



Spring 2026

# the Forest Steward

Volume 11, Number 1

*Our community thrives through  
dedication to our mission*

*New River Gorge National Park was host to a 2025  
Forest Stewards Apprenticeship Program crew.*

Forest Stewards  
 Guild

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*A view up to the tree canopy in a redwood forest.*

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*Forest Stewards Apprentices for WV and VA crews in 2025 participate in training to build essential navigation skills in the field.*

## The Guild is forging ahead

at a thoughtful and rapid pace! We are expanding programs and projects that we've been building for years. Bringing our workforce development programs beyond New Mexico helps support a healthier future for forests and communities and continues the Guild's reputation as a leader in shaping the future of ecological forestry. These partnerships with the National Park Service, land trusts, Tribal Nations, and other local entities allow us to help build capacity for sustainable stewardship.

Another recent milestone was purchasing our headquarters building in Santa Fe, New Mexico! Now more resources can go into the woods each month.

People-power is shifting in the Guild too! Our staff has doubled in the past two years, as we implement a brand new strategic plan and are finally able to invest in dedicated development efforts and a more keen focus on

membership growth and engagement. New opportunities for networking, sharing our stories, and supporting our members are on the horizon!

The Guild has a long reputation for excelling in collaborations and empowerment, engaging in essential research, creating programs that are both niche and transferrable, and nurturing a community of learners and practitioners at the heart of ecological forestry. Yet, we are just getting started!

Thanks to our knowledgeable, diverse, and passionate community, I'm thrilled to step into the Guild's next 30 years! Despite the unprecedented challenges and constant need for diligence, I am confident in our mission and steadfast toward our collective vision. Thank you for forging ahead with us!

I hope to see you at our national 30th Anniversary Guild Gathering in Maine in September!

*Colleen*

# The Past and Future of Forest Stewardship

by Rob Bryan, Guild Founding Member

Recently, Zander Evans asked me if I would be willing to write an article about changes I've seen over the last thirty years both in the profession and in the woods. Since I attended the meeting in Asheville when the name 'Forest Stewards Guild' was coined, a lot has happened. Over 40 million acres owned by vertically integrated forest products companies were sold to timberland investors. The magnitude of threats facing the forest - including the climate change, invasive insects and plants, over-browsing by white-tailed deer, catastrophic wildfire, fragmentation, development, and loss of markets for low-grade timber - has increased exponentially. Trust in science is declining and has, like much else, become a deeply partisan issue. Despite an increase in visits to national and state parks and forests, our society at large does not understand enough about the ecosystems that support civilization. The unwillingness to make changes needed to avert an existential crisis is astounding.

There have been positive changes as well. For example, while auditing forest management across the U.S., I observed how forest certification established minimum standards of acceptable practice on both large and small ownerships. Growing forest carbon markets can help pay for approaches to management that are more aligned with Guild Principles (though increasingly, some groups are using carbon sequestration as a justification to advocate for no-cut on public lands). While working with conservation owners to develop management strategies on ownerships from 20 to 50,000 acres, I was able to see how programs such as Forestry for the Birds help foresters and landowners do a better job of integrating management for wildlife habitat and other ecosystem functions with timber management. And because the Guild has been a clear and objective voice for science-based ecological forestry, it has received recognition and had a positive impact on forest policy and management disproportionate to its small membership.

While the past is important, what interests me more is the next 30 years and beyond, and how the Guild can move toward its vision of "a future where forest stewardship is a nationwide imperative."

Guild membership is trending up: total professional membership is up 45% since 2017, and student membership has more than doubled in the past nine years. However, the Old Guard is phasing out and compared to the 42,400 conservation scientists and foresters the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates in the country, we still have very limited reach.

Perhaps it is time to think more holistically about membership involvement if we are to grow and have a greater impact. Luckily, Guild leadership recognizes this and included ambitious membership growth goals in the organization's recent strategic plan. After much thoughtful planning, the organization is hiring to

allow more focus on membership than was possible previously.

While there are strategies we should explore to expand membership in all categories, I believe a significant area to grow the Guild's potential influence lies in giving more emphasis to Affiliate members, those not working in natural resources, but who support the Guild mission. In particular, the Guild should develop a separate membership category for forest landowners, develop a program to recruit them as members, and provide a means for them to become more involved in the organization. America's 11 million private forest landowners are equal partners with Professional members in stewardship of their land. The goals and values of forest landowners shape how we practice forestry on the ground, and without forest landowners' willingness to engage in forestry, most private-land foresters would not have work. If landowners have a greater stake in the Guild as organizational partners, they will be more likely to share the Guild philosophy with others in their social and professional networks, which in turn will have positive ripple effects. On the organizational side, landowners with opportunities for involvement are more likely to step up as volunteers and become donors who can support the expansion of our good work in the woods.

Much of what I have said about forest landowners applies to the third leg of the applied forestry stool - loggers and other forest operations professionals. I'm not saying that forest landowners or operations professionals should have an equal voice in all aspects of the organization. Professional foresters are uniquely qualified to speak on certain topics, silviculture for example, but on some other subjects, such as many aspects of forest policy, forest landowners could be important contributors. Likewise, loggers and other technicians have their own areas of expertise to contribute. Loggers and landowners have state and national organizations that they can belong to, but, as with professional forestry organizations, the missions of those groups may not always align with the Guild's mission and principles.

It's time for the Guild to move beyond the 20th century professional organization model. While writing this piece, I was pleased to learn that an expanded membership focus is already in the works at the Guild. The organization has been working to set the stage, so membership recruitment and engagement can be more effectively enhanced, starting now. My vision of the future is an organizational structure that will fully integrate all members of the community of forest stewards who subscribe to the Guild's mission and principles. Non-professionals need a meaningful place at the Guild table so that together we are more prepared to meet the challenges of the future.



Forester and logger partnerships



Northeast Region Guild Gathering



Jeremy Turner at Guild Gathering



Forester and landowner collaboration



Northern Highlands State Forest, WI



Forester and landowner collaboration



# The Guild Supports Innovations in Wildfire Management

By Colleen Robinson, Forest Stewards Guild

Wildfire management spans the full lifecycle of living and working in fire-dependent forests and ecosystems. Before wildfire there's education, prevention planning, community empowerment, policy development, mitigation project funding, and training a workforce in proven methods to reduce the risk of wildfire and build resilience for areas that have been affected. During wildfire there's detection, communication, response, community protection, resource protection, and so much more. After wildfire, there's the long process of community recovery and relief efforts, rehabilitation, slope stabilization, watershed protection, reforestation, adaptation, and learning for the future. Every step of the way requires dedicated collaboration across jurisdictions that

wildfire ignores.

An *Across the Landscape* Guild e-newsletter article from August 2025 references much of the work the Guild does in the Southwest throughout this life cycle. It also points out that although suppression isn't in our scope of work, we support the implementation of tools that can assist in effective detection and wildfire management. There is a lot of wildfire work that could not happen without the Guild. There is also no wildfire work the Guild could do alone.

In July 2025, on behalf of the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, and with pilot funding from the Santa Fe Community Foundation and the Santa Fe – Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District, the Guild installed a fire camera atop Tesuque

Peak to assist with fire detection across large swaths of the Fireshed. During the first week, the AI system locked onto the Laguna Fire over 60 miles away telling us the technology was working! The Santa Fe Interagency Dispatch Center and the joint City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County Dispatch Center use the camera feeds and are set up to receive alerts.

In what is essentially a technology demonstration project, efforts continue as we learn more about how the cameras integrate into emergency response systems, and how multiple cameras, strategically placed, can provide critical views of the landscape that one camera alone can't accomplish. All of this improves the technology's effectiveness and is just one part of the broad scope of Fire Adapted Communities work the

Guild and our partners make possible at all stages of the wildfire lifecycle.

The Guild is a fiscal and outreach agent for wildfire cameras in north-central New Mexico. Though we depend on the skills, knowledge, dedication, and processes of the entire Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition partnership, the Guild community provided most of the financial support, making additional cameras and a lot of the testing possible.

Two Guild Lifetime Members, Steve Robinson and Jonathan Frenzen, were critical to making this happen. Steve learned about the Guild in 2025, promptly joined, and generously donated directly to the effort. Jonathan is a retired University of Chicago professor and has volunteered thousands of hours through the Fireshed to the initiative.

The importance of this impact cannot be overstated, though not everyone can contribute that amount of time or money. Just as necessary are funding from the Santa Fe Community Foundation, and strong partnerships with the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, the Santa Fe National Forest, Santa Fe - Pojoaque SWCD, The Nature Conservancy of New Mexico, and many others. The Guild's wildfire camera giving campaign in early 2026 yielded more than \$10,000 in two weeks from collective donations by the Guild community. Grassroots coordination and fundraising from donors at the communities of Monte Serreno, Tesuque Village, and Canyon Road also support installation of the second camera in the network on Picacho Peak. This off-grid, backcountry set-up required assistance from Santa Fe Helitack and the Santa Fe Hotshots. The whole project is an example of how "it takes a village" to provide benefits that span far wider than any one jurisdiction.

That type of collective action doesn't just happen. Partners are attracted to the Guild because we can resource the results we need, either through program development, funding and empowerment for local efforts, or coordination of generous inputs from Guild members and partners. Our forests and communities need all of this. The innovative forester, the bold policy-makers, the researchers and their students, the landowners, the engineers, the loggers and mill-workers, the philanthropists at every giving level, the communicators and educators and authors, and all of the partners from government to NGOs to neighborhood HOAs and Fireshed Coalitions. Even that list misses so many contributors.

While the Guild is not responding to wildfires, we are piloting and testing tools to assist wildland fire management and help us all live better with fire. More broadly, our entire community is helping to create a better life for people and forests in countless ways. That includes you. Thank you!



- 1 Preparing to install the Tesuque Peak camera and equipment.
- 2 Dr. Jonathan Frenzen briefs USFS Fire Managers on how the Tesuque Peak system works.
- 3 Tower engineers work to install the Tesuque Peak camera.
- 4 Dr. Frenzen problem solves a finicky connection near the base of the tower.

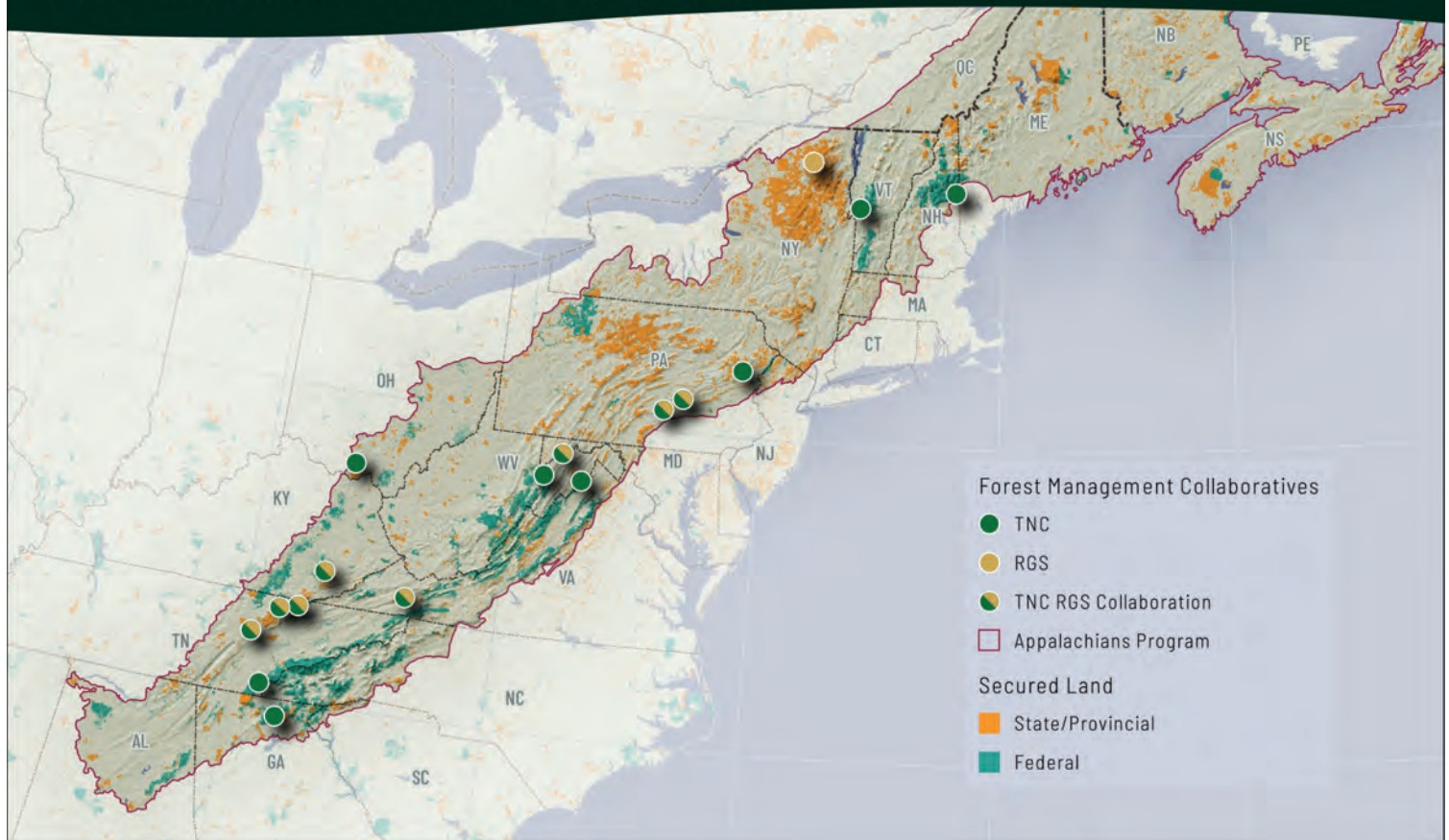
See more amazing photos from April's Picacho Peak camera installation efforts at [ForestStewardsGuild.org/fire-management](https://ForestStewardsGuild.org/fire-management) or on our social media channels



# Guild Partners Advance Large-scale Forest Resilience and Wildlife Habitat in the Appalachians, through Conservation Collaborations

by Guild member Ben Larson and Sean Barry, Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society; and Katy Shallows and Chelsea Bowers, The Nature Conservancy,

## Forest Management Collaboratives in the Appalachians



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The Appalachian range is an iconic, globally important forest landscape. Spanning 200 million acres from Alabama to Canada, its woodlands and waterways nurture diverse wildlife and millions of people. But this ancient place, home to hellbender salamanders and heelsplitter mussels, wood thrush and golden-winged warblers, is undergoing rapid change.

Appalachian ecosystems face numerous threats including invasive species, habitat fragmentation, and climate stress. From fire-dependent oak to high elevation red spruce, Appalachian forests host a vast range of restoration needs.

Recognizing the scale of these threats to forest resilience, two conservation organizations, The Nature Conservancy

(TNC) and Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society (RGS & AWS), are collaborating with many other partners like the Forest Stewards Guild for landscape-scale forest and freshwater management in the Appalachians.

For TNC, the Appalachians are a priority landscape for tackling the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. TNC aims to double the pace and scale of forest management across the Resilient and Connected Network (RCN) of climate-resilient lands by 2030. For RGS & AWS, the Appalachians and surrounding areas are a critical geography for grouse and woodcock populations, providing expanses of forested habitats, including higher elevation refuge for ruffed grouse.

### Collaboration and Continuity Unlock Large-scale Conservation

Forest resilience calls for large-scale conservation efforts. However, most threats to resilience, such as invasives and habitat fragmentation, cross ownership lines. Guild members involved in this effort know as much as anyone that collaboration allows partners to successfully bridge ownership boundaries and work at the scale needed for landscape-level impact. In addition to working on larger numbers of acres, collaboration also builds collective strengths. One partner may have expertise in science and planning, while another contributes expertise and efficiency in operational forestry. The Fire Learning Networks and Joint Ventures are just a couple of examples of how multi-partner collaboration is an effective pathway for supporting

management across varying land ownerships, including public and private lands. In this case, the Forest Stewards Guild is contributing to the collaboration through on-the-ground work of stewardship apprentices in Southwest Virginia.

The key to successful forest management collaboratives lies in consistent public and private funding. Public funding provides the operational resources needed to manage public lands, advise private forestland owners, and innovate management practices. Private philanthropy helps non-governmental organizations like RGS & AWS and TNC (and the Guild) match public funding, so both types of investments are maximized to restore more land.

Examples of significant public funding for collaborative forest management in the Appalachians include the U.S. Forest Service's Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) sponsors several public-private funds that have supported landscape-scale efforts, including the Central Appalachians, Delaware River, Chesapeake WILD programs in Virginia and Pennsylvania, and the Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund in Tennessee. The Guild's work with NFWF has supported shortleaf pine restoration on the Cumberland Plateau and Forestry for the Birds in West Virginia. Annual budget appropriations to state agencies charged with forest and wildlife management are also substantial investments in long-term forest and habitat health.

### Dynamic Forest Collaboration in the Appalachians

Today, TNC and RGS & AWS are exploring new partnership pathways through place based collaboration—which means working together in a shared landscape toward common goals—with Appalachian forests as the priority focus.

However, the collective organizational goals can only be achieved by co-investing in staff capacity, science, planning, funding, and project implementation through partnerships. This is why TNC and RGS & AWS have worked with other partners since 2020 to create and implement dynamic forest restoration blocks (DFRB).

The DFRB approach is a focal area framework based on planning, implementation, and monitoring forest diversity at a biologically meaningful scale (approximately 1,000 to 75,000 acres). The DFRB framework was developed by Jeff Larkin, American Bird Conservancy and Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Ben Jones, formerly at the PA Game Commission and now president of RGS & AWS, and others.

Initial DFRBs aimed to restore the full suite of habitat types for eastern forest birds and other wildlife, which also enhances landscape-level forest resilience. Combined with other forest management collaboratives, DFRBs direct resources to strategic landscape-scale units of private and public lands and ensure site-level management contributes to landscape-level goals.

Over the last six years, TNC and RGS & AWS have integrated priorities from the RCN and developed approaches for climate-informed and freshwater aligned DFRBs. Today, TNC and RGS & AWS are collaboratively implementing nine DFRBs across five states and are planning together in new landscapes, working side by side with other partners and agencies (see map). Although forest management approaches can vary widely, these organizations are demonstrating how on-the-ground collaboration provides a setting for partners to identify common ground and forge solutions together. Their place-driven, innovative forest management partnership in the Appalachians is redefining what's possible.

### Catoosa Wildlife Management Area DFRB

The Catoosa Wildlife Management Area hosts RGS & AWS's first DFRB in Tennessee. DFRB partners identified management zones to achieve desired conditions for oak-pine woodlands and savannahs over time. Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and TNC leaned in to complete TN's first project to accelerate late successional forest characteristics.

### Southwest Virginia DFRB

This DFRB spans Channels State Forest, Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Hidden Valley WMA, TNC's Clinch Valley Conservation Forestry Program, and other high elevation focal points. DFRB partners' goals have benefited from the Guild's Forest Stewards Apprenticeship (FSA) Program crews providing a local skilled workforce for forest management activities.

### Western Maryland DFRB

This DFRB contributes to critical habitat connectivity along the Allegheny Front. RGS has supported mined land reforestation and forest management in public lands here for over 10 years. Partners including TNC, MD DNR, Green Forest Work, and RGS have defined desired conditions and needed management practices. With UMD Extension outreach support and USFS funding, partners will engage private landowners, and the American Bird Conservancy will assist implementation.

### Kittatinny Ridge DFRBs

TNC's history of land protection, RGS's active chapters, and the PA Game Commission's 10+ years of active habitat management have led to the development of two DFRBs along the Kittatinny Ridge. Smaller private and municipal landowners with drinking-water reservoirs are included and will benefit from the experience in forest management and fundraising of all partners involved.



Billy Coffey (crew leader) and crew remove invasive autumn olive in early successional habitat at TNC's Clinch Valley Farms property (part of TNC's Clinch Valley Conservation Forestry Program).



Address Service Requested

## Ready, Set, Grow...

This year and next, the Guild will offer many new opportunities for members to engage, support each other, and share their stories of positive impact. As the Guild grows, especially in the Development, Communications, and Membership department, we can turn more of our attention and organizational focus toward member needs and skills. All along the way, your financial and in-kind support of the Guild helped us get here and will continue to be essential for this community to thrive.

Meanwhile, we continue the Guild's robust commitment to learning and connection among our members, with numerous webinars and in-person events from coast to coast. We hope to see you online, in person, and in our membership rosters throughout the year and beyond.

### Please join us at upcoming gatherings:

- Northwest Innovative Forestry Summit 2026 - June 10 - 12 in Washington
- The Future of Forest Stewardship Workshop & National Guild Gathering - September 15 - 17 in Maine

Visit [ForestStewardsGuild.org/events](https://ForestStewardsGuild.org/events) frequently for updates. So far in 2026, the Guild has hosted more than ten events with a total of 500 registrants! These are vital connections, whether in the woods, around the table, or virtual. *Thank you* for your enthusiastic participation.

*All photos submitted by article authors or the Forest Stewards Guild unless otherwise noted.*