

WET FEET AND SAPPY FINGERS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM RESTORATION WORK IN THE WEST VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS

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This presentation summarizes our practical experiences from a decade of working with state and federal agencies and private landowners to protect, conserve, and restore the spruce forests and fir swamps of West Virginia. We present case studies that demonstrate the collaborative planning processes, site selection techniques, and restoration activities used in our partnerships to bring about successful projects. The presentation recounts some of our experiences and share some of the lessons we've learned working at two unique restoration sites, each with their own set of challenges and participants – Canaan Valley and Blister Swamp.

The key projects include the following:

- West Virginia's balsam fir genetic diversity conservation: To protect the genetic diversity within WV's balsam fir swamps, we collect seed from each key swamp and seed bank it through partners like the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Fir seedlings have been grown and planted back into their respective swamps to boost the numbers where balsam woolly adelgid mortality has occurred.
 - West Virginia balsam fir swamp forest restoration: To support natural balsam fir regeneration in the swamps where deer browsing prevents sapling development, we construct various types and sizes of deer exclosures. Some become research and demonstration sites on the impacts of deer to swamp vegetation; others simply are deer-free 'refuges' for fir and other companion plants.
 - Red spruce forest restoration across the high-elevation WV landscape: To expand and connect fragmented stands of native red spruce forests we; collect significant amounts of seed with volunteers; this seed is not available commercially; seed bank and have seedlings grown at commercial nurseries as well as at the State Nursery and NRCS Plant Materials Center; work with federal and state agencies, researchers, and private landowners to develop innovative and collaborative restoration plans that identify priority sites and applications. Since 2002 more than 100,000 red spruce have been planted in West Virginia primarily by volunteers.
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