



Article Reprint from

Cooks Current

Newsletter

The View from Laughing Springs: Hans Reimann's ecological notes

Winter 2008

Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*)

As a forest steward of 22 years here in our exceptional value watershed, my physical & spiritual life has evolved with and become a reflection of my adopted home. This important slice of headwater stream systems, with climax tress upwards of two centuries old, has favorably reacted to my tinkering. Quoting Aldo Leopold, "The first rule of intelligent tinkering, is to save all the parts." My first few years here at Laughing Springs were mostly spent as an observer of those parts. Even though abused by the previous owners, the old tree canopy and the water from the springs sheltered and nourished the remnants of a vibrant ecological jewel. One of the tree species easily observed in the early years of my stewardship was the Norway spruce. It was easy to observe because the Norway spruce stood out more in the winter as an evergreen than the deciduous trees and shrubs. With each passing cycle of seasons, I began to notice more evergreens in the bottomlands near Springtown Hill Rd. While the native plant species began to spread and flourish, the Norway spruce spread faster. At first I was impressed with the pretty little evergreens and like most eastern U.S. citizens, brainwashed into believing the ideal Christmas tree was a Norway spruce. These trees are promoted by the government and the landscape industry as the perfect evergreen in the Northeastern landscape.

Over the last ten years, I have educated myself about invasive plants. I have come to understand that in our native landscape and even more so in hedgerow and open forest edge habitat, Norway spruce and evergreens, in general, are unwelcome. From an initial estimate of a dozen Norway spruces located at Laughing Springs in 1986, the population of this tree species has exploded to over 60 spruces by the summer of 2008. Oak, hickory, maple and ash tree species, as well as shrub, grass and perennial wild flowers were being crowded out as the spruces began growing together in groups. My decision to begin eliminating the spruces came about as they encroached on a colony of locally rare fern-leafed false fox glove. This beautiful perennial wild flower with its distinctive foliage and striking yellow bell shaped flowers, grows under the canopy of a 200 year old black oak; probably the oldest living black oak in the Cooks Creek watershed.

Enough evidence exists to declare the Norway spruce a locally invasive species in the Cooks Creek watershed. This is my first species listed as such that is not on a state or federal official list. As with most alien tree species, some native creatures

find comfort in them. Robins are nesting in some, and so removal of the spruces becomes a gradual process dependent upon the nests becoming inactive.

Finally, since some of these spruces are of good Christmas tree quality (bows, ornaments, wreaths), I would like to make these trees available to the public. While supplies last and for a small donation to the Watershed Association, you can reserve your own Holiday Tree from Laughing Springs. This issue of our newsletter will have probably reached you too late for this Holiday Season. But, by contacting me or other watershed board members, you can reserve a spruce tree to cut for next year. My hope is that when folks come to tag and then cut their future Christmas trees, they will take with them a better appreciation of our native ecosystems. Thank you for reading our newsletter.