

WWOA's Woodland Mentor Program

Mentors help new members learn proper forestry care

By **Tristan Persson**

In 2020, WWOA received a grant from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Cooperatives, shortly after Wisconsin's Safer-at-Home order went into effect.

The grant funded two projects. First, it allowed WWOA to award two additional UW-Stevens Point Forestry Leader Scholarships in 2020, and secondly, it provided funding to create WWOA's new Woodland Mentor program for members. With the first year of WWOA's Woodland Mentor program finishing up this June, here is an overview of the program, some participant remarks, and our plans for this coming fall. You can learn more about this members only program at wisconsinwoodlands.org/woodland-mentor-program/.

WWOA created a mentor program for new members joining our organization or inexperienced members. This program is designed to help Aspens, or new or inexperienced members, learn more about the benefits of WWOA, help find options for their woodlands, share information on caring for their land, and inform them of services and programs available to woodland owners. Aspens are paired with an existing, experienced WWOA member called a Mentor, who helps them achieve the goals of the program and guides them through 10 important landowner topics.

Some goals of the program include:

- Help Aspens feel welcome within WWOA.
- Ensure that Aspens feel comfortable engaging in the WWOA network and becoming active at the chapter level.
- Engage Aspens in learning about the variety of resources available to assist them in caring for their woods.



Carl A. Garske said downed trees are normally a many day project, but not this year. The ones pictured had been leaning, but what little snow they had, took them down. Garske is part of the WWOA Mentor Program, and is teamed with Steven Ahrenholtz of Cincinnati, Ohio, who has with woodlands in Eau Claire County. Garske lives in Corpus Christi, Texas, but spent the winter at his tree farm in Harshaw in Oneida County. He said, "Steve and I have spent many hours talking about our woods and of course many other things."

- Encourage Aspens to consider their long-term goals and objectives for their woodlands.

WWOA board members, staff and our AmeriCorps members created 10 landowner topics or themes that each woodland owner should understand. A special thank you goes to Don Hoffman, Sue McKenzie and Tristan Persson, volunteer coordinators and Marshfield Clinic Health System AmeriCorps members serving WWOA, and Nancy Bozek for their work on the topics.

The program was adapted to work under the conditions of the pandemic.

Throughout the year, topics with related links and publications were emailed about once a month to Mentors and Aspens, along with questions to help start discussions on the topic. They were encouraged to meet virtually to have discussions on and share their experiences with these topics so that the Aspen could learn a little about each topic. Examples of topics included safety, professional advice, financial assistance, establishing a management plan, taxes and forest health. Each module was presented by the mentor in a manner of communication that

worked best for the pair, either by email, phone calls or video chats. Participants were also mailed a welcome package containing many publications pertaining to the upcoming topics, along with a hard copy of the My Land Handbook and a few thank you gifts for joining the program. Aspen and Mentors were encouraged to participate in the virtual Winter Woodland Owners Conferences. A special virtual Timber Tax seminar was also offered to participants by member Carl Bar-kow to help cover the complicated topics of land ownership, property classifications, timber basis and taxes.

For our inaugural year, we had 13 Aspens and 11 Mentors participate in the program. Though it was difficult to not visit each other in person during the pandemic, we encouraged the pairs to meet at WWOA's Annual Meeting in Hudson, Wisconsin, this September. Here are some comments from the program's mid-term survey:

- "I appreciate this program."

- "I am encouraged to have questions prompted by the modules."
- "The resources for each topic are very thorough and I feel well prepared."
- "I am actually connecting to more WWOA materials and learning of resources for my woodland than I am likely to have done if I had not signed up for the mentoring program."
- "Having a mentor is PRICELESS!!!"

We recognized our Mentors and Aspens in the Spring issue of *Wisconsin Woodlands* under News and Notes. WWOA is very proud of the time our volunteer Mentors put into this program, as well as the eagerness of the Aspens to learn more about WWOA and woodland management. You can learn more about the program by talking to current participants.

If you are interested in participating in this program as an Aspen or Mentor, WWOA will begin a new recruitment period in late summer/early fall. The

next class of WWOA Woodland Mentors program is tentatively scheduled to start in October 2021 and run until late Spring 2022.

Visit the Woodland Mentor program webpage, <https://wisconsinwoodlands.org/woodland-mentor-program/>, to find answers to frequently asked questions and learn more. If you are interested in participating, just complete the New Member Interest form or Mentor Interest form and submit it to WWOA. This will help us best match you with a suitable partner for the program. We are excited to continue the Woodland Mentor program another year and hope to have more participation and events!



Tristan Persson is the volunteer coordinator and Marshfield Clinic Health System AmeriCorps member serving WWOA.

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