

Scout Camp Takes Action to Protect and Manage Forest Resources

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All photos by Sandy Clark, U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry

Nestled in Monroe County in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania is the Resica Falls Scout Camp—a 4,200-acre retreat whose signature feature is Resica Falls along Bushkill Creek. The camp provides clear streams and waterfalls, and what seems like endless mountain trails for Scouts to explore nature.

Resica Falls was established in 1957 in a joint effort between the Valley Forge and Philadelphia Scout Councils. In 1996, these two councils merged to create the Cradle of Liberty Council.

The Scouts have operated Resica Falls for 60 years. Over the last two decades, the Cradle of Liberty Council has become more proactive in managing Resica Falls' forest resources and providing permanent protection to the camp.



Resica Falls near the camp entrance.

“Bob Hartman is the driving force behind the success at Resica Falls. He carries the biggest load,” said Consulting Forester Robin Wildermuth, who runs Woodland Management Services. Hartman is the Chairman of the council's Conservation Committee for Resica Falls.

Forest Stewardship at Resica Falls

Forest stewardship plans are planning documents that describe the natural resources on a property and the management activities that can be pursued to enhance those resources. A stewardship plan generally provides direction for a 10-year period and is driven by the management objectives of the property owner.

In the case of Resica Falls, one of the conservation committee's primary objectives was to improve the quality of its timber resources. The camp underwent extensive timber cutting about 40 years ago and was then left to regenerate naturally. “An additional problem was that around 2007 the oak resources got pounded by a combination of factors, including an outbreak of the invasive insect gypsy moth,” said Wildermuth.

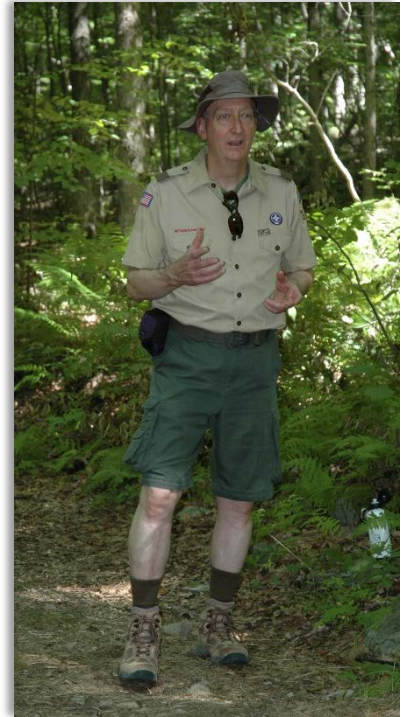
Forest stewardship activity at Resica Falls really started taking off in 2006 when the council entered into a conservation easement [see sidebar at right] with the Natural Lands Trust on behalf of Middle Smithfield Township in Monroe County. The easement permanently restricts development on the property, which will keep the camp's forests as forest for scouting use.

Conservation easements are a tool that limits certain rights otherwise held by a landowner. Just like other real property interest, the easement is recorded with the local land records and becomes part of the chain of title for the property. Once established, the easement applies to the current landowner and all subsequent owners. The easement's purposes will vary depending on the character of the property, the goals of the land trust, and the needs of the landowners.

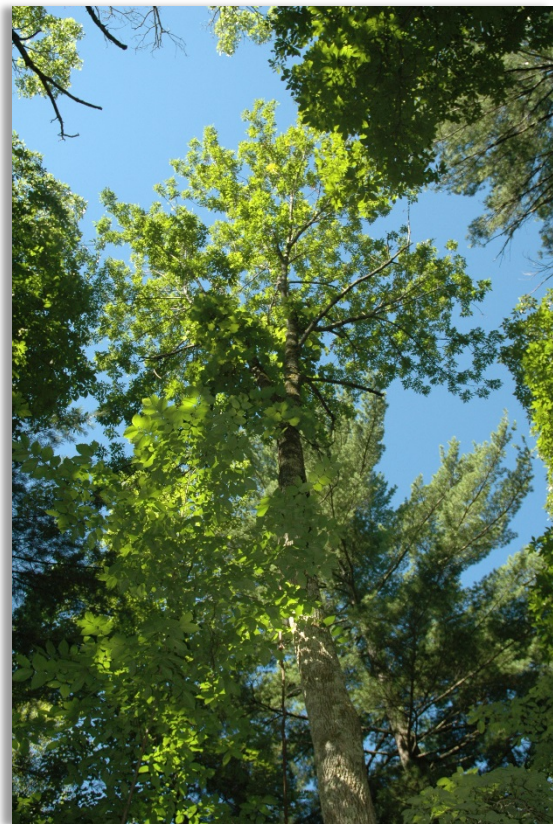
After establishing the conservation easement, the conservation committee began work on updating the stewardship plan. By then, the existing stewardship plan was about to expire and a new one needed to be written. Hartman had a forestry background from his college days and took the lead in learning about stewardship plans. “Bob came to a field tour that I conducted and asked a lot of pertinent questions about stewardship plans and management practices,” recalled Wildermuth.

“Robin is the consulting forester that you dream about finding. I work with him on a frequent basis. We reviewed several consulting foresters before selecting Robin,” said Hartman.

Because Resica Falls is such a large, complex property, the stewardship plan recommended a host of treatment options to create a vegetative mosaic to optimize the potential of its resources. The plan has recommendations for just about every type of timber management option possible. Treatments include commercial thinning, intermediate thinning, seed tree release, and even some small patches of clear cutting to create open areas and provide early successional habitat for wildlife species that depend on this type of habitat. In one area, the camp removed a small patch of birch and replanted it with Norway spruce, red spruce, and a pitch x loblolly pine cross (*Pinus rigida x taeda*) to establish winter cover.



Bob Hartman.



Trees at Resica Falls Scout Camp.

The stewardship plan also has treatments for controlling invasive species like multiflora rose, Japanese barberry, and autumn olive. At one time these plants were brought in to stabilize the soil, but they were found to outcompete native plants for resources while at the same time providing little value to wildlife. Certified professionals chemically treat invasive species at the camp.

Skid trails remained after logging activities at Resica Falls in the 1970s. Some of these skid trails were converted into a network of recreation trails throughout the camp. The stewardship plan identified places where these trails needed to be stabilized and have water bars added to reduce the impacts of soil erosion. The stewardship plan also identified areas that needed deer exclusion fences to eliminate the excessive impacts that deer can have on plant regeneration.

The Cradle of Liberty Council works cooperatively with the Natural Lands Trust to develop and carry out the stewardship plan. Since the council entered into a conservation easement with the Natural Lands Trust, the trust reviews and approves all projects.

Though a stewardship plan typically covers a 10-year span, it is not a static document. Changes can be made using an addendum, which is what happened at Resica Falls when they learned about golden-winged warblers. The golden-winged warbler has undergone significant population declines in Pennsylvania due to the loss of early successional forest habitat. The warbler is now considered a species of concern. Work at Resica Falls through a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) grant has resulted in the creation of 200 acres of warbler habitat to date at the camp.

A portion of the funding to carry out projects identified in Resica Falls' stewardship plan comes from cost-share grants from the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance for conservation practices that improve soil, water, plant, animal, air, and related natural resources.

NRCS has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources that permits the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry to inspect EQIP contracts on behalf of NRCS. "Cost-share funds are released to the recipient once we have certified completion of the project," said Monroe County Service Forester Garrett Beers.

Although the cost-share program is a great resource to obtain funds for project work, it covers only a percentage set by NRCS at a predetermined rate. The remainder of the cost is the responsibility of the landowner. In some cases, the cost of a project can be more than anticipated. That happened at Resica Falls for a project to enhance and expand wildlife habitat by mowing. To handle these unexpected situations, revenue generated from timber sales is placed into a fund to cover shortfalls.

Funds to accomplish work identified in the stewardship plan also come from money raised through hunting and fishing fees. Trout are stocked along a 7-mile stretch of Bushkill Creek. This area is one of the leading areas on the East Coast for fly fishing, and the council has a permit system for catch and release fishing at Resica Falls. The council also allows hunting access for a fee and offers a reduced fee to individuals willing to volunteer some time to help with projects.

Those with little background in the intricacies of land management may perceive some of the activities at Resica Falls as a radical departure from what was present just a few short years ago. But under the guidance of a forest stewardship plan, resource managers have enhanced the structure and health of the forest. They have created and improved different habitat types that create a mosaic of ecotypes that offer benefits to a greater diversity of wildlife. They have also removed invasive species that, while appearing to provide a thick, lush environment, in actuality provide little sustenance while crowding out native plants that can better support wildlife.

The conservation committee at Resica Falls has achieved many positive results through projects identified in its stewardship plan. The next challenge will be involving other council members to join the committee with the same dedication and drive to keep the momentum going forward. The current stewardship plan is in year 6 of the 10-year planning document. The conservation committee foresees beginning discussion on a new stewardship plan when the current plan is within 2 years of expiring.



View of Bushkill Creek above Resica Falls.