

A Walk in the Woods - August 2011

By David Falkenham, UNH Cooperative Extension Grafton County Forester

The 2011 hunting season is rapidly approaching and many of us are frantically preparing for the opening day of archery season or the regular firearms season. Many people have permission from a specific landowner to use their land for hunting, while others hunt mostly on public land. It is also true that many people hunt on land whose ownership is not entirely known to the hunter.

As a kid growing up in Lancaster, my dad and I would spend countless hours hunting and fishing on private land. Usually it was someone my dad knew, and at some point during the season he would contact the owner and thank them, possibly returning a favor at some point in time. My dad was the local doctor so he had permission from a lot of landowners. Three lessons that he taught me about using land were: 1. Respect the land, 2. Respect the landowner and 3. Try to pay back the favor of using the land.

These three lessons will never be outdated. If you use land for any recreational purpose, whether it is hunting or hiking you should make a point of thanking the landowner. The private landowners in New Hampshire make much of our outside recreation possible and we often take for granted the outdoor opportunities that we have in this state. In New Hampshire, if land is not posted then it is assumed that access, including hunting, is allowed. Even if land is posted, a visit to the land owner could gain you access. This is a benefit that is not universal throughout the country; it is very much a New England tradition.

Our private landowners provide us with many benefits. A place to walk, hunt, fish and find peace are all benefits that many of us enjoy on private lands. These benefits are brought to us by generous people who are willing to own the land and pay the taxes and by doing so they preserve our way of life here in New Hampshire.

I would recommend to all hunters and non-hunters that they follow the lessons my dad taught me; respect the land, respect the landowner and try to pay back the favor if you can. Get to know your landowners and ask them if there is any work that you can do for them on their land. Maybe a road needs clearing, or a boundary line needs painting or a trail needs to be maintained. These are all things that anybody can do to help, and if you use their land for your recreation, you owe them. Owning land is expensive and a lot of work, so a little help goes a long way. If they don't need help with anything, a good gesture such as a card or a small gift will go a long way.

For those of us who do hunt, private landowners are a critical component for our current success and the future of our sport. Every hunter should know who provides the opportunity to hunt the land we love so much and we should respect and be grateful for this opportunity.

Happy hunting and good luck to all.