

50 YEARS LATER WOODSMEN STILL CELEBRATE HERITAGE

8/26/97

This past week marked the 50th Anniversary of the New York State Woodsmen's Field Days. I attended two of the three days of the annual event held each year in Boonville.

The concept originated in 1942 with the formation of the Woodsmen's Club in Old Forge. The first field day was held there in 1948 "to preserve the heritage of logging, lumbering and wood-using industries as exemplified through woodsmen's competitions."

Professional woods workers compete with each other for the title of New York State Woodsmen's Champion and Lumberjack Champion. The latest in industry tools, technology and equipment are displayed with many finished wood-based products. Nearly every countenance of the forest industry is represented.

The technical and educational viewpoint was represented by three of New York's professional and technical schools. The College of Environmental Science and Forestry and its affiliate, the New York State Ranger School at Wanakena, were joined by Paul Smith's College and SUNY Morrisville with displays. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation added its expertise to the above organizations to collectively educate and to disseminate knowledge and advice to technicians, forest landowners and the public at large.

The Northeastern Loggers Association ably represents the logging industry. Located in Old Forge, it publishes a monthly magazine dedicated to advance progressive, environmentally sound and safe timber harvesting practices to its many members through the 22 northeastern states it covers. The entire industry is predicated on one general theme "Managed Forests Provide Forever."

The latest figures available to me at hand show some encouraging statistics. Over 60 percent of New York's 30.2 million acres is forested, more than any other northeastern state. Forest land increased by 1.2 million acres between 1968 and 1980, a century-old trend that continues today.

Eighty-three percent of the 18.5+ million acres of forest land is classed as commercial forest land. State-owned forest preserve portions of the Adirondack and Catskill Parks accounts for most of the noncommercial forest land. Ninety-four percent of New York's commercial forest land is privately owned with non-farming citizens owning the largest amount.

Timber, growth and removals increased between surveys with 2.8 cubic feet of timber being grown for every cubic foot of timber being cut.

Thirty-year projections show a slight decline in forest land, but increasing timber volumes. With forest conditions improving, numerous forest management opportunities exist to further improve the conditions and substantiates the validity of the theme, "Managed Forests Provide Forever."

Timber production is only a small part of the value received from New York's sustainable forestry initiative. Improved air and water quality, benefits to wildlife and recreation are only a few of the many other advantages also derived.

I highly recommend attending next year's field days where even the most disinterested will find solace in the many and varied food offerings. At the very least you will leave with an overwhelming desire to operate heavy equipment.