



Annual Review 2020

2020

25 years of service to the forests
and all who depend on them.

Winter trail. Photo credit: Jerry Monkman, EcoPhotography.

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ANNUAL REVIEW



Early frost in upstate New York.
Photo credit: Dakota Wagner

Adaptation and Resilience

We looked forward to our 25th anniversary with enthusiasm and excitement, then 2020 shattered our expectations. Instead of coordinating a celebration, we found ourselves working around a pandemic and developing new safety protocols. Guild members and staff proved as resilient and adaptable as any diverse, healthy forest. In this Annual Review, you can read how we worked together, moved events online, refocused on planning, and made sure crucial field operations could continue.

Difficult times only underscored the importance of partnerships and mutual support. Members and supporters across the country reaffirmed their desire to put the forest first and demonstrate that we can balance ecological, social, and economic values.

Your support allows us to create more online learning, host safe field events, offer trainings, engage in policy advocacy, conduct ecological research, and support forest stewards.

Even as we worked to adapt to the pandemic and social distancing, the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and far too many others called for us all to affirm that black lives matter and respond to injustices and racism in our country. The Guild takes this responsibility seriously. We are taking concrete steps to be more inclusive and equitable. So far this includes increasing

our efforts to recruit new staff from communities that are underrepresented in our field, improving our staff benefits, and engaging in trainings. We are building on our Forest Stewards Youth Corps, that already enlists a diverse group of young adults eager to become natural resource professionals. Like many conservation organizations, we are asking how we can better represent all the different communities and people who benefit from forests.

Thank you for renewing your memberships and making donations that have been critical to the Guild's survival. If you haven't had a chance to show your support for the Guild recently, please do it today at www.ForestStewardsGuild.org or email membership@forestguild.org.



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Smoke impacts in Corvallis, Oregon.



Pacific Northwest

Northwesterners have faced a confluence of crises this year, and the Guild is doing what we can to support forest stewardship through these challenging times.

Kendal Martel is helping to build fire adapted communities with a HEPA air cleaner loan program in Oregon, following the lead of New Mexico's successful program. While smoke from wildfires requires a regional response, we can support individuals facing smoke impacts, particularly from prescribed fire. The loan program is part of a larger project to develop a Community Response Plan in Lake County and increase outreach and education about both wildfire and the need for prescribed fire.

Gregor Yanega is bringing the Foresters for the Birds program to the Northwest by developing a guide on bird-friendly management for working lands. As people are getting outside and thinking about wildlife, this program helps connect people to their land and engage them in forest stewardship.

To help promote ecological forestry in the region, Guild members and staff joined the planning team for the Innovative Forestry Summit. This summit is being re-imagined virtually and is planned for spring 2021. The event will help us think about how the next 25 years of ecological forestry will look.



Well-attended, but socially distanced CRP project presentation to the Rotary Club in Lakeview, Oregon.

We turned a Forest Stewardship Council certification requirement into a new partnership with forest products companies in the Northwest. Together, we've developed educational materials that promote ecological forestry. Check out our new *Supporting Forest Stewards* webpages on old growth forests, biodiversity in the Klamath-Siskiyou region, and the threat of conversion.





Lake States

Inspired to re-think strategies for collaboration, we find that together, we still make each other stronger.

We plan to pick up the cherished tradition of a Lake States Guild Gathering again in 2021 – hopefully with more than one event. Meanwhile, the virtual gatherings continue. We are working with partners to offer a three-day online symposium on Minnesota forest and wildlife issues. Consider joining this event December 8th through 10th.

We've advanced several ongoing projects from afar. We've continued discussions with a variety of partners on Natural Climate Solutions, including work on forest carbon. Lake States Foresters for the Birds programs continue planning for future efforts. A research paper regarding forest management approaches to reduce the impact of deer browse is in the works.



A brief focus on the forest floor, as we too often look up in forestry.



Reasons for optimism...a pine seedling sprouting in a fallen birch log.

Finally, we are reviewing silvicultural approaches that can enhance old forest conditions while maintaining timber production on a couple of private properties where the Guild and partners work.

The Guild developed a burn plan for the University of Minnesota's Cloquet Forestry Center (CFC) and administered burn unit prep contracts ahead of prescribed fire efforts in CFC red pine stands. These efforts will return fire to this ecosystem and serve as a terrific learning opportunity at this educational facility.

We are excited to report that we have joined the Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape partnership in central Minnesota, which is a group of partners working to combine conservation easements with sustainable management practices to protect Camp Ripley's mission and enhance natural resources in the region.



Northeast

This year's Guild focus in the Northeast has been maintaining and building connections, communication, and a strong sense of community as we've made our programs virtual and socially distanced.

This spring, an interactive webinar on *Communicating with Landowners* shared best outreach practices with foresters looking to effectively reach landowners. A more recent webinar, *Forest Management from a Landowner's Perspective*, featured two Connecticut woodland stewards who offered insights on what they look for in a professional forester and what makes for a productive working relationship. Our online Oak Resiliency Tool Kit further supports professionals.

Leaving women woodland owners without access to safe chainsaw operation training was not an option, despite COVID-19. In spring, we offered a two-part *Virtual Chainsaw Safety Workshop* followed by a weekend-long, in-person training in Maine, wherein

COVID-19 safety was paramount. Participants were empowered to build practical skills in a learning environment focused on safety even amidst these uncertain times.

August included a Forestry for Maine Birds workshop in eastern Maine. This socially distanced, outdoor event provided educational field stops in a beautiful landscape. Farther south, the North Atlantic Fire Science Exchange offered a virtual prescribed fire science workshop featuring cutting-edge fire physics modeling in the New Jersey Pine Barrens.

We started the year with a fantastic webinar series on *Forest Climate Adaptation* in partnership with the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science. The series was extended through the summer, ending with a webinar on *Climate Change Communication*. This work continues in October with the first webinar in a series co-presented with University of Maine's Forest Climate Change Initiative.



A socially distanced Women's Chainsaw Safety Workshop.



Forestry for Maine Birds presenters teaching tour participants the basics of the Handy Habitat Assessment, a tool you can use to assess habitat features in any forest. Credit: Logan Johnson



Southeast Region Manager Jennifer Chandler (left) and Region Coordinator Dakota Wagner (right) at a field site in middle-Tennessee.



Southeast

The Guild recently welcomed Jen Chandler to the team as the new Southeast Region Manager. Jen and Dakota are excited to continue work on current projects, and further expand the Guild's reach in the Southeast. Our goal is to make sustainable, ecological forestry accessible to landowners and natural resources professionals, alike.

The Southeast office has been busy implementing on-the-ground forestry efforts. In January, the Guild welcomed over 40 participants to a learn-and-burn event and S130/S190 training at the University of the South to increase capacity for prescribed fire on the Cumberland Plateau. Shortleaf pine seedlings were planted on over 575 acres on the Cumberland Plateau, and additional habitat enhancement efforts, including prescribed burns,



Southeast Region Coordinator, Dakota Wagner, collecting data for a shortleaf pine management plan on Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency's Bridgestone Firestone WMA.

will continue in late 2020 and 2021. Progress has been made toward the enhancement of bottomland hardwood forests and implementation of wildlife forestry in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley and Coastal Carolinas. We are producing management plans and continue to develop demonstration sites.

The Southeast office embraced the challenge of reaching partners, professionals, and landowners in a time when travel and personal interactions are limited. We produced an exciting series of webinars that include topics such as *Wildlife Forestry in Bottomland Hardwoods* and a full series on *Appalachian Coves*. To date, over 335 individuals have attended the live webinars, and over 250 have watched the recordings online.



Intermountain West

The Guild's Intermountain West Region office is just over a year old. This office intersects with Fire Management to provide planning expertise based on decades of collective forestry and fire experience. Our professional networks have expanded in the last year and we are finding our niche as planning experts, while supporting and learning from the other great organizations in the West. Our next challenge is to find new funding sources to support local collaborative groups that could use our planning and implementation expertise.

We completed two Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP), covering 391 square miles of Colorado's Front Range, with a new CWPP in progress. We are finding great ways to adapt to the disruptions COVID-19 created in these community-based projects, by developing video content and using technology to connect with more residents than we were able to in-person. These adaptations allow us to share new spatial analysis efforts with wildfire planners across the country. Our CWPP experiences greatly influenced a new forest management plan for Jefferson County, Colorado that considers both wildfire risks and ecological values.

We've worked to remove barriers to prescribed fire implementation by developing tools and providing clarity. Meg Matonis completed an analysis of nationwide Prescribed Burn Manager programs to help improve and expand these programs. We also led a survey of prescribed fire practitioners about liability and insurance, that we hope will lead to more confident use of this essential land management tool.



This photo is part of a Field Assessment for a CWPP.



Public hearing to share Platte Canyon CWPP results in January 2020.





Southwest

As the world felt like it was falling apart in the early spring, the Southwest office made the deliberate decision to craft something that didn't exist. We created a safe, socially distanced Forest Stewards Youth Corps Program, to continue to offer 34 underserved, local-area youth an opportunity to work on forest and ecosystem projects with two National Forests. The summer program resulted in competitive career pathways for the youth and increased capacity to complete work projects for the Forests. The fall Fire and Fuels program for young adults is currently underway following the same model.

The Guild was appointed as the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition manager this year and works with a diverse group of stakeholders to increase fire adaptation in New Mexico. The Coalition's efforts were recently tested by the lightening-started Medio wildfire, six miles from Santa Fe and just a few miles from the municipal watershed in the heart of the Fireshed. The Coalition's previous forest treatments became pivotal in suppression efforts, firefighter safety, and protecting resources in our backyard. As smoke enveloped Santa Fe, the Guild's HEPA filter loan program provided respiratory-compromised individuals some respite.

More examples of creatively adapted work in the Fireshed, and stories from our Youth Corps members are available on the Guild's website and e-newsletters. Collaborations continue as practitioners shared knowledge and ideas in the virtual *New Mexico Wildland Urban Fire Summit*. The Guild plays a large role in these collaborations and ensuring that they continue, even when it must happen online.



FSYC Fire & Fuels crew, training to safely use chainsaws while prepping burn units.



FSYC crews conduct forest restoration monitoring in a ponderosa pine forest in northern New Mexico.

Fire Management Program



Credit: Daniel Godwin

The Guild's Fire Management program continues to adapt to the new world of operations in the context of COVID-19 and the devastating wildfires this summer. Wildland fire is inherently focused on people, which is ever more difficult during periods of social distancing. 2020 is complex and challenging but focusing on planning has allowed us to stay productive.

With support from the US Forest Service and watershed groups in Northern Colorado, we are developing large-scale programmatic pile burn plans in critical watersheds – ultimately, over 67,000 acres. These plans will lower the cost and complexity of developing new burn plans for additional fuels treatments within these areas.

Fire Management also welcomes a large donation of equipment and a new staff member. A close partner, The Nature Conservancy of Colorado, decided to

end their fire program. However, to support ongoing prescribed fire work, they generously donated their entire fire cache to the Guild and worked with local partners and stakeholders to transition relationships and contracts. One of their program leads has joined our team – welcome, Gabe Donaldson!

Fire Management looks forward to a future where we can work closer with partners to get good fire on the ground in a safe manner that does not adversely impact populations already stressed by COVID-19 and wildfire smoke. Smoke is a social justice issue: those who are at most risk are also least equipped to mitigate it, and most likely to be adversely affected by the pandemic. We are building tools to help ourselves and other fire managers to make better decisions about how best to emit smoke in the safest way in these unprecedented times.

Stewards Circle

Providing essential support for our work

More than ever, generous gifts by Stewards Circle members help us maintain focus on our mission in a time of constant change. Thank you for helping us adjust and respond resiliently in 2020.

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Shifting Strategies maintaining impact

Adaptation has been a guiding theme in 2020 as we made large programmatic changes to continue promoting community-based, collaborative solutions to land management during the pandemic. We continued to put the forest first and support forest stewards with online resource kits, a flood of webinar offerings, and new safety protocols. There is something new every day! Please visit our website often for program information, events updates, and resources such as:

- The Forest Adaptation Series in partnership with the US Forest Services' Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science,
- Landowner connections and communications about climate change, oak forest resiliency, and forest management,

- Resources to support FSC certified companies around topics of land conversion, old growth, bottomland hardwoods, and biodiversity - from Appalachian coves to the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains,
- Proposals and pushes for improved forest policy,
- Publications on managing ash trees, restoration, and prescribed fire,
- Reflections from founding members on our first 25 years, and
- Inspiring stories of Guild members practicing ecological forestry in Across the Landscape.

Please continue to support the Guild with your financial contributions, ideas, knowledge-sharing, passion, and partnership! We will continue to support forest stewards and put the forests first, and its only possible with your help.

Black spruce needles and cones in Rhinelander, Wisconsin.