



# Afoot in the Field: A Resource for Conservation Landowners in the Finger Lakes Region

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I've bucked up a fair number of logs for firewood over the years and enjoy the whole process of cutting my own wood – it heats you at least a few times from moving it, splitting it, stacking it, and then finally burning it! But in a couple instances, the sweat on my brow, while felling a tree or bucking one up, came not from the exertion of the work but from the nervousness of having the keen eyes of

chainsaw safety instructor Bill Lindloff scrutinizing my every move...

There is a mental image of Bill that will probably never leave my mind. He is kneeling down on the forest floor, a safe distance away from where I am working on an assigned cutting task, head slightly cocked toward the other safety class participants, grin on his face, and counting the number of mistakes I make on his fingers. He says something like, "Well, you remembered to check your surroundings for potential hazards, you identified an appropriate escape route, you satisfactorily planned and executed your cut, you are wearing all the right personal protective gear, and you remembered to set the chain break when you were done cutting. But, you get minus ten points for forgetting to fully wrap your thumb around the upper handle of the saw, and minus another ten points for forgetting to lower the face shield on your helmet while you were working". Considering that that was the second time I'd taken Bill's class, the demerits were embarrassing. But all of us in the class were in the same boat, and we were all learning, and re-learning, some very valuable safety lessons.

One of the other participants in the Game of Logging class that I took this past year was a man named Charles Stackhouse. Charles owns and actively manages a beautiful property near Keuka Lake, is a volunteer with the Finger Lakes Trail Conference (the organization that sponsored the chainsaw safety course), has served on the Board of Directors of the NY Forest Owners Association, and is a Master Forest Owner who helps others learn about forest management. Charles had some great stories about doing land management work on his own property, had a passion for being outside in his woods, and was committed to volunteerism and helping other landowners learn about good forestry and safe use of equipment. He graciously agreed to be interviewed for this issue of Afoot in the Field and offers some great stories and tips about how to work safely on your property with machinery and power tools.

Chris Olney  
Director of Stewardship

# Conservation Landowner Profile: Charles Stackhouse

## 1. Please tell us about the size, landcover types, and history of your family property on Bluff Point, just north of Keuka Lake.

We purchased this farm in 2003, next to property we already owned. This gave us a total of 311 acres. Our present home was built on it in 2005.

The farm consisted of over 50 acres of recently abandoned vineyards, 46 acres of brushy cover, 130 acres of woods, and 85 acres of open fields in various stages of reversion to shrub land. There are several small gullies and our southern border is a very deep and wide gully. There are two seasonal small streams. The old farm house had fallen down, as had a small barn and wooden silo. The remains of a larger dairy barn could still be found, as could a hand dug well with piping to move cool water to a cement trough where milk cans were cooled. Old farm equipment was scattered about.



The farm was once used for dairy cattle, raising beef cattle, and for commercial vineyards. The woods turned out to be in sad shape due to previous cattle and sheep grazing in the woods, heavy invasive plant pressure, and at least two

episodes of high grade timbering in the past. (High grading is where the best trees are removed leaving undesirable trees behind).

## 2. Please describe your various management activities on the property over the past several years.

Active management of a property such as ours consumes as much time, effort, and money as you desire to spend. The benefits are great: exercise, fresh air, firewood, benefits to wildlife, great hunting, nice hiking and cross country skiing trails, a healthier and more beautiful woodlot, and never suffering from boredom.

Our first efforts were to prepare a home site and build a home. We sited our home 2000 feet off the road for privacy and to obtain a view of the hills and Keuka Lake, set into the south end of the woods facing south over an open field. I cleared trees for the house site and driveway – the builder later removed 52 dump truck loads of stumps. We also removed acres of abandoned vineyard.

Ripping out old vineyards can be very time and labor intensive. The trellis consists of wooden or metal posts 24 feet apart and 2 or 3 wires running the length of the rows. We cut the wires at the end of each 24 foot panel and pulled them free of vines and brush. When the bundle of wires was thick enough, we coiled them to haul to the metal recycler. The posts were usually pulled with a wrapped chain lifted by tractor drawbar on the 3 point hitch and later with the blade of a bulldozer. Old vines were chopped with a tractor mounted brush hog mower. Steel posts broken off at ground level caused a number of expensive flat or destroyed tires. We bought a reliable metal detector to locate all the broken-off steel posts, which we subsequently dug out with a backhoe. There were hundreds of broken posts per acre! All steel posts were sold for scrap metal. The cleared land was either plowed for farm ground or left to revert to shrub land for wildlife cover.

The old house, barn, and silo were real hazards and were removed by burning and burying.

Several tons of scrap steel were hauled off. The old well was covered by large flat stones for safety. Old barbed wire and woven fences are being removed in stages.

We heat our home, workshop, and hot water entirely with wood (except for summertime domestic hot water). We installed an outside wood boiler and have a small wood stove in the house. I built several woodsheds with pole timber I harvested in the course of thinning evergreen stands. Wood from clearing the house site and driveway heated our home the first few years. Since then firewood then has come from timber stand improvement activities and the construction and maintenance of woods trails.

We highly encourage landowners to build good access roads and trails. These can greatly enhance the enjoyment and maintenance of a property. I cut the first few woods trails and roads by hand – very slow work. Our consulting forester laid out woods roads for us and his crew used a bulldozer to construct miles of roads in only a few days. The steep areas all have water bars and other erosion-prevention structures. Crossings of wet areas were made with either culverts or log corduroy. All trails were seeded to shade grass mixtures to stabilize the soil and minimize erosion.

Several brushy fields were reclaimed to farm ground by mowing and by grubbing out shrubs and small trees with a backhoe. We lease farm ground and a renovated vineyard to neighboring farmers. Other brushy fields were cleared and mowed, and we are trying to transition them to native grasses and forbs for wildlife. Other wildlife habitat improvement projects include constructing numerous brush piles for small game, leaving a couple of dead den trees and downed logs per acre, and putting up over 30 bluebird houses.

Deer hunting is important to us – for recreation, for healthy food, and to reduce the size of the deer herd to try to allow forest regeneration. Our county has an extremely large deer herd; the numbers are far above what the habitat can support. Our strategy for deer hunting was to plant a number of small hunting food plots, erect metal ladder tree stands or wooden free-standing elevated hunting huts, and to learn and try to apply some science to managing the deer herd. We census the bucks with multiple game cameras. We calculate the number of does and fawns and then set harvest goals. In our area, a harvest of less than 30% of the does leads to even more deer next year.

We knew nothing about forest management when we purchased this property; we couldn't tell healthy forest from poor forest. We started with a visit by the NY State Dept. of Environmental Conservation Service Forester. We were cutting firewood, so asked the DEC forester to come mark the trees we should be cutting to improve our woods. After walking our woods with us, he developed a Forest Stewardship Plan. This described our woods, inventoried the trees, and suggested a 10-year plan to accomplish our goals. Our goals were to harvest enough firewood to meet our needs, improve the habitat for wildlife, improve the health of the forest, and grow some merchantable trees to help defray the costs of property management. Next we hired a private Consulting Forester who worked with us to enroll our property in the NY State 480A Forest Tax Program. He and his crew also constructed woods roads and performed timber stand improvement and invasive plant control work that I did not have the time or expertise to do. We discovered and joined the NY Forest Owners Association – a great group of similar minded people from whom we have learned a lot and with whom we have made some great friends. (All New York forest owners should belong to NYFOA!) We took the training given by NYFOA and Cornell Cooperative Extension to become Master Forest Owner volunteers who provide free woodland visits and peer counseling to other woodland owners.

The activities in our woods that I have done include marking and posting the boundaries of our property to avoid issues with trespass and conflicts with neighbors during woods work. Trail work has already been mentioned. Timber stand improvement (i.e. “weeding the woods”) consists of eliminating deformed, diseased, or undesirable trees to allow maximal growth of desired trees. At first I had one of the foresters mark for me which trees to remove; now I do most of it myself. We carefully measured three plots of trees and have entered them into the Northeast Timber Growing Contest ([www.TimberContest.com](http://www.TimberContest.com)) to track rates of growth.

Our property was almost overrun with invasive and interfering plants such as European buckthorn, multiflora rose, Japanese honeysuckle, autumn olive, Japanese knotweed, and garlic mustard. These outcompete more desirable native shrubs and trees. I attack these as I can with either mechanical removal or herbicide (glyphosate). Progress is slow but steady.

### **3. What are the equipment and tools that you use to conduct your management activities?**

The first tool a landowner should obtain is a quality chainsaw. Buy from a local dealer who services what he sells. Learn how to sharpen the chain! Plastic felling wedges should always be carried. A bucket loader tractor is immensely useful for property management. Useful accessories for the tractor are a brush hog mower, a log chain or stout rope for pulling, tire chains for use in snow; a backhoe; and a 3-point hitch logging winch. A dump trailer that I pull either with tractor or pickup was a great purchase; I have hauled firewood, wood chips, gravel, rocks, brush, stumps, scrap iron, and equipment with it. Splitting mauls, wedges, peavey, and log splitter are useful for firewood.

### **4. What safety training have you had, and what safety precautions do you take when using power tools and machinery?**

I had no safety training when I started and was lucky not to be hurt on a number of occasions. I read some and picked up some safety tips from neighbors. Since then I have taken the invaluable chainsaw and tree felling safety class called Game of Logging (levels 1 and 2). When I bought my first chainsaw in 1986, the local dealer insisted that I buy a set of safety chaps and a logging helmet with hearing protectors. I try to always wear them. Good leather gloves and steel toed boots are a must; I now have a set of special chainsaw boots. My first tractor had no rollover bar or seat belt but now I wouldn't own a tractor without them. I always take my cell phone afield with me now. On some jobs I try to get a neighbor to accompany me. Drinking plenty of liquids in hot weather and resting or stopping when fatigued are important.

### **5. Have you ever had any accidents or close calls that reminded you about how important it is to be careful, have the proper personal protective gear, and take safety precautions when using power tools and machinery?**

I have lost track of the number of times a logging helmet has prevented injury from falling sticks or branches or from being slapped by brush. Once a six inch cherry tree “barber-chaired” as I was felling it and the butt of the trunk missed my head by inches. Learning to plunge cut has made felling much safer. When felling small trees, it is often tempting to take safety shortcuts, especially when tired. Mentally reviewing the safety lessons from the Game of Logging every time any tree is felled or bucked is a very good idea. Over the years I have replaced two sets of chainsaw chaps when they were cut



across the front of the mid left thigh by the saw. Without the chaps, both times would have been a serious cut to my thigh.

One near disaster occurred when brush-hogging a field. For years I kept a logging chain on the tractor on the left foot platform under my left foot near the clutch. I didn't notice that it started to slide off the platform to the ground. The tractor passed over the far end and then that end got wrapped in the rotating bush hog blade. As the chain got wound up in the mower, the hook on the near end caught the edge of the foot platform and ripped it and the step below it off of the tractor in a flash. If it had caught my boot, my leg would probably have been ripped off.

Another time I was on my bulldozer pushing over some buckthorn trees whose trunks were only about 6 inches in diameter. As the trees were tipping, the front of the bulldozer climbed up a few feet in the air over the root balls. With the front of the dozer weighted by the very heavy blade, as the dozer went forward it suddenly teeter-tottered to the ground and threw me up out of the seat. I had a hard hat on but struck the top of my head on the underside of the dozer canopy with great force, which transmitted down my neck. For a few moments I was convinced I had fractured my neck. Then I remembered that there was a seat belt on the bulldozer that I had never worn before, thinking it was foolish to wear it on such a slow moving vehicle. It always gets worn now.



Photo by Marty Howden

Chainsaw safety training class with Bill Lindloff

# Chainsaw Safety Tips:

1. Never work alone. Make sure that someone knows where you are working and when you are expected to return.
2. Do not wear loose clothing, and always wear ALL Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):
  - Certified Chainsaw Safety Chaps
  - Certified helmet with face shield and hearing protection (not more than 5 years old)
  - Heavy-duty, tall work boots with steel or composite safety toes
  - Heavy-duty work gloves
3. Read the instruction manual that came with your saw. Check controls, chain tension, chain sharpness, all bolts and handles, and that the fuel and lubrication reservoirs are full.
4. Never remove any of the safety features built into your saw.
5. A sharp and well maintained chainsaw increases productivity, decreases fatigue, and helps prevent injuries and accidents.
6. Never “Air Drop-Start” a chain saw. Always start the saw on the ground, or in a “leg-lock” position.



7. Always use a chain saw with both thumbs wrapped around both the handle bar and the pistol grip. Never ever use a chain saw with only one hand.
8. Know and plan for “kickback” situations at all times, from your chain saw and from whatever you may be cutting. To avoid kick-back, do not saw with the tip of the bar, except for proper bore cuts.
9. Always engage the chain brake when not cutting. Do not use a chain saw whose chain is turning while the engine is at an idle.
10. Do not operate a chain saw with the Power Head above shoulder height. Do not climb a tree with your chainsaw.
11. Do not use a chain saw with an insecure stance or footing. Do not operate a chain saw while standing on a ladder.
12. Never disregard proper and safe falling, limbing, bucking, or boring techniques. Take a training course to learn the proper techniques.
13. Always check for hazards and identify a clear and accessible escape route.
14. Do not turn your back or take your eyes off of a hung up tree or while escaping from a falling tree. “Widow Makers” or broken branches and tops can fall on you at unexpected times.
15. Watch for branches or stems under tension, they may spring out when cut.
16. Never limb or buck a log while standing on the downhill side of a log.
17. Cut off “root wads” can stand back up or roll in uncertain directions when released from the upper segment of a downed tree.
18. Always have a good first aid kit nearby. Stay current on first aid and CPR training.
19. Never work when you are fatigued. Never ever use alcohol or drugs before or while operating a chain saw. You must be mentally and physically able to complete the job.
20. You must have the knowledge to complete the job properly and safely. Know your limitations. If something is beyond your capabilities, don’t do it!

**Sources:**

Cornell Cooperative Extension - <http://rensselaer.cce.cornell.edu/environment/emergency-preparedness/chainsaw-safety>

New York State Department of Health - <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/3233.pdf>

US Occupational Safety and Health Administration - <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/3269-10N-05-english-06-27-2007.html>

Chainsaw Journal - <http://www.chainsawjournal.com/chainsaw-safety-tips/>

Carl Smith's Chainsaw Safety - <http://www.chainsawsafetytraining.com/safety.php>

## Where To Find Information About Chainsaw Safety Courses

**New York Logger Training:** <http://www.newyorkloggertraining.org/Home/Workshops>

**Game of Logging:** [http://www.gameoflogging.com/upcoming\\_events.php](http://www.gameoflogging.com/upcoming_events.php)

**Cornell Forest Connect:** <http://cornellforestconnect.ning.com/events>

**New York Center for Agricultural Medicine & Health:** <http://www.nycamh.com/programs/gameoflogging/>

**Finger Lakes Trail Conference:** <http://www.fltconference.org/trail/members1/volunteer-trail-workers/certified-sawyer/>

**Route 96 Power & Paddle:** <http://www.powerandpaddle.com/#!chainsawsafety/c1r7e>

**STIHL Professional Instruction Program for Companies & Municipalities:**

<http://www.stihlusa.com/information/professional-training/>

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*The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a membership-supported, not-for-profit land conservation organization dedicated to protecting the lands that define the character of the Finger Lakes region. Since its founding in 1989, the Land Trust has protected over 16,000 acres of the area's forests, farms, lakeshore, and gorges.*

*Afoot in the Field is a newsletter provided by the Land Trust for landowners in the Finger Lakes who own properties that are permanently protected with a conservation easement, or who are otherwise committed to, or interested in, land conservation and wildlife habitat protection and improvement. For more information about the Finger Lakes Land Trust and its conservation programs visit [www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org) or call our Ithaca office at 607-275-9487.*

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