

An American Land Ethic: Protecting the Family Farm

Most Americans think of New Jersey as the overcrowded land of turnpikes and oil refineries. The truth is much more diverse. New Jersey has a wide landscape, with a variety of forest ecosystems, from the hardwood forests in the mountains of northern New Jersey to the coastal-plain, pine forest ecosystems of the southern area of the state.

By **ROBERT R.
Williams**



As a young forester, I spent the first 12 years of my career working in the great conifer forests of Washington and Alaska. Yet here in New Jersey for the past 20 years, I have had the pleasure of working in forests every bit as magnificent as the ones in the Pacific Northwest.

And yes, they are on private lands and in the American Tree Farm System®.

Environmentalists would have us believe that the only reason we have forests in New Jersey is because they have convinced the public to purchase land and keep it out of the private sector, thus preventing anything bad from happening to the forests. I applaud those folks who have helped protect large stretches of forest from becoming paved over, and their success has been remarkable. But, without a vision of active management of these precious forest resources, they will be preserved out of existence, and the very plants and animals preservationists hope to protect will be gone.



Bill Haines Sr. (who died in 2007) and his son Bill Jr. earned 2006 New Jersey Tree Farm of the Year honors.

Generations of Stewardship

There is another reason we have great expanses of forestland left in New Jersey, and that is the American land ethic of stewardship of the land that farm families have followed for generations. The Lee and Haines families of Burlington County, New Jersey, both in the American Tree Farm System, have farm and forestland holdings that total about 18,000 acres. Their families have stewarded these lands since the late 1860s.

This land also happens to be located in the preservation zone of the Pinelands National Reserve, created by Congress with the National Parks and Recreation

Act of 1978. The reserve covers 19 percent of the total area of New Jersey, and without this important piece of legislation, it's not likely our pine forests could have been saved.

Unfortunately, most environmentalists have disregarded the intent of the act, which was to sustain the pineland forest ecosystem with a working landscape to allow our cultural and historical heritage to continue to steward these resources as they have for generations. They would rather have the Lee and Haines families removed from their lands to allow "wilderness to return."

Our pinelands are highly fire and dis-

turbance dependent. Fire has been eliminated as a result of safety concerns and the forests are now suffering. Disturbance by forest management activities has also been reduced to levels that provide little to no disturbance on the landscape level. Many of the fire-dependent, endangered species now only thrive on private lands that are actively managed and used. These species thrive on these lands not in spite of the owners' management and uses but because of these activities.

The Lee and Haines families, for which I serve as consulting forester, use fire actively to maintain their critical forest watersheds, which provide the needed volume of clean water for their cranberry farms. They have used lumber from their forests for more than 100 years to



Abbott and Steve Lee, above with pine regeneration four years after harvest, manage the 2005 New Jersey Tree Farm of the Year.



build the wide range of farm structures needed—and to provide the wood fiber our society continues to demand.

In the 1700s, a sawmill stood on what is now the Lee farm; and early in the settlement of this tract it was owned by Benjamin Randolph, a furniture-maker in Philadelphia who built the desk from which Thomas Jefferson wrote our Declaration of Independence. The Lee family has been caring for this land since 1868, when Stephen Lee Sr. purchased 2,000 acres among the pines near Chatsworth and established a cranberry farm. Years later, Gifford Pinchot hunted here. Brothers Abbott and Stephen III, along with his son

Stephen IV, now continue the Lee Brothers Inc. family tradition, working an 1,800-acre cranberry and blueberry farm in the heart of the Pinelands.

In nearby Washington Township, the Haines family farm has remained in continuous operation since 1890, when Martin Haines purchased a parcel of bogs and upland in an area colorfully known as Hog Wallow. It's now in the hands of the fifth generation of cranberry and tree farmers, with Bill Haines Jr. running the Pine Island Cranberry Company, which he formed in 1988.

In the mid-1800s an iron forge located on the Wading River on these farms

produced cannon balls used in the Civil War era. Yet there are those today who would have the public believe that cutting trees on these forest lands will lead to loss of our pinelands forest resources. It never did and never will.


The Pineland National Reserve in southern New Jersey is a national treasure that all citizens of the United States should visit and experience. (Note the name: National Reserve not National Preserve.)

With the exemplary land ethic of the Lee and Haines families, part of the working forests of the Pinelands National Reserve will be there for generations yet to come to enjoy and cherish. They will be there for us all to appreciate and to help understand that

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having working farms and forests are not exclusive of having extremely high-functioning vital forest ecosystems on our landscapes for all to enjoy and help sustain our high quality of life.

Both Tree Farms have earned the New Jersey Outstanding Tree Farm of the Year awards: Lee in 2005, and Haines in 2006. Education has been a large component of both farms: Their location within a few hours driving distance of 70 million U.S. citizens offers a unique opportunity to teach the public about the need to manage our forest resources.

In 2007, the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection Division of Parks and Forest selected the Lee Family as the New Jersey Forest Steward of the Year. The honor is a tribute to the family's efforts to sustainably manage their forestland — and those of the more than 900 privately owned stewardship forests in New Jersey. 

Robert R. Williams is a certified forester and wetland scientist with Land Dimensions Engineering in Glassboro, New Jersey.

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