

Forest Owner Volunteers Needed!

--by Gary Goff, Sr. Extension Associate

The NY Master Forest Owner/COVERTS Program is looking for a few good volunteers for the 2000 membership drive. The goal of the program is to provide private forest owners with the information and encouragement necessary for them to achieve their ownership goals. New forest owners in particular often need some guidance with setting and achieving ownership goals. It's the Master Forest Owner (MFO) volunteers who reach out to their forest owning neighbors and supply the one-on-one peer counseling that truly makes the difference.

About 35 new volunteers receive annual training and support from Cornell Cooperative Extension via a 4-day workshop at Cornell's Arnot Forest, just south of Ithaca. Topics include tree identification, compass work, wildlife and forest management, how to use soil survey maps, forest ecology, forest economics, and education techniques. The schedule is a 50:50 mix of indoor lectures, and outdoor field trips and exercises. This year's training takes place from Weds. evening 13 Sept., through Sun. noon 17 Sept.. The training workshop is free. It's a packed schedule, but all new volunteers leave with a wealth of information, references, good memories, and confidence to go out there and make a difference! Continued support consists of routine mailings, a newsletter, and annual one-day regional refresher workshops.

Volunteers are expected to arrange and meet with 4 or 5 neighbors annually for a half-day tour of their property and discuss topics of interest to the neighbor forest owners. A few of the visits are referred to the MFOs by County Educators from Cornell Cooperative Extension and/or Foresters from NYS DEC. Volunteers are obligated to the program for only one year, but the vast majority continue on for several years. Many have been volunteers for all 10 years of the program! The current corps of over 140 volunteers from 46 counties annually meet with 100's of forest owners and impact management on over 5,000 acres. Volunteers also have the opportunity to work with NYS DEC foresters, and their County Extension Educators on various educational programs.

The NY MFO/COVERTS Volunteer Program is jointly funded through grants provided by The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS), the NY/Tri-State Chapt. of Safari Club International, The Wentorf Foundation, and NY Woodland Stewards, Inc. with cooperation from Cornell Cooperative Extension, NYS DEC, and the NY Forest Owners Assoc.. The term "COVERTS" (pronounce like cover) meaning good ruffed grouse habitat, refers to a similar program sponsored by RGS, and is symbolic of the importance of habitat to all wildlife. The term "Master" Forest Owner, implies education as in "School-Master". The training the volunteers receive complements their experience as forest owners.

If you are interested in learning more about forest management and sharing that information with your neighbors to help them and your community, please call or write: Gary Goff, MFO/COVERTS Program Director, Fernow Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, NY 14853: ph.; 607/255-2824, e-mail; grg3@cornell.edu. We will send you a brochure on the program, a listing of current volunteers, and an application form. Applicants are encouraged to apply by mid-August. All of this information, and more, is on our WEB site at <http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/mfo/index.htm>