

HABITAT HERO: JOHN HOOVER



Diversifying a Private Forest to Diversify Wildlife

Since 1866 – a year after the end of the Civil War – John Hoover’s family has owned property in Centre County, Pennsylvania. Over the decades, the largely forested property became subdivided and boundary lines and titles blurred with most of the land going into disuse. Nearly 40 years ago, when John inherited a portion of the original property, he figured the best way to unclutter boundary lines and make better use of the land was to buy as much of the surrounding forest and original deed as possible.

“I’m a mechanical engineer and mostly dealt in new product design and development,” said Hoover. “And this land issue was a challenge, a unique problem that I wanted to solve. It took me more than a dozen years but I ended up bringing together 600 acres under single ownership.”

Hoover currently lives in Connecticut but plans to retire soon and relocate to a home next to his forest.

The land is situated in a corridor that connects the 5,900-acre Bald Eagle State Park with 4,000 acres of State Game Lands.



HABITAT STATS

Location: Centre County, PA

Habitat Type: Eastern forest

Target Species: Golden-winged warbler and cerulean warbler

Other Species: Wood thrush, prairie warbler, indigo bunting, wild turkey, deer and grouse

Conservation Practices: Removing invasive plants and select trees; improving forest stands; enhancing declining habitat.

Pennsylvania

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Its location makes it a potentially valuable commodity as a linkage for wildlife and natural resources, a vital connector between two protected areas.

The first harvest, which cut and thinned out aspen trees, saw a dramatic increase in game species on the land. Six more harvests followed. Each targeted at a specific section of the property.

Each successful harvest helped his bottom line by selling timber while diversifying both his forest and the species of wildlife that visited it.

“As I walk through the land, I look at it as entering different rooms of a house. Each room is different and has its own use,” Hoover said.

Hoover has reached out for help along the way, including the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture (AMJV), USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), American Bird Conservancy, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Pheasants Forever and others.

Through these groups, Hoover was able to get technical and financial assistance to help plan and implement forest management practices. With this help, he has not only improved his bottom line, but he has been able to create top-notch wildlife habitat.

Right now, Hoover is participating in two conservation efforts. The first is Working Lands for Wildlife, an NRCS-led effort to help private landowners like Hoover restore



At-risk songbirds like the golden-winged warbler and cerulean warbler benefit from sustainably managed forests.

declining habitats to help at-risk species. In the Appalachians, NRCS is helping landowners manage for young forests to benefit the golden-winged warbler and other species. Golden-winged warblers in the last 45 years have suffered one of the steepest population declines of any songbird.

Meanwhile, Hoover is also participating in the Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project, which is led by AMJV and funded through NRCS’ Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Cerulean warblers prefer older forests with canopy openings, which like young forests, are not common in Appalachia. Hoover is currently thinning out dense mature forest areas that contain tall deciduous trees to create open canopies and gaps to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor, promoting the growth of saplings, shrubs, and other vegetation in the forest understory.

In addition to helping the golden-winged warbler and cerulean



warbler, managing for healthier forests also leaves the best trees on the tract: tall, straight, and defect free. They will be the seed source for the next trees that make up the future forest, Hoover said.

“I am blessed and lucky to have a good chunk of land that allows me to do different activities on different sections,” said Hoover. “I’m able to focus on hardwood development in one area that doesn’t benefit wildlife as much but benefits trees, and in other areas I can focus management that is best for bird and other wildlife habitat.”

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