

# W O W



featuring  
**DELAWARE  
HIGHLANDS  
CONSERVANCY**



## SUCCESS SERIES

Amanda Subjin of the Delaware Highlands Conservancy has a background in forest management and education. She coordinates Delaware Highlands Conservancy's Women and their Woods (WaTW) program, which serves women landowners in Pennsylvania and New York. This success story highlights her thoughts and insight on how the program was born, the needs it addresses, and some of its sweetest successes.

*WRITTEN BY LEONORA PEPPER, FOREST STEWARDS GUILD.*

*FEATURING DELAWARE HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY.*

*IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SUSTAINING FAMILY FORESTS INITIATIVE, WITH A GRANT FROM THE US FOREST SERVICE, STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY*

# PROGRAMS

Fall retreats are held over four days, with a very intensive agenda meant to serve as a crash course in forestry. Participants delve into stewardship topics including tree identification and mensuration, silviculture, how to perform water quality assessments, and even exercises in cognitive mapping to help landowners put on paper the most-valued aspects of their properties, as well as the challenges to managing them.

Spring WaTW workshops bring together graduates from the previous fall's retreat to meet participants from previous years. While the fall retreats are more classroom-oriented, the spring workshops include a field tour and allow ample opportunity for women to build land-management experience through hands-on activities.

In 2012, the spring workshop took place over two days at a landowner's property where participants shared lodging.



The landowner cooked a big ham, and everyone else chipped in potluck style.

The workshop curriculum covered chainsaw safety, personal protective equipment (PPE), hands-on use of an ATV with a logging arch for small-scale logging operations, and a hike covering the land-use history of the property. Participants also got to experience the use of prescribed fire for controlling invasives—in this case Japanese barberry. Lastly, the landowner had received funding for an edge planting bordering fields on her property, and workshop participants helped to install it with an eye to wildlife habitat improvement.





# NEEDS ADDRESSED

At the retreats, there are so many needs that emerge from the discussions, it is difficult to identify just a few. Here, however, are three that are often in the forefront:

## IMPETUS

When Amanda was an undergraduate student at Penn State, she reports “I was the only female student of Forest Management in the class of 2005. Being the only woman was a challenge, but it was not something that hindered me.” In taking on the coordination of the Women and their Woods program, Amanda wanted to encourage women landowners to be stronger voices in land stewardship.

From the start, the value in creating this kind of learning space was apparent to Amanda. “We would fill so much time with introductions and personal stories of the challenges on individuals’ land. The depth of conversation showed the need for women to have this space to discuss these things together.” Amanda believes that in swapping over-the-top stories and comparing scars from attempts to eradicate multiflora rose, these women are also strengthening their connection to their land.

### 1. The ability to reach out to someone who has been down the road before.

The program seeks to address the need for a peer learning platform as women navigate the challenges and learning processes of land stewardship. For example, what professionals would someone who’s been down the path before recommend? The idea is not for the program teachers and coordinators to make specific recommendations, but rather to create a peer-to-peer learning network. Those who have interacted with natural resource professionals in the past can offer advice, for example, on questions to ask when vetting professionals.

### 2. Invasive plants

**This is a big issue, and everyone has it!**

Once landowners become aware of the problem—and sometimes they aren’t initially—they want to know how to go about getting rid of the invasive. The WaTW program provides the opportunity for women to share what has worked well for them, and also seeks to provide insight into where to look for mechanical assistance or financial support.

### 3. Keeping family land in the family

The passage of land from one generation to the next can be challenging if different family members value it for different reasons. In the WaTW context, participants often ask, “How do I convey this connection to the land to the next generation?” By offering information on easements, the program can provide one piece of the conservation puzzle. In addition, this is yet another opportunity for women landowners to share accounts of what works.

## CHALLENGES

### Why just women?

One of the biggest challenges encountered in Women and their Woods is the question, “Why are you doing this just for women?” There always seems to be one person who raises the question. The Conservancy strives to provide a welcoming environment and maintains that men are not excluded. In fact, men have participated in past programs. In her experience, Amanda has found that these men “eventually wallflower and then fade out the door. When the programming is geared toward women, men participate less. And it’s not because of anything we do, it’s just what happens.”

On the other hand, male presenters and professionals end up participating more. (More on this in Successes!)

In addressing this challenge, the program seeks to continually think about “how to engage women but still keep men involved. We want to recognize that the programming is targeted to women, but without excluding men.”

### Women are busy...

As rewarding as it is to get away for a weekend of intensive land stewardship learning, it is often hard for women to take a weekend away from their homes and families. WaTW strives to connect to all generations of women land stewards; for each the challenge may be different, whether they are raising children or caring for an aging spouse. And, of course, managing land can be a job in itself!

With this in mind, WaTW coordinators are thinking about how to offer childcare or other resources that might help reduce barriers to participation.

### Getting your words straight...

In reaching out to the target landowner demographics, it is important not to lose audiences over a question of word choice. In this region, the average acreage is very small, maybe six to nine acres. These often take the form of smaller parcels of woods, or small woodlands at the back of a farm. As a result, many women landowners don’t consider themselves “forestland owners”, but might be more likely to identify as “woodland owners”.

# SUCCESSSES

## 1. Professional involvement

Through Women and their Woods programming, Amanda and her partners are seeing more professionals getting and remaining involved. Each time any new professionals participate, they react very positively to the strong engagement and all of the good questions that women participants ask. Most often these professionals come out wanting to stay involved and help as much as they can. In this way, the program pulls people in to become an active part of the network.

## 2. An expanding network

It is a testament to the program's success that people keep joining the emailing list, which is growing steadily. This growth shows that women continue to look for the kind of information and training offered by the program. There is a steady flow of emails from women with requests such as "I really want to learn to use a chain saw". As a result of the WOWnet website and the promotional outreach the Conservancy has done, it has become a place that women go to find his information. Meanwhile, the audience is ever broader. The retreats and workshops have grown from serving a Pennsylvania audience originally to covering the mid-Atlantic region. The program continues to look to form new partnerships and to fill the need further afield.



## 3. New partnerships

Partnerships have been key to WOW's success, and through its programming WOW has given rise to new partnerships. WOWNet, the national Women Owning Woodlands network, has been a great resource for connecting individual programs and initiatives into a movement spanning the country. Information and resources available through WOWs' connection with Penn State and the Center for Private Forestlands have also been critical to the program's growth. Working with academic institutions and educational resources also gives the Delaware Highlands Conservancy more clout and a greater reach as a nonprofit organization.

#### 4. Norma Dale Smith says...

One of the first WOW retreats was attended by a woman named Norma Dale Smith. Norma had had close ties to family land since she was a little girl, and now her grandchildren were getting involved. Inspired from the retreat, Norma gathered all her stories from the land, put them into book form, and published the book to give to her children and grandchildren. Even while she was learning more about managing the land, Norma was also continuing to forge a connection to the land for herself and her family. Norma's books have been printed and shared with participants at the WOW workshops.



As a weathered practitioner of women-specific land stewardship programming, Amanda offered some points of advice to others coordinating similar programs in other parts of the country. Here are three of her pointers...

## As told by Amanda ADVICE TO PEERS

- Reach out to existing local networks in the field of natural resource conservation. These can include watershed associations, woodland owner groups, and local conservation districts. Ask them if they see a specific need for women. Pose the same question to local professions who may become future workshop presenters.
- Make sure your outreach is tailored to your target audience, as people won't respond to outreach if they are not sure it is meant for them. In the context of WOW's retreats and workshops, people often ask, "Do I need to own land to attend?" Depending on the region in which you work, there are many women who do not identify as woodland owners but nonetheless have a stake in land stewardship or love being involved in public lands. You may need to think about your branding and outreach approach, as these individuals may not turn out for programming branded for "woodland owners".
- Facilitated discussion is one of the best resources available to zero in on specific needs that women-specific programming can address. Organize these conversations and learn everything you can from what is said!

