

# COMEBACK STEWARDS

THE NEW STEWARDS OF OUR FORESTS AND WOODLANDS WILL NOT BE LIMITED TO YOUNG COLLEGE GRADUATES. THEY WILL ALSO INCLUDE SOME INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE LEAVING WELL-ESTABLISHED CAREERS AND HAVE OPTED TO GO BACK TO COLLEGE TO STUDY FORESTRY. **BY APRIL TERRERI**



Don Quigley, professor of forest technology at the Thompson School of Applied Science at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, has noticed an interesting trend. “I get a few people in their 30s, 40s, and even retirees in every class we offer now, who are excited about this field and passionate to work toward their degrees,” says Quigley.

And so we interviewed a few students from the Thompson School in New Hampshire, as well as a graduate of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, to get a better understanding of the new breed of adult students and stewards-in-the-making.

## A New Journey

**W**hen Joyce Quinn was 47, she made a momentous decision to return to college. The mother of four had been a stay-at-home mom for 20 years, working part-time for a literary agent in Boston. Suddenly, she found herself faced with a divorce and the need to support herself. “I wanted to get involved with something I liked to do and I have always been an outdoors person,” says Quinn, who earned a BS in

forestry from UNH and an associate’s degree in forestry science from the Thompson School.

She didn’t know anyone in the Forest Service, so the solo journey meant she was entering totally new territory. “Initially, I planned to get my associate’s degree in technology so that I could find a job in the Forest Service or with the state,” she explains. She then decided to continue her studies at the college to earn her BS degree. “I really wanted to get into the Forest Service so I could contribute somehow and help make people aware of what the forest really means to us because so many people don’t

understand its importance.”

Quinn admits that when she first entered college, she had no idea where her journey would lead her. “I was learning so many new things and it was a totally different world to me. Although I had always been a hiker and a camper, working in the Forest Service and looking after the forest is much different than I ever realized,” says Quinn, who has been a forester for almost two years in the FIA (Forest Inventory and Analysis) program at the USDA Forest Service in Concord, New Hampshire.

The work that Quinn does in the forest contributes vitally to the industry’s intrinsic understanding of the forest. “What we do increases our knowledge of how trees live and thrive and which sites are better for which tree species.” Her job requires collecting data, visiting the same sites every five years to remeasure and record details of the living forest. “The measurements we take and the data we collect help show the analysts what is going on in the forest. Some of the trees are in very bad shape and we want to discover why. It could be

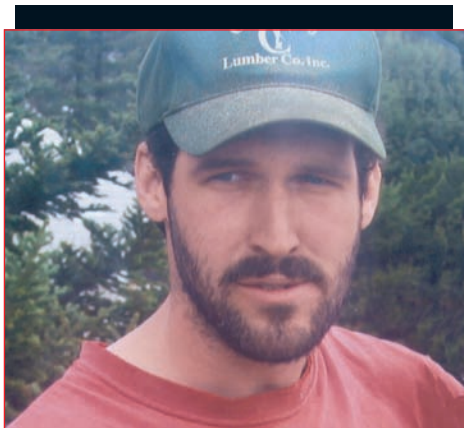


**JOYCE QUINN**

due to the soil, the amount of light, or to storms—or to any other number of reasons.” She and her colleagues record things like tree diameters, heights, crown condition, and any evidence of damage or disease. They also note the presence or absence of seedling and sapling regeneration.

Today, Quinn says the decision she made a few years ago to return to college was “an absolutely good choice. I feel at home in the woods doing what I do, and I enjoy getting up every day to go to work. When I am out in the woods, it is almost a spiritual experience. I really appreciate the smells and sounds and watching the wildlife out there.”

She looks forward to continually learning what the forests teach and envisions managing lands and developing management plans for national forests and private lands, using her inventorying skills to plot the best course to get the most from the healthy, living forest.



**DAN DUCLOS**

**Putting His Business on Hold**

**D**an Duclos, 35, is the father of two young daughters and the owner of his own logging business. When he was 33, he took a great leap of faith and made a decision to go back to school to study for his associate’s degree in forestry. “It was a huge decision for my wife and me and it was the biggest chance I have ever taken in my life,” says the owner of

Duke’s Logging, LLC, in the town of Ashland, located in central New Hampshire. “My decision meant that I would have to put my business on hold in order to study at the Thompson School.”

His business had been good until about two years ago, when log prices began to destabilize. “At my age and with a growing family to support, I felt I couldn’t go through life with these dramatic ups and downs.” Then his business operating costs increased and profit margins began to shrink. Dan first considered investing to become fully mechanized.

He talked with others in the business and they were buying equipment to stay competitive. “But the thing is, when times are good everyone can find work,” says Dan. “But when things tighten up, those with over a million dollars invested in equipment begin to work for next to nothing, and plan for a long-term recovery. They were putting little guys like me out of business. So instead of investing in more equipment, I decided I would take a different approach and go back to college.”

Dan believes that once he is a licensed forester, he will have a more diverse range of job options available to him. He has been traveling 75 miles south to Durham four days a week this past school year, and working part-time at his logging operation. He has also been selling firewood during the winter months. “With my degree, I will be able to write management plans. I am also looking down the road to a time 15 years or so from now when I might not want to do the physically demanding job that working in the woods requires.”

His love of the land is another factor motivating Dan to take the chance he did. A New Hampshire native, he has been concerned about the extreme land development that has taken place over the last two decades, especially in the lakes region. “When I am a consulting forester I can influence

people to take different avenues with their decision-making, to avoid parcelization and to keep their lands as working forests.”

Too many times, he reports, he sees land passed on to heirs who don’t have the core values their parents had. “The first thing they do is log the land in an irresponsible way, cutting out everything worth something and leaving behind a bunch of trees that are not merchantable,” Dan says. “There are just enough trees to make it look like it’s covered with wood and then they turn around and sell the land.”

Another practice that concerns Dan and others is the increasing interest in the chip market and its negative impact on the basal area. “Chips for biomass will be a huge industry in the next few years. The downside is that we will lose a lot of wood to chips from trees that could have been left to grow. This is due to the fact that it’s a lot easier with mechanized equipment to reach over and cut two or three extra trees. There will be a lot of harder cuts now because of the profitable chip market.”



**SCOTT ROLFE**

**Passion for Outdoors**

**S**cott Rolfe had a good career as a manager for a national supermarket chain. But one day he decided to make a significant change in his life by leaving behind his secure job to go back to college to study forestry. “I wanted to move to a career where I could

make more of a contribution,” says Rolfe, now 38 years old. For the last 10 years, Rolfe, Licensed Professional Forester, has worked for the Department of Resources and Economic Development at the NH Division of Forests and Lands in Concord, New Hampshire.

He was 26, married and with a baby on the way, when he entered the Thompson School to pursue an associate's degree in forestry. “It was definitely a challenging time to make that change, with my wife as the only income provider at that time,” Rolfe says. “But we managed and I believe that we reaped the rewards of our efforts in the end.”

Having grown up on a small farm, the woods and the outdoors were a large part of Rolfe's upbringing. “My dad took me hunting and fishing regularly. I was always inspired by what Aldo Leopold said about carrying out a sound land ethic.” This ethic became increasingly important to Rolfe as he watched New Hampshire lose 20,000 acres annually over the last decade.

Rolfe says his first real passion on the job was to implement a sound land ethic in sustainable forestry. “Now I can put the whole picture together after I've gained knowledge and wisdom working every day. I have been working with my local community to try to protect from development some very important keystone parcels in my region.” He says he believes he will become more involved in this area, educating private landowners about the options they have to save their forests. “Many people don't realize that conservation easements can allow them to do this and they often misinterpret what a conservation easement really is.”

One of the biggest challenges in the forestry industry, notes Rolfe, is the ever-increasing operating costs contractors face. “More and more logging contractors are dropping out of the business because their profit margins have shrunk so much to the point that they are not

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sure they can pay their bills. Then you have the cost of diesel, which is really hurting many of the guys who have a weekly fuel bill that could be as high as \$20,000.”

In addition to the Division of Forests and Lands' mission to maintain sound forestry practices and multiple-use management, Rolfe says another critical responsibility is to help sustain New Hampshire's local wood industry. “We do this by providing a steady supply of wood to the market even during the down cycles [regarding stumpage prices] while most private landowners hold tight. Our timber harvesting becomes a key element during these hard times to local loggers and mills.”

Education and mentorship are other priorities Rolfe takes seriously. In combination with an interpretive program, his division developed a management brochure describing the forester's role in managing public lands. This information is available at trailheads into public lands so that visitors realize they are entering a working forest, sustainably managed for multiple uses, explains Rolfe. “We have a vast range of recreation such as hiking trails and snowmobile trails which are utilized by the public more than they were 15 or 20 years ago, so our goal is to educate the public about what is going on in the forests they enjoy.”

If you ask Rolfe how he feels about the decision he made 10 years ago to return to college, you are certain to get an affirmation. “It's the best thing I ever did. I have a more satisfying career today knowing that the work I do has a positive and long-term impact.”

## First Child in the Woods

**B**en Deumling, 26, was born with a love of the forest and the outdoors. “I grew up running around in the woods,” says Deumling, whose family has managed Zena Timber Products in Rickreall, Oregon, for over 20 years. The day we caught up with Deumling, he was on a three-month-long hike of the Hayduke Trail.

When he graduated college in 2005, he knew he wanted to run a sawmill. He graduated from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, with a BS in environmental studies and politics. “Our family had never really done any sawmilling—just forest management. We were harvesting timber and selling it to a local sawmill. We had a little portable sawmill from the time I was a kid that we used once in a while, and I thought we could do more than just sell logs to a mill. So the seed had been there for quite a long time.”

Last September, Deumling started a wood products business, providing custom cutting and cutting rough lumber on the company's sawmill. “Eventually we plan to do secondary processing, drying, planing, and moulding lumber into a variety of products.” If I had continued to cut only dimension lumber I would not be able to make ends meet.”

Zena is an FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)-certified forest that sells FSC-certified lumber. Within this context, Deumling plans to develop a niche for his business. “I plan to sell more finished products down the line. I

believe the more flooring and kiln-dried moulded flooring I can sell, the fewer trees I will need to cut because the more I process it myself, the less volume I will need to produce. So this is the business model I am working toward. By producing more value-added products, this gives me the confidence to move forward.”

Although Deumling’s mother, Sarah, owns the 200 acres surrounding the family homestead, she will soon own another 1,100 acres of the larger Zena Forest the family managed for so long. Both parcels have conservation easements on them, allowing only habitat conservation and commercial forestry in perpetuity. Sarah reports that selling the development rights has raised

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much of the money needed to allow the family to enlarge its forest land base. Ben’s business, Zena Forest Products, uses the parcels for raw material for its wood products business.

Deumling’s recent three-month hiking trip is an extension of his love and respect for the land. “As I grow older, I realize how important this kind of activity is for me. Being in nature is invigorating and I learn to know myself a lot better when I am out here. I have a lot I want to learn about the forest. For me it is an emotional connection in

that I want to work to save forestlands because I see it getting cut down all the time. I want to keep taking care of forests so they don’t get sold to someone who will just pave them over or develop them.”

Deumling envisions himself having a forest management role sometime in the future, but for now, he says there is a lot to learn in his sawmill business. ■

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