The Huntington Wildlife Forest Experience

by Bill Porter, AEC Director

To say that winter is long in the Adirondacks is probably trite or redundant. Either way, most of us here are glad because we can use a long winter.

Each February, Dick, Ray, Charlotte, and now Scott and Stacy, and I begin planning for the summer. We start listing the names of those who we know will be coming and generally conclude that it will be a quiet summer.

Then, about April 10, the snow melts and with it goes our perception of the upcoming summer. By spring it seems like so many people are looking for a place to stay, hold a meeting, bring a class or collect a sample, that we’re not sure that Huntington Forest is large enough. Even as we’ve built more housing, we keep filling it to capacity and, some weeks during the summer, beyond.

We keep trying to find places for people, and making the case to build more housing because alumni tell us over and over, “the summer I spent at the Huntington changed my life.” That is the reason field stations exist.

As most of you know, there is something indescribable about spending a summer in the North Woods as a student. Part of it is the self-confidence that arises from realizing that you recognize nearly every species you encounter (okay, well, a lot of them), and that you are beginning to understand a complex ecosystem. Part of it is the camaraderie of being part of a research team and the sense of accomplishment that comes with solving problems every day as a team. Part of it is climbing Goodnow Mountain at sunrise, watching a moose on Military Pond, or sitting under the stars at Rich Lake beach listening to the coyotes howl.

But most of that life-changing feeling comes from getting to know ecology, wildlife and forestry, firsthand, and realizing that this profession is more fun than you could possibly have imagined.

So, once again we were planning while the snow flew. It looks to be a busy summer and spring’s only begun. We are happy to be planning the summer because working with students is the reason we all love being here. Few rewards in life compete with sensing the joy students feel as they discover the Adirondacks for the first time.

We can’t wait to share our passion for the field, and for Huntington Forest. The experience will change a few more lives this summer.

Record Use at AEC in 2000

While we always seem busy here, last year we were able to say that we were twice as busy as just three years before. User-days at the AEC jumped from just over 3,000 in 1997 to more than 7,000 in 2000. AEC instructional programs reached a record 1,600 elementary, high school and college students, and professionals participating in credit courses, workshops and other learning experiences at the AEC.

While ESF students, faculty and administration still make up a large percentage of our users, the number of visiting researchers and participants in a variety of instructional programs is a rapidly growing entity at the AEC.
AEC Growth Means Continuing Investment

The AEC’s research and public service programs have grown dramatically over the past two decades. The opening of the Adirondack Park Visitor Information Center on Rich Lake in 1990 and construction of the Rich Lake Dining Center and bunkhouses in 1993 helped spur our growth.

Additionally, the AEC expanded its instructional program and now offers five field-oriented credit courses: Interpretation of Field Biology, Stalking Science Education in the Adirondacks, Advanced Wildlife Techniques, Adirondack Forest Ecology and Management, and Winter Mammalian Ecology. All these improvements have allowed us to attract and accommodate more students, researchers and visitors, expanding the quality and breadth of AEC programs.

The experience that students receive at the AEC is an important part of their development as individuals and as natural resource professionals. We are committed to providing a summer experience that will complement and enhance the instructional activities at the Syracuse campus. Students are encouraged to get involved in a variety of learning experiences while at the AEC, and few walk away from their time here bored.

The Huntington Lecture Series in July and August provides an opportunity for students to learn about Adirondack Park issues and regional ecological research and to interact one-on-one with natural resource professionals, policy makers and public figures. Students also are encouraged to attend regional field trips, such as a visit to the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake and the DEC’s goose banding “round-up” on the St. Lawrence River. This summer we have plans to enhance the graduate student experience by providing an AEC staff liaison to ensure one-on-one attention.

While an increase in activity puts pressure on AEC resources, the quality of the experience students, researchers, and visitors receive at the AEC remains high. Since bunkspace has become the limiting factor at the AEC, we have tried to continue investing in our infrastructure to meet the needs of increasing numbers of users.

A user fee helps us maintain buildings and buy beds and mattresses. Fortunately, the college administration has been very supportive over the years in helping us to build additional housing.

We hope that another new bunkhouse will be under construction soon. Once this facility is online, we plan to invest in restoring Huntington and Arbutus lodges. Both of these historic college landmarks have seen significant wear and tear in recent years with the crush of users. Given what we have accomplished over the years, we look forward to seeing what investments in AEC facilities will bring.

Fee Schedule and Reservation Form Online

For individuals interested in spending some time with us, we have our fee schedule and a reservation form on the Web. Check out www.esf.edu/aec for general information about the Adirondack Ecological Center and the Adirondacks. User fees are linked from the AEC Web page or you can go directly to the page at www.esf.edu/aec/fees.htm. The form needed for reservations is also linked to the AEC Web page, or can be found at www.esf.edu/aec/policies.htm.
Sad Farewells and Happy Hellos

Darleen LaPelle-Gauvin Retires

After 22 years of great service to the AEC/HWF, Darleen LaPelle-Gauvin retired in October 2000. Darleen’s job evolved from secretary to administrative assistant in recognition of her role as the AEC accountant, accommodations coordinator, receptionist, and counselor — all duties she handled in an excellent manner.

Darleen was born and raised in nearby Long Lake, but was eager to shed the snow and ice of the Adirondacks for the sun and golf courses of Florida.

At her farewell dinner party at the Adirondack Hotel in Long Lake, Darleen recounted her job interview with then-director Bill Tierson. When asked if she could type, had any knowledge of forestry or wildlife, knew anything about the HWF, or had any secretarial skills, Darleen answered “no, no, no, and no!”

We’re not sure how much forestry she learned, but she sure learned to keep us organized. Darleen became a great friend to us all, and we will miss her great sense of humor and dedication. We’ll also miss her homemade doughnuts and fudge.

We wish her well in retirement!

AEC Hires Two New Biologists

Darleen’s retirement wasn’t the only staff change in 2000. The AEC welcomed Scott and Stacy Haulton to the program staff. Stacy McNulty Haulton attended SUNY-Geneseo for her B.A. in biology. Her interest in research began at Geneseo, where she helped with a study on the effects of magnetism on avian navigation. She took a graduate research position at ESF from 1994-97 with Bill Porter and is proud to have been a part of the white-tailed deer radio-telemetry research at the AEC.

Upon finishing her M.S., Stacy worked as a GIS technician on the Virginia Gap Analysis Project. She enjoyed a wide variety of experiences at Virginia Tech, including using aerial videography to map vegetation and working on natural resource management plans for an Army base.

A move to Chicago brought Stacy to The Nature Conservancy, where she became part of the Great Lakes eco-regional planning team. Stacy worked with cooperators across eight states and Ontario to define priorities for land conservation. Great Lakes work was a wonderful experience, but she could not resist the call to return to her heart’s home, the Adirondacks.

At the AEC, Stacy hopes to pursue her interests in forest and landscape ecology through teaching and research.

Scott Haulton also attended SUNY-Geneseo (though ironically Scott and Stacy never met there), where he completed a B.A. in English. He taught high school briefly before deciding to go back to school to pursue a degree in wildlife ecology. Scott attended ESF from 1994-96. He was involved in The Wildlife Society student chapter and enjoyed two summer experiences at the AEC.

During Scott’s first summer experience with the AEC he assisted with Stacy’s graduate thesis project trapping and radio-collaring deer. Scott earned his B.S. in EFB and went on to Virginia Tech for an M.S. in wildlife ecology. His work there focused on ruffed grouse chick survival and brood habitat on timber company lands in Virginia and West Virginia.

It wasn’t long after completing his M.S. that Scott was offered a job working in suburban Chicago for the DuPage County Forest Preserve. Scott’s job as ecologist was to assess and promote ecological health and species diversity on public lands while providing recreational opportunities.

When offered the chance to come back to the Adirondacks to work as an ecologist, Scott didn’t hesitate. Scott and Stacy married in July 2000 and arrived at the AEC shortly thereafter. They are both thrilled to be part of the AEC team.

Class Learns How to Cope With Winter

Ever wonder how mice, deer, and squirrels get by through the long, cold winters in the North Country? Students in the Winter Mammalian Ecology class learned these lessons and more during the annual six-day course held at the AEC during the college’s spring break. The course is co-taught by mammologist and winter ecology expert Dr. Joe Merritt from Powdermill Biological Station in western Pennsylvania and ESF’s Dr. Bill Porter. Students learned how physical and behavioral adaptations help mammals from shrews to musk oxen live in harsh northern climates. Lectures were supported by field trips and activities — students visited deer wintering yards, live-trapped small mammals, and tested the physical characteristics of the 3-foot snowpack outside the AEC office.

Everyone had a great time and the snowshoe races were a big hit with students and spectators alike! For those interested in next year’s class, please contact Bill Porter for details.
AEC/HWF Research

■ New Patch Selection Forest Management Project at HWF

AEC program staff and HWF foresters have begun plans to establish a 100-acre patch selection demonstration site south of Wolf Lake, in an area known as “Bureau Brothers Turn.” Harvest of the predominately mature northern hardwood stand is slated to begin in fall/winter 2002.

Small cuts, approximately one-fourth of an acre, will be dispersed throughout the site to remove about 20 acres of the stand in the first year of harvest. Future harvests of mature timber on the site will take place about every 15 years.

AEC program staff is studying the stand’s conditions before and after the harvests to determine how the cutting affects flora and fauna at the site. These studies will investigate the site’s tree cavity use and availability; amphibian, small mammal and songbird populations; vernal pools; deer browse impacts; and vegetative communities. Pilot projects began in the summer of 2000 and are planned to continue for the next several years.

■ Foresters to Inventory HWF’s CFI Plots

The forestry staff report the forest’s 288 Continuous Forest Inventory plots will be sampled in the summer of 2001. These permanent plots are inventoried every 10 years to monitor the growth and mortality of forest vegetation. Work will be done by a crew of approximately six students. This will be the fourth time many of the plots have been inventoried since being established in 1970.

■ ALTEMP Review: Always Something Going On

Another year, another batch of ALTEMP data collected. ALTEMP, or Adirondack Long-Term Monitoring Program, began 20 years ago to monitor long-term changes in the natural communities in and around HWF. To date, over 30 ALTEMP studies have been started, collecting information on nearly everything from chipmunk abundance to weather conditions. Most projects are sampled annually.

Last fall, AEC program staff covered the property by foot, paddle and air for the ALTEMP beaver colony survey. Surveyors found 30 active lodges in both 2000 and 1999. Generally, the number of active lodges found has increased since 1980. Scott and Stacy Haulton have submitted a paper detailing results of the 20-year ALTEMP beaver colony survey and 10 years of research from the 1950s to the Adirondack Research Consortium’s 7th Annual Conference to be held in May 2001.

ALTEMP’s annual fall seed productivity survey, conducted by Ray Masters, showed the third best beechnut crop in the survey’s 12-year history. Better-than-average production was also found with red and sugar maple seeds.

Ray also was busy with the winter bird survey at HWF’s Natural Area. Though the final results aren’t in for the season, Ray says he’s finding far more white-winged crossbills this year than in past surveys.

Despite almost too much snow this winter, the annual ALTEMP winter track counts and snowshoe hare surveys are currently under way. Frequent snowfalls like those in the Adirondacks this winter obscure tracks and make the survey difficult to complete. One thing is apparent even before the final results are in: snowshoe hare abundance appears to be at its lowest level in many years.

Plans are under way for this spring and summer’s ALTEMP projects, including surveys for ruffed grouse, songbirds, amphibians, small mammals, coyotes and other predators, and loon nests. Stay tuned for ALTEMP updates in future issues.

■ HWF Chosen as Mercury Deposition Study Site

In 1978, HWF was among the first North American sites to begin weekly collections of precipitation samples for chemical analysis in the National Atmospheric Deposition Program. Today HWF is joined by more than 200 sites nationwide providing data on precipitation amount, temporal trends, and geographic distribution of acids, nutrients and basic cations in precipitation. ESF’s Dudley Raynal is site supervisor.

In December of 1999, HWF’s atmospheric monitoring site became one of only 40 national collection sites in the Mercury Deposition Network. Data from these sites enable researchers to determine seasonal and annual mercury flux in precipitation. Dudley and Charles Driscoll of Syracuse University are site co-supervisors.

■ Also Noteworthy


• A paper co-authored by Stacy Haulton, Bill Porter, and Brent Rudolph, “Evaluating four methods to capture white-tailed deer,” was accepted for publication in The Wildlife Society Bulletin. The article appears in the Spring 2001 issue of the journal.
• The Adirondack Research Consortium’s 8th annual conference was held May 23-24, 2001, in Saranac Lake, N.Y. The conference had a strong showing from AEC staff and graduate students: Scott and Stacy Haulton presented a paper titled “The Wait and See Approach: 30 Years of Surveying Beaver Populations at the Huntington Wildlife Forest.” Ray Masters presented a poster, “The Huntington Wildlife Forest: From Adirondack Great Camp to Premier Research Station.” Bill Porter, James Gibbs, Dick Sage, and Stacy Haulton participated in the Adirondack Research Consortium Working Group on Unit Management Planning. Anne Oyer presented a paper, “Immigration of Female White-tailed Deer into a Low Deer Density Area in the Central Adirondacks.” Karl Didier presented a paper titled “Linking Spatial Patterns in Maple Regeneration and White-tailed Deer Densities in Northern N.Y.” Michale Glennon presented the paper “Effects of Land Use Management on Biodiversity in the Adirondack Park — Year 1 Results.”

Graduate Research at AEC/HWF

Each year the variety of research projects associated with the AEC/HWF seems to grow and last year was no exception. Thirty-five graduate student projects used HWF during the summer of 2000. Presented here are just a few of them.

Shawn Carter (Ph.D. candidate in EFB with James Gibbs) continued examining how forest structure affects the abundance and diversity of salamanders, spiders, and beetles. Shawn’s research will have direct implications for managed forests where structural diversity may be limited. Shawn’s work, which began in 2000, will continue for the next few years.

Sheila Christopher (Ph.D. candidate in EFB with Myron Mitchell) began her research in the summer of 1999. Sheila’s work focuses on sources and movement of nitrate in the Archer Creek Catchment. In 2000, Sheila installed 29 sampling wells into the rocky terrain of the Arbutus Lake watershed. She plans to sample soil water, groundwater, throughfall, and precipitation under a number of conditions.

Jodi Forrester (Ph.D. candidate in EFB with Don Leopold) was involved with several projects last summer. She sampled permanent vegetation plots as part of HWF’s Integrated Forest Study to estimate the change in the structure, composition and nutrient cycling of a mature northern hardwood forest following infestation by beech bark disease. Jodi also assisted with research on mineralization and nitrification in old-growth and mature northern hardwood forests, and a study of changes in herbaceous plant diversity in response to the removal of the woody understory.

Karl Didier (Ph.D. candidate in EFB with Bill Porter) completed another field season looking into the relationship between deer and regeneration failure in the Adirondacks. Karl’s work investigates how deer affect regeneration resulting from a recent large ice storm in the Adirondacks. Last season, Karl and his crew were busy setting up deer exclosures, collecting soil samples, and sampling vegetation throughout northern New York.

Greg McGee (post-doctorate, EFB) continues his work at HWF’s Integrated Forest Study site and Catlin Lake Natural Area with Myron Mitchell, Don Leopold and Dudley Raynal. Greg’s research investigates the influence of forest age on the forest’s ability to hold nitrogen. In addition to the two sites at HWF, Greg has two other study areas in the Adirondacks on Hennessy and Ampersand mountains. Greg also is involved with several other projects, including studies of beech bark disease, lichen diversity and moss distribution.

Amy Mallett (M.S. candidate in FOR with Ralph Nyland) completed her first field season at HWF last year. Amy’s project looks at the potential of controlling understory American beech by using a felling technique and compares this method with herbicide control. Beech stump sprouting is a problem for many forest managers, and Amy hopes her work will help determine the best time to cut beech saplings to limit sprouting. She will complete a second field season in 2001.

Blair Page (M.S. candidate in EFB with Brian Underwood) completed the field work for his thesis project in the winter of 2000. Blair investigated the effects of winter supplemental feeding on the condition of white-tailed deer fawns in the northern Adirondacks. Winter deer feeding is an age-old custom in the Adirondacks, though few studies have attempted to determine its effectiveness. Blair is analyzing data and hopes to have his thesis completed in the summer.
Rebecca (Coleman) Quail (M.S. candidate in EFB with Dietland Muller-Schwarze) completed the second and final field season for her thesis project in 2000. Rebecca’s project focuses on the importance beaver-created ponds have to the productivity of amphibians breeding in vernal pools. Currently, she is writing her thesis and plans to defend this summer.

The Huntington staff also sends their congratulations to Rebecca, who was married to Brian Quail shortly after last summer’s field season.

Michale Glennon (Ph.D. candidate in EFB with Bill Porter) completed another field season for her dissertation, “Effects of Land Use Management on Biodiversity in the Adirondacks.” Michale is measuring species diversity and distribution of small mammals and songbirds at HWF and several other Adirondack sites. Michale’s relationship with the AEC dates back to 1993 when she received an internship at HWF while attending Dartmouth College. In 1994 Michale returned to the HWF to work as a research technician for a black bear study.

**EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- The AEC will offer Advanced Wildlife Survey Techniques August 12-17, 2001. Participants will learn to use common techniques to survey wildlife populations and assess habitats. Students will also learn skills necessary to conduct quantitative assessments and data analysis. Cost for the six-day class (including room and board) is $255. For more information see the AEC’s Web site at www.esf.edu/aec.

- The 5th Annual Huntington Forest Reunion tentatively is scheduled for August 2002. This year’s planned reunion was postponed to phase in an alternating schedule with the Cranberry Lake Biological Station’s alumni reunion. We hope this will not disappoint those of you who made plans around this date. We’re hoping the new schedule will allow you to attend both events in future years.