



The Landmark



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News from the Four Town Land Trust

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November - Membership Month

As most of you know, November was membership month for the Land Trust. For those who haven't heard about it, and those who meant to get a new member and haven't yet, it's not too late - there's still the rest of December before the year ends. People can join any time, of course, but the membership year is the calendar year, and tax deductibility of donations also changes with the calendar. We would like to see every member of the Land Trust get at least one new member, and if that happened we would at least double our membership! Of course, if you aren't a member yet, now is a good time to join.

Landward

Forest evolution sounds like a rather esoteric subject, but if you know what you're looking at it can be rather fun to go out in the woods and deduce, Sherlock Holmes style what has happened there for the past few decades.

Take the Land Trust's land in Somers. There's a spot along the trail where you can see a stand of hemlocks, three of them quite large and the rest sapling size. There are a few tall white birches but no small ones, and a lot of fairly large red oaks with two, three, or four trunks per tree. I can tell you from this information that several decades ago the area was a mature (but not old) oak stand with the three hemlocks smaller but still adults, and that it was then heavily logged, with all sizeable trees but the hemlocks cut.

How can I tell? The main clue is the fact that the oaks are multiple-stemmed. Trees which grow from seed are almost always single-stemmed. High proportions of multiple-stemmed trees occur when vigorous trees are cut and the stumps grow sprouts, red oak is a prolific stump sprouter. Another clue is the presence of the birches, since white birch is more a pioneer tree than a forest tree. It will seed into an open area and survive there much better than under a forest canopy, however light the shade. It grows fast and can survive as a dominant tree in the canopy, which is a good thing since the oak sprouts grew quickly too, with the extensive root systems they had available. The new forest grew up and closed in quickly, excluding the less tolerant species.

Hemlock is on the opposite end of the scale from white birch. Eastern hemlock is the most shade tolerant species in the east, which is why it is so dim in hemlock stands. The three large ones there are big enough that they were in the canopy at the time the timber was cut, and in fact were big enough that they would have been harvested if hemlock wood was worth it. They weren't, so they were there producing seed when the other trees were removed. The small hemlocks clustered around the big ones are about the same age as the oaks and birches, but hemlock seedlings grow much more slowly than either white birches or oak sprouts. They were quickly overtopped by the other trees. That would have been the end of a less shade tolerant species, but once they get established hemlocks can hang on for decades waiting for the trees above them to grow old and die.

In most cases, the next stage would be another harvest of the oaks. Again the average woodland owner (we are speaking hypothetically now, not of the Land Trust's Skyline Scenic Area and Nature Preserve) would leave the hemlocks since they aren't worth anything, and this time the "young" hemlocks would have enough of a height advantage over the new oak sprouts and any pioneer species seeded into the area that the hemlock stand would remain pure - the other trees would be shaded out, and the hemlocks would be the new dominant trees in the area. Outside that area, oak sprouts would still compete with birches and other pioneer species to see which can grow the fastest.

This holds a lesson for those of us who own forested land. If we decide to cut any trees, we should cut the poor quality trees along with the good ones - better yet, ahead of the good ones - so as to maintain the quality of the stand. If you want hemlocks, that's fine. I like them myself. But if you want oaks you should cut the other species too so that the oaks will have a better chance of growing back. Over the centuries people have been doing what comes naturally and cutting the desirable trees while leaving the worthless ones to reproduce, which is why red oak, which used to be the dominant tree in the state, has recently been dethroned by red maple, a nearly worthless tree.

The Fifth Town of the Four Town Land Trust


When the Four Town Land Trust formed, it was suggested that Stafford be included. At the time, we decided not to include it formally but to stick with the original four towns. Stafford has been the unofficial fifth town since, but now we plan to include it formally.

As a result, the Land Trust directors approved a motion at their November meeting to call a members' meeting for the purpose of amending the Certificate of Incorporation to list Stafford with the other four towns; and to change the name of the organization to the Five Town Land Trust, Inc. This would serve to strengthen our identity in Stafford, increasing the likelihood that we would be able to preserve land there. Since Stafford is one of the few towns in the state with no land trust, we feel this to be important. The inclusion of Stafford would also increase the pool of potential members, and active members for the Land Trust. The members' meeting to decide this important issue has been set for 7.30 P.M. on Tuesday, January 22, 1991 at the Melrose Schoolhouse.

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All comments contained herein are those of the editor and are not necessarily those of the Land Trust.

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