

# The Coverts Project in Maryland

## A Forest-Wildlife Volunteer Training Program

For the past 12 years, woodland owners and managers have committed their time for one weekend a year to learn how to have healthy, abundant and diverse woodlands. Working together, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension and the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to forest wildlife conservation, have been bringing together woodland owners to teach sound forest wildlife management practices through this neighbor-helping-neighbor volunteer educational program: *The Coverts Project*. The name comes from “covert” (pronounced *kuv’-ert*), a thicket that provides sheltering habitat for wildlife.

The goal of Coverts is to develop a statewide network of trusted friends and neighbors, called “Coverts Cooperators,” who know how to manage woodland for timber and wildlife, and become agents of change by sharing this information with others. Research has shown that landowners oftentimes implement wildlife or forest management practices or contact a forestry professional, only after being encouraged by trusted friends or neighbors who don’t have suspicious motives.

### Who Is Eligible?

Since 1990, more than 332 people have received Coverts training. Through an application process, roughly 30 individuals are selected each year and are trained to become Coverts cooperators. Folks who should apply are woodland owners and managers, educators, land trust representatives, land planners or others interested in the stewardship of Maryland’s woodlands and wildlife. Priority is given to applicants who live on woodlands, are active managers and are involved in their communities.

### Program Description

Training is an intensive 3 and 1/2-day seminar in September. Through classroom sessions, Coverts cooperators learn about:

- Maryland’s forests and how they grow
- Wildlife and its needs
- Sound forest stewardship to improve the health and productivity of their woodlands while improving habitat, diversity and abundance of wildlife
- Natural resources professionals and organizations that provide information and other assistance to help manage their properties.

The classroom learning is then reinforced with outdoor demonstrations on how these principles can be applied to individual woodlands. Time is spent on outreach strategies and techniques and how to best share what has been learned with others they know.

All meals, lodging, training and reference materials are free to participants. The reference materials include two books given to each participant prior to the workshop: *The Woodland Steward* by James Fazio and *Wildlife and Timber from Private Lands* by Cornell Cooperative Extension. Additionally, participants are given an extensive manual filled with information on topics ranging from tax laws to planting crops for wildlife.

Coverts cooperators are trained and educated in sound forest management practices and in return, the graduates are asked to apply these principles to their own property and actively encourage others to practice good forest

stewardship by "education through demonstration."

Specifically, Cooperators agree to:

- Develop and implement forest stewardship plans on their properties
- Maintain a set of reference materials provided at the training to answer questions from other landowners or to direct them to appropriate professional resources
- Commit about 5 hours per month for the next year to work with natural resource and Extension personnel, local groups, and/or other cooperators to encourage other landowners to implement forest stewardship practices
- Advocate sound forest and wildlife management in their communities.

### Coverts Cooperators as Agents of Change

The need for educated forest landowners has become essential as public resources have become more limited and the number and diversity of forest landowners who need education has increased. Wildlife habitat improvement and recreation are common landowner objectives, but leaving your woodland alone will usually not bring the greatest benefit. Coverts cooperators educate other landowners and citizens that forest management planning and forest management practices, including timber harvesting, can greatly improve wildlife habitat diversity and other forest benefits. Coverts cooperators serve as catalysts at the local level to bring together forest landowners and others who are searching for education about managing their forest properties. They can direct interested people to forest and wildlife professionals who can help them.

### Impressive Accomplishments

The graduates of past Coverts programs have been very busy. Sixty-eight percent had organized some event that included forestry or wildlife information, which resulted in more than 10,000 people receiving educational information from cooperators. Audiences included family members, friends, coworkers, students, scout groups, campers, hunters, firewood cutters, homeowner and civic associations, tree farmers, state government officials, and RGS banquet attendees. Two cooperators appeared on television shows to discuss forest/wildlife issues.

One-third of cooperators reported that other forest landowners had sought professional forestry assistance as a result of their efforts. Additionally, cooperators spent more than 17,000 hours managing their own land interests and 3,000 hours on outreach to friends, neighbors, and communities. Many cooperators have taken leadership positions with forestry organizations that they would not have otherwise sought prior to the Coverts Project training.

Some specific accomplishments of past cooperators include:

- Two new businesses that have educational missions
- Organizing adjacent landowners into an informal group with common forest management interests
- Coverts program articles in local newsletters and newspapers
- Speaking engagements.

The Coverts Project is a model of effective public and private cooperation that expands with the training of each new group of enthusiastic cooperators. Some evidence of the effect of the Coverts Project is expressed in the following quotes from cooperators:

- "I finally convinced my neighbors to try some basic practices and they were amazed with the results."
- "The Coverts Project really made the forestry and wildlife information crystal clear. I realized how much I didn't know."
- "The Coverts manual is so complete that our son, an agriculture major, used it in his college courses."

The application deadline for the 2003 Coverts program is July 7 and interested parties can contact Joy Drohan at 301-432-2767 x310 or by e-mail at [jd294@umail.umd.edu](mailto:jd294@umail.umd.edu). To learn more about the Coverts Program or about nominating or becoming a cooperator, to download an application or to look at a past training agenda, log onto [www.naturalresources.umd.edu](http://www.naturalresources.umd.edu).



Participants of the 2002 Coverts Program.

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Editors: Jonathan Kays, Lori Bittenbender, Denni Johnson  
Published four times a year and distributed to more than 5,000 forest landowners, resource professionals, and others interested in forest stewardship. For a free subscription or to send news items, dates, and comments, phone 301-432-2767 x338; fax 301-432-4089; e-mail [lb203@umail.umd.edu](mailto:lb203@umail.umd.edu); or mail to *Branching Out*, Maryland Cooperative Extension, 18330 Keedysville Road, Keedysville MD 21756. The sponsoring agencies' programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, gender, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital or parental status or national origin.

## Tree Farmer of the Year

The Maryland Forests Association recently named Larry Beauchamp of Somerset County as their 2003 Tree Farmer of the Year. By day, Larry is an inspector for the Maryland Cooperative Agriculture Department and specializes in mosquito control. He's been with the department for 26 years.

Back in the mid 1980s, Larry and his wife inherited 186 acres of land that had been in his wife's family for over 100 years. Located on the lower Eastern shore near the Maryland/Virginia line, 100 acres of the land is in timber, the rest is used for farming.

As soon as they inherited the land, the Beauchamp's had a forester come out to evaluate the property. From that evaluation, the couple decided to produce timber for income and to create wildlife habitats for hunting and recreation.

They did not cut all their timber at once. Instead they decided to cut it in small blocks over the years, which allowed their son to run his own firewood operation during his high school years. The couple reserved some of the hardwoods on the property for wildlife habitat and then also planted food plots and scattered water holes for wild game.

As a 1995 graduate of the Coverts program, Larry has offered tours of his property to other Coverts volunteers and to college students studying bird-life.

Congratulations to the Beauchamp family on this award and for their fine example of solid sustainable forestry. For more information about the Maryland Forests Association, log onto their website at [www.mdforests.org](http://www.mdforests.org).

## Inspector of the Year

The Maryland Forests Association has also named Bernard "Bernie" Zlomek of Allegany County as their 2003 Inspector of the Year. Bernie has worked for the State of Maryland for the past 34 years and is the Project Manager for the Allegany Project for the Maryland Forest Service.

Along with forest rangers, Eric Warnick and Randy Kamp, Bernie provides forest management assistance to landowners by preparing and implementing management plans. The department also has a host of other responsibilities, which include:

- Assisting with urban forestry. They recently completed a major tree planting program in Cumberland.

- With Allegany being the driest county with the most diverse topography, the department works closely in forest fire suppression.
- The department is in charge of all public-right-of-way trees and oversees any work that needs to be done on public property.
- They planted many forest buffers to improve water quality in the area and of course for the Chesapeake Bay.

There are a lot of aspects that Bernie likes about his job including the variety of projects and people he works with and he especially enjoys working outdoors.

While Bernie does not own forestland, he does have a firm belief in practicing sound, sustainable forestry management. He is very appreciative of projects like "Project Learning Tree," which has ensured that all future teachers at Frostburg State University are trained in sustainable forest management by incorporating forestry education in the elementary education curriculum. He also believes that the Tree Farm Program sponsored by the American Tree Farm System is an inspiration and that Tree Farmers are people to be admired.

Congratulations to Bernie and his forest rangers on this award and for their continued efforts to preserve Maryland's forests for generations to come.

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## New Book on Sustainable Forestry

*Living in the Appalachian Forest: True Tales of Sustainable Forestry* by Chris Bolgiano. The book is comprised of short narratives and describes forest management activities and personal sacrifices people have made in the name of good stewardship. Available from [www.stackpolebooks.com](http://www.stackpolebooks.com) or by calling 800-732-3669.

## Forestry Correspondence Course

Registrations are now being accepted for the fall general forestry correspondence course, which runs from September 1 - December 15 and is sponsored by the Maryland Cooperative Extension. The cost is \$150, which includes the text and a separate Appendix. For more information, contact Nancy Stewart at 410-827-8056 or at [ns111@umail.umd.edu](mailto:ns111@umail.umd.edu).

## Artists Sought for Bear Stamp Contest

The Maryland DNR Wildlife & Heritage Service is asking for original artwork submissions for the 2003-2004 Black Bear Conservation Stamp design contest. Entry fee is \$10 and the subject must be a black bear. Submission deadline is June 6. For more information, log onto [www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/bbstampcontest.html](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/bbstampcontest.html) or call Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559.

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## Take Note

### Doing Nothing is Costly

There is a widespread but mistaken assumption by many landowners that leaving the forest alone, or letting nature take its course, is the best course of action for wildlife, forest health and other forest benefits. History has shown otherwise. The forest is dynamic and will change with time, whether we do anything or not. However, nature can be a cruel actor in the play of life. Over the last year thousands of acres of forestland have been damaged and changed as a result of insects and disease, invasive species, ice and wind storms, and tornadoes. Could active forest management have helped? Yes!

If forest lands are monitored by a professional forester, trees killed or threatened by insect and disease outbreaks can be harvested, the damage minimized, and the landowner may receive some financial return. In forests covered with grapevines and other vines, ice and wind storms will usually cause extensive damage compared to forests where vines are cut and ice loads reduced on tree tops. This can be done in a way that wildlife populations are not hurt.

What can you do? Call a professional forester to inspect your forest and develop a written forest stewardship plan. Many active forest management activities can improve the health and vigor of woodlands and wildlife habitat, as well as your personal enjoyment. Don't let nature take its course unless you are making the judgement based on the sound advice of a forest professional. Learn more about forest stewardship at [www.naturalresources.umd.edu](http://www.naturalresources.umd.edu).

## Upcoming Stewardship Events

- **June 13 & 14: MFA Loggers/Forestry Field Days** at Garrett County Fairgrounds. Activities include a skidder pull competition, trade exhibits and a professional lumberjack competition. Contact phone number is 301-895-5369 or e-mail [mdforests@hereintown.net](mailto:mdforests@hereintown.net).
- **July 19: Maryland Christmas Tree Association Summer Meeting** at Mt. Hope Farms, Hagerstown. Contact Danny Blickenstaff at 310-790-2372 or at [mthope@erols.com](mailto:mthope@erols.com).
- **November 1: Mid-Atlantic Forest Stewardship Seminar** at Frederick Community College. Topics include developing a forest stewardship plan, developing a wildlife habitat plan and marketing timber. Contact Wilma Holdway at 301-631-3576 or at [wh89@umail.umd.edu](mailto:wh89@umail.umd.edu).

## Web Watch

**[www.kentuckysnakes.org](http://www.kentuckysnakes.org)** - Helps viewers identify snake traits: poisonous, nonpoisonous, backyard variety, patterned, solid and striped. The site provides common names, species and geographic regions.

**[www.naturalresources.umd.edu/costshare.htm](http://www.naturalresources.umd.edu/costshare.htm)** - Provides a listing of links to organizations that provide cost-share programs for forest landowners in MD.

**[www.equinestudies.umd.edu](http://www.equinestudies.umd.edu)** - Horse lovers should check out this website, which contains information on the University of Maryland's academic Equine Studies program, adult- and youth-oriented Extension horse programs and links to informative equine publications.

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### Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)

Funding expected late this summer. Provides cost-share programs for forest landowners. See the last issue of *Branching Out* on the natural resources website for details on programs or call the state forester in your county.

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### Branching Out - Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring 2003

Please send changes of address.

See page 2 for addresses and phone number.

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*Take Note*

