

Forest stewards on tour

By Benna Keoghoe

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On an unseasonably warm rainy Tuesday in January, eight intrepid woodlot owners gathered around the table to share stories. They talked about why they got into management and how they do it, before setting out in the rain to tour each other's woodlots.

They may have purposefully postponed the moment when they had to go face the rain, although they are woodlot owners after all and they are used to facing the elements. So, it might have been just the sheer fact that there was a lot of stories and information that they wanted to share, that they procrastinated indoors.

These landowners were part of a forest

stewardship recognition program that was promoted by the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute (MTRI) and made possible through funding from the Nova Forest Alliance and Parks Canada. The winners of this prize have woodlots located all around the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve and are being recognized for their commitment to habitat stewardship. This in turn helps to maintain landscape connectivity and overall forest health in southwest Nova Scotia.

Recently, I went to sit in on a lecture about the current worldwide ecological situation. The word stewardship was highlighted throughout the lecture, which led me to look more into its definition, one being: "an ethic that embodies responsible planning and management of resources." I realized that these woodlot owners were a perfect fit for the award. Their stories and sentiments reflected exactly the essence of stewardship.

"I don't like to think of it as me owning my land, but that I'm just borrowing it and taking care of it for future generations" an outlook both Jim Crooker and Dave Thomas shared while we were sitting around the table.

"I'd like to leave my lot in as good, if not better, condition than the condition it came to me in," another statement shared by more than one of the woodlot owners at the table.

When we built up the courage, we then

took on outdoors and spent the remainder of the day touring around 3 of the 8 winning woodlots. Sharing the different approaches and harvest methods that each of them use.

One very interesting aspect of having these landowners together for the day was that they each had something slightly different to bring to the table. Some managed their land just for their own use, some for aesthetic reasons, some for recreation and some for an income, the one common factor however was the love of spending time in the forest. Each appreciated their resources and taking care of the habitats that they are so lucky to have access to.

They didn't stop at sharing stories, there were networking and creative ideas contributed as well. It turned out that this group of landowners used a variety of harvest/extraction tools ranging from horses, to tractors, to an ATV and trailer and even an Iron Horse (a low impact, machine used for transport in difficult terrain). The realization that each woodlot owner was using different techniques led to discussions of having an amalgamated event like a demo show or a workshop.

All in all it was a wonderful day in the woods with great company who had a lot to share and to teach. It made me realize how much information is out there amongst small woodlot owners in Nova Scotia and that each one of them has the potential to share more.

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