



Forest
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WHAT YOU NEED TO
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THE WILDERNESS ACT AT 50

CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 12 **Battle for the Pinelands**
A New Jersey forester chronicles the decline of public forest management as seen in the country's first National Reserve.
By Bob Williams
- 20 **Virginia is for Forest Lovers**
Fueled by increased demand for pulp and biomass, the forest industry in the Commonwealth is thriving.
By Pete Williams
- 28 **Not all TIMOS are Alike**
Ever-evolving timberland investment management organizations continue to offer institutional investors a way to mitigate fluctuations in the value of their portfolios.
By Tracy Buran Evans and Gary A. Myers
- 34 **Tax Time**
Forestland tax rules have grown increasingly complicated. Here's what you need to know as you prepare your 2014 returns for April.
By Linda Wang
- 38 **The Wilderness Act at 50**
Signed into law in 1964 after eight years and more than 60 drafts, landmark legislation has left a lasting legacy – and not just in the West.
By Carol Gering and Tom Straka
- 42 **A View from Your Stump**
If it Pays, it Stays
By Steve Bullard

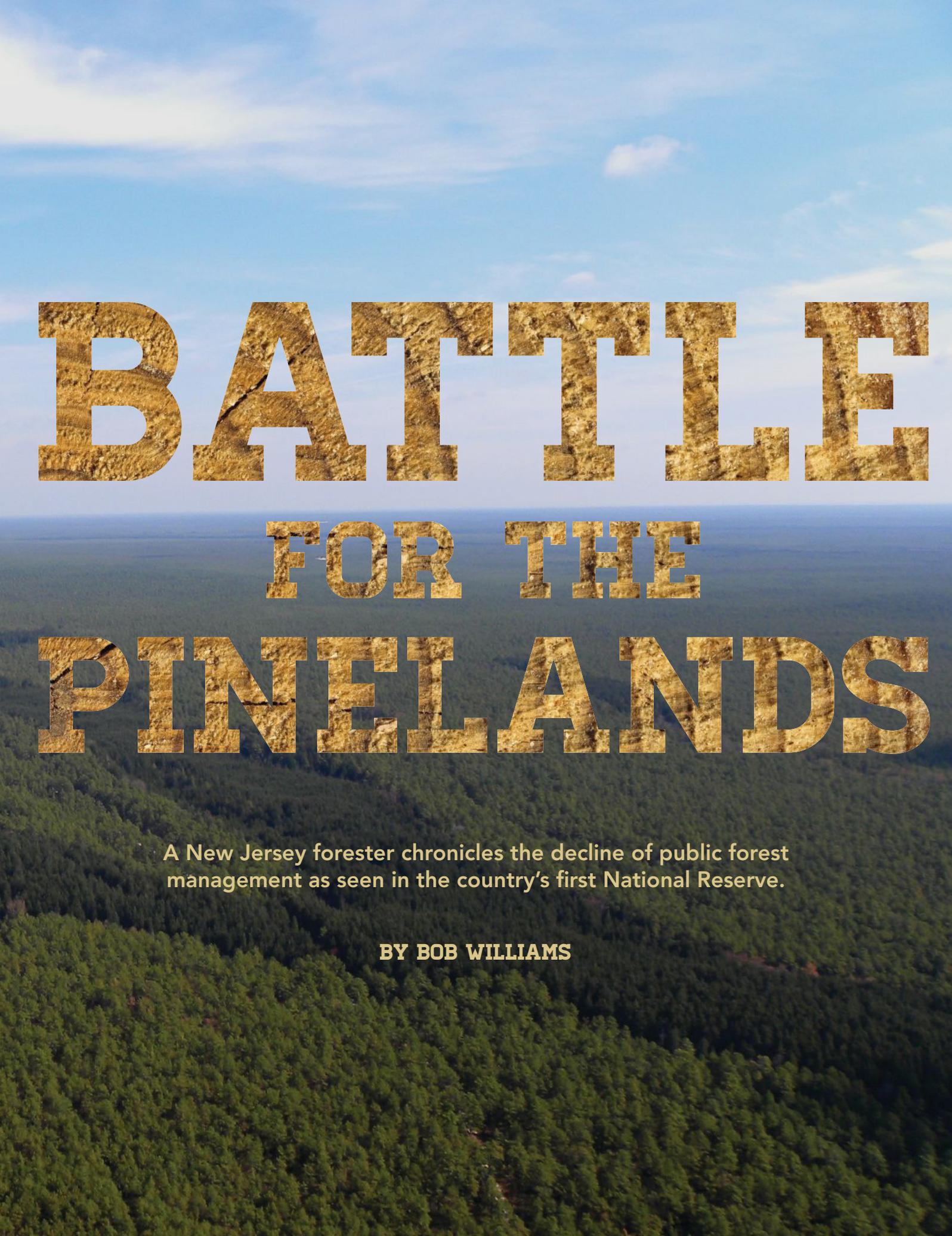
DEPARTMENTS

- 2 From the President
- 4 Action Source
- 8 Your Favorite Tree



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BATTLE FOR THE PINELANDS

A New Jersey forester chronicles the decline of public forest management as seen in the country's first National Reserve.

BY BOB WILLIAMS



A logger uses an Oliver tractor in 2012 similar to the ones forester Bob Williams saw in the same area in 1959.

My interest in forestry began fifty-seven years ago when my father began to take me to his deer club in Chatsworth, New Jersey. I would be allowed to play in the sawdust pile at the cedar mill behind his club. I also was given the job of bagging cedar shavings that were used as bedding for our hunting dogs. Ever since, I've always been interested in the Pinelands Forest and its uses. This area is now designated as the Pinelands National Reserve – our nation's first national reserve by an Act of Congress.

Today, if the mill owner wished to rebuild that sawmill, there likely would be significant opposition, as well as accusations that the return of the mill would result in the destruction of our white cedar forest resources. The general anti-timber harvesting attitude of the public, bureaucratic red tape and misunderstood forestry regulations have meant that Paul Schaier, a third generation operator of our last remaining cedar mill, and I could not secure enough white cedar logs to manufacture the cedar shake shingles needed to shingle the roof of the new interpretive center at Historical Batsto Village. As a result, the center was roofed with nonnative western red cedar. Situations like this are an insult to the idea of the Pinelands National Reserve and its purpose to protect and perpetuate our cultural, historical and natural resources in this region.

As a professional forester, I'm often asked to explain why we harvest trees in the Pinelands. Usually this question is asked by someone convinced that cutting trees is bad and must be having a negative impact on the Pinelands region. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Since European settlement some 300 years ago, the forests have been harvested repeatedly for an ever-changing forest products industry. It's only been in the past

thirty years that industry timber harvesting has not been a common practice in the Pinelands region. Today, the steep decline in forestry as a viable use of the land in New Jersey continues.

Since the inception of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) dated 1979, forestry has typically been discussed in a negative light. In the early 2000s, the Pinelands Commission appointed a new forest advisory committee to address some concerns about forestry activities. Again, the discussion of forestry was undertaken with a negative connotation as the backdrop.

Nevertheless, that was an appropriate time to discuss forestry in the interest of the wellbeing of the Pinelands' forest resources and the commercial forestry interests in the region. Both are in trouble, and both need to be better understood by people who care about the Pinelands if either are going to survive the way the CMP intended them to.

What we see on the landscape today probably bears little resemblance to what was here in pre-settlement times. Timber that was here at that time was of a much superior quality and size, and there was likely a higher percentage of early successional ecosystems fostered by the severe natural disturbance of wildfire. The natural cycle of disturbance and succession promotes diversity of plants and animals.

Three hundred years of intensive cutting and excessive wildland fires have dramatically changed the landscape that we see today. Along with these factors, the aggressive exclusion of fire from a highly fire-adapted ecosystem over the last sixty years or so has created a situation that now threatens the very unique biodiversity we so zealously wish to protect. We are literally preserving the Pinelands to death. As if that isn't enough of a problem, we also have created a wildland fire hazard that poses the threat of catastrophic fires that will result in significant loss of life, property and biodiversity itself.



Cedar log offices built in New Jersey in the 1930s have stood the test of time.

The Pinelands' Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) preamble warned of all this. It recommended the need to continue to have severe disturbances to the forest, the control of hardwood in the pine forests, and the need to have fire play a role in sustaining the forest. The CMP also recognized the need to encourage forestry because it is the only land use option that is compatible with the longterm goals of the CMP. We have done little of this, and it's time to begin to change people's viewpoint of forestry. Forestry offers an economic use that is compatible with environmental protection goals. This is indeed a rare situation in human endeavors and we have largely ignored the economic benefits of forestry that when done properly, can sustain the ecological integrity of this special forest.

As a result of the hard work of the Pinelands Forest Advisory Committee in the mid-2000s, the Pinelands forestry program now offers an opportunity to

enhance, create or protect the unique biodiversity here, while at the same time mitigating the dangerous wildfire hazard that threatens the public's health and safety. Understand: you cannot preserve a forest. It will change with time. That is nature's way. But with thoughtful management, which includes forestry, you can preserve a dynamic forest system.

In fact, it was a group of foresters who in 1894 began the first discussions and efforts to protect this area from development and to perpetuate its natural resources for future generations. As a forester in 2014, I feel as though I should follow through on what those foresters started 130 years ago.

I view myself as an environmentalist, but I don't believe most environmentalists view me as such. It's easy to be against a subdivision, golf course or any land use action. It's easy to buy land and simply preserve it. The people of New Jersey, and this nation, should understand that they cannot expect to halt timber harvesting in forests in their states while continuing to consume increasing amounts of forest products. That merely exports timber harvesting

"TODAY, THE STEEP DECLINE IN FORESTRY AS A VIA





Cedar is used to build striking homes in New Jersey.

BLE USE OF THE LAND IN NEW JERSEY CONTINUES.”

to other regions, or worse, to other countries where forest management is not as well regulated and managed by professional resource managers.

We all must take responsibility when it comes to the stewardship of our forestlands. I know that it's difficult for environmentalists to support or advocate forestry, simply because of the nature of it – cutting trees. But I believe that with a better understanding of the positive role forestry can play in the Pinelands, all us environmentalists can come together and support truly compatible forestry here.

Trees are the answer to many of our environmental problems. They clean our air, water, and soil while providing habitat and beauty as well as our planet's most useful renewable natural resource – wood fiber. They are the ultimate solar energy producers. I will continue to look for the environmentalist who is for forestry.

It has been more than ten years since the Pinelands Preservation Alliance first asked me to give my view on forestry. A few environmentalists actually have spoken and worked with me. Yet, active forest management and stewardship of our Pinelands forest resources and many of our state and federal forests remain in free fall decline. Recently, one small forest company had a great plan and made the capital investment needed to initiate a forestry company. Within two years, it died for the lack of access to pine fiber while sitting in an ocean of overstocked, beetle-infested, fire-excluded public in forests!

I hope I am still around in ten years to write a more upbeat commentary of how the public opens its eyes and demands politicians to do their jobs and provide the support and funding needed to provide the essential stewardship of our public lands and support for active management of our private lands.

Let's hope there's some chance of that taking place. ■

Bob Williams is a longtime forester and president of Pine Creek Forestry L.L.C., in Laurel Springs, New Jersey.