

Steve Hobart Accepts National Awards For Piscataquis County's Demonstration Forest in Williamsburg Township

The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District received two prestigious national awards for the Demonstration Forest in Williamsburg Township. Steve Hobart of Blanchard represented the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District in receiving these awards at the National Association of Conservation District's (NACD) Winter Meeting in Los Angeles, California. Hobart of Blanchard currently serves as Chairman of the Board. He also serves as the Northeast Director to the National Association of Conservation Districts.

The district was the national winner, out of seven regional winners and out of 3,000 conservation districts in this county, of the NACD 2006 Collaborative Conservation Award, given in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This award recognizes a conservation district this is carrying out, with their partners, outstanding community and collaborative conservation projects that have a significant positive impact on the community resource base. Project cooperators include Piscataquis County schools, Boy Scouts, the Maine Conservation Corps, the Penobscot Indian Nation, local businesses, churches, Job Corps, the United Way, and the many, many volunteers who have rolled up their sleeves and assisted at our volunteer work days.

Hobart also accepted the NACD 2006 Excellence Award for the Forestry Resources category for education at the Demonstration Forest in Williamsburg Township. This award recognizes successful initiatives that the district has made with the forest to support educational opportunities for the public, while it also serves as a training site for teachers, foresters, and others interested in conservation education.

After years of effort by district supervisors, ownership of the project land came under local control in 1980, and has been built into an educational resource over the last decade. The Demonstration Forest is a model forestry program. A Timber and Watershed Management Plan encompasses practices that benefit tree growth, enhance wildlife habitat, protect soils and water and promote public education. Workshops are conducted on various topics, including forestry Best Management Practices, the use of GPS units, soil and water conservation, natural history, wetlands and planting for wildlife.

The interpretive trails wind through 180 acres of old farmstead, unique areas of headwater wetlands, which help to feed the Pleasant River, riparian areas, and a naturally formed 70 foot deep, 200 foot wide "canyon". There is varying terrain and a diversity of flora and fauna. The forest offers hiking, bird watching, snow shoeing and cross-country ski trails for year round enjoyment.

The Maine Audubon Society has listed the Demonstration Forest in their "Maine Birding Trails" Directory. The Southern Piscataquis Regional Recreation Map and Guide that was issued in 2006 includes the Demonstration Forest as a recreation and tourism site in this county. This map is a partnership of the Cultural and Heritage Ecotourism Committee of the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

There is an outdoor classroom, an information kiosk, a geocache site, picnic tables and benches. Interpretive signposts guide and teach visitors throughout their forest journey. Brochures are available to the public to explain the significance of each posted location along the trails.

Foresters, teachers and the general public are encouraged to make use of the forest for educational and recreational purposes. The site is available to other natural resource education groups who wish to host programs and events there. For more information about the Demonstration Forest please contact the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District at 564 – 2321, Extension 3, or stop by our office at 42 Pine Crest Drive, Dover – Foxcroft.