



# Minnesota forests

May/June 2008

www.mnforest.com

The MFA works on behalf of family forest owners, through education and advocacy, to promote stewardship of woodlands.

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## 2008 MFA Spring Field Days Big Woods, Big Turnout, Big Success!

The MFA Spring Field Days and Annual Meeting event was held on May 16th and 17th at Cabela's in Owatonna. It was a glorious weekend to be touring and talking about the great outdoors!

More than 60 people gathered to learn more about planting and pruning high-value hardwoods, restoring wetlands and prairies, and establishing easements.

On Friday afternoon, tours buses whisked participants to various woodland and habitat restoration sites. This gave them the opportunity to view the various forestry and habitat demonstrations up close and personal and ask questions from the experts on topics ranging from butternut cankers to burning schedules for prairies. The day was topped off by the MFA Annual Meeting, banquet, and a presentation about oak savannas.

After an early Saturday morning wildflower hike led by Dick Peterson, MN DNR, participants spent the morning in seminars learning about estate planning, conservation easements, and carbon credits.

If you missed the 2008 MFA Spring Field Days, plan to attend our session next year in Ottertail County. You don't want to miss this opportunity to learn how to nurture and grow your woodlands and share successes (and near misses!) with other like-minded land stewards.



Gary Michaels, DNR Forester, shares information about pruning with John Rose of Underwood and David Adams of Brooklyn Park.

## A Sizable Property Tax Break for Managed Woodlands Now Nearing Reality

By Bruce ZumBablen

As part of two Omnibus Tax Bills, the 2008 Legislature passed and the Governor is close to signing (as of May 27) into law new provisions for woodland owners. Those landowners who hold not less than 20 acres or more than 1,920 acres have an opportunity to reduce their property taxes by 35 percent!

There are two conditions woodland owners must meet to qualify for the tax break: They must have a management plan that meets

the Sustainable Forest Incentive Act (SFIA) standards; and they must not have enrolled their woodland under the SFIA (intended to prevent double dipping). If you don't have a forest stewardship management plan, now is the time to get one. Apply at your local MN DNR Forestry office.

The property tax details are described in the statutes as "Class 2c managed forest land."

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# Minnesota State Tree Farmers of the Year

The Minnesota Tree Farm program has more than 1,800 farms enrolled with a total of 220,000 acres under management. This "Family Forest" program is well suited to continue to help small, privately owned Minnesota forests thrive into the future.

The 2008 Minnesota State Tree Farmers of the Year announced at the MFA Spring Field Days evening program truly represented the idea of forest management being a family affair. This year's winners, the Ploof brothers of Morrison County, have enjoyed and managed their family woods together for more than 20 years.

What began as a tree-planting project on the family farm in Culdrum Township evolved into a forest with nearly 40 native species. The woods boast pine, mixed hardwoods, aspen, and even apple trees scattered among 770 acres. Forester Bob Perleberg notes that "the Ploof brothers could plant a tree in a rock and it would grow."

Congratulations to the Ploof brothers, Minnesota State Tree Farmers of the Year, and all the regional winners. They are true land stewards and true inspirations!

*Middle right: Bob DeRoche, MN Tree Farm Program (right), congratulates Southern Region Minnesota Tree Farmers of the Year David and Carole Cartwright.*

*Lower right: NE Region Minnesota Tree Farmers of the Year are John and Kathy Saumer, pictured with Bob DeRoche (right).*

*Not pictured: Northern Region Minnesota Tree Farmers of the Year Gary and Ida Johnson from Roseau.*

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*Property-tax Break continued from page 1*



*2008 Minnesota Tree Farmers of the Year are the Ploof brothers from Morrison County. Left to right: Galen, Tom, Peter, and Doug.*



They require a woodland owner to apply to their county assessor for the tax break. The assessor, with the assistance of the MN DNR, must then verify that the property qualifies for the reduced rate. The new provisions are effective for taxes payable in 2009 and thereafter.

The MN Department of Revenue (DOR) will be preparing guidance to county assessors on how to implement the new tax provisions. MFA has been invited to meet with DOR and DNR officials to discuss the details.

For landowners who prefer to receive annual incentive payments from the state under the SFIA rather than receive the property tax break,

*Forester Tom Kroll explains the provisions of the new tax law at the MFA Spring Field Days. He notes that property taxes are a big concern for family forest owners.*





# Highlights from the MFA Spring Days Tours

## Pruning and Thinning in High-value Stands

Ron Maas doesn't appear to be a man who watches a lot of television. For nearly 20 years, he has been intensively managing about 18 acres of hardwoods on his property near Owatonna. While that may not seem like a lot of work, consider that Maas has chosen to hand-nurture thousands of red oak and black walnut seedlings into stands of mature, high-value hardwoods.

While some of these trees are nearly 20 years old, they aren't nearly ready for harvest. That's down the line. In the meantime, they are meticulously fertilized; weeds are controlled with Roundup and other herbicides.

At the age of five, trees were pruned on a rotating basis to encourage an excellent shape and to remove branches that may cause defects in the high-quality wood. Maas' goal is 17 feet of clear-stem veneer lumber. To accomplish the back-breaking work, Maas wears a special shoulder harness to heft the pruner; even so, most pruning excursions are limited by shear strength to one tank of gas.

The hard part may actually be in thinning the stands. It's hard to pick which tree to remove when so many look good. During this past winter, Maas employed the Rule of Three (see sidebar) and managed to cut about one-third of the trees in his plantations. Still, he knows he has to go back soon and make even harder decisions about which trees to remove.

**Foresters use the Rule of Three to decide which trees to thin. Start with a group of three trees and pick the two best crop trees that are vigorous, dominant or codominant, and have little defect. When choosing trees to leave, always start with the first tree beyond the last one chosen, even though it MAY have been considered in previous selection. On corners, choose from both directions. And the best advice? Always ask a forester for his/her opinion before thinning!**

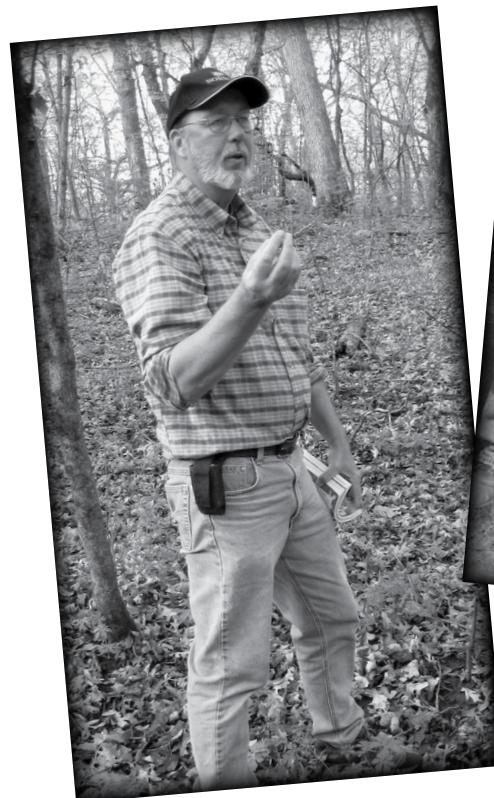
**Why plant so many trees to begin with if you're going to thin back anyway to a smaller number? Why not just plant the exact trees you want to establish your goal for stand density? As DNR Forester Dick Peterson points out, by planting additional trees, you get a choice of stock and individuals. It's like interviewing 10 people for a job instead of one!**

*Photo background by Eli Sagor (Flickr: esagor).*



*Top: Pruning in a thinned stand of red oaks.*

*Bottom: Ron Maas talks about his red oak and walnut plantations.*



*Above: Doug Applegren of Kerrick and Lowell Thornber of Roseville examine a stand of thinned walnut.*

*Left: Dick Peterson, MN DNR, explains the Rule of Three.*



## Preserving Your Land, Preserving Your Heritage

Surrounded by lakes, streams, and houses sprouting like dandelions in the spring, Dick Huston and his family long ago decided that Rice County needed to better protect and restore its dwindling wild places. And the family knew they could do their small part.

MFA Spring Field Days participants got to view the Huston property near Roberds Lake in Rice County. Huston, a veterinarian, placed about 180 acres into an easement with the Minnesota Land Trust. His family specified certain conditions on the legal agreement, including how much they could increase the footprint of the house, whether additional residences would be allowed on the property, and whether or not they would fence the acres.

While families sometimes disagree on how property should be managed in the future, Huston said his children were on the same page as he and his wife. "The kids grew up knowing that you take care of things, so there was no question in their minds (that a conservation easement was right for the land)."

Many family forest owners have worked tirelessly to sustainably harvest, plant, and restore woodlands and other habitats on their acreages. They consider their land a gift in many ways, so it's little wonder that they would like to preserve this gift for future generations.

A conservation easement, or legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified land protection organization that usually involves the transfer of development rights, is one of many ways to permanently protect and preserve woodlands and other wild places. Conservation easements are not one-size-fits-all; they are tailored to the landowner's needs. For more information, go to [http://www.myminnesotawoods.umn.edu/legal/lega\\_conservation.html](http://www.myminnesotawoods.umn.edu/legal/lega_conservation.html).



Top: Dick Huston talks about his woods and restored wetlands and prairies.

Above: Some of the trees planted in a former field on the Huston property.

Left: The sign says it all.



Far left: Marilyn and David Adams enjoy the bright spring day.

Left top: George Anderson and MFA Board Members John O'Reilly, Barb Spears, and Terry Helbig celebrate Minnesota's return to its growing season.

Bottom center: Participants from all over Minnesota hike to view restored wetlands and prairies at the Huston property near Faribault.





## Direct Seeding of Hardwoods

Rice County was once 70 percent covered in oak and mixed-hardwood forest. Thanks to reseeding and replanting efforts, this highly converted county is beginning to reclaim its leafy glory.

One such reforestation is occurring on land that Arnold and Ethel Sauber once owned and donated to the MN DNR. Part of a former agricultural field was seeded nine years ago with hardwoods using a converted fertilizer spreader (and lots of volunteers to step acorns into the ground). And my how this forest has grown!

The site today boasts thousands of oak, ash, walnut, and maples per acre. Strong seedlings will eventually crowd out weaker ones, and the density of the stand will naturally reduce. The tract also looks more natural, since direct seeding is a closer approximation of natural regeneration than planting trees in rows.

To learn more about seeding hardwood trees on your land, including collecting seed and planting methods, see the publication *Direct Seeding of Native Hardwood Trees* from the MN DNR (download at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/treecare/maintenance/collectingseed.html>).



*Top: The Saubers were one of the first tree farmers in Rice County. They donated their land to the MN DNR as a stewardship demonstration site.*

*Above: At right is the seeded hardwood tract that will eventually resemble the larger woods at left.*



*A big thank you to coordinator Terry Helbig who worked tirelessly to plan and coordinate the 2008 MFA Spring Field Days.*

## Big Thanks are in Order!

Thanks to all who helped make the 2008 MFA Spring Field Days and Annual Meeting a rousing success!

### DNR Lake City

Terri Helbig, Angela Yuska

### DNR Faribault

Dick Peterson, Jim Wilson  
Joe Brown, Gary Michael

### Landowners

Dick Huston, Ron Maas

### Speakers

Emily Hutchins, DNR,  
Rice Lake State Park  
Sarah Strommen, MN Land Trust  
Dave Velde and Dale Enerson,  
MN Farmers Union  
Eli Sagor, University of Minnesota  
Extension

### Cabela's

Linda Kahnke, Lisa Kubista

### Food Events Sponsored By:

Nelson Cheese, Mike Greenheck  
SE Landscape Committee,  
Lindberg Ekola  
MN Tree Farm Program,  
Bob DeRoche



*Top: Bidding on some handmade goods from the woods at the MFA silent auction.*



*Above: At the banquet on Friday, a good (and informative!) time was had by all.*

Now that we've had a successful 2008 MFA Spring Field Days, we want to make sure that everyone plans to attend the 2009 event. Next year's Spring Field Days in northern Ottertail County should be bigger and better than ever, with a focus on families! We'll have family- and kid-friendly events in beautiful north-central Minnesota, including some great fishing. Start planning now to bring your children or grandchildren to the 2009 MFA Spring Field Days!



What's new  
from...

**MyMinnesotaWoods.org**  
Your source for woodland stewardship advice



- Five things every woodland owner needs to know
- Income tax tip: One more benefit of a forest management plan
- Your changing woodland: How forests grow
- Featured forest type: The Laurentian Mixed Forest Province
- Featured link: Old lumber camp photos from the MN Historical Society

For the live version, with much more info on each topic, visit [MyMinnesotaWoods.org](http://MyMinnesotaWoods.org)



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*We hope you enjoy the copy of Sustainable Forestry: A Landowner's Manual included with your newsletter. This booklet provides an overview of sustainable forestry practices that you may wish to implement on your land. It was brought to you by the Minnesota SFI Implementation Committee. Find out more at [www.aboutsfi.org](http://www.aboutsfi.org).*

