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Turning Great Ideas into Action: *Planning is the Key!*

Now you have all these great ideas for your property. How do you go about doing them?

If you decide to put an addition on to your house there are several decisions that you need to make. How big will it be? How much can you afford to spend? What will it be used for? Where will the door and windows go? And should you hire a professional to do it or do you have the tools and knowledge to do it yourself?

The same process holds true for your woods. If your goals are small and simple like putting in a walking trail or planting a few shrubs to attract wildlife, a few simple tools and the information provided in the recommended resources may be all you need. If you decide to cut some firewood, improve wildlife habitat or put in a cross country ski trail, then a planning document will help improve the health of your woods while you reach your other goals — and possibly even save you time and money. First, you need to decide what you want to do. What are your objectives? Then, determine if those objectives are realistic and affordable.

Doing It Yourself vs. Hiring a Professional

Here are the basics: No matter whether you own a quarter of an acre or a hundred acres, it's a good idea to mark your property lines, protect yourself with safety equipment if you plan to do the work yourself, and

develop a written plan of work. Your plan may be a few notes or it may be extensive, depending on your interests. Regardless of your other goals, it's best to keep the ecological interests of the woods and it's inhabitants in mind.

Foresters versus Loggers

Your land may be too small for either a forester or a logger to get involved, but it's worth knowing the difference between the two if you decide to cut any trees.



Professional forestry advice

Loggers are skilled at cutting trees. They usually pay the landowner a set sum for the standing trees and make a profit when they get paid for the quantity and quality of the wood they bring to the mill. The more high quality wood they bring to the mill, the more profit they make.

Foresters are trained in four year forestry programs to read the wooded landscape. They understand soils and water, how

trees grow and where they grow well, how to prevent erosion, the economic value of the standing trees (known as **stumpage** in the forestry world), and much more. They take a long term view of the forest and can tell some of the forest history of a piece of property by what grows there today. They can also predict the species and health of the forest in the future and what landowners can do to “manage” the woods so they are healthy over the long term.

On larger properties, foresters define property lines, identify insects and disease problems, and assess the economic value of the standing trees as well as their projected economic value over time.

If requested by the landowner, foresters assess wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and other landscape features — but these assessments vary widely depending on the personal interests, knowledge and experience of the forester. Once the information is collected and analyzed, the forester compiles it in a written **management plan** that acts as a decision-making guide.

If a timber harvest is recommended, the forester hires the logger, and oversees any cutting of timber to be sure the landowner objectives are met and environmental regulations are followed. Foresters often save landowners money since they make decisions that increase the economic value of standing trees over the long term.

Some foresters are paid by the management plan, others take a percentage of the income of a timber harvest that they have overseen, still others charge an hourly fee. It is standard practice to ask foresters for references from previous clients. Talking with a landowner who has worked with the forester over a number of years will give you a good idea whether your property will be managed in accordance with your goals and values.

Landowner Beware

Along with the many non-economic values that woodlands offer, they also are an investment. The standing trees are worth money. Over time, with proper management, they will probably be worth more. Just like some stocks are worth more money than others, some trees are worth more than others. Market prices for wood vary. Trees are also more or less valuable depending on their species, age, and health. A forester has the expertise to tell you when it is in your best economic interest to cut trees and when it is best to continue to let them grow. A good forester will balance those economic concerns with ecological concerns and with other landowner goals. They will

act as both an economic advisor and an ecological advisor for the natural resource you have on your property.

If you plan to have some logging done in your woods and decide not to hire a forester, it is important to protect yourself from liability, your investment

(the trees themselves), and your woods from potential damage. To care for your woods, decide in advance which trees should go and which should stay in order to best meet your goals. The easiest way to mark trees is to spray a paint mark on the ones you wish to cut (and instruct the logger on which to take). Work with the logger on the location of the trails if you want to use skidder trails for recreation later on. Don't leave it to the logger to decide which trees to cut or where to put skidders, and don't hesitate to stop a logging operation in progress if you feel your directions are not being followed. It's your land and the logger is working for you.

Most loggers are ethical, but there is a significant problem in the state with those who are not. Avoid hiring a logger that



Don't leave it
to the logger to
decide which trees
to cut...

approaches you in person or through the mail and offers to clean your woods up for free, or worse yet, wants to be paid to cut your trees and take them away. This is akin to paying someone to steal your wallet. Many sad stories exist of landowners who are left with an after-harvest eyesore, no income from their natural resources, and a signed contract that protects the logger from being sued. If you hire a logger, be sure to have a written contract that legally protects you and your property. A sample contract is available from the Maine Forest Service.

Doing a “Walk Through”

It is unlikely that you will hire a forester to create a management plan for a property under ten acres. You may be able to hire a landscape architect, arbor-ist, or a professional forester on an hourly basis to do a short “walk through” with you in order to give you some ideas about how to meet your goals. Look for someone who can tell you about the soil, historical land use, the health and economic value of the trees growing on your property, the wildlife that lives there, and what the woods will look like in twenty years if you leave them alone or if you choose to cut some trees.

It’s best to have a list of objectives and questions ready before the visit. A professional should work with you, keeping your interests in mind and telling you if your objectives are practical for your woods. Keep in mind that many objectives, from wildlife habitat improvement to achieving a healthier woodland, require cutting some trees.

What is Good Forestry?

The practice of good forestry, or silviculture, promotes the health of the woods as a whole, rather than focusing on individ-

ual trees. Good forestry mimics natural processes of birth, growth and death — and tailors these processes to help achieve landowner goals without compromising the ecological health of the woods.

Silviculture was initially developed to help regulate logging and work towards a long term supply of timber. Initially, this meant that good forestry was the ability to grow trees faster and more efficiently and cut them for profit without damaging water quality or future trees. These origins led to much of the terminology of forestry that includes terms such as “crop trees” and “timber harvests”.

Generally, on larger woodlands, good forestry today means taking into consideration the sustainability of the woodland “crop” or product, but also sustaining or reestablishing the ecological health of the woods. As an owner of a small piece of the Maine woods, good forestry means integrating this knowledge of silviculture into an overall bigger picture of the value of your land to water quality, wildlife habitat, and your other goals. There is more than one way to do that.

You and Your Woods: Two Examples

Here are two examples that show how small property owners combined their values and objectives with the amount of time and money they wanted to spend.

Woodland Example 1:

This property of nine acres is fairly flat, with young poplar, cherry, white birch, gray birch, balsam fir, and alders growing in a damp area right behind the house. Most of the property is old pasture land that grew up into medium to large sized poplar, gray birch, and white birch. A lot of the poplar has broken branches from winter storms. A



Good forestry today means taking into consideration the sustainability of the woodland



Mature poplar and birch with a dense understory of pine/spruce, note conks growing on over-mature birch and storm-damaged poplar.

dense thicket of shade-tolerant spruce, partially shade-tolerant fir, and pine are growing up beneath the sun loving hardwoods. None are taller than 25 feet high and most are spindly due to the crowded growing conditions.

Old stone walls that used to border field edges run through the woods. An old white pine with a dead top grows next to one of the walls in the middle of the woods. At one back corner of the property is 3/4 acre of hemlock, which is the edge of a larger hemlock stand located on the neighboring property.

Landowner Objectives

The owners want to be able to get outside and walk through the woods, which is not easy because of the dense conifer thickets. They also want to improve wildlife habitat and are concerned with the overall health of the woods. They don't like the way the damaged poplars look and want to do something about them. They have also noticed shelf mushrooms, or conks, growing on the birch but aren't sure if the trees are severely damaged as a result.

Actions

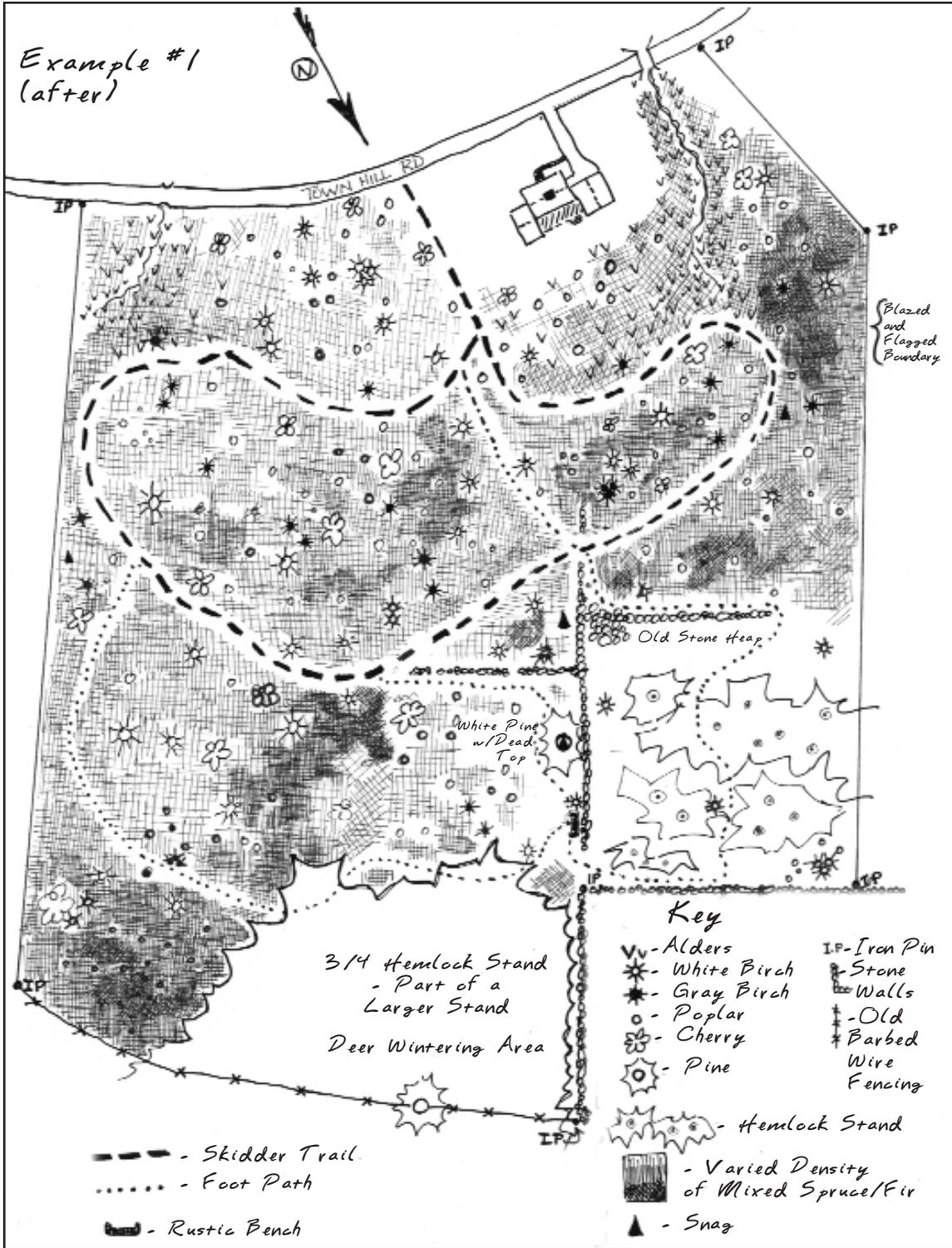
The landowners decide to hire a forester for a couple of hours to walk through their woods and answer some questions. Keeping their priorities in mind, she tells them that the poplar is over-mature and diseased with canker. The broken branches no longer produce buds which are a favorite food for partridge (ruffed grouse) in the late winter and early spring. Broken, hanging branches are also a safety risk because they can fall at any time.

Shelf mushrooms growing on some of the birch indicates internal decay. Several of these could still be saved as snag trees for wildlife, and the others cut in order to reduce safety hazards in the woods. She recommends leaving the cut birch on the forest floor for wildlife use and to replenish the soil.

The big old pine with the dead top already has woodpecker holes on one side but will stand for a long time without causing a hazard, though it is important to reassess it every few years to be sure it doesn't become one. The forester tells the landowners that cutting many of the poplar and some of the birch would be the best fit for their priorities of improving access and wildlife habitat. Thinning out some of the conifers in the understory will allow the remaining ones



Woodland Example #1: A nine acre woodland dominated by a mixed northern hardwood overstory with a dense understory of shade tolerant spruce and balsam fir. Alders, gray and white birches and cherry grow in the damper areas.



Woodland Example #1: Some of the damaged and mature poplars were removed to allow more light into the understory. The landowners planned the location of the skidder trails for the logger, then added on to it by clearing smaller trails that pass important landscape features such as snag trees and a vernal pool. A rustic bench in an open area near the stone wall and a white pine takes advantage of a scenic spot.

more room to grow taller and bushier, thus diversifying the structure of the woods. Some of the understory could also be left as it is to provide thick cover for wildlife.

Harvesting the poplar is a small job that can be done by hiring someone with a farm tractor to cut the trees and haul out the logs. The forester suggests they ask at a local farm and garden supply store and search the weekly Swap and Sell guide for someone offering the service.

The forester gives them an eyeball estimate that the amount of timber removed will be approximately two big truck loads, or about 20 cords. The landowners will probably just break even between the expense of the woodcutter and the income from selling the logs. They decide to flag a loop trail where they want the woodcutter to make a trail to haul the logs out. Seeding the trails with a native “conservation mix” available at garden supply stores after the job is finished will keep the trail from growing back into brush, protect soil and water, and also provide food for deer, rabbits and other wildlife.

The forester reminds the landowners that papers must be filed with the Maine Forest Service if they plan to sell any wood and cautions them to have a written contract with the woodcutter that protects their objectives for their woods and protects them from liability.

With a little exploration, the forester finds that the hemlock at the back of the property appears to be an important piece of a larger deer wintering area. The owners and the forester agree that the best thing to do is leave it alone. The owners also decide to contact their neighbors since they probably would appreciate knowing that they have important deer wintering area on their property.

Woodland Example 2:

This property has a house on 1 1/2 acres of mixed northern hardwoods. The woods

are primarily made up of oak, birch, and maple of varying heights. Some ornamental conifers grow near the house and a large old white pine grows at the back of the lawn.

Landowner Objectives

The owners, a young couple with two children, like to watch birds and would like to make maple syrup for their own use and to give as gifts. They would also like to emphasize the beauty of the birch and beech trees. Their primary consideration is to make sure their actions improve the overall health of their property.

Actions

The owners clearly mark their property boundaries and, using a tree identification guide, identify most of the trees on their property to species. They find that many of the trees they thought were sugar maples are red maples, instead. The red maples will still produce sap, though not as much as the sugar maples. To find out if the maples are large enough to tap, they measure the circumference of each trunk at about four feet from the ground. A few good sized sugar maples and red maples are over 24 inches in circumference (the minimum size for tapping). They mark each tappable-sized tree with colored flagging to be able to see them from a distance, then walk back a hundred feet to view the overall form and health of the marked trees.

On the rough map they drew of their property, they record notes about the size and health of the trees. Some maples growing close to other trees have small crowns and will not be good sap producers unless they have some room to spread out in the canopy to grow more leaves. One cluster of maples sprouts from an old stump and competes with its close neighbors for water, sunlight, and soil nutrients. Some have thin foliage. The landowners decide to help the largest maples with the biggest crowns by thinning out competing trees—without

opening up the woods so much that increased sunlight encourages new trees to compete with the maples.

The owners do the work themselves. At the same time, they trim back some ladder fuels from ornamental conifers growing near the house in order to reduce fire hazards.

When they first scouted their woods, the owners noticed several large sugar maples on the neighboring property. They decide to contact the neighbors to tell them about their maple sugaring plans and ask if they are willing to have their trees tapped in exchange for some maple syrup. After discussing how maple syrup is made and the effects on the trees (which are tapped for only a few weeks in the spring), the neighbors readily agreed and asked if they could join in during the maple sugaring season.

The big white pine at the back of the lawn has a dead branch. The owners think it might be diseased and contact the Insect

and Disease Management (IDM) Division of the Maine Forest Service for more information. From the information they obtain, they believe the branch was damaged in a storm and will have no lasting impact on the tree. They decide to hire a licensed tree care company to remove the hazardous branch since it is beyond their skill to do so.

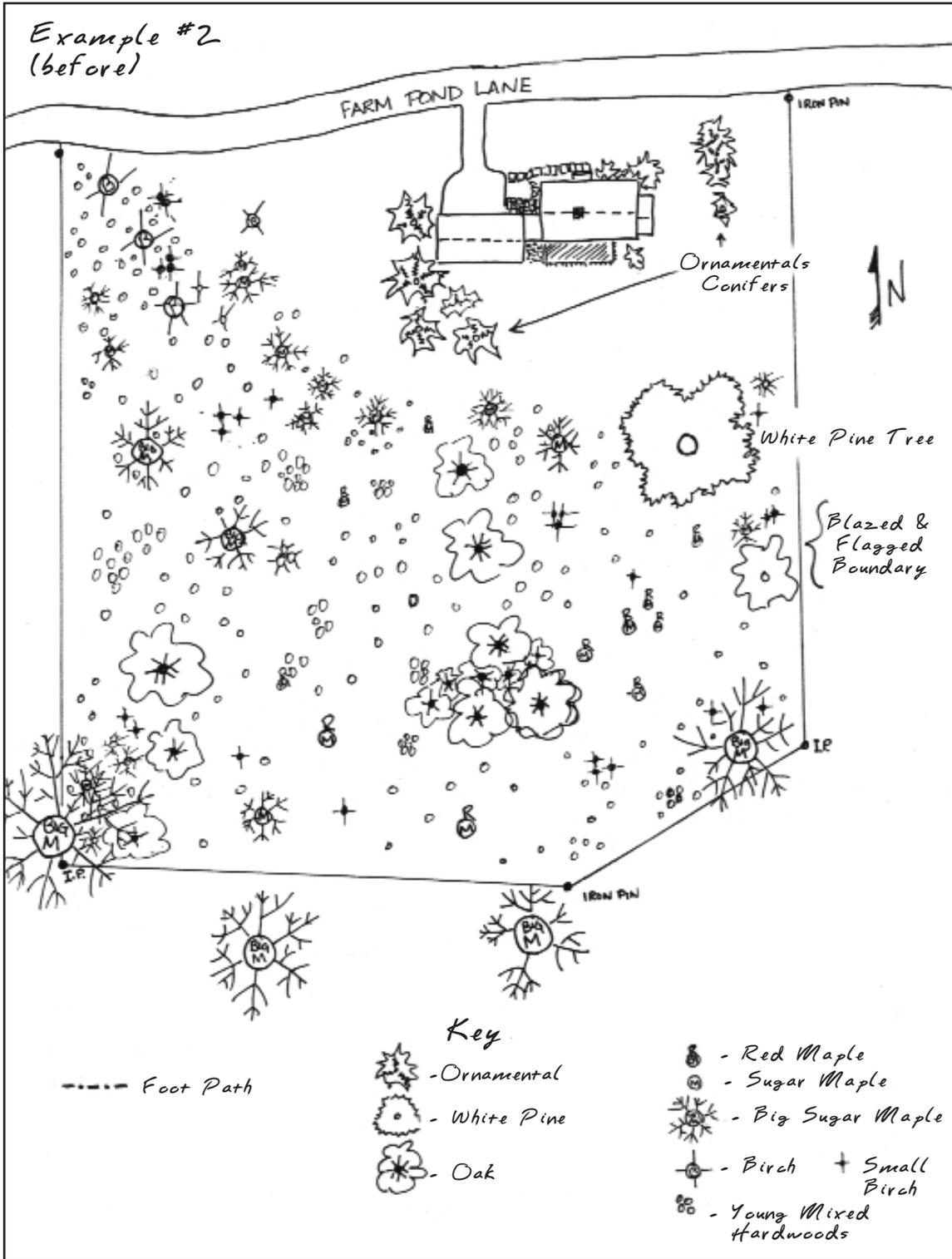
They consider opening up the lower level of the woods by pruning the lower branches of the trees left after thinning in order to make a more park-like look. After finding out that this kind of pruning discourages most wildlife, because little cover is left in the understory, they decide to prune only one small area beneath white birch where they plan to cultivate some medicinal herbs in the understory for their own use. They also plan to put in a circular trail to take advantage of bird watching on their property.



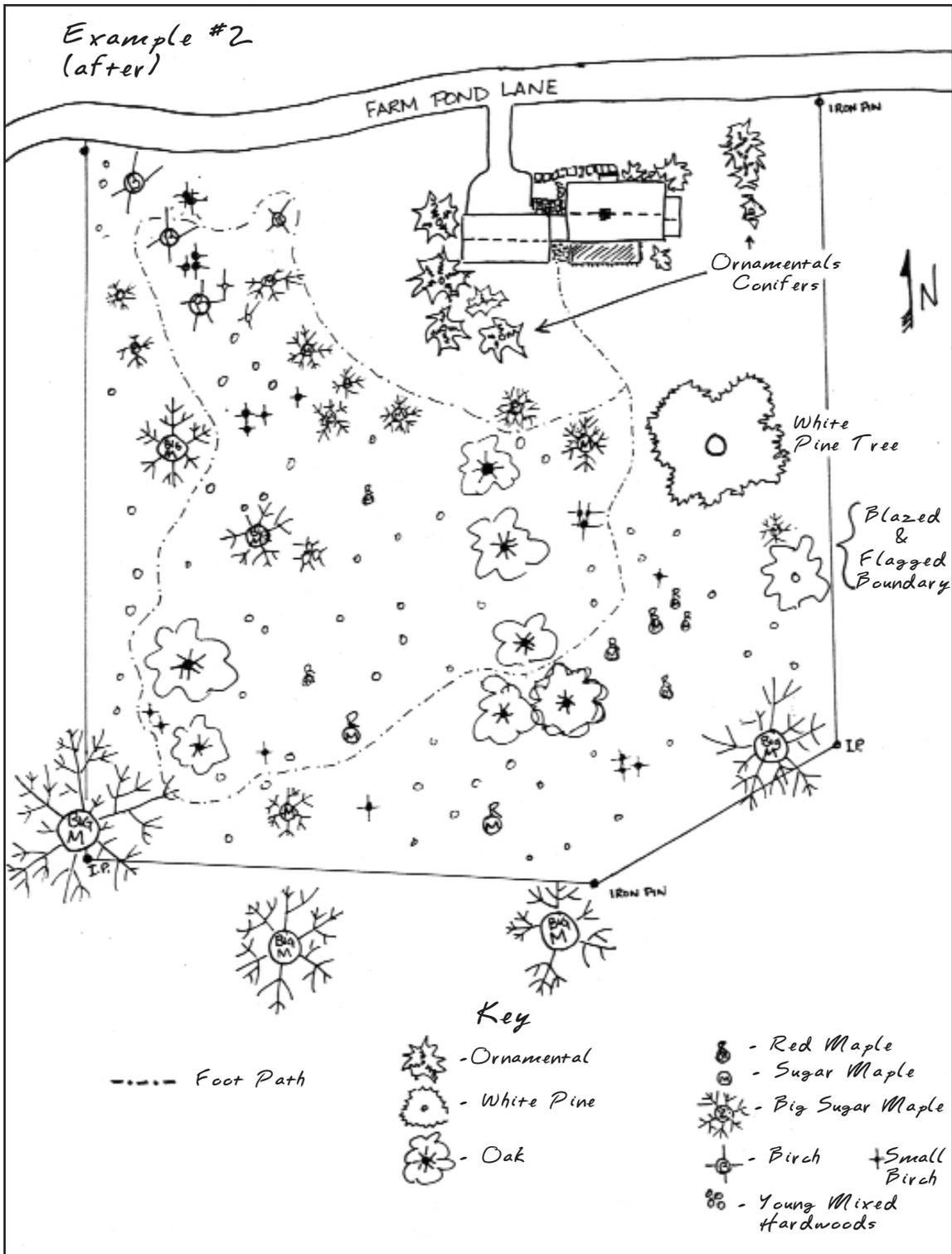
Before cleaning out underbrush



After, note ginseng now growing in new space.



Woodland Example #2: A 1 1/2 acre property with mixed northern hardwoods made up of oak, birch and maple. Ornamental conifers grow near the house.



Woodland Example #2: Weaker trees competing with healthy, sap-producing sugar and red maples were removed, but some were left to provide cover for wildlife. The understory beneath the birches was cleared to make room for a future woodland herb garden. The owners plan to put in a narrow walking trail.

RESOURCES

Property Boundaries

Boundary Information. Maine Forest Service, Department of Conservation. Forest Fact Sheet 4. Contact: 800-367-0223 (In-state) or 207-287-2791 (Out of State).

Timber Trespass. Maine Forest Service, Department of Conservation. Information Sheet. Contains selected laws pertaining to cutting timber without landowner permission. This is a common occurrence when property boundaries are not accurately marked (or not marked at all). Contact: 800-367-0223 (In-state) or 207-287-2791 (Out of State).

Proper Pruning for Healthy Trees

The Profit in Pruning. 1986. Forest Fact Sheet. Department of Conservation, Maine Forest Service. Illustrates proper pruning techniques and the results of good pruning. To order: 800-367-0223 or call your local field forester.

Pruning Guide for Pine and Hardwood Trees. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Forest Fact Sheet 12. To order, request a brochure of Cooperative Extension publications from: Information Services and Publications, UNH Cooperative Extension, Taylor Hall, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

Cutting and Selling Trees

A Field Guide To Laws Pertaining to Timber Harvesting in Organized Areas of Maine. January 1996. Explains, in simple terms, state laws and regulations that must be considered when harvesting wood. Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Contact: DEP, Bureau of Land and Water Quality, 17 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333 or 800-452-1942 (In-state) or 207-287-2111.

A Guide to Selling Trees from Your Woodlot. University of Maine Cooperative Extension. 12 pp. #7096. \$1.00. To order: 800-287-0274 or the Internet at <http://www.umext.maine.edu>

Improve Your Woodlot by Cutting Firewood. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Contact: Information Services and Publications, UNH Cooperative Extension, Taylor Hall-University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

Information Sheet: Shoreland Zoning. Describes what constitutes a shoreland zone and gives the minimum state standards (local standards may be more stringent) for timber harvesting within this zone. Contact: 207-287-4987.

Selecting a Logger. (Brochure). Gives options for choosing a logger. Department of Conservation, Maine Forest Service. Contact: 800-367-0223 (In-state) or 207-287-2791 (Out of State).

Selling Less for More. Tips on getting the most from harvesting your woodlot. University of Maine Cooperative Extension. 2 pp. Bulletin #7180. Free. Contact: 800-287-0274 or the Internet at <http://www.umext.maine.edu>

Timber Sales Contract. University of Maine Cooperative Extension. 4 pp. Bulletin #7074. Free. Contact: 800-287-0274 or the Internet at <http://www.umext.maine.edu>

Woodlot Harvesting with Small Tractors. University of Maine Cooperative Extension. 8 pp. Bulletin #7054. \$1.00. Contact: 800-287-0274 or the Internet at <http://www.umext.maine.edu>

Woodland Planning

Beattie, Mollie et al. 1993. *Working with your Woodland: A Landowner's Guide.* Provides all the basics necessary for sustainable forest management on small woodlands. Hanover: University Press of New England. Order through bookstores.

Decker, D.J., et al. *Wildlife and Timber from Private Lands: A Landowner's Guide to Planning*. This guide helps landowners incorporate wildlife considerations into woodland management planning. Cornell Cooperative Extension. Information Bulletin #193. To order: 607-255-2080 or the Internet at <http://www.cce.cornell.edu/publications/natural-resources.html>

Landowner's Guide to Forest Stewardship Practices. A series on the ecology, stewardship, and management of small woodlands. Funded by the Stewardship Incentive Program, which assists owners of more than ten acres. Provides good background information specific to Maine for anyone who wants to know more about the forest in general and their property in particular. Available from the Department of Conservation, Maine Forest Service. Contact: 800-367-0223 (In-state) or 207-287-2791 (Out of State).

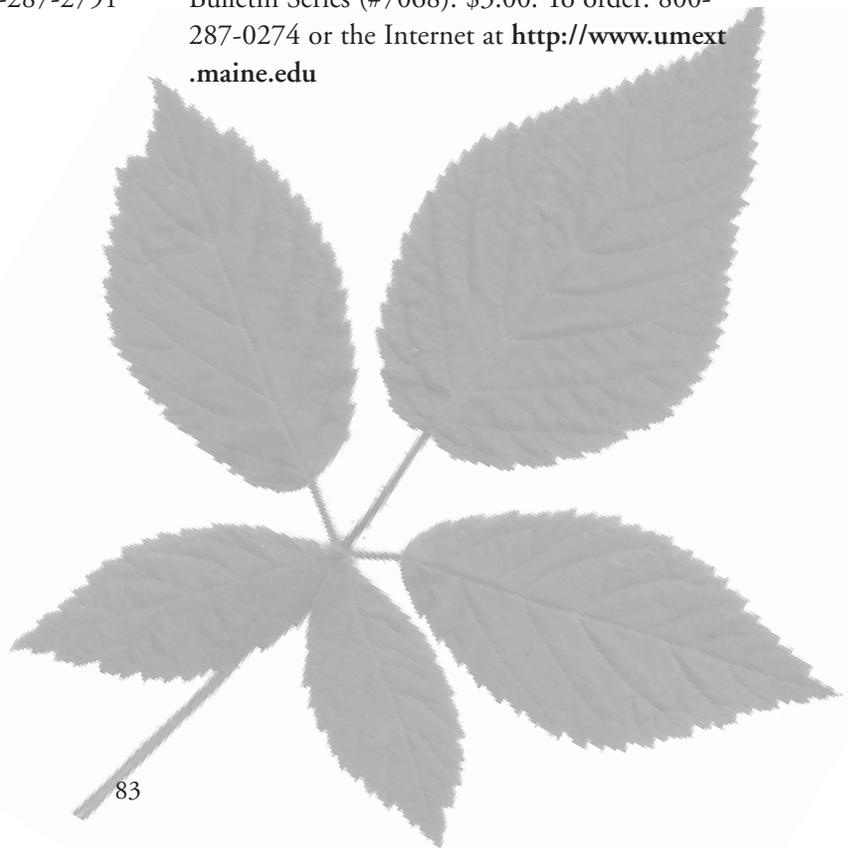
Forestry in Blueberry Country: Forestry Management Benefits In Maine's Lowbush Blueberry Country. Contact: Down East RC&D, P.O. Box 210, Cherryfield, ME 04622 or call 207-546-2368 or the Maine Forest Service, State House Station 22, Augusta, ME 04333 or call 800-367-0223 (In-state) or 207-287-2791 (Out of State).

Seeking Professional Forestry Assistance. University of Maine Cooperative Extension. 6 pp. Bulletin #7071. Free. To order: 800-287-0274 or the Internet at <http://www.umext.maine.edu>

Thinning Young Forest Stands. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Forest Fact Sheet 7. To order, request a brochure of Cooperative Extension publications from: Information Services and Publications, UNH Cooperative Extension, Taylor Hall, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

Weeding Young Forests. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Forest Fact Sheet 6. To order, request a brochure of Cooperative Extension publications from: Information Services and Publications, UNH Cooperative Extension, Taylor Hall, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

Yankee Woodlot Plan and Video Series. Easy to understand 10-part series of informative fact sheets for small landowners, plus a journal and directory that can be used with the Video. Call for information on the video. Contact: University of Maine Cooperative Extension. Bulletin Series (#7068). \$3.00. To order: 800-287-0274 or the Internet at <http://www.umext.maine.edu>



Creating a Plan for Work and Fun

When you put all the Backyard Family Projects together you will have almost completed a comprehensive work plan while having fun in the woods with your family and neighbors. All you need to add are proposed actions, a time frame for completing the work, and a schedule of any maintenance or seasonal work. Get the whole family involved in decision-making to finish up the plan for your land.

DOING THE ACTIVITY

The Backyard Family Projects combined provide a good picture of your woods and your interests. Put them together, read them over and add in a work (and fun) schedule to guide you to your goals. Remember, you choose how much or how little you want to do. You can always decide to do more later.

Step 1: Brainstorming

Get your family together and brainstorm a list of things you would like to do on your property. Want to build a tree house, make maple syrup, grow mushrooms, create wildlife habitat, and create a nature trail? Don't worry if the different activities are compatible for now, just jot down a wish list.

1. When you finish the list, discuss all the items and decide on your top three priorities.
2. Discuss how much time each of you are willing to spend (*per week, per month, or per year*) on the activity. Are you willing to give up some television time to spend some time outside with the family? Or are you willing to cut back on some other activity that takes you away from home? How much time do you have in the spring to collect and make maple syrup? How much time do you have to prepare, plant, and tend a woodland wildflower garden? Do you have the time to talk with your neighbors about a community trail or organize a neighborhood get together? Your answers to these questions will determine if you tap five trees or fifteen, or plant a three by five foot flower plot or a thirteen by fifteen foot plot. Remember, it's always best to start small and expand.

Step 2: Putting the Pieces Together

Now that you have established your top three priorities, take a look at the Backyard Family Projects to see which ones you've done and which ones will be useful for you to do. It's a good idea to get a three-ring binder to collect all the projects, maps, and your notes.

The Backyard Family Projects fit together best in the following order:

Backyard Family Project #5: How to Find Your Way in the Woods. This is an activity well worth doing so you can mark your property boundaries and create an accurate map of your property.

Backyard Family Project #1: Scouting Your Land. A basic map of your property will be useful no matter what you decide to do. It can be added on to as you discover more and more about your property. Make several photocopies of the finished Master Map to use in future planning activities. (*You may even want to make a couple on transparencies at a copy store and buy some erasable pens. This way you can play around with where a trail might go or where a wildflower garden might work, without having to go through your whole stack of photocopies.*)

Backyard Family Project #6: Getting Down and Dirty. Understanding your soil will allow you to understand one of the most basic limitations to what you can do with your property. (*The other significant factor is the amount of shade*). Note on the Master Map where vegetation changes from one kind to another. These vegetation boundaries are useful in indicating soil dampness (and type), but they also provide useful clues towards what kinds of activities to pursue in certain areas of your property.

Backyard Family Project #2: A Wildlife Safari in Your Woods. Draw in wildlife habitat and wildlife signs on the Master Map. This will give you a picture of what wildlife habitat you already have and might want to protect, and where you can do some wildlife home improvement projects.

Backyard Family Project #3: Planning a Woodland Wildflower Garden. Add notes about wildflowers you identified to the Master Map and woodland features like boulders, streams, or rock walls that you want to incorporate into your design.

Backyard Family Project #4: You Can Grow Mushrooms! If mushrooms are your interest, add notes to the Master Map about where hard woods are available for logs and where there are favorable shady sites protected from drying winds located in an area not too far from a water supply.

Backyard Family Project #7: How About a Community Trail? Whether you plan a trail on your property or a neighborhood trail that spans several properties, sketch in the piece on the Master Map that crosses your property. Take advantage of scenic spots like paper birch trees, rock walls, large white pines, flowering trees, snags, and vernal pools.

Step 3: A Quick and Easy Way to Get Organized

The woods in your backyard should be fun, so you don't want to make your family projects a chore. Keeping flexibility on when things need to be done to complete a woodland project will keep them from becoming chores, but some planning will allow them to be more fun. A wall calendar can serve as an easy reminder.

Creating a Yearly Calendar and "To Do" Lists

- 1.** Look at the information you've already collected in the Backyard Family Projects, decide which 3 projects you want to do first and then fill out a "To Do" list for each. After filling out the "To Do" list, prioritize all the items on the list in the order that you need to do them. (*See the attached example for Maple Sugaring*). It's a good idea to photocopy the "To Do" list — one copy for each of the family projects you plan to do. You can include these lists in the 3-ring binder with all your other notes and use them as a guide.
- 2.** Using a monthly wall calendar, write in when certain activities need to take place. Logs for growing mushrooms can be cut in winter, for example, to be used in the early spring (*or cut right before inoculation*). Maple stands can be thinned of smaller, less healthy trees in the fall when the foliage is beautiful and black flies are nonexistent. Creating a neighborhood trail in summer requires some work contacting neighbors and getting organized in the spring. (*Use a different colored pen for each of your top three projects and you'll be able to see at a glance what activity is related to which project*).
- 3.** Use the calendar to also record what you see on your property and where you see it. Do you notice a lot of birds in the trees in May? Painted trilliums in the woods near a big rock? A robin's nest beneath the overhang of the shed in June? St. Johnswort blooming in July? Monarch butterflies in September? If the whole family adds notes of what they see, soon you'll have a day to day record of your property and the whole community of living things that makes up the natural neighborhood in the woods in your backyard.

Activity Maple Sugaring

To Do:

Who Will Do?:

 Learn to identify maple trees

Whole family

 Find maple trees that are large enough to tap

Dad and the kids

 Take out some competing trees

Hire someone

 Hire someone to take out the trees

Mom will do

 Tools for making syrup: a drill, spiles, buckets, a boiling pan

Dad

 Look for old wood stove (to boil sap)

Mom

 Split firewood

Hire someone

 Collect bottles, jars for syrup

The kids

 Late winter "to do" list for collecting sap/making syrup

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Notes: Need to keep an eye out for stove at yard sales

Check for someone to cut wood (Ask Larry at the Barbershop).

Activity _____

To Do:

Who Will Do?:

































Notes: _____
