

Pinnacle News

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association
Spring 2020

Creating Wildlife Clearings to Foster Healthy Forests

By Andy Toepfer

More than 1,800 acres of Pinnacle lands are called “mixed upland forest,” meaning they have a mix of tree species growing on elevated land. Most of this forest is 40 to 60 years old, with some scattered large trees and pockets of younger trees. This is a result of past logging practices and is similar to many forests in our region.

The Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association’s goal is to allow these woods to naturally progress over many decades to a condition comparable to old growth forests, which once covered most of the Northeast. Old growth forests have many different ages of trees, clearings created by large trees felled by storms or wildfires, and lots of dead trees on the forest floor that provide valuable habitat. These types of woods allow complex relationships between plants, animals, fungi, soil bacteria, insects, etc.

WHPA’s upland forest has a long way to go and many decades of change to get to this condition, but we have plans and projects in place to get there. One of these projects—in partnership with USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service—is creating wildlife clearings, which means cutting a small area of trees to encourage the forest to grow back in a healthier, more diverse way.

A large body of evidence shows that creating these openings provides new habitat for a variety of wildlife, from birds and mammals to fungi and insects. These clearings are also called “early successional forest openings,” referring to the natural process of succession where a forest grows through different stages of development and hosts a greater diversity of species over time. The openings add diversity to the age class of our forest by allowing space for stands of very young trees to grow. Many tree species that populate an early successional opening are poorly represented, or even absent from a more mature forest.

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association lands are enrolled in the Vermont Current Use Program, a state-run program that requires us to have a forest management plan. Our plan’s primary objective in the mixed upland forest unit is to protect and enhance its natural habitat, native animals and plants, and ecosystem functioning. The objectives outlined in the management plan must be followed for our continued enrollment in the program.

The resiliency and ability of forests to change and adapt to a changing climate is also a serious concern, and
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Pinnacle wildlife clearing. Top: 2015, bottom: 2019.

A Note on Upcoming Events

Due to the coronavirus, all Pinnacle programs through June 2020 have been canceled. Look forward to these events in 2021! Please check our website, windmillhillpinnacle.org, for updates on programs starting in July.

Chickadee photo by PutneyPics/Flickr

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(Wildlife Clearings, continued from previous page)

maintaining a healthy early successional component in our forests may be helpful for diverse forests of the future. In our wildlife clearings, we've left some older trees standing such as red oak and cherry, which are called residual mast production trees. These trees offer shade as well as acorns and cherries for wildlife to eat. They may also drop seeds and promote the growth of new seedlings. Dead trees, sometimes called snags, are left standing for cavity nesters such as woodpeckers. All cut trees are left lying on the ground to decompose—no wood is removed.

To visit one of WHPA's wildlife clearings/early successional forests, take a hike to Paul's Ledges. Created in 2012, this was WHPA's first 2-acre opening. A limited clearing existed at Paul's Ledges, as there had been a cabin on the site, and the expansion encouraged the growth of grasses, raspberries, and blackberries. Trees are becoming re-established here, and the canopy will start to close over time. This site has been well used by black bears and deer.

Farther north, beyond where the Athens Access trail comes up from Cemetery Road in Athens, is another 2-acre cut made in 2016. This opening, not visible from the trail, shows regeneration thick with hardwoods, very little grass or berries, with a large aspen component occupying one section. Farther north, taking a side trail to the left off the main trail before the main trail enters the sugar grove, are two more 2-acre cuts done in 2015. These two areas have vigorous regeneration of hardwoods and a small component of grasses and berries.

In the far south on WHPA land, not far from the Dodd Trail, a five-acre cut was begun in 2019, half of which was cut in November 2019. The stand consists of a fair amount of multi-stem white pine and multi-stem red maple, the aftermath of previous pastures and then hard logging. This opening is also not visible from the trail.

At this time, it's unclear whether additional cuts will be needed after completing the five-acre opening. If the ongoing results of the regeneration at the existing sites are good, perhaps bringing the total up to 20 acres of wildlife clearings might be reasonable. Of course, in a few years, the first cuts will not look like openings, but will rather resemble young forests with some mature trees remaining (the mast trees such as cherry and oak, mentioned above). As these stands age there may come a time in the future, after our current project ends, to start a cycle of openings all over again.

Hiking the Pinnacle Trails from End-to-End in a Day

By Daron Tansley



On August 6, 2018, I watched the sunrise from Putney Mountain and then hiked 23 miles all the way to Bear Hill. I wanted to experience walking the length of the wildlife corridor along Windmill Hill Ridge, and to pass through its different ecosystems. Over the years, I have watched in awe as WHPA and Putney Mountain

Association have acquired and conserved parcels of land to form this corridor, one that's so important to preserve in our fragmented world. I also wanted to visit Athens Dome for the first time. I was excited to look for signs of moose along the Wetland Trail, maybe even see one. And I wanted to see if I could handle the long hike, both physically and mentally.

I started the hike in the dark, the light from my headlamp giving me a sense of otherworldliness. Watching dawn breaking and listening to the birds singing filled me with wonder and energy for the coming day. The fog in the valleys below started to glow orange and yellow

as the sun rose. The view was breathtaking. Just before I left the summit and walked over to West Cliff Trail, I said words of thanks to nature, as I always do on hikes and saunters.

I especially enjoyed descending the switchbacks off Putney Mountain. I kept my eyes and ears alert for birds and other wildlife. I believe that doing a physically and mentally challenging hike and being in tune with nature are not mutually exclusive. About half a mile from Five Corners, I watched deer browsing. A little while later, I spooked a barred owl.

The trail between the Monadnock-Sunapee outlook and the Pinnacle is one of my favorites, one that I hike often both during the day and at night. I often see the tracks of porcupine, fisher, raccoons, deer, foxes, and coyotes in this area and hear ovenbirds, wood thrushes, hermit thrushes, and scarlet tanagers. As I approached the savanna ecosystem with its red oaks, hop hornbeams, and sedges near the Pinnacle, I slowed down and looked deep through the trees, and I saw deer browsing. Such moments were a welcome break during the hike.

After a drink and snack on the Pinnacle, I enjoyed the gradual downhill along the Jamie Latham Trail. I felt emotional as I approached Paul's Ledges along the Hemlock Trail. I knew Paul for many years. What a wonderful tribute to have this beautiful spot named after him.

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(End-to-End Hike, continued from previous page)

The day was starting to get hot. I was happy to get back into the shade of the woods and continue on along Sugar Hill Trail and Bemis Hill Road, through a working sugarbush.

Near Sleepy Valley Road, I saw a red-tailed hawk and a barred owl. These sightings gave me a new burst of energy and enthusiasm, one that was much needed because the heat was starting to have a draining effect on me. I kept myself well hydrated and fueled. The prospect of seeing Creature Rock and maybe a moose also helped me continue beyond the Route 35 kiosk.

The woods from the kiosk were particularly lovely and relatively cool, and I welcomed the downhill section down to the Ledge Road Trailhead. I was in awe of the house-sized glacial erratic boulders that form Creature Rock. From here I had a new burst of energy as I began to anticipate exploring the upcoming Wetland Trail. I was happy to find a lot of moose poop along the trail, but I was anxious too. What if I encountered an agitated moose? I watched my surroundings carefully and kept in mind trees along the trail I could quickly get behind should a moose charge me.

It was especially satisfying to reach Bear Hill and to see a red-tailed hawk fly in front of me while I ate and rested. From here, I walked back out to the Route 35



Photo by Daron Tansley

kiosk, where my wife picked me up and drove me back to my vehicle on Putney Mountain.

I highly recommend hiking the full length of the land conserved by the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association and the Putney Mountain Association. Instead of hiking about 23 miles in one day, you could split the hike up into sections, perhaps staying at the cabin on the Pinnacle and/or the shelter along Creature Rock Trail, or doing shorter day hikes. For me, part of the fun of hiking is in the preparation, doing the research, looking at maps and trail descriptions, and getting my gear, food, and liquids ready. Happy trails!

Beverly Bruhn Major: In Fond Remembrance

By Arthur and Carol Westing

Protecting the Pinnacle in memory of Jamie Charles Latham (1968–1991) was an inspired decision inasmuch as it not only honored a fine young man who died tragically in the prime of his life, but additionally led to the establishment of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, with its over 2,000 acres of woodland protected in perpetuity for the greater good of both humans and nature. Now, 28 years after its formal establishment, three of the association's eight founding members have ever so sadly followed in Jamie's footsteps: first Ellen Dunn Zimmerman (1940–2019), then Robert J. Haas (1930–2019), and now most recently our wonderful first Chairperson, Beverly Bruhn Major (1935–2020).

We have known Beverly, her husband Randolph, and their children for the past 54 years, sharing our lives as fellow hikers, 4-H volunteers of several sorts, political activists, and ardently dedicated WHPA co-founders and continuing supporters—but, most importantly, as valued friends through the various pains and pleasures that life has brought our two families during all those years. Visiting Beverly and Randolph either in Westminster West or at their summer home in Friendship, Maine was always special. But we recall with particular warmth the dozens of annual Easter celebrations—a local hike with our two families plus other special friends, followed by a shared dinner at their home, and always culminating in Beverly's famous paschka dessert—a tradition begun in memory of daughter Elizabeth Ann (1965–1967). There is an Estonian saying that home is not where we were born, but rather where we raised our children—and that was what we were so fortunate to be able to do in Westminster West in parallel with the Majors and their children.

In the early years of our formidable challenges in attempting to gain access to the Pinnacle, it was with Beverly at the helm, that is, with her abilities and perseverance, that kept our initial group of eight going—importantly, of course, including Jamie's mother Alison Latham and Sean Long in addition to Ellen, Robert, and the two of us (and soon after also Beverly's husband Randolph, and then also Elizabeth Mills plus numbers of other hard-working individuals). Indeed, it was Beverly who in chairing the association during the crucially formative first 13 years of its existence set the stage for its continuing success.



Field Note: My Close-Up Encounter with a Luna Moth

By Sarah Waldo

A perfect June morning lured me to the WHPA Martin Reserve to conduct a regular seasonal monitoring of the Dunn Nature Trail. My primary goal was to assure the trail was well marked by the blue discs that designate the trail pathway.

Making my way along the trail, I spotted a lime-green patch on a tree trunk ahead positioned at the same height from the ground where I'd expected to see one of the blue discs. Growing closer to that viridescent spot, I realized with great delight that I'd come upon an adult luna moth.

I'd never before had the opportunity to fully inspect a luna moth, having seen one flutter at a lit window, and another briefly visit an outdoor porch light at night. That morning I was able to have a long, close-up look, snap a few pictures, and then read up about the luna moth later on when I got home.

I found that the luna moth, *Actias luna*, family Saturniidae, is one of the largest silk moths in North America, with an average wingspan of 4 ½ inches. Unique to North American hardwood forests, the moth can be spotted from May through June, after emerging from its cocoon. They live for only about a week, during which their sole mission is to mate. Like many other ephemeral insects, adult luna moths have no mouthparts and thus, do not eat.

The wings of the luna moth extend into long, thin tails, with a purple or pink "bumper" at the front edges of the wings. A recent study found that luna moths defend themselves from predatory bats by spinning the tips of



Luna moth. Photo by Sarah Waldo

their hind wings in circles, thus interfering with the bat's echolocation detection and making the moths harder to track and trickier to catch. The moth's body is white and hairy, antennae are feathery, and four distinctive eyespots adorn the wings.

Luna moths are sensitive to the environment and light pollution (constant light at night), pesticides, and parasitic flies; all of which can cause harm to this delicate species. Wild populations are threatened due to these sensitivities. Unfortunately, the luna moth is not listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature or the Environmental Protection Agency, so restrictions on light pollution and pesticide use in their habitats are unlikely. To conserve and educate the public, populations of luna moths are being bred in captivity and are often used in classrooms to teach about their role in the environment.

Keep an eye out for the luna moth in early summer months! You too may be as fortunate as I was to discover and witness the beauty of this short-lived creature.

In Remembrance: Bob Haas

By Alison Latham

Bob Haas, one of the eight founding trustees of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, died at his home November 3, 2019. I remember Bob mostly for his love of the land and his down-to-earth-attitude, which kept the organization's trustees on focus during those early years.

Back then the Trustees met monthly from 7 to 10 p.m., and Bob's wife, Pat, was heard to mutter more than once, "What in the world do you talk about for three hours??" There was an old silo on the Bissell parcel, the Pinnacle's first acquisition, and the staircase to the top was crumbling. So Bob, who was also a volunteer fireman, offered to burn it down, which he managed quite nicely without setting the surrounding woods on fire.

His passion for the history of the Pinnacle Ridgeline helped us all understand and appreciate the history of the early non-native settlers on and near the ridgeline. With others he spearheaded the Ancient Roads survey, documented the location of old cemeteries, lime kilns and cellar holes, and helped mark and map trails.



He shared his knowledge in many Pinnacle talks and walks and was always willing to consult with individuals who needed historical information. Many of us cherish the tidbits of history and advice gathered at his kitchen table. He was a genuine, unassuming man of action.

Thank you to donors who gave in honor or in memory of a special person. [Visit our website](#) to see the acknowledgements of these recent donations.



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