

# Keeping Your Woods as Woods



## Notes from the Chief

*Robert Boyles, ODNR Deputy Director, State Forester and Chief, Division of Forestry*

As a fellow private woodland owner, I enjoy tending my own property for a variety of forest resource benefits. These include sustainable timber production, enhancement of wildlife habitat, and related recreational uses. Hearing the sound of a spring gobbler, achieving a successful timber harvest, watching the natural changes of the woodland from season to season; these are a few of several important facets of woodland ownership for my family and me.

Under the OFTL program, sustainable management for merchantable forest products can and does go hand in hand with promoting valuable wildlife habitat, offering woodland owners a lifetime of stewardship benefits. These benefits may be shared and in turn, passed along to future generations.

I hope you glean many useful tips from the articles within this latest issue of our newsletter, including the “OFTL Landowner Highlights” – a great story of a private woodland owner who, by thoughtful planning and prudent choices, earned and continues to enjoy sustainable resource benefits from his well-tended woodland.

## Ohio’s Latest Forest Threat: Thousand Cankers Disease of Black Walnut

*Tom Macy, Forest Health Administrator*

Over the past several years, Ohio has been hit with some devastating new forest pests. As if we didn’t have enough to deal with as a result of emerald ash borer, gypsy moth, and a plethora of invasive plants, in 2011 Asian longhorned beetle was discovered in Clermont County. In early 2012 hemlock woolly adelgid was found in a native hemlock stand in southeast Ohio. In late 2012 we detected the insect vector of thousand cankers disease in Butler County, with the fungal component confirmed in the same area in 2013.

The walnut twig beetle (WTB) is a tiny bark beetle less than two millimeters in length that is native to the western United States and Mexico. In its native range, WTB feeds on the western walnut species Arizona walnut (*Juglans major*) and southern California walnut (*J. californica*).

The fungus, also presumed to be native to the western states, is known as *Geosmithia morbida*, and is consistently found on the bodies of WTB and in their galleries – tunnels created in wood as a result of feeding activity – and frass, the sawdust-like excrement. It is not currently known whether there is any mutualistic relationship between WTB and the *Geosmithia* fungus.

When WTB bore into the twigs and trunk of a walnut tree, they carry with them the spores of *Geosmithia morbida*. When the beetle enters the tree, the fungus produces small areas of dead tissues, or cankers, on the inner and outer bark tissue. Eventually, these cankers form beneath the bark and in the cambium layer in and around WTB galleries. Initial infestations may show little or no outwardly visible symptoms. Repeated attacks by large

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*The fungus spores that WTB carry produce small areas of dead tissues, or cankers, on bark tissue.*

Ohio’s black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) and closely related but less common butternut (*J. cinerea*) trees are now threatened by thousand cankers disease (TCD), a “disease complex” involving an insect vector and an associated fungus (as observed with the more well-known Dutch elm disease). TCD was first found in the eastern U.S. in 2010 near Knoxville, TN, and has since been found in Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and most recently, our buckeye state.

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## Ohio's Latest Forest Threat — TCD *Cont'd from Page 1*

numbers of WTB finally result in “thousands of cankers” that then lead to premature yellowing or “flagging” of leaves from June to August and thinning of foliage in the crown of the affected tree.

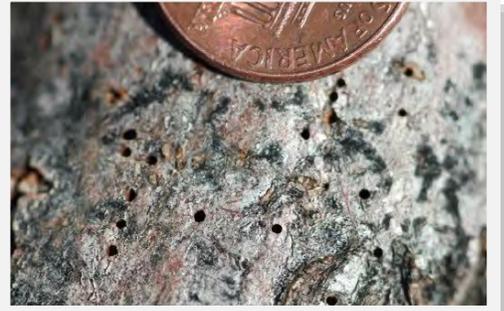
Walnut anthracnose, an unrelated and less serious fungus, typically causes early yellowing and leaf-drop on black walnut. However this fungus causes brown spots on the yellowed leaves, whereas leaves that have turned yellow due to TCD will typically not have brown spots.

From initial infestation, it could take as long as 10-15 years for TCD symptoms to develop, however, by the time symptoms are visible, affected trees usually die within 3-4 years.

At this time, there is no known treatment for TCD. Systemic insecticide and fungicide options are being researched as possible control measures, however, these may only be viable options for individual, high-value trees, and not practical at the landscape level. Preventing the movement of the insect and fungus, especially in firewood, is vital to ensuring that the disease does not spread. The ODNR Division of Forestry and Ohio Department of

Agriculture have been monitoring WTB traps near the known infestation in Butler County, as well as statewide in order to find any additional infestations.

Landowners and natural resource professionals are urged to regularly inspect walnut and butternut trees for symptoms of TCD. If a suspected TCD infestation is found, contact the ODNR Division of Forestry Forest Health Program at (614) 265-6705.



*Perspective on size of holes caused by WTB boring into the twigs and trunk of a walnut tree.*

## Ohio Forest Tax Law Landowner Highlights

*Cameron Bushong, Service Forester*

One of the first landowners I had the opportunity to work with as the service forester for Athens County was Rick Harper. During my visit, it became apparent that Rick had developed an ecological conscious throughout the ownership of his property, and began to see forest management through a different light. The stewardship of his land is closely tied to the person Rick is: both a skilled hunter and an accomplished woodworker. Rick's goals as a landowner include producing merchantable forest products and providing hunting opportunities. The Ohio Forest Tax Law (OFTL) program has supported Rick in achieving his goals.

Rick and his father, Jack, purchased their farm in 1985 for the grouse hunting opportunities it provided. The previous landowners grazed livestock in the woods and harvested timber throughout the property via the non-silvicultural, high-grade method.



*Jack Harper with the last grouse seen on the property.*

At the time of purchase, the woodlands on the farm had begun to recover from the past land uses. Abandoned agricultural fields scattered throughout the property had reverted to dense, brushy, early successional forests.

These reverted fields provided the necessary habitat

for early successional wildlife, including grouse. As the old-field reversions progressed on the successional time clock, the understory gradually thinned out and opened up. Consequently, the last grouse seen on the property was in the summer of 2010.

Shortly thereafter in 2011, Rick contacted the service forester covering Athens County. At this time, Rick's land was certified under the “Old Law” OFTL agreement that didn't require landowners to have an active management plan. After doing his own research and talking with natural resource professionals, Rick decided he wanted a management plan developed for his property.

He discovered the need to clearcut sections of his woodlands to create early successional habitat to hold grouse and whitetail deer on the property. The service forester incorporated clearcuts into the management plan and suggested cutting stands with poor quality timber on a rotational basis to provide multiple types of habitat at the same time.

Thirty-two acres were identified for low-grade timber removal and wildlife habitat enhancement. After a year of searching for someone to complete the timber harvest, Rick sold merchantable forest products to a master logger. The master logger applied all of the appropriate best management practices throughout the



*Rick Harper standing in one of the recent clearcuts. A drumming log for grouse has been set up in the background.*

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# Managing for deer....Keep it fun!

*Bryan Kay, Private Lands Biologist, Division of Wildlife, District 3*

Landowners wanting to manage their property for deer hunting has exploded in popularity in the last 5-10 years. Between multiple outdoor television channels, numerous hunting shows, and aisle after aisle of food plot mixes, managing for deer can quickly become overwhelming. Do you plant red or white clovers, annuals or perennials, brassicas, rape seed? What areas?...how many acres? The possibilities are endless and often driven by budget, investment of time, and available tools needed to establish the plot. So where do you start? In my position, I primarily work with private landowners and I get this question a lot.

The first question that needs addressed is what are the goals and objectives? When managing land for deer, the goal is simple: make your property very attractive and desirable to white-tails. What should we look for? A deer's habitat is made up of three components: food, cover, and water. Let's start with food. This is the time to walk the property and really

address what and how much food is present and what time of year those sources are available to deer. After doing this, it may be determined that enough food is already there and this is not a limiting factor. You may be surrounded by agriculture, or have a mature stand of oaks yielding acorns in season, or have field edges plentiful with soft mast species. If this is the case, no need to add more of something you already have. If this is not the case and food is scarce, adding a food source could be beneficial.

Deer food sources become extremely important three times during a year. This may determine which direction you go with the food plot. Spring food availability plays a big role in antler development and is a necessity for newborn fawns at weaning; these plots should be rich in protein. Late summer/early fall food sources are important for bucks to "bulk up" and help prepare them for the upcoming breeding season when food is not their number one concern, and to increase their fat supply to help them through the winter months. Such food plots should be high in carbohydrates. The third and final time of year is providing food during the winter months; critical sources now may include corn or bean fields that were left unharvested or winter wheat fields.

When it comes to deer movement and bedding, cover is very important. Deer, especially older bucks, don't want to be in the wide open. Cover can be added to a woodland stand by cutting trees and allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor to stimulate new early successional growth. Cover can also be added by planting native warm season grasses. These grasses can provide great travel corridors between woodlots. Or it can be as simple as stop

mowing and let your fields revert back to shrubs and brush. A perfectly manicured field provides little browse and zero cover for deer. Lack of a water source could easily be corrected by digging a water hole if the soils are right.

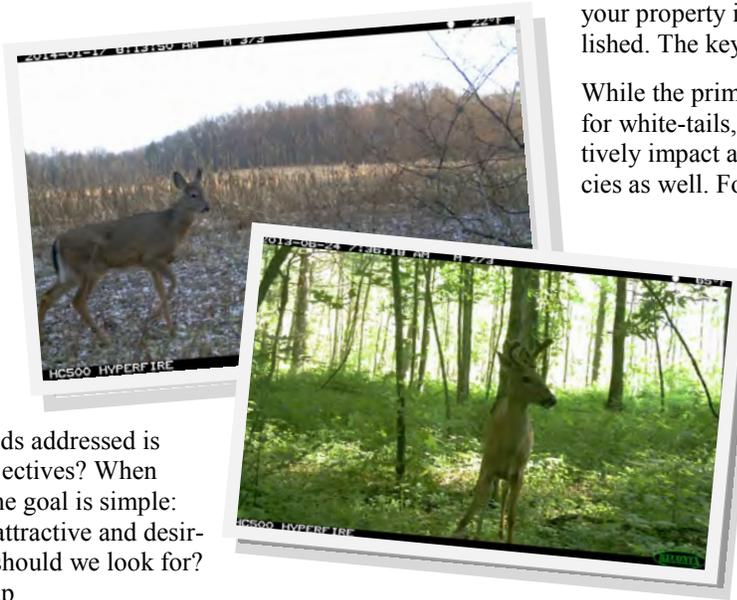
The take home message is determine what habitat your property is lacking and try to get that established. The key to a healthy habitat is diversity!

While the primary goal may be to better your habitat for white-tails, odds are you are also going to positively impact a number of non-target wildlife species as well. For those who miss hearing the drumming of a spring grouse, those thick, early successional stands created for bedding areas provide the vital habitat needed for grouse and optimal nesting cover for the wild turkey. Not to forget about the numerous song birds that will utilize these stands, like the eastern towhee and prairie warbler.

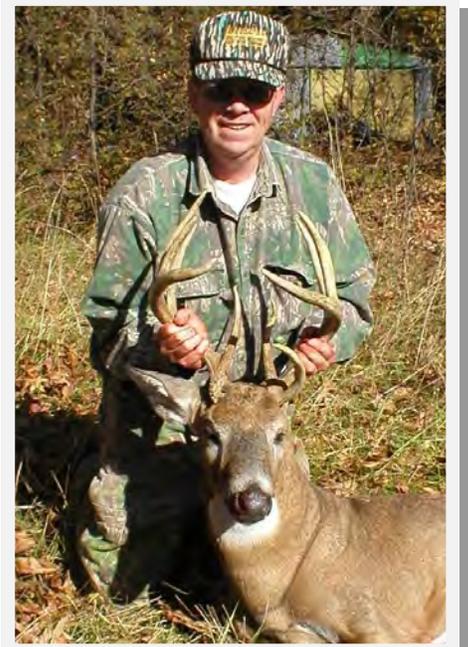
The most important thing to keep in mind while managing land and habitat for deer is to keep it fun.

While it may be frustrating at times, this should not feel like work. When it is no longer fun it may be time to scale back and take a new approach. Do not bite off more than

you can chew for if you do, this may cause you to become discouraged and give up. Keep your projects small, reasonable and realistic. Remember that you do not have to tackle this alone. Contact your area Ohio Division of Wildlife Private Lands Biologist for technical assistance.



*Doe slipping along field's edge to bedding area; and young buck caught on trail cam.*



*Another OFTL landowner managing for mature whitetail deer and sustainable timber resources.*

## OFTL Landowner Highlights *Cont'd from Page 2*



*68" Howard Hill style longbows made by Rick from Osage-orange, maple and walnut from his farm.*

harvest areas. The timber harvest accomplished Rick's goals, while promoting the health and productivity of his woodland...and the property already is holding deer!

There are several things that can be gleaned from Rick's story. First, time spent in the woods between a service forester and a landowner is an excellent learning opportunity for everyone involved. Second, a woodland stewardship management plan is a valuable tool provided through OFTL. The plans are crafted around each landowner's specific goals and promote forest benefits including the timber resources. It helps landowners

sustainably produce the products and services they desire from the woodlands. Third, forest management requires work on the landowner's part. Rick researched forest management, networked with professionals and searched for a full year to find a buyer. His time and effort have paid off. Finally, forest management is a multigenerational process. It took 25 years for the forest to change enough so that it no longer provided habitat suited to grouse. The management we do today impacts generations 20, 50, and even 100 years from now. OFTL considers this aspect of forest management and helps to ensure the forest resource needs of today are fulfilled without compromising the needs of future generations.



*The arrows are also made by Rick from yellow poplar and turkey feathers found on the farm.*

## For the OFTL Landowner...did you know?

*Mark Wilthew, OFTL Coordinator*

The oil and gas boom in Ohio with Utica and Marcellus shale plays likely is no surprise to you by now. Drilling rigs and pipeline infrastructure installations are now common sights in the major shale play areas of our state. Oftentimes, these natural resource development activities occur within properties where woodlands are present.



*Clearing for Utica shale play drilling operation, Columbiana County, Ohio*

As an Ohio Forest Tax Law (OFTL) program participant, you may be interested in leasing, or have already entered a lease with an oil and gas company. Your forest land certificate does not restrict you from entering an oil and gas lease, however, this does bring up a good question: "How might this lease impact my forest land certification?"

Forest lands certified by the Chief of the Division of Forestry involve a property's surface – the woodland acreage upon the ground – and not the oil and gas under the surface. However, because oil and gas wells and delivery infrastructure are necessary to gain subsurface resources, these activities do eventually impact the land surface.

If you decide to enter an oil and gas lease, and unless your lease agreement specifically excludes any activities within the forest land, such as a no-surface impact lease, consider that the oil and gas company may plan to conduct the above mentioned surface activities within your certified forest land. You may determine that you will permit this activity within your forest land; however, please be aware that a reduction in certified forest land acreage may result in the cancellation of your forest land certificate.

The word "may" is used because within the OFTL rules, where a landowner is considering conversion of certified forest land to a use other than production of a merchantable forest product, **IN ADVANCE** of the clearing, the landowner may submit a request for an amended forest management plan and certified forest land acreage for the portion not to be converted.

If you think that oil and gas operations upon your land will include the clearing of some currently certified forest, please contact your service forester before clearing occurs to see if your management plan and forest land certificate would be eligible for revision. Thanks again for being a conservation partner!

**Ohio Department of Natural Resources**

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