasses, the inland waterfowl, wading birds, and other wetland habitat, vernal pool habitat, as well as protection of pitch pine/scrub oak habitat, which is in decline statewide. Michele Windsor, Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Oxford County SWCD explains, "Being located in the Saco River Watershed, one of Maine's most valued and significant watersheds, the Tenmile River Demonstration Forest exemplifies the diversity of its natural forest and wetland communities, helps people understand how they can be wisely managed, and protects them for future generations."

Says Oxford County SWCD Board supervisor Ring: "The Tenmile Demonstration Forest represents an outstanding example of conservation districts working to provide the public with both recreation and education of our natural resources."

#### Yankee Woodlot, Somerset County

The Yankee Woodlot, as the demonstration forest is called, was developed in the 1980's when there was a statewide initiative underway to establish one demonstration area per county in Maine. Though owned by the State of Maine, Somerset County SWCD holds a 25-year lease (renewable) on the woodlands, to be used as a demonstration forest.

The 280 acre parcel is typical of central Maine terrain, emerging from abandoned pasture and cropland in the 1930's. The woodlands are a mix of mostly



Ethereal Stream. Photo by Patty Conior

eastern hemlock, sugar maple, yellow birch, quaking aspen, balsam fir, eastern white pine, white ash, and northern red oak.

All aspects of managing a woodland are demonstrated here, from tree identification, boundary line marking, harvest planning and conduct, while emphasizing the importance of natural resource features for wildlife and forest management. Harvests are conducted to demonstrate different strategies, such as crop tree release, species selection, thinning for improved growth of remaining trees, patch cuts, and white pine stand management—all in different areas to provide examples to landowners of what practices can be used in keeping with their objectives.

Brockway's enthusiasm was evident as she talked about a new program called Women Owning Woodlands. "Women are sole or co-owners of over half of woodland properties nationwide, yet the data show that women are far less likely than men to participate in management activities. With forest stewardship a critical piece in any global climate change solution, it just makes sense to focus some of our activity around educating and empowering our women woodland owners. That is why we are piloting Women Owning Woodlands at Yankee Woodlot: to provide much-needed opportunities for women to join with their peers and gain the knowledge and confidence that leads to actively participating in forest stewardship," explained Brockway.

According to Somerset County SWCD Executive Director Joe Dembeck "The greatest value of our demonstration forest is that it allows for interested

landowners, resource professionals, and the public to interact with educational workshops ranging from tree identification, harvest planning and conduct, wildlife habitat, invasive plant management, apple tree pruning, and numerous other forestry topics.”

### Williamsburg Demonstration Forest, Piscataquis County

The Williamsburg Demonstration Forest is located in Piscataquis County and consists of 180 acres of mostly forestland. The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District acquired the property in 1980 from the U.S. Forest Service. Supervisors of the District worked tirelessly to make sure the District was deeded the property for educational and public use.

The Williamsburg Demonstration Forest is a certified Tree Farm as part of the American Tree Farm System. A red pine plantation and a tamarack plantation was planted there by the University of Maine. Much of the property is high and dry, but there is a canyon wetland, a scenic overlook with an outdoor classroom, vernal pools, and a geocache. A trail system of 2.5 miles is open to the public year round for hiking, birdwatching, snowshoeing, and cross-country

skiing. Throughout the network are colorful and informative displays about forestry practices, local wildlife, and the history of the property.

Forest management is an integral part of the demonstration forest. A variety of harvest sites are seen, including an area where pre-commercial thinning of softwood has taken place and an example of shelterwood harvesting.

According to Lynn Lubas, Technical Coordinator at the Piscataquis County SWCD, “The Williamsburg Demonstration Forest is an outstanding example of maintaining forestland in a sustainable way using different techniques such as crop tree release, thinning and harvesting mature trees, while at the same time providing a healthy forestland for wildlife and the public”.



Linda Brownson lives in the western foothills of the White Mountains in Wentworth, NH, where she manages 200 acres of mixed northern hardwoods and conifers for wildlife habitat. She is NACD Executive Board member for the Northeast Region and President-elect of the New Hampshire

Timberland Owners Association.

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