

Northeastern Ohio Forestry Association
Forty Years of Forestry
By Daniel Bartlett, ODNR Division of Forestry

Forty Years of Forestry

Over the past six years of being the ODNR Division of Forestry Service Forester in Salem, Ohio, I have gotten to know the diverse group of people who call themselves the Northeastern Ohio Forestry Association (NEOFA). Officially formed in 1972, this woodland owner organization was created for the “development and promotion of a realistic forestry program through education, information and contact with forestry officials...” This however was not the first attempt at forming a woodland owner group in northeastern Ohio. Two meetings were held in 1967, but personal interests of some of the attendees caused the ultimate breakup of the group before it got off the ground. There was still a lot of interest in forestry, but no cohesive group.

The first meeting of what was to become NEOFA was held March 17, 1971 with six attendees. By April of 1972, nine dues-paying members elected Harold L. Smith of North Jackson, Ohio to be their first president. Later Timothy J. Hunley, a former Youngstown State University (YSU) student, became president of NEOFA. Mr. Hunley had taken introductory forestry classes at YSU under Dwight V. Beede, the father of NEOFA member Susan Stephens. In 1975, the membership reached 60 strong with many of the current features of the organization starting to take shape. This included sponsoring young people to attend the Ohio Forestry Association Camp, setting up a forestry display at the Canfield Fair, doing twilight tours on members’ properties, and presenting awards to members who made outstanding contributions to forestry and the organization.

NEOFA received the Governor’s Arbor Day Award for education in 1986, and in 1989 was inducted into the Ohio Division of Forestry’s Forest of Honor. A green ash tree was planted at the Forest of Honor grove in Zaleski State Forest to commemorate NEOFA’s significant contributions to the accomplishment of the Division of Forestry’s mission and the advancement of forestry in Ohio.

Other main elements of NEOFA’s purpose are training and education. In 1994, John and Susan Stephens invited the renowned Soren Ericksson from the Game of Logging to give a safe tree felling training. There was an overwhelming response, and soon John and Susan became chainsaw safety training instructors themselves. Chainsaw training became one of NEOFA’s biggest draws to new members.

NEOFA Today

NEOFA is made up of 195 dues-paying members throughout northeastern Ohio. Members own from one tree to thousands and are from all walks of life. There is a wonderful mix of ages represented from school children to grandparents.

With a few modern updates, NEOFA has held true to its foundations. Devoted members staff the extensive forestry display at the Canfield Fair daily from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. They make sure someone is at the booth actively engaging passersby to get the message of woodland management and conservation out to everyone. If there is someone who owns woodland, volunteers make sure that they receive all the best information to get moving with management or harvesting.

One of the most heartily supported elements of the group's purpose is sponsoring young people to the Ohio Forestry and Wildlife Conservation Camp. Each year the group sponsors 9-12 young people. They hold a benefit auction at the annual banquet meeting to raise the money for this endeavor. The auction items have included handmade wooden objects, tools, baked goods, gift certificates, maple syrup, and unique items. There is a chainsaw raffle as well, but we pretty much know who will win. The same man has won for the last three years, much to the chagrin of the rest of the group.

The main staple of NEOFA is the monthly meetings or twilight tours. The meetings are based on woodland education but can include other pertinent natural resource issues. During the twilight tours, members show off their accomplishments and continuing projects on their properties. Twilight tours are a great time to exchange ideas and experiences for the benefit of all. Past meeting topics have included conservation easements, Ohio's Forestry Tax Law, The Buckeye Wood Turners Club, and raptor rehabilitation.

Since its introduction in 1994, the landowner chainsaw trainings offered by NEOFA have been a great success. After the passing of John Stephens, the torch of training was passed to Brock Couture, the 2011 Ohio Forestry Association Outstanding Logger of the Year. Brock is assisted by Jim Elze, Dave Hively, and Susan Stephens in scheduling and conducting trainings. Participants may take up to four levels of training from chainsaw maintenance to safely felling large, difficult trees.

Two awards are given every year: the Distinguished Service Award and the Outstanding Woodland Landowner award. The awardees are usually surprised at the banquet meeting and given engraved wooden plaques. Most members are very humble about receiving their awards. Their basic sentiment after receiving their award is "I don't deserve this: I was just doing what was right."

Future Forestry

The future looks bright for NEOFA. There is a committed base of caring people who feel strongly about good forest management. They have diverse backgrounds that give strength to and offer new possibilities and ideas for the group. The one thing they all have in common is a love for the land and a willingness to learn from it.



Thank you to all the NEOFA members who helped me dig into the past for this article. A special thank you to Jim Elze and Susan Stephens for putting up with my many questions. I need to give credit as well to the late service forester Jim Ball who kept meticulous notes on the formative years of NEOFA.

NEOFA'S CHARTER MEMBERS

HAROLD SMITH	JOHN STEWART
TIMOTHY HUNLEY	VAL GALIETI
WILLIAM BARRICKS	DONALD COVELESKI
DWIGHT BEEDE	JOHN SEPIC
JAMES BALL	JOHN WAGNER
ELDON SANOR	DAVID MORONEY
JAMES LAPHAM	CHESTER NEBO
RAYMOND SILVIS	MORRIS BOYD
GEORGE KETCHUM	GEOFFRY AELI

Dan Bartlett helps woodland owners with long-term goals for the development and care of their renewable forest resource in Mahoning, Columbiana, Stark, Carroll, and Tuscarawas counties. Dan can be reached on Wednesdays at (330) 222-1486 or at daniel.bartlett@dnr.state.oh.us.

Highlighted/boxed text:

One of the most heartily supported elements of the group's purpose is sponsoring young people to the Ohio Forestry and Wildlife Conservation Camp. Each year the group sponsors 9-12 young people.