

Swanzey forester, inspector gets national recognition

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SWANZEY — Scattered throughout the United States are more than 4,000 tree farm inspectors — an army of foresters that volunteers its time to help ensure that when landowners chop down their maples, pines or hemlock, they do so in the most sustainable way possible.

Within this cadre, a national forestry foundation has determined Wayne L. Young is a cut above the rest.

"I couldn't believe it. The first thing I did was call my wife," Young, 65, of Swanzey, said of being named by the American Forest Foundation as National Tree Farm Inspector of the Year. "To me, it's really an honor and a privilege."

Tree farm inspectors like Young perform some of the in-the-trenches work of the forest certification program, the American Tree Farm System.

Since 1941, the program has recognized landowners who "are sustainably managing their forest land ... and addressing the resource values of wood, water, wildlife and recreation," according to Wendy H. Scribner, Carroll County forester for the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

Scribner also serves as chairman of the New Hampshire Tree Farm Executive Committee. The program is sponsored, at the state level, by the UNH Cooperative Extension, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, the Granite State Division of the Society of American Foresters and the N.H. Timberland Owners Association.

A graduate of the University of New Hampshire's forestry program, Young has run his consulting business Wayne L. Young Forest Management since the mid-1980s and has served as a forest inspector more than 25 years. In addition to this work, Young does annual workshops at the Harris Center for Conservation Education in Hancock and speaks about forestry at local schools.

"I think (volunteerism is) important, so you just do it," he said, and called the Tree Farm System "extremely important.

"It's to signify those people who are really interested in being good stewards of their land," Young said.

Anyone looking to certify their property under the Tree Farm System generally must adhere to four basic requirements: they should devote at least 10 acres of land to growing and harvesting forest products; landowners must develop a forest management plan; they must follow recommendations from a licensed forester; and they must show a commitment to forest stewardship.

Under the ranking system New Hampshire uses for certification, landowners can earn points through a variety of efforts. These include everything from enhancing winter deer yards and identifying vernal pools to participating in conservation organizations and sponsoring tours or field trips on their property.

About 160 properties in Cheshire County — encompassing about 15 percent of the total forest land — have earned Tree Farm status, according to Steven S. Roberge, the cooperative

extension's forester for Cheshire County.

They can be identified by the green and white diamond-shaped placards that Jonathan W. Nute — Roberge's and Scribner's counterpart in Hillsborough County — called "the sign of good forestry."

But, Nute said, "the whole thing depends upon volunteer tree farm inspectors," who assist landowners in developing their plans for good management and help them stay on track.

Nute likened these inspectors' volunteerism to the pro bono work of an attorney.

"Foresters do free inspections for the Tree Farm System to have good forestry in New Hampshire," he said.

The National Tree Farm Inspector award is given to people for a variety of reasons, including a commitment to sustainable forestry, outreach and education and assisting landowners in managing their properties, according to Brigitte W. Johnson, director of communications for the American Forest Foundation.

For Young, the honor also marks the culmination of more than two decades of volunteer work during which, Scribner said, he's performed more than 300 inspections.

It isn't exactly an Academy Award, but to a forester, it may be pretty close.

"I have to pinch myself once in awhile," Young said, beaming while sitting in his home office.

He was hardly alone in his enthusiasm.

"This is a really big deal," said Nute, who took particular pride in a New Hampshire resident snagging the title from inspectors in larger timber-producing states such as Washington and Oregon.

"It's a real feather in our cap, (for) a little state like us, to have Wayne Young be our champion."

Despite New Hampshire's relatively small size, its forest industry's nothing to scoff at.

"We're a very small state in the union but New Hampshire relies pretty heavily on the forest-based economy, whether it is timber, whether it's maple syrup, whether it's tourism," Roberge said.

"People come to New Hampshire to go fishing because we have clean water. The forests have a huge role in that."

Roberge also cited the throngs of leaf peepers that flock to the Granite State each fall and predicted that if the forests are abused, it could radically alter the state's identity.

While the forests play such an important role in the public good, over half the woodlands available for management in the state are privately-owned, according to the cooperative extension.

Among these individually held properties is Young's own wooded wonderland — a 33-acre stretch in Swanzy he certified as a tree farm in the 1970s.

Young has helped some of the trees on his land flourish by removing those of lower quality. He's left dense tree growth around brooks to create covered travel corridors for animals.

And, by clearing out a small patch of land bordered by indigenous tree species, he's attracted many different types of animals, such as foxes, coyotes, bears and moose. "Just a little niche

of diversity — like a field — with an edge effect, you'd be surprised what you can get in," he said.

Meanwhile, Young has harvested enough timber to more than meet his home heating needs.

In 1987, he was honored as Cheshire County's "Outstanding Tree Farmer" — a plaque that is just one of many accolades decorating his office wall.

He is also a four-time winner of the N.H. Outstanding Tree Farm Inspector of the Year.

Today, Young and his wife, Diane, are heading down to Washington, D.C. — his first trip to the capital — for this year's annual National Tree Farmer Convention.

The trip will include sightseeing, a stop on Capitol Hill and, finally, Wednesday night's banquet, where Young will receive his latest award.

His colleagues say he's well deserving of the honor.

"He does such good work out there in the woods. He's very careful, he's very meticulous in the jobs that he does," said Roberge, one of Young's fellow inspectors who nominated him, at the state level, for the national title. "As a professional, he's top notch."

In the meantime, Young recognizes the significance of tree farm inspectors' work.

"Development is coming, and it has been coming over the years. I've seen so many good pieces of woodland go," he said. "They're all hacked into house lots or paved over or whatever."

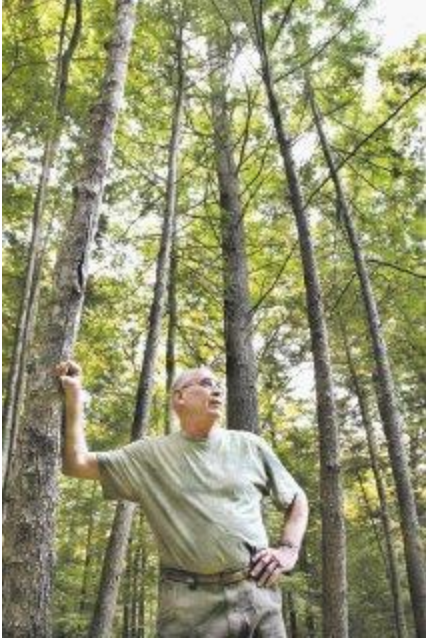
And while stressing the Tree Farm System's significance, he also clearly finds personal gratification in meeting its standards.

"It's a privilege to own a piece of property," he said. "But I think it's even more of a privilege to own it and treat it decently."

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9/23/09 m.moorephoto news---Wayne Young, stands in the woods on his Swanzey property, which carries a tree farm designation. Young has won a national tree farm inspector award and will travel to D.C. to accept it.