

Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District 2020 Cooperator Newsletter

Release Date: 11/18/2020



PCSWCD celebrates past recipients of our Outstanding Cooperator of the Year Award, honored for excellence in forestry, in our "Blast from the Past" article on page 7 & 8.

Photo left: Mel Ames, 1928-2020.

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*An opportunity to get involved
with issues concerning
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Please consider participating in a
Piscataquis County Soil and Water
Conservation District Board Meeting.

Learn more about
environmental concerns and
natural resource management
in Piscataquis County,
how they are being addressed,
and how you can provide volunteer help.

The meetings are published on our
Facebook page and are via Zoom.

Please call 564-2321 extension 3 or
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with any questions you might have.

*Sarah or Kacey will be happy to speak
with you!*

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WHAT AND WHO IS A COOPERATOR?

Cooperators are individuals (or entities) who have (an agreement) with PCSWCD, NRCS or FSA. The individual or organization “cooperates” with the USDA offices by developing and managing their lands in ways that reflect land and water suitably with good management practices.

The PCSWCD, NRCS and FSA assist cooperators to meet their land use goals by providing them with technical guidance related to the land uses with which they participate. The USDA offices also may provide cost-share assistance for some land use activities.

In providing cooperators with technical assistance, the District acts independently or coordinates with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. District staff can help cooperators learn about NRCS programs available to them, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that provides financial assistance to land managers to help them install conservation practices addressing resource concerns.

LOCAL WORKING GROUP MEETING NOTICE

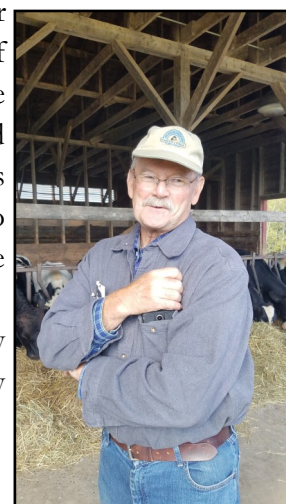
The 2022 Local Working Group (LWG) is scheduled for Thursday, December 3, 2020 starting at 10AM and ending at 12PM. This meeting will be held only as a Zoom meeting in accordance with CDC guidelines of minimizing in-person gatherings and NRCS office visitor policy. A key component in NRCS program delivery, the LWG is made up of farmers, foresters, landowners, personnel from agencies involved in natural resource management, and the general public working in Piscataquis County. The purpose of this group is to provide guidance to NRCS concerning the implementation of conservation programs in Piscataquis County. The LWG advises NRCS on the environmental concerns in the area and determining local natural resource priorities. NRCS advises the LWG of the 2018 Farm Bill updates, the local application process, including ranking criteria and application periods, and eligible conservation practices. For more information and to register to attend this meeting, please contact the Piscataquis County SWCD at 207-564-2321 ext. 3 from Monday-Friday, 8am until 4:30pm or by email at info@piscataquisswcd.org.

MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD OF SUPERVISORS CHAIR, TOBY HALL

Despite the challenges and restrictions imposed by the pandemic, Piscataquis County Soil & Water Conservation District still accomplished a considerable list of programs and services, which included our annual fish and plant sales, public education workshops and volunteer work days. Our Technical Coordinator, Lynn Lubas’ retirement was recognized by the dedication of the new Bluebird Trail at the Law Farm. Through a new contract with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) we were able to expand our committed staff work hours and create a full time Project Manager for stream restoration for aquatic wildlife. This position strengthens the partnership bond between NRCS, TNC and PCSWCD who will now be working together to provide private landowners with the ability to upgrade road and stream crossings.

I am thankful to our staff, board members and volunteers who have dedicated many hours above and beyond. I look forward to a new year of serving our local community and meeting our mission goals – with or without Zoom!

Toby Hall



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP) CONTINUES WITH THE NATURE CONSERVANCY & PCSWCD'S STREAM RESTORATION WORK

During the past 6 months, 8 Aquatic Organism Passages (AOP) were completed in Piscataquis county which freed up a total 5.55 stream miles of upstream aquatic habitat! These projects all reside in priority habitat for Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout, and trout were seen at several sites after construction. Also, heron and mink tracks were identified using the new passages!

This summer, PCSWCD's Stream Restoration Project Manager, Emily Dickison, conducted 18 road-stream crossing assessments for 5 landowners. Of those crossings, 12 are potential AOP sites for 2021. It has been a busy first field season for the District and it has been rewarding to participate in and witness conservation in this county!

The Maine Aquatic Connectivity Restoration Project is a five-year, \$6 million effort that provides significant financial and technical assistance to private landowners to upgrade road-stream crossings. The project improves road safety and stability while increasing opportunities for fish and other aquatic life to thrive. Made possible through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the project is available from 2018-2022. The project is supported by a collaboration of 26 tribal, state, federal, nonprofit, and private landowners, and covers 25,255 square miles of project area, including the last endangered Atlantic salmon-listed watersheds in the U.S. and critical Eastern brook trout habitat. The overall goal is to restore aquatic organism passage to at least 50 miles of stream, brook, and river habitat. As construction season comes to a close, we are underway to meeting that goal!



Photo left:
Site before
AOP stream
restoration.



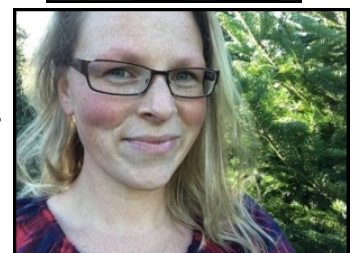
Photo right:
Site after.

PERSONNEL CHANGES IN THE PISCATAQUIS NRCS OFFICE

Landowners involved with programs through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) are now working with a few new faces. Seth Jones started as the Piscataquis County District Conservationist (DC) in March 2020. Seth has worked with NRCS for 18 and 1/2 years and held a position as District Conservationist in Presque Isle prior to joining us in the Dover-Foxcroft office.

For several years, NRCS cooperators have worked with Lynn Lubas, as she provided administrative support to the DC position in our office. Lynn retired at the end of August 2020 and PCSWCD Educational Coordinator Kacey Weber has stepped in to take over Lynn's NRCS responsibilities.

Two new faces, same great service! Seth and Kacey look forward to working with you all!



**SPOTLIGHT ON PCSWCD'S CONSERVATION PARTNERS:
*JESSICA LEAHY & STUDENTS, SCHOOL OF FOREST RESOURCES, UMAINE***

Jessica Leahy, Professor of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources School of Forest Resources Program at University of Maine, Orono has been working with the PCSWCD for years now and growing our partnership through exciting student-led projects for the District. From technical work with GIS Mapping at the Demonstration Forest, to a Capstone Forest Management Project and building new bog bridges at the Law Farm, Dr. Leahy and her students have actively partnered with our District in hugely impactful and beneficial ways.

Our partnership blossomed when PCSWCD was exploring options for renewing the current Forest Management Plan (FMP) for the Law Farm. Kirby Ellis, one of the foresters that worked on the original management plan, shared an idea to pull in UMaine Forestry students to help complete the FMP renewal for their senior Capstone project. It was a natural fit to ask Leahy her thoughts on this idea and it was quickly decided that the forestry students mentored by consulting forester Kirby Ellis would work on their senior capstone project by writing a forest management plan for Law Farm. Their work on the FMP is already underway and will be completed in the spring in a SFR492 *Senior Capstone course*.

Soon after the Capstone students began visiting the Law Farm to start planning for the FMP, Leahy came to us again with an opportunity to work with other Forestry students from the SFR478 *Tools for Forest Management course* for a volunteering opportunity. With bog bridging left on our "to-do" list for the Law Farm, we knew these students would be the perfect fit for the job. Seven forestry students met Sarah Robinson, Executive Director, Kacey Weber, Education Coordinator and Junior Representative, Kylie Dow, on the trails at the Law Farm where first donuts were consumed then heavy lifting began! Earlier in the season, we had a volunteer cut bog bridge planks from fallen tree and two PCSWCD board members went to the Law Farm to cut the footings for the needed bridging. On the volunteer work day with the students, they walked along the trail, lugging the planks and cedar footings, and instinctively plucked honeysuckle and tucked them into branches to dry. Within an hour and a half these super power seniors had the bridging in place and nailed down, ready to be walked on. With their help, we now have visitors enjoying dry boots when they walk this part of the trail system. When reflecting on the day, Dr. Leahy shared "these days, our 'tools' in modern forestry are more often than not software, so it was a treasure to have last week's focus be on Recreation Management and have the tools used be ACTUAL tools (and their hands)!"



Article continued on page 6. . .

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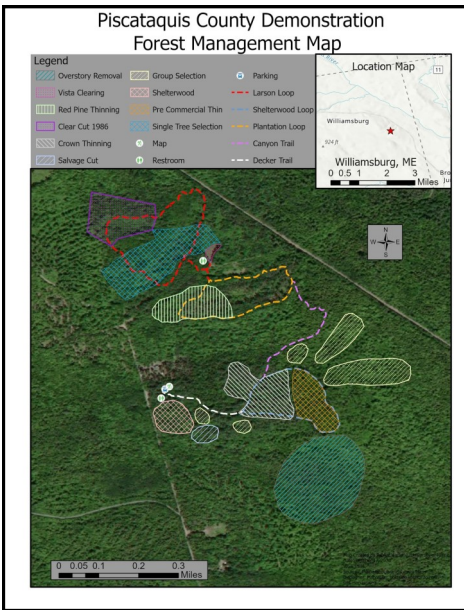
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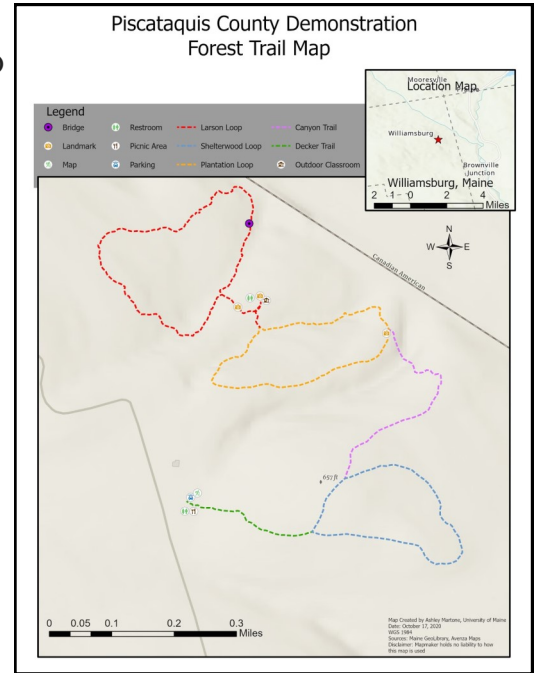
Greenhouse/Nursery



Continued from page 5...As if those two projects weren't enough, Leahy coordinated with the PCSWCD and 2 undergraduate research assistants in the Leahy Lab to undertake updating the Demonstration Forest trail and management maps. These two students met with one of PCSWCD's Board members to walk the trails and update the much needed mapping for recreational and forestry purposes. Their mapping work was not part of a class assignment. Leahy shared "having the opportunity to do field work while also helping a fabulous organization was a great way for me to diversify their work, use their skills, and meet our goals of having a solid UMaine-PSWCD partnership." Now when visitors enjoy the Demonstration Forest, they can clearly see landmarks and the trail system accurately with the recreational

trail map. The recreational trail map PDF file can be downloaded from the www.piscataquisswcd.org website! With these georeferenced PDF files and the Avenza Map App downloaded on your phone, the blue dot will show you where you are!

PCSWCD is extremely grateful for the partnership with Jessica Leahy and the work produced by her and her wonderful students. We hope to continue developing opportunities for UMaine and appreciate the hard work these students have put into both our public lands. On behalf of all the Board of Supervisors and staff we thank you Jessica Leahy and all the students involved!



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Customers not already in contact with Lowe's are asked to email bugwatch@maine.gov or call 207-287-7545.

DEPARTMENT OF
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A BLAST FROM THE PAST: PCSWCD FORESTRY COOPERATORS OVER THE YEARS

Year after year, the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) has recognized and honored a Cooperator (land manager) of the Year. All across the county, we have celebrated many individuals (or entities) who have implemented exceptional conservation practices on their land through an agreement with PCSWCD, NRCS or FSA. The individual or organization “cooperates” with the USDA offices by developing and managing their lands in ways that reflect land and water suitably with good management practices. PCSWCD rotates the award every other year between Forestry Cooperators and Agriculture Cooperators.

This year, the PCSWCD chose to postpone our Forestry Cooperator of the Year award due to the emergency shut down caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With a new honoree not being named in 2020, we decided it would be an opportunity for us to showcase a “*Blast From the Past*,” and highlight a few of the previous Forestry Cooperators of the Year. We have selected a few memories to share with our newsletter readers, enjoy!



Above: Mel Ames in his woods. Below: Mel and Betty Ames.



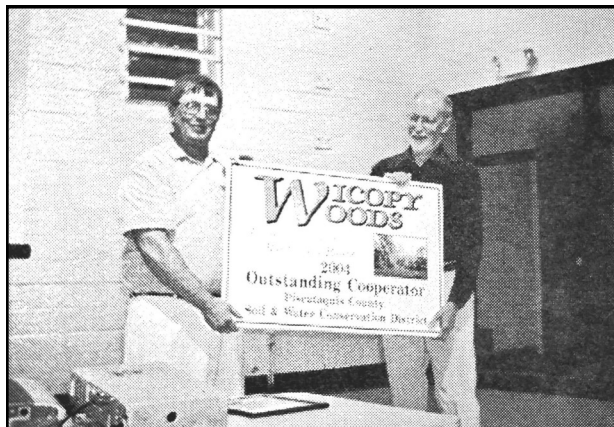
In honor of Melvin G. Ames Sr. (1928-2020), we would like to remember our 1991 and 2013 Outstanding Cooperators, Mel & Betty Ames of Ames Tree Farms. Mel also received the Outstanding Tree Farmer Award for Maine in 1957, among many other notable achievements such as serving on the Board of Supervisors for PCSWCD, County Board for Cooperative Extension, and serving as a charter member of the Forest Products, Marketing and Management Association and Cooperative (later known as Woodland Owners of Maine). Mel also served as president of Maine Woodsman’s Association and held a seat as a County Commissioner and selectman in both the towns of Sebec and Atkinson. He served for the advisory committee for Scientific study for Baxter State Park and started the Wood Harvest Program at Charleston Correctional Facility. For over 65 years, Mel Ames had been managing “a living trust for future generations” – the forests around him. According to Mel, “here in Maine we are filled with forests and trees like Texas has oil. It is the resource, and we have great potential here!” He loved his woods and his family, and worked as a woodsman all his life. Rest in peace, you will be remembered.

With Christmas just around the corner, we want to recall the Cooperator of

the Year award given to James and Jeanene LaCasce and their son Duane and wife Joy of Finest Kind Christmas Tree Farm. Twenty years ago, Finest Kind Christmas Tree Farm was recognized for their best management practices in their woodlands and for their tree farm education. PCSWCD hosted an annual banquet where James provided a tour of the woodlot. They displayed tree plantations with grafting, examples of fungus and insect damages, and showcased a new trial species. Duane, Joy and Matt LaCasce continue to run and operate the family Christmas Tree Farm, located in Dover-Foxcroft.

In 2004, Ron Locke owned Wicopy Woods in Sebec and was awarded PCSWCD’s Cooperator of the Year.

Article continued on page 8...



Ron Locke receiving his Outstanding Cooperator award in 2004.

*Continued from page 7...*The 130-acre forest has remained an exceptional working forest and Locke's work continues with a combination of past management and new goals set forth by new owners Dr. Jessica Leahy and Dr. Bob Seymour. Under Locke's management he was also awarded the Maine Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year in 1984. Locke was a PCSWCD District Supervisor and worked for many years and was instrumental in obtaining the District's Demonstration Forest in Williamsburg Township. Locke's legacy is now carried on by Leahy and Seymour, as an ideal Forest Stewards Guild Model. Further, Leahy and Seymour were most recently awarded the 2020 Maine Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year.



Bob Seymour and Jessica Leahy, current owners of Wicopy Woods, Sebec, ME.

PCSWCD Forestry Cooperator of the Year Award Recipients from the past 10 years:

The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) of Greenville ME was awarded in 2018 at their wilderness lodge, Medawisla. We awarded Between the Rivers in 2015 at their education center in Shirley. Mel and Betty Ames of Atkinson ME were awarded in 2013. Richard and Sylvia Johnson of Sebec ME were award in 2011.



Lastly, in this "Blast from the Past" article, we wanted to share an extraordinary accomplishment and say a big thank you to Donna Coffin. 2020 marks 25 years that Donna has served on our Board of Supervisors as an Associate Supervisor. Thank you Donna for 25 years of knowledge, guidance and volunteering your time to us!



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BE A PART OF THE LAW FARM WITH PCSWCD'S DEDICATED BENCH PROGRAM

If you have visited the Law Farm nature trails since 2019, you may have noticed the beautiful benches that are placed around the property. There is a bench that overlooks the field where hazelnut, American chestnut and frasier fir trees are planted, another overlooks a quiet field and another that looks out are a series of bluebird nest boxes. These beautiful benches offer a quiet place to enjoy nature, beautiful views and a connection to the land.

The bench that looks out at the bluebird boxes sits alongside our Bluebird Trail and is dedicated to Lynn Lubas for her 12 years of service to the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District. If you visit the bench, you will find the bench has a beautiful metal plaque honoring Lynn.

In an effort to further connect the public to the Law Farm, continue the great work at the property and offer a unique, meaningful opportunity to the public, the PCSWCD has created our *Dedicated Bench Program*. Folks can choose from the remaining two benches placed along the property and dedicate one to a loved one. A donation of \$250 to the PCSWCD will include the bench dedication and a plaque that will be installed on the bench. Your donation will also help to maintain the trails and public space at the Law Farm, ensuring it as a quality public land for all to enjoy for years to come.

For more information on our *Dedicated Bench Program* and how you can dedicate a bench to your loved ones, please be in touch with Sarah Robinson, Executive Director, PCSWCD, 207-564-2321 ext. 3, info@piscataquisswcd.org. As we continue to improve and develop the Law Farm, there will be other dedication and adoption programs like our *Dedicated Bench Program* and therefore more ways for the public to make a lasting mark on the property!



Benches for Dedication from left to right: 1st photo—Field View Bench location, 2nd photo—Field View Bench view, 3rd photo—Kiosk & Agroforestry Bench view, 4th photo—Kiosk & Agroforestry Bench location.

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2020 LAKE SMART REPORT

The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District has been offering LakeSmart evaluations since 2017 and has served as a LakeSmart HUB since 2019. For those unfamiliar with the LakeSmart program: this program is free, voluntary and geared towards waterfront property owners looking to address erosion concerns on their property. The program also offers a LakeSmart award for properties that serve as an example of “living lightly on the lake” and are laid out in a way to offer full protection to the water resource from any erosion. LakeSmart is administered by Maine Lakes and the program is offered through HUBs that have trained volunteers who complete LakeSmart evaluations. Waterfront property owners connect with the local HUBs in their area and request an evaluation. The LakeSmart program is an effective program for combating soil erosion and lake pollution as it provides education and low-cost, easy solutions for homeowners.

The PCSWCD has seen a steady increase in evaluations completed since 2017, but 2020 has been by-far our busiest LakeSmart year. After closing our office doors to the public in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked quickly to restructure our offerings. Postponing some of our in-person educational offerings allowed an opportunity for more field work, including LakeSmart evaluations. Since May, Kacey, our Educational Coordinator and LakeSmart HUB Coordinator, has completed 15 evaluations and awarded 4 LakeSmart awards. These evaluations were completed on Sebec Lake, Schoodic Lake, Lower and Upper Wilson Pond, Bennett Pond and Whetstone Pond. Folks sought out the LakeSmart program to help with problem solving issues on their property including erosion occurring on driveways, run off from camp roads impacting their properties, bank erosion along their shorelines, preparation for new construction and much more.

The PCSWCD is hoping to grow the LakeSmart program in Piscataquis even more in 2021, further protecting our water resources. If you have a waterfront property, we strongly encourage you to reach out for a LakeSmart evaluation. There is a lot to learn and nothing to lose for participating!

FSA PROGRAMS FOR FARMERS & LANDOWNERS *Submitted by Scott Speck, County Executive Director, FSA*

Below are two current programs offered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA):

Disaster Assistance for 2020 Livestock Forage Losses: Producers in Piscataquis County are eligible to apply for 2020 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on pasture. LFP provides compensation if you suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land or fire on federally managed land. County committees can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office of qualifying drought or if a federal agency prohibits producers from grazing normal permitted livestock on federally managed lands due to qualifying fire. ***You must complete a CCC-853 and the required supporting documentation no later than February 01, 2021, for 2020 losses.*** For additional information about LFP, including eligible livestock and fire criteria, contact the FSA County Office at 207-474-8323 ext. 2 or visit fsa.usda.gov.

The Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2: This program pays direct cash benefits to producers of livestock, fruits, vegetables, grains, flowers, aquaculture, Christmas trees, honey, maple sap/syrup, and many more who have been directly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Specifics can be found at www.farmers.gov/cfap. ***Signup deadline is December 11th, 2020.***

CARBON CONVERSATION WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

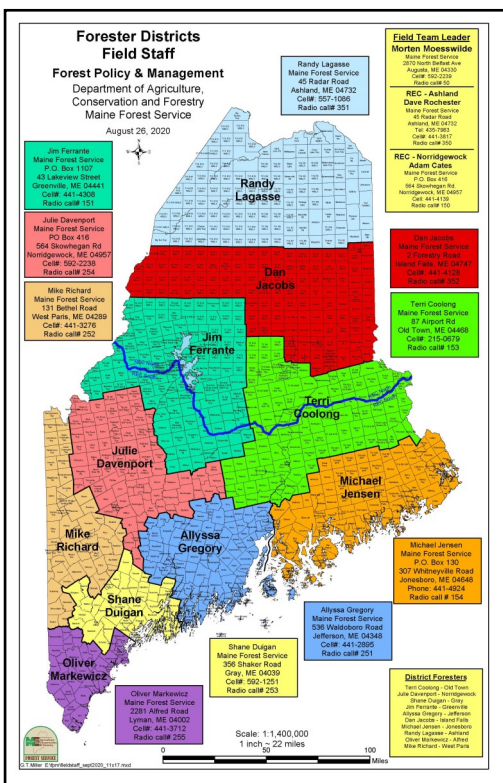
On October 4th, 2020, our District held an outdoor discussion centered around Carbon in the forest. This event was named Carbon Conservation: The Forest’s Role in Storing and Sequestering Carbon and this cutting-edge program came together through a collaborative effort between the Piscataquis and Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association’s Low Impact Forestry Program and the Maine Forest Service. The program ran from 12:30-4:30PM and was held outdoors at the Law Farm. Presenters include Andrew Shultz and Jereme Frank of the Maine Forest Service, David Rocque of Maine DACF and contributions from several others.

Since carbon in the forest is an emerging concept, we designed this as a discussion with goals to share information, help guide conversations and inform on the direction forest management may be going relating to carbon. Presenters for Carbon Conservation presented information on how to understand the terms - sequestration vs. storage - when thinking about carbon in our forests. Carbon is cycled through and stored in the forests differently than in agricultural systems. The landowners that joined us for the discussion shared their goals for managing their land with carbon sequestration in mind and we all discussed ways to have constructive conversations about carbon with the foresters and loggers working on your land.

There was much discussion around the recently produced publication from UMass Amherst, titled Forest Carbon. The publication can be downloaded and read here: https://masswoods.org/sites/masswoods.org/files/Forest-Carbon-web_1.pdf Landowners, forest industry workers or citizens wanting or needing to understand climate change and carbon further should take a few moments to review this publication as it is done exceptionally well.

The PCSWCD hopes to offer this discussion again and perhaps take this offering and eventually turn it into a series of workshops centered around carbon sequestration and storage in forests. Stay tuned and be sure to join us for our next Carbon Conversation!

WELCOME DISTRICT FORESTER JIM FERRANTE



Jim Ferrante is originally from Rowley, MA. He earned his bachelor’s degree in Forestry from the UMass Amherst in May 2012. His family owns a wood lot in Corinna, Maine, where he has spent a lot of time enjoying outdoor recreation such as hunting and fishing and where Jim developed a fascination with trees, the forest and where he has honed his passion for practicing silviculture. Jim joined the Maine Forest Service in the fall of 2020, after relocating from New Hampshire, where he worked for a small family-owned forestry consulting company. He has a great deal of experience in both invasive plant and insect species mitigation and control, timber harvest supervision, as well as forest management planning. In his spare time, Jim is a passionate angler, and enjoys spending as much time outside as possible with his wife and two dogs, and is looking forward to becoming a father in the spring. ***District Foresters are a FREE and excellent resource for landowners in Maine. Have you connected with your District Forester?*** Use the map to the left for contact information. The PCSWCD is looking forward to working with Jim and welcomes him!



PCSWCD's Chainsaw Safety for Women Program gained national recognition when the article below was published in the [National Association of Conservation District's Forestry Notes Publication on 10/23/2020](#)

MAINE SWCD WORKSHOP CATERS TO FEMALE FOREST

LANDOWNERS: The **Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District** (SWCD) in Maine is working with women to ensure they have the skills necessary to manage the state's forestland.

In the past three years of developing and modifying the Chainsaw Safety for Women workshop, the conservation district has offered four sessions, three solely for women, and another in which at least half of the attendees were female.

"Many people in this county don't have a house with a lawn," said **Kacey Weber**, Piscataquis SWCD educational coordinator. "They have a house with wooded acreage, and our county has an aging population, so we were thinking, 'How do we aid in getting people to work on their forested lands in constructive ways?' We chose to serve women with this program, because we saw the need in this county."

Piscataquis County is the second-largest county in the state, but it is among the least populated. Of its 17,500 people, 45 percent are over the age of 45; more than 17 percent are over age 65, and just under 10 percent are women living alone.

"Primarily, what we're seeing are women who have lost their significant others, where they are left with acreage to care for," said **Weber**. "And how can they do that when they're struggling to find arborists and people to come out and help?"

In 2018, the conservation district developed the safety program with an eye on assisting those landowners. The initial course offered 15 slots, and the demand pushed the workshop into a second day, offering another full session to accommodate the number of women who signed up on the waiting list.

"That first year we saw an overwhelming 'Yes, we need this,'" **Weber said**. "And that first year, we had men who came to us and said, 'Hey, why don't you do this for us, we need it, too.' This is a program we've played with trying to meet the demand."

The workshop provides a foundation for how to use a chainsaw, with varying starting levels for women who have used one in the past or are just picking one up for the first time. Some of the basics include terminology, personal protective equipment (PPE), chainsaw strip down to learn components and function, as well as putting it back together for use on a cut demonstration site. There, attendees go over and practice basic cuts.

Participants bring their own PPE and chainsaws and learn proper fitting and different chainsaw options for different management needs.

Last year, the conservation district opened the course to men and women. This year, they flipped back to women-only and expanded into a level two session, conducting the workshop over a weekend in September. The second level is hands-on, conducted in the woods, and focuses on working on several different situations that may be encountered when managing forests, including what to do if a tree is hung up and how to clear an area.

One person in attendance had experienced a tree hang up while cutting firewood, while another nearly broke a leg dealing with a spring pole incorrectly. A woman in her 70s had a storm ravage her forestland and no one to come help. Now, she's "going to town on her property," **Weber said**.

"We're taking a variety of people from a variety of different situations and giving them information so they can go to their woods and operate safely in a way they need to," **she said**. "The impact of this course is profound. It's really empowering."





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OUR HARD-WORKING STAFF



From left to right: Sarah Robinson, Executive Director; Kacey Weber, Educational Coordinator; Emily Dickison, Stream Restoration Project Manager

OUR DEDICATED BOARD MEMBERS



From left to right, top to bottom: Toby Hall, Chairman; Janet Sawyer, Treasurer; Gordon Moore, Supervisor; Steve Tatko, Associate Supervisor; Donna Coffin, Associate Supervisor; Sam Brown, Associate Supervisor; Sue Mackey Andrews, Supervisor; Mike Pouch, Associate Supervisor; Kylie Dow, Junior Representative

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