

The Bradford Era

Gratitude for growing trees

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UNIVERSITY PARK — One of the things that is certain about this crazy year, we can all find things to be grateful for. At the forefront is our gratitude for frontline and healthcare workers who have kept stores open, society safe and worked their hardest to keep us healthy.

What's also been apparent has been the tremendous increase in engagement with the natural world as parks and forests proved safer places to be outside and connected to the world around us, while still physically distancing from our neighbors.

In Pennsylvania, we're fortunate that the majority of our landscape is trees; 60% of the state is forested and more than half of that forest is owned by people like you and me. Those forests have not only provided us access to recreation and beauty — ways to decompress from worries — but so many more values, like clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat and wood products.

For that, and for those who own them, we are grateful.

As we move to the next season of winter snows and quiet landscapes, take a minute to reflect on how forests and trees add to your quality of life and give thanks for those who care for them.

In Pennsylvania, 56% of the state's 16.9 million acres of forestland is owned by people — families, individuals, partnerships — not the federal, state or local governments, and not industry. Pennsylvania likely has more woodland owners than any other state in the nation.

While academicians debate methods used to estimate the correct number, we know there are a lot of Pennsylvania woodland owners out there (740,000 by the most recent estimate in 2010). It is important to recognize that these unique individuals, every day, are making decisions about the care and well-being of their piece of Penn's Woods, and we owe them all a debt of gratitude.

From the smallest parcels with stands of trees (not maintained as lawn) that are an acre or more in size to the largest forested watersheds, these wooded properties contribute to our Commonwealth's well-being. They clean our air, removing particulate matter and other air pollution that affect respiratory diseases — heck, they make our air.

These woodlands clean water and act as a sponge, absorbing massive amounts of stormwater. It would take a rainstorm of over 4 inches per hour to overcome the infiltration capacities of good forest soil that's not previously saturated. Tree root systems, primarily the micro-roots, capture and hold pollutants to clean streams.

With so much of the woods in the hands of private owners, their lands are the primary source of the raw materials that are the wood products we use daily. When we survey woodland owners, timber is number nine or ten on the list of reasons for owning woods. Things like connection to the woods, privacy, wildlife and biodiversity, recreation, family legacy and aesthetics far outweigh a desire to cut trees.

Source: http://www.bradfordera.com/opinion/gratitude-for-growing-trees/article_26b8f3ea-6c05-53b1-98da-4b195c65210d.html