

KENTUCKY WOODLANDS NEWSLETTER

"BRINGING PEOPLE AND WOODLAND
SUSTAINABILITY TOGETHER"



Spring 2026



White oak seedlings after midstory control but before harvest of overstory.



Young white oaks patiently waiting for midstory control.

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KWOA White Oak Restoration Efforts

by Scott Taylor

If you've been paying attention over the last few years, you've probably noticed a lot of talk about white oak in Kentucky, and other states as well. That buzz is for good reason: We have a real problem with our white oak populations all across the eastern United States. The problem is not that we don't have plenty of mature, marketable white oak trees in our forests today; the problem is that we don't have enough young white oak trees in our forests to continuously replace those mature white oaks that are being harvested. So, in the near future, we'll start seeing less mature white oaks to meet the needs of society, to meet the ecological needs of our wildlife, and to maintain the integrity of our forest stand diversity. The old buzz word of "sustainability" is what the issue is. Our white oak stands are not sustainable today.

Why are we in this situation? Lots of reasons have led us to this point. But, the main reason is that we are not managing our oak stands. Let me say this again. We simply aren't managing our oak stands. But the good news is that we can change that. We have science-based knowledge that shows us how to manage those stands effectively so they will regenerate naturally. How do we do that? The answer has two parts. First, we have to understand the technical reasons that prevent that natural regeneration. Second, we have to understand how to create the right conditions to allow that natural regeneration to occur.

Why don't we have young white oaks growing in our forest? The understory and mid-story of our white oak stands have been taken over by shade-tolerant species such as beech, red maple, and others. These shade-tolerant species prevent the young white oaks from growing and thriving, so they can't replace those mature trees when a disturbance occurs (such as a harvest, a natural disaster, or just an old white oak tree dying). Following the disturbance, those shade-tolerant species take over and now we have a new stand created, which is primarily beech, soft maple, and others.



A Message From Your President



Spring is here! After this year's wild winter weather here in Kentucky it's a wonderful time for new beginnings. This is my first year as president of the Kentucky Woodland Owners Association. I'm honored to serve KWOA as we move into this new year.

By way of introduction to those of you who don't know me, my name is Scott Taylor. I'm a woodland owner like most of you, and I have deep roots in Kentucky. My brother and I own Elk Cave Farm in the knob lands of Boyle and Casey counties. It's a family farm and a working forest, today focused only on the forests. Parts of our farm have been in our family for over a hundred years. My granddaughter is the sixth generation of our family to be providing stewardship for the forests. While quality commercial timber production is one of our goals, we are also very focused on stewardship of the entire forest system. This includes water quality, air quality, wildlife habitat, and wildlife populations.

Since the founding of our farm, we have learned that managing forest lands is a complex endeavor and that it takes a concerted intellectual effort to learn how to manage a forest and a driven personal effort to make that management happen. Managing all aspects of the forest is a demanding job, but a very rewarding one.

As woodland owners, we all face a myriad of challenges effectively managing the natural resources of our forests. It is important to be able to tackle these challenges armed with knowledge and expertise. KWOA's mission is to support you as a woodland owner/manager to find the solutions for those challenges. We do that by providing educational opportunities; facilitating connections to people, organizations and agencies; and by advocating for you as woodland owners with legislators, organizations and agencies.

My hope is that I can help our board of directors continue to provide a level of service that you, as members, deserve—and that we can increase that level of service to you, as members of KWOA. I look forward to serving as your president of the Kentucky Woodland Owners Association.

Spring is a wonderful time in the woods. The creeks are running with cold, clear water; new leaves are popping out; and the woods are waking up after a long cold winter. Enjoy your woodlands this spring and spend as much time as possible in the woods!

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Founding Editor: Don Girton (1993-2005)
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Current Editor: Bill Furbee

Kentucky Woodlands Newsletter is published quarterly. We welcome submission of articles and information for inclusion in the newsletter subject to review and approval by the executive committee.

Submit copy to:
Bill Furbee, Editor, editor@kwoa.net



Scott Taylor

-Scott Taylor
KWOA President



Letter to Gatton Academy

by Caleb Stickney

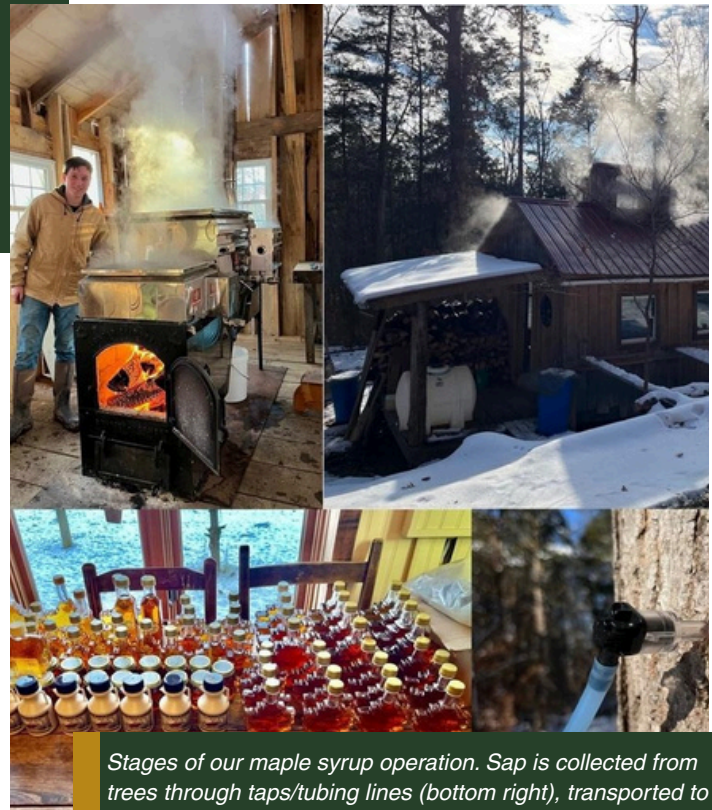
After my time at Gatton, I studied Environmental Engineering at Harvard University, completed my Master's in Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering at the University of Kentucky, and now work as a Stream Restoration Engineer at Beaver Creek Hydrology in Lexington. Through each step of this path, I have constantly tried to combine my academic and professional goals with my love of farming. While living in Massachusetts, my heart longed to be back on the farm in Kentucky. Caring for the land has always been my deepest calling. And my long-term goals have always been to live on and nurture my family's land, to watch our forests grow, and to deepen my connection to both my homestead and the surrounding community.

My family's farm sits along the banks of the Red River in Estill County, Kentucky, in an environment of forests and steep hills. This landscape guides how we manage the land, with our operation being primarily focused on woodland-based agriculture. We grow shiitake and oyster mushrooms, produce maple syrup, sustainably manage our forests, raise a small herd of Hereford cattle, and grow as much of our own produce as possible in our garden. We always strive to maintain the interconnectedness of our operations.

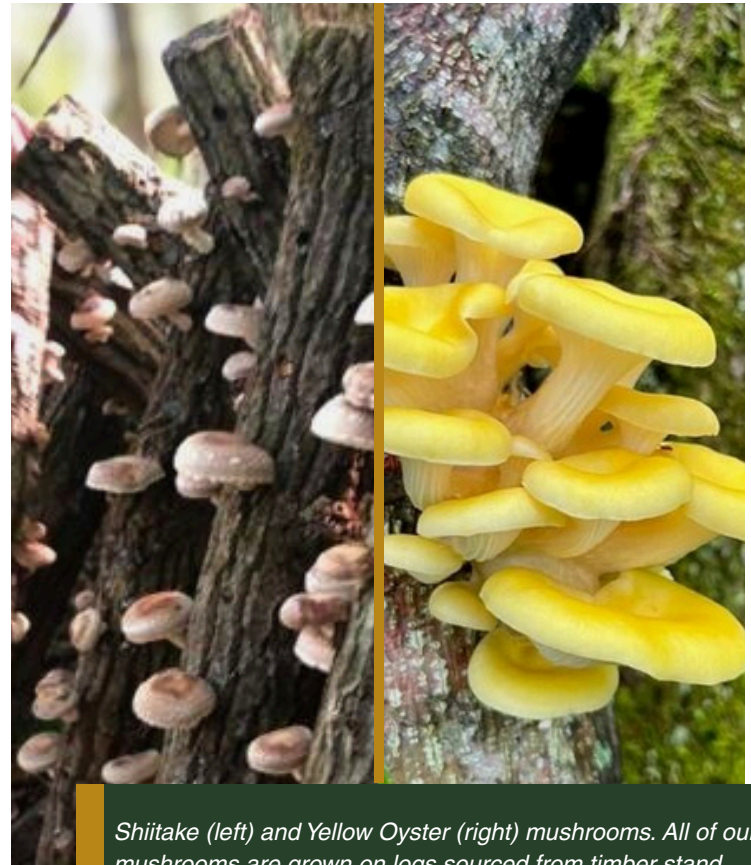
Timber-stand management provides the logs for mushroom production, as well as promoting the growth of Sugar Maple trees, which we tap for syrup. Also, sawdust from our sawmill, along with manure from the cattle, is used as fertilizer in our gardens.

Additionally, most of the structures on the farm have been built from wood salvaged from our forests and sawed on site with our sawmill. In conjunction with this interconnected approach, we strive to respect the nature and carrying capacity of the land, ensuring a sustainable operation into the future. I hope to continue living on and caring for this land throughout my life, making our homestead an example of sustainable agriculture in Eastern Kentucky - and spending many peaceful evenings listening to the song of the Whip-poor-will.

This writing previously appeared in the Gatton Academy Alumni Newsletter.



Stages of our maple syrup operation. Sap is collected from trees through taps/tubing lines (bottom right), transported to the sugar shack (top right), boiled in an evaporator (top left), and bottled into a variety of containers (bottom left).



Shiitake (left) and Yellow Oyster (right) mushrooms. All of our mushrooms are grown on logs sourced from timber stand management on the farm.

KWOA Annual Scholarship

by Doug McLaren



GET TO KNOW JILLIAN



Jillian Skube with Doug McLaren.

KWOF's 2025 Forestry Scholarship Recipient

KWOF is pleased to award its 2025 Forestry Student Scholarship to Jillian Skube, a junior forestry major at the University of Kentucky. The award is granted based on leadership potential, connection with the forestry community, and an insight of the forestry profession. The scholarship is in the amount of \$1000 paid directly to the University for tuition fees.

Ms. Skube is a graduate of Nelson County High School. From an early age she has had an interest in forests, possibly having a father who is a wildland firefighter could have helped in obtaining this interest. The interest and involvement in his work sparked a curiosity for Jillian towards the profession of forestry

This curiosity was answered while enrolled in a plant sciences program in high school which used Bernheim Forest as their “classroom.” An FFA project involving prescribed fire in woodlands landed her in the FFA nationals; she was placed in the top ten nationally. A visiting University of Kentucky faculty member made note of the award to Jillian and suggested she make a visit to the University’s Forestry Department.

During her senior year in high school that visit was made possible where she met representatives to the forestry program. She has not regretted her training as a forestry professional.

Now a junior in the forestry program, Jillian is involved in the Forestry Club, gained valuable experience through multiple positions in the department, and has served as a teaching assistant in the tree identification course.

A letter of reference from one of Jillian’s professors commented, “The work assigned to Jillian was not easy... establishing research plots, tagging trees, seed counts, and collection of treatment data. Jillian approached the work with determination and persistence. Where reliability and endurance are as valuable as enthusiasm, Jillian demonstrated both.”

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KWOA White Oak Restoration Efforts

by Scott Taylor

How do we create the right conditions for our young white oaks to thrive and be ready to replace that mature stand of white oaks? A technique called mid-story control is used to remove those shade tolerant species from the mid and understory of our oak stands. This allows more light to get to the forest floor by removing those shade tolerant species, which in turn allows the germinating oak seedling to become established and thrive. At harvest time for the mature trees the young seedling will be ready to take off and grow the next generation of white oaks.

The Kentucky Woodland Owners Association has partnered with the White Oak Initiative, the Dendrifund, the Alabama Forestry Foundation, the Tennessee Forestry Foundation, and the Kentucky Forest Industries Association on a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to tackle this issue. KWOA will be providing educational workshops to teach land owners how to employ mid-story control practices to ensure a sustainable supply of white oak is on the landscape in Kentucky for future generations.

KWOA has also partnered with the University of Kentucky Forestry and Natural Resources department to deliver the technical discussion part of the educational workshop, in conjunction with the 2026 Woodland Owners Short Course in June of 2026. This section will be delivered during the online portion of the Short Course. Be sure to register and attend the 2026 Woodland Owners Short Course for this important part of the program. After the technical discussion part of the program, we'll have a hands-on program to teach landowners how to actually perform mid-story control practices in a white oak stand. This is a critical technique landowners and managers need to understand to effectively regenerate their white oak.

We sincerely hope you will take advantage of this opportunity. Stay tuned for more info concerning registration. We look forward to seeing you at the workshops.



Young white oak saplings 6 years after overstory harvest.

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www.kwoa.net/joinrenew-kwoa

Jack with shiitake mushroom harvest.



In Their Own Woods: The Stickney Family

by Bill Furbee

In Estill County, the Stickney family manages a 100-acre woodland that includes shiitake mushroom production – which dates back to 1987 – and grass-fed cattle. They're also longtime KWOA members.

“Our farm has been instrumental in our life for the last 40 years,” Jack Stickney says, adding that it has defined the family in many ways.

For example, he offers, “We are now Forest Farmers who live and work on this woodland farm. Shiitake mushrooms, maple syrup, grass-fed beef, and custom sawing are currently products we offer for sale.”

Jack explains that managing the family's 230 acres is its main endeavor. “Helping the land recover from 200 years of hard-scrabble subsistence farming has left this land in poor condition,” he says. “Helping the woodland regain its diversity, vigor and health is paramount in our efforts—building up the fertility and vigor of our pastures, as we work to integrate a healthy relationship with our small cattle herd. We strive to live sustainably on this land,” Jack continues, “by taking only what we need and giving back all we can.”

In 2016, Jack Stickney was named Kentucky Tree Farmer of the Year by the Kentucky Tree Farm Committee.

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Looking Back

Seasonal and Significant Moments in Woodland History

March 3

World Wildlife Day

Established in 2013 by the UN to raise and support awareness and conservation of wild flora, fauna, and forest ecosystems.

March 21

International Day of Forests

Declared in 2012 by the UN to celebrate all forests and to promote sustainable management.

Third Week of March

National Woodland Owners Week

Recognized in the US to raise awareness and appreciation for private woodland owners.

March 31

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Anniversary

The CCC was established in 1933 and has played a significant role in park/forest infrastructure, wildfire prevention, and reforestation throughout the United States.



Jack, Caleb, and Teresa Stickney with signage recognizing their work.

It was a great honor to be acknowledged by like-minded folks working to better our woodlands for future generations.

In Their Own Woods: The Stickney Family

by Bill Furbee

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Jack points out that it's important for land use to be treated and considered for its long-term use, not simply as a commodity to be taken. Being part of KWOA contributes to that understanding, he says.

"If the forest interests you," Jack says, you have nothing to lose—only things to gain by participating with KWOA."



In KWOA's article series, In Their Own Woods, Kentucky's woodland owners share sketches about their properties, their experiences and their plans for the next generations of trees, wildlife, and humans.

The installments endeavor to "put a face" on a family forest – the owners' aspirations and challenges, unique aspects of the property, woodland management and timber harvests, and intentions and hopes for the next generation of ownership. We hope the series will be interesting and helpful to our readership and encourage the sharing of ideas and prospects in the stewardship of our private forests. If you have a story you'd like to tell about your experience as a woodland owner, please let us know by contacting info@kwoa.net.

KENTUCKY WOODLAND OWNERS ASSOCIATION

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FROM THE WOODS TODAY

From the Woods Today is a weekly, livestreamed on-line program produced by the University of Kentucky's Forestry and Natural Resources Extension team.

The show, held each Wednesday at 11 a.m., features current information on woodlands and wildlife topics including woodland management, tree ID, invasive species, forest health, wildlife habitat management, and many other forestry-related segments.

Learn more at the website below or sign up for weekly show reminders.



<https://forestry.mgcafe.uky.edu/woods-today>