

# MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

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**Joseph "Archie" Hagar,  
Hunting for Likes,  
Woodlots for Wildlife**

**JOSEPH A. HAGAR: STATE ORNITHOLOGIST 4**

— Wayne R. Petersen

*Widely recognized as an authority on the American Black Duck, Hudsonian Godwit, Broad-winged Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, and Black Rail, State Ornithologist Joseph "Archie" Hagar left an indelible mark that continues to inform management decisions today.*

**HUNTING FOR LIKES: HOW TO KILL IT ON SOCIAL MEDIA 14**

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*Social media provides hunters with a fantastic opportunity to share their stories and promote the hunting tradition but navigating the complexities of the digital world requires a thoughtful approach.*

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— Bill Davis

*A landowner's account of improving the quality and diversity of forest habitat to benefit wildlife.*

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**On the Cover:** Late afternoon in a snowy wood. The Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) seen here is a State Wildlife Action Plan species that thrives in young forest and shrubland habitats, which provide abundant fruits, buds, and catkins (preferred grouse foods), and high stem densities that offer grouse much needed protective cover from avian predators like hawks and owls. Nikon digital photo © Bill Byrne

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# LABORS OF LOVE

## MANAGING A SMALL WOODLOT FOR WILDLIFE

Sometimes opportunities present themselves when you least expect them. My wife Dianne and I had been talking about investing in real estate, a place where we might enjoy some added recreation like hunting, hiking, snowshoeing and primitive camping. We were both lucky enough to grow up spending summers at family-owned cottages, Dianne at Dean Pond in Oakham and I at Deering Lake in Deering, New Hampshire, where a strong sense of curiosity about fish and wildlife was instilled in us. We

knew that waterfront property was going to be prohibitively expensive for us so we started casually researching upland properties in Massachusetts and eastern New York State. Nothing jumped out at us so we moved the idea to the back burner while we paid for a college education and other less glamorous expenses. Then one day a friend and colleague mentioned that his uncle owned a woodlot right here in Worcester County, but that he never used it because he had retired to Cape Cod. Apparently the uncle, who was conservation minded, had offered to sell the property to the Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) but a deal had never been struck. “Hmmm...,” we thought, “Game on!”

Intrigued, we took a ride with our friend and hiked the property, noting that it had been logged in the past with a log landing

**BY  
BILL DAVIS**

and network of skid roads now well grown over. You didn't need a degree in forestry to see that previous logging efforts, from 20 to 30 years ago, had looked to maximize profit, removing the high quality pine and oak trees for saw logs and leaving the poorer quality timber standing. We were impressed enough, however, to ask for the uncle's phone number and then we got to work.

Our research began with the town assessor to look at the 50-acre property and surrounding parcels. We were pleased to learn the woodlot had significant frontage on a public road and abutted state property on one side. The other two sides of the rectangle had only two private owners, neither of whom had done any development. We began friendly negotiations with the uncle and eventually settled on a price we both felt was fair. Suddenly we owned a nice piece of woods! Now what?

Our first step was to locate and mark our boundaries. The road and stone walls, dating back to the 1770s when the road was accepted at Town Meeting as a public way, made some of the work relatively easy. For some of the other lines we relied on the written deed, as well as our friend, who had spent a lot of time on the property during his youth. Our friend also had considerable skills when it came to taking and following a compass bearing, which proved invaluable for finding the longest and most vague property line. He took his bearing from an iron pin at the end of a stone wall, adjusted for magnetic north, and plunged into the thick White Pine and

birch whips with Dianne and me following closely behind, furiously flagging branches as we tried to keep up. Miraculously we emerged from the pucker brush squarely on another stone monument, after bush-whacking for more than three tenths of a mile! Impressive! We followed up with a chain saw, hand loppers and a bow saw to make the boundary conspicuous for ourselves and future forestry work.

We also verified wetland margins that had been marked by a professional wetlands scientist for a more recent timber harvest that never occurred. The property had an intermittent stream winding through it as well as a seep, both of which are wetland resources we needed to be aware of when planning habitat enhancements. A related step in the process was to consult the Natural Heritage Atlas of Priority and Estimated Habitats to see if any state-listed species had been documented on the property. According to the maps there had been no rare species found or habitat mapped on our parcel.

We then applied for Chapter 61B—Open Space and Recreation status with the town assessor. Chapter 61B provides a significant tax savings incentive for property owners that keep their land as open space. Should the owners wish to sell, they are obligated to pay the difference between the Chapter 61B tax rate and what would have been the regular assessed tax rate for the five years prior to the sale. The town also is entitled to the right of first refusal if the property is





# TIMBER



*Licensed foresters have valuable experience in assessing, measuring and marking trees to be cut under a timber sale contract. In this photo, a forester is using a Biltmore Stick to measure the diameter of a potential Red Oak sawlog tree, and has used blue paint to indicate a tree to be cut for timber.*

to be sold, should they choose to match any fair market offer. With no intention to develop or sell the property in the foreseeable future, Chapter 61B was a good fit for us. The application process was simple and straightforward, and the Chapter 61B designation is renewed on an annual basis by submitting a one-page form. Additional Chapter 61 programs include: Chapter 61–Forestry and Chapter 61A–Agriculture.

Now it was time to take a hard look at the woodlot from a forestry perspective. The entire acreage was essentially a closed canopy, with limited light reaching the forest floor resulting in little shrub or new tree growth. Much of the forest was dominated by Black Birch, patches of which were crowded and stunted, as well as Black Oak, American Beech and White Pine. Rounding out the mix were the occasional Red Oak, White Oak, Black Gum, Yellow Birch, Red Maple, American Chestnut sprouts, Shagbark Hickory, Mountain Laurel and Sassafras. There was a remnant of both Highbush and Lowbush Blueberry, but again the lack of sunlight through the canopy was a limiting factor for the few plants that persisted.

Working for MassWildlife, and having been involved with the management of tens of thousands of acres of Wildlife Management Area, I knew we needed professional help, so I went through my Rolodex (yes, I'm a dinosaur!) and spoke with colleagues about licensed foresters that covered central Massachusetts. We found an outstanding professional and set to work on a Forest Management Plan. Although not required under the Chapter 61B–Open Space and Recreation designation, we opted for a Plan for our own benefit and for future reference. In the simplest terms, the Plan identifies the landowners' goals, prioritizing their vision for the property and then describes the means to get there. The forester cruised the property and assessed the type, volume and quality of the trees. He shared that information with us and went over the various management strategies we could use. For Dianne and me the priorities boiled down to improving the quality and diversity of the forest and habitat to benefit wildlife. Period. We knew that if we worked to manage the health of the forest by creating high-quality young forest habitat that wildlife benefits would follow, and that we'd then be able to enjoy enhanced wildlife viewing, hunting,

hiking and photography. We also realized that we'd have a lifetime of renewable cordwood for our woodstove at home, could share this woody windfall with our family, friends and neighbors, had a marketable commodity in the standing oak and pine, and would have blueberries for our grandson to pick on top of it all!

Our forester put together a comprehensive Forest Management Plan to give us a clearer picture of our property and the potential to improve it. He then set out to put the Plan into action. Since our woodlot consisted of marginal quality trees at best, we agreed to retain most of the best specimens and mark much of the remainder to be harvested, primarily as cordwood. Some of the better oaks, that were located in areas where we wanted to create openings in the canopy by applying a more aggressive cutting strategy, were marked as saw logs rather than cordwood as their straight grain could be used for hardwood flooring or other finished products. The result of this marking effort was blended into a Forest Cutting Plan, complete with estimates of the volume of timber to be removed and a sketch of the property identifying the specific stands to be cut and their relationship to the boundaries and wetlands. The cutting plan, which is required in Massachusetts for all private and public lands when wood products are being sold, was then submitted to the DCR Service Forester for approval. After review, we received a permit from DCR and our forester reached out to his network of loggers to see who would be both suited and interested in taking on our modest project.

Our forester was outstanding to work with. He truly understood and shared our goals and found a local logger who treated our property with respect. When the operation was in full swing the market for higher quality oak was down, so we elected to retain the trees that had been marked as saw logs. To compensate, and remove the total volume of wood we were seeking, we added another 20 cords to the total amount of firewood to be harvested, resulting in 175 cords coming off the property. While 175 cords may sound



*Eastern Towhee (female)*

## WILDLIFE



*Honeybee on Sweet Pepperbush*

Photos © Bill Byrne



*Gray Catbird on Common Blackberry*



# CAMPING

Photo © Bill Davis

**We've built a small, primitive campsite, not far from an original fieldstone well where we can draw water to douse the campfire or wash our dishes, and we've listened to Barred Owls, Great Horned Owls, Gray Tree Frogs and other denizens of the night from the comfort of our sleeping bags.**

significant, when viewed on the ground it only addressed a little more than half the acreage. This leaves us with ample opportunities for future forestry work and habitat improvement, working in stages to promote a dynamic forest with trees of varying ages.

In the meantime, we are simply enjoying every minute we spend on the property. We've worked hard to improve the landing and access created by our logger's equipment, so we can get our small utility tractor and pickup truck to many parts of the property for our firewood needs. We've expanded on the openings and thinnings our forester planned and logger implemented, watching the new growth from

stump sprouts, seeds and acorns, while the blueberry and spicebush flourish in the welcome sunlight. We've invited friends to harvest their own cordwood on our property, an additional 10 cords removed this past fall, as this only furthers our goals to continue to diversify the habitat and expand the openings, making them attractive to a wider variety of wildlife, and we've offered firewood to our neighborhood for their backyard fire rings. We've made annual purchases from the Extension Service, planting apple trees and arborvitae to benefit wildlife and ourselves. We've found wildlife trails and set up trail cameras to capture images of the resident deer, Fisher, Eastern Coyote, Raccoon, Wild Turkey and fox. We scroll through the photos in anticipation of seeing our first Black Bear or Bobcat, but so far they haven't made an appearance. We've built a small, primitive campsite, not

far from an original fieldstone well where we can draw water to douse the campfire or wash our dishes, and we've listened to Barred Owls, Great Horned Owls, Gray Tree Frogs and other denizens of the night from the comfort of our sleeping bags. The sight of the flashing wings of a Pileated Woodpecker, the sound of the croaking call of a Raven or the rhythmic drumming of a Ruffed Grouse in the spring is simply icing on the cake.

Beyond the bounty provided by the cordwood, we've also been fortunate enough to harvest the occasional turkey or deer from the property. There is an

*Continued on page 29*



# LAND CLEARING



Photos © Dianne Davis



## HABITAT

Clearing land to create access roads to ease the removal of timber and firewood and to enlarge existing and create new openings in mature forests can benefit a wide variety of wildlife that thrive in shrublands and young forest habitats. The two bucks pictured above were captured by the author's wildlife camera in a forest opening he created on his property. The removal of thick forest canopy allows sunlight to reach the forest floor, often triggering the growth of plants that have been locked in the seedbank for many years. New shoots that emerge from stumps left by selective cutting also provide valuable browse for wildlife such as deer.



## FIREWOOD



# LANDOWNER RESOURCES

## MassWoods.net

- Chapter 61 Guide
- Forester List
- Stewardship Options



## MassWildlife Programs

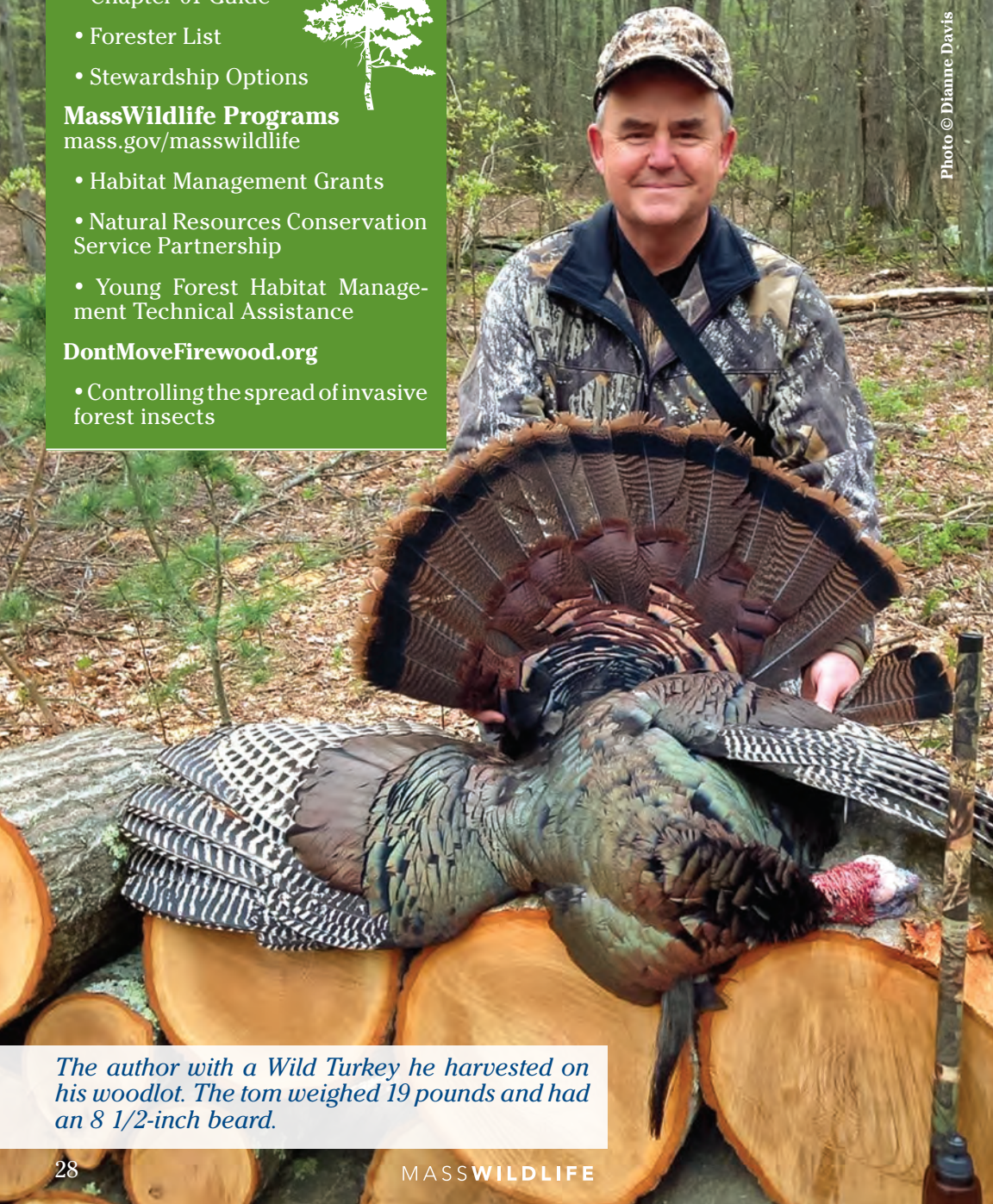
[mass.gov/masswildlife](http://mass.gov/masswildlife)

- Habitat Management Grants
- Natural Resources Conservation Service Partnership
- Young Forest Habitat Management Technical Assistance

## DontMoveFirewood.org

- Controlling the spread of invasive forest insects

Photo © Dianne Davis



*The author with a Wild Turkey he harvested on his woodlot. The tom weighed 19 pounds and had an 8 1/2-inch beard.*

incredible sense of personal satisfaction in taking an animal from your own property and then seeing your family and friends thoroughly enjoy it. Likewise there is added warmth coming from the fire in our woodstove when we realize we selected the tree, felled the tree, bucked it up, split it, brought it home, stacked it and have now brought it to the hearth. Of course if we ever sat down and crunched the numbers for the real costs involved we'd probably realize that venison from the woodlot actually costs \$3,000 per pound and firewood is \$5,000 per cord! But no matter, it's priceless to us.

Looking ahead we'd like to maintain the forest openings and create some grassy connections that would be attractive to foraging and strutting turkeys in the spring. We'll nurture the apple trees and look forward to the first fruit they produce. We'll find and mark the oaks that were killed by one year of drought and two years of Gypsy Moth caterpillar defoliation, and use them for our firewood needs for at least one or two winters to come. We'll leave a couple large white pines that were broken off by strong winds, and allow the ants to colonize and the woodpeckers to feed on the ants while Barred Owls, nuthatches and chickadees inspect the broken trunks and cavities. And we'll create brush and stone piles with the idea of shelter for small mammals, Garter Snakes, Black Racers, insects and maybe that first bear!

We're considering permanently protecting the property through a conservation easement, likely with DCR. An easement protects the property from development by incorporating a no building clause into the deed, which stays with the property even through changes of ownership. The owner still legally owns the property and

can reserve rights under the terms of the easement which would allow for continued forestry or other activities that are consistent with conservation goals. Ultimately, the economy may well dictate the fate of this small tract of land. It's perched on the sprawl frontier with development creeping in from the north and east. We'd hate to see development pop up around us, with the woodlot becoming the "hole in the donut" and a destination for ATVs, mountain bikes, dogs and yard wastes.

Perhaps, if our children or their children do not want to keep the property in the family, the town can acquire it or assign the right to acquire it to DCR. That would certainly be in keeping with our wishes.

Thinking back to my youth and remembering my father working tirelessly at the family's summer camp in southern New Hampshire, I now realize that his efforts were truly a labor of love. He loved that cottage and land, and all the hard work that went into it, whether it be building a stone wall, hand digging a well, building a porch or cutting wood for the old Franklin stove. The work was a form of therapy

that served to renew him, and we feel that sense of renewal now on our own property, no matter the size of the rock we dig out of a cart road or the impossible twist in the piece of oak we're trying to split. The connection we feel to the land is strong and very compelling for us regardless of whether we're working or recreating. Our friend, who originally told us about the woodlot, probably summed it up best when he lists the three reasons why people like to own, and ultimately conserve, their property: "They love the land, they love the land and they love the land!" Truer words were never spoken.

## About the Author



*Bill Davis is MassWildlife's Central District Manager.*





# MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE



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