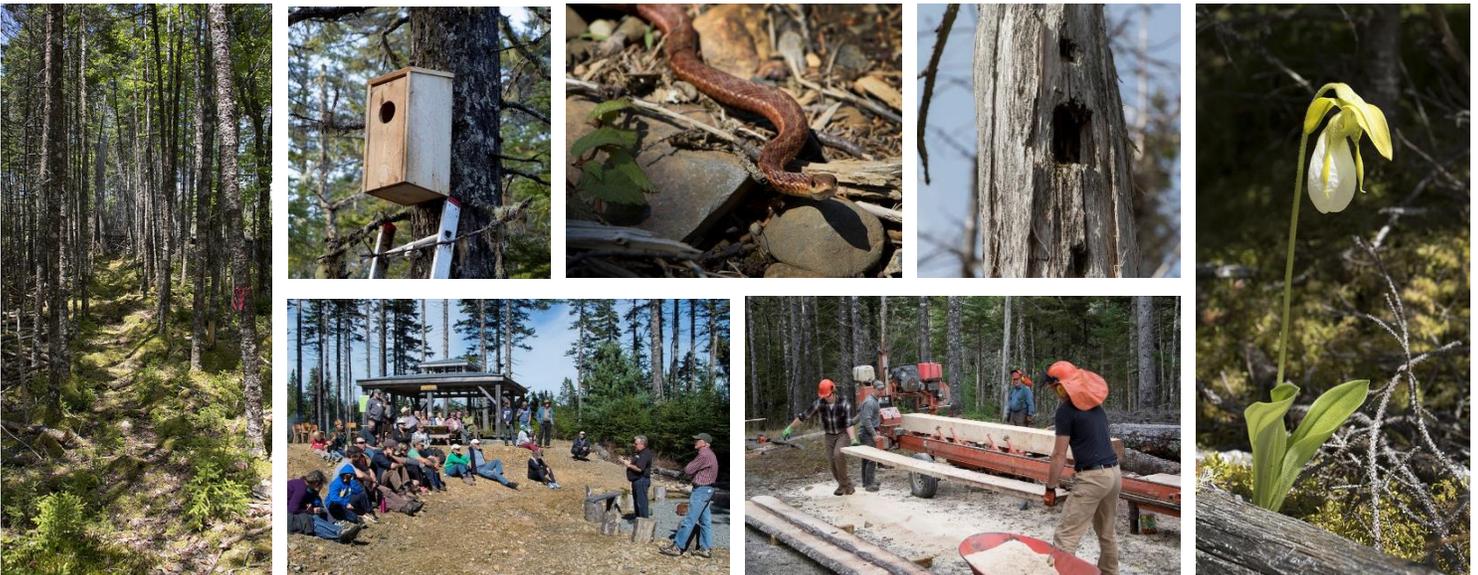


# Building a Destination

## Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest 2016 Annual Report

by Christie Verstraten  
March 2017



*Photos courtesy of Dan Hutt and Christie Verstraten*



## INTRODUCTION

Another busy year at the Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest has come and gone with many exciting developments to report. Thanks to the many infrastructure projects completed over the past few years by our hardworking volunteers, we now have a road network, partial trail system, bridges and water crossings, visitor shelter, and humanure toilet in place to support our growing educational programming and research, as well improve access to sites for harvest and silviculture.

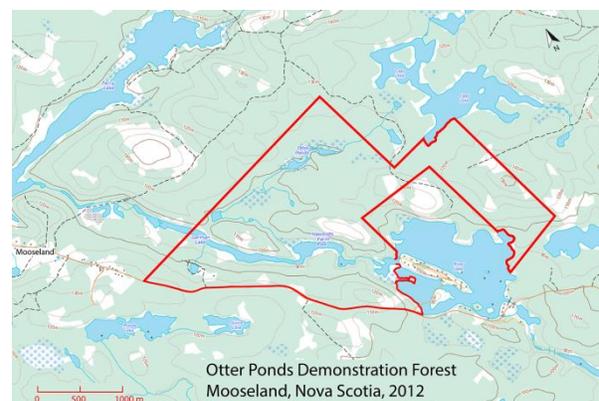
Our MEC-funded Trail Master Plan has been completed and trail construction is already well underway with 3 km of new trails roughed out and approximately 5 km more to come. We've hosted an array of interesting workshops, events and tours over the past year and welcomed over a hundred visitors to the project, both locally and internationally. The OPDF continues to grow into a destination for woodlot owners, naturalists, biologists, hikers, families, researchers, and anyone with an appreciation for responsible, multi-value forest management.

## BACKGROUND

Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest (OPDF) is a 486-hectare (1200-acre) parcel of Crown forest near Mooseland, Nova Scotia. Operated as a division of the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association (NSWOOA), the OPDF is a place for all Nova Scotians to learn about ecologically, economically and socially sustainable management of our native Acadian Forest. OPDF is a living laboratory that shows how timber production can be compatible with the protection of the full range of other forest values and services. It provides opportunities for woodlot owners, elementary and high school groups, university students and researchers, non-profit organizations, and individuals to visit an outstanding example of working forestland.

Otter Ponds demonstrates the philosophy, science, and practice of uneven-aged management in the Acadian Forest. It produces timber for market using the best forest practices presently known, while protecting wildlife habitat and the Tangier River watershed, respecting the ecosystem services provided by the parcel, and enhancing the social and cultural value of the forest. Another important objective of the OPDF is education and public outreach through field trips, public field days, workshops and other on-site events. We also reach out directly to woodlot owners through NSWOOA's newsletter and our Facebook page.

Management practices are certified to the Forest Stewardship Council's Maritime Standard. OPDF is managed by a unique partnership that includes four non-governmental organizations (NSWOOA, Ecology Action Centre, Eastern Shore Forest Watch, and Mooseland and Area Community Association), Northern Pulp Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources.





## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Trail Development

In September of 2015 OPDF submitted a successful proposal for a Mountain Equipment Co-op grant of \$7200 to hire a contractor to create a Master Trail Plan. We received half of our funding in January 2016 and awarded the consulting contract to Community Forests Canada (CFC). CFC staff and OPDF volunteers spent spring of 2016 designing and mapping the proposed trail network. They held a Trail Visioning Workshop on February 19<sup>th</sup> with OPDF directors, volunteers and staff to determine what the purpose of the trail network should be and how it could be best designed to access important and interesting sites for education and recreation.

CFC led a Trails Workshop on June 18<sup>th</sup> for a small number of OPDF volunteers and staff. In attendance were: CFC employees Dale Prest, Daimen Hardie and Eli Manchester; Darren Keith (harvest contractor who works with CFC); OPDF directors Dan Hutt and Scott Asling; NSWOOA director Ryan Dickie; OPDF staff person Christie Verstraten; and OPDF volunteers Jasmine Smart and Schuyler Smith. The group worked to rough out approximately 3 km of trails. A final draft of the Master Trails Plan was delivered to the trails committee in fall 2016. The second half of our grant was received in early 2017.





## Sidney Prest Memorial Bench

The Board of Directors decided to install a bench in honour of the late Sidney Prest, long time OPDF volunteer and champion. The bench is being built by Kate Campbell out of OPDF wood with a metal memorial plaque and placed along one of the new trails.

## Sawmilling

Frank Higgins brought his portable saw mill to OPDF on October 25<sup>th</sup> to saw some fine spruce logs. The seven logs had been cut from the right-of-way of the road to Powder Horn Hill the previous year. The logs were milled into 16-foot, 2" boards needed as tread planks for the three bridges at Otter Ponds. Wade, Dale and Jacob Prest, Dan Hutt and Mike Murray all came to help manoeuvre the logs onto the mill and stack the planks. A few hours later we had about 800 board feet of high quality 2" x 10" boards and a season's worth of scrap wood for the Otter Ponds camp fire.



## Owl Nesting Boxes

OPDF is now a research site for a study into the breeding and migration of the Boreal Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl. On November 21<sup>st</sup> Dan Hutt helped St. Francis-Xavier University researcher Randy Lauff, and his assistant Chad Brazier install eight owl nesting boxes at Otter Ponds in the hopes that some of them will be homes to owl families in the spring. "The owls are probably there, already", says Randy, "but the nesting boxes make it much easier for me to follow their progress". Much of the day was spent looking for just the right location: lots of canopy cover, but fairly open below so the owls can fly around easily and can see their prey of mice, voles and shrews. They prefer quiet areas away from noisy burbling brooks which mask the sounds of prey. Randy will be back in early April 2017 to check the boxes for nests.



### **Water Crossing Railings**

In November, Kate Campbell built and installed railings along the two new water crossings on Powder Horn Hill Road. Made of pressure-treated lumber, the railings will help maintain safe conditions for workshops and tour groups.

## **SILVICULTURE**

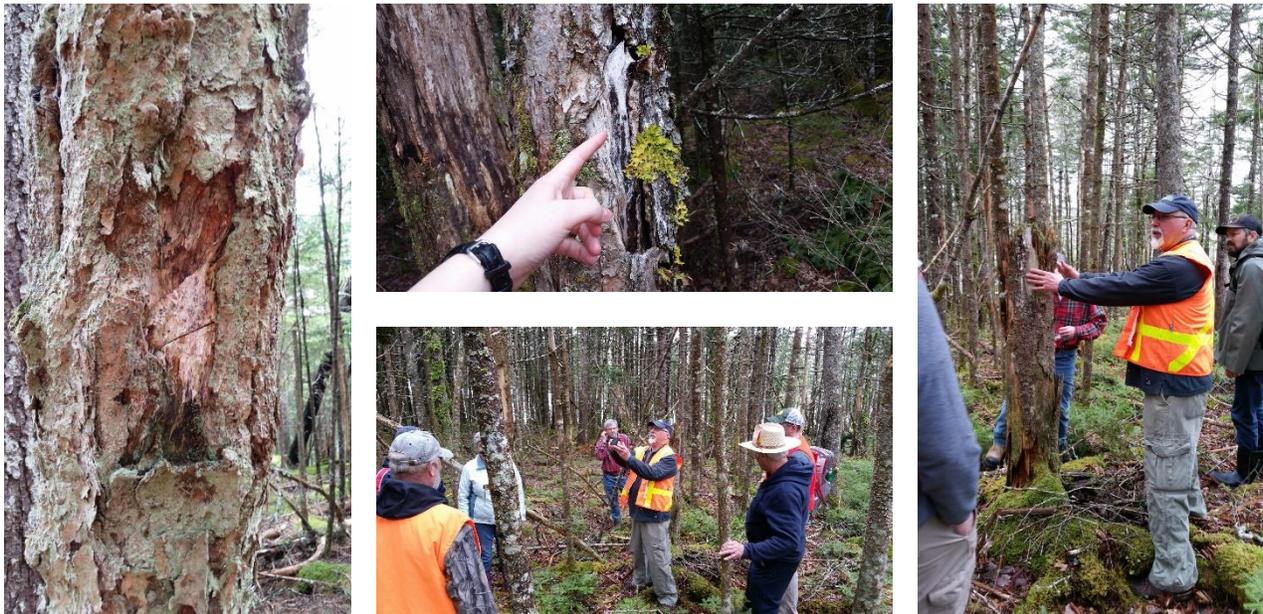
OPDF did not cut road right-of-ways or do any harvesting in 2016 due to poor market conditions and low prices for roundwood. The board decided to hold off on three planned harvests until prices improve, as we would have lost money harvesting in current markets.

## **EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH**

### **Boundary Line Maintenance Workshop**

Our 2016 Boundary Line Maintenance Workshop was held on May 15<sup>th</sup> at the Mooseland Community Centre and OPDF. Britt Roscoe, Nova Scotia Land Surveyor, once again offered his services. He led the group through the morning classroom session and an afternoon field portion, providing advice and answering questions about boundary lines and surveying. Christie Verstraten provided staff support and there were 7 participants in attendance. We have found over the past few Boundary Line Maintenance workshops that a small group size works best and encourages participants to ask questions and seek advice about their own situations. Britt is on the NSWOOA Board of Directors.





### Spring Bird Count

The presence and absence of birds can inform us about changing ecosystems. Birds are especially good indicators of habitat quality – both the number of birds present, and the assemblage of bird species in an area. When forest habitat changes, often the types of birds present will change in predictable ways. In the wee hours of June 4<sup>th</sup>, five bird enthusiasts set out to better understand the avian species at OPDF to help inform our forest management goals.

Matt Miller and Clare Robinson (OPDF Board and Education Committee) were joined by experienced birders Donna Crossland (Parks Canada), Chris Pepper (NS Bird Society) and Kate Steele (NS Bird Society). Donna shared a Forest Bird Monitoring Protocol designed for Parks Canada and helped us establish six monitoring sites. Point count surveys of 10 minute duration were conducted in three habitat types (i.e. hardwood drumlin, lowland softwood, softwood ridge).

The bird count revealed that OPDF is home to many North American migrant songbirds – even a couple of species at risk: the endangered Canada warbler and the threatened Olive-sided flycatcher. Broad goals for our bird monitoring project at OPDF include: compilation of a habitat-specific baseline inventory of forest songbirds occurring there, description of temporal changes in relation to local and landscape habitat, and contribution to the understanding of population trends for forest birds in Nova Scotia. Migration-related data help shed light on larger issues such as climate change. Monitoring programs in Nova Scotia typically occur in mostly mature, undisturbed forest. This program offers the opportunity to study trends in a forest undergoing uneven-aged management, where timber production is compatible with the protection of a full range of other forest values and services.



## Old Forest Assessment Workshop

The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute hosted an Old Forest Assessment Workshop at OPDF on September 25<sup>th</sup> as part of a NSDNR-funded program training people to use their Old Forest Assessment Tool to explore and document mature forests in Nova Scotia. The workshop was led by Colin Gray and Tarissa Holmes of MTRI and was attended by 10 participants, including Dan Hutt and Christie Verstraten. Participants spent the morning at the Mooseland Community Centre learning how to use the tool and take measurements for data collection, and then moved to the North boundary line of OPDF for the afternoon to take what they learned to the field. Data was collected both using paper data sheets and a mobile application.



## OPDF Fall Field Day

OPDF's annual field day was held on September 17<sup>th</sup> this year to great success. Directors on-site estimated a crowd of approximately 70 people and it turned out to be a beautiful, sunny fall day. We tried something different this year and scheduled a series of presentations on various topics throughout the day, including: OPDF's approach to forest management; carbon offsetting; roads and bridges; and trail planning and construction. Many topics were offered more than once during the day, giving people multiple opportunities to take in different sessions (see **Appendix A** for a complete presentation schedule). Each talk started at the visitor's shelter and took a different route through the project's trails and roads network. The Honourable Lloyd Hines, Minister of Natural Resources, gave a brief welcome to participants before a free barbeque lunch.



### Field Trips and Tours

On August 10<sup>th</sup> a Girl Guide group from Birmingham, England visited OPDF as part of an International Girl Guiding Orientation. A total of 11 guides and guide leaders were in attendance, along with Mike Murray and Wade Prest. This was the group's first visit to North America, let alone Nova Scotia, and their first exposure to the forest and wilderness here. Mike led the group on a tour of the project and discussed uneven-aged management and responsible forestry. The visit was arranged with Mike by the Canadian Guides Liaison/Coordinator, who knew of the goals and aims of OPDF.

### Acadian Forest Keepers AGM and Tour

The Acadian Forest Keepers had their annual general meeting on October 29<sup>th</sup> at the Mooseland Community Centre on a rainy Saturday. The AFK is a group of private woodlot owners that adhere to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Maritime Standard of forest management. Issues discussed at the meeting included: how do small private woodlot owners achieve chain-of-custody for their forest products; and will the coming carbon market really allow woodlot owners to make money by selling carbon credits instead of cutting down trees? After the meeting Wade and Dale Prest led the group on a tour of Otter Ponds. The rain-resistant AFK were very impressed by fine old specimens of Beech on Hawboldt's Farm Hill. The OPDF project lands are FSC-certified and is a member of the AFK certification pool.





## Hiring of Education Program Coordinator (November 2016 – May 2017)

School groups, woodlot owners, individuals and organizations interested in ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable forest management have visited OPDF annually since the project was launched in 2010. To date, much of the planning and delivery of these programs has been provided by OPDF board volunteers with one day per week of support from NSWOOA staff. Matt Miller, former Forestry Program Coordinator with the Ecology Action Centre, played a key role in developing and delivering our education programs. This fall Matt left EAC to begin a new job. EAC agreed to fund Clare Robinson as a Forest Education Program Coordinator for 7.5 hours/week over a six month term to continue the great work Matt was doing to help build the sustainability of these programs into the future. Clare is working closely with NSWOOA staff to pursue and secure funding for the development and continued delivery of education programs at OPDF.



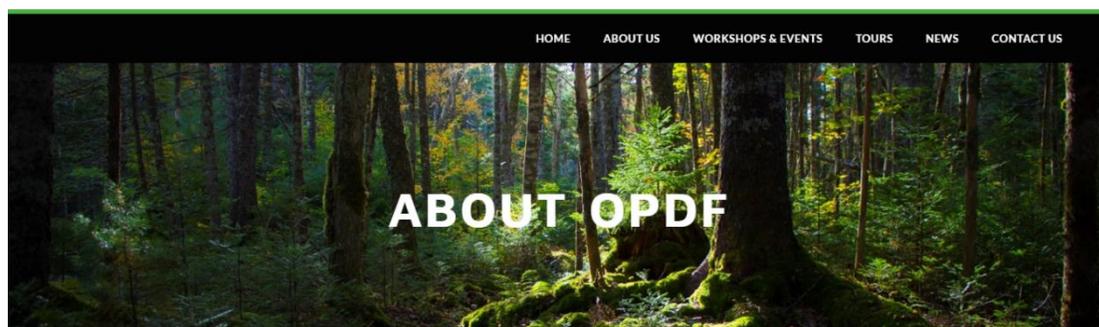
## Magazine/Newsletter Articles

The December 2016 edition of *Legacy*, the monthly newsletter of NSWOOA, featured an article by Christie Verstraten on Boundary Line Maintenance. The article mentioned the BLM workshops that have been put on over the past two years and OPDF's plan to continue offering these workshops every one or two years. Readers interested in attending the next workshop were instructed to contact her directly. She has already received responses from seven interested landowners.

## Communication and Marketing

The OPDF Facebook page was updated regularly by staff with forest-related articles, project announcements, and upcoming events at Otter Ponds. The page has increased significantly in popularity, with the number of page 'likes' increasing by about 56 percent from 182 on January 1<sup>st</sup> to 284 on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016. Staff have posted event announcements for Otter Ponds programs to the NSWOOA's event page and to [nswoods.ca](http://nswoods.ca), a new forestry events website created and maintained by NSWOOA.

The board decided that OPDF needed to have a better online presence and decided to develop a new website for the project. Christie Verstraten started building a new website through Weebly in fall of 2016. The URL [otterponds.ca](http://otterponds.ca) was purchased, and traffic to the old website at [opdf.ca](http://opdf.ca) will be redirected to the new one when the site is ready to go live, likely early in 2017.





## Other Outreach Activities

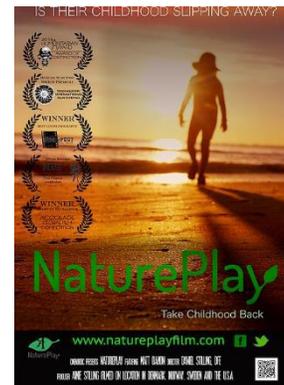
The annual Spring Woodland Conferences were held in March and April, with approximately 350-400 people in attendance. As NSWOOA is on the provincial committee for these events, NSWOOA staff attended all three conferences with the NSWOOA/OPDF display to talk to participants about the project and hand out brochures.

NSDNR held their second Open Forest Day on June 25<sup>th</sup> at Shubie Park in Dartmouth, NS. NSWOOA staff attended with their display. Since the audience at this event was primarily urban families, staff talked mostly about OPDF and had a sign-up sheet for people interested in visiting the project.

Christie Verstraten, Clare Robinson, and Simon and Susan Melrose attended the annual Association for Science Teachers Conference at Halifax West High School in Clayton Park, NS with the OPDF poster and educational documents. They talked to approximately 30 interested teachers and had a sign-up list for those who were interested in learning more.

## Nature Play Screening

Clare Robinson attended an event hosted by the Shambhala School and the Young Naturalists Club on November 24<sup>th</sup> to promote education programs at OPDF. The event included an expo featuring clubs, groups and organizations related to nature and environmental education in the Halifax area, and a free screening of the award winning film “Nature Play, Take Childhood Back”, a documentary that compares stressful environments of US schools with the Nordic North where outdoor play is heavily incorporated into the curriculum. Approximately 50 parents, children and teachers attend the event.



## Postponed or Cancelled Events

Due to a variety of reasons, several planned OPDF events were either cancelled or postponed in 2016.

The Woodland Owner Mentorship Program is a program run jointly by the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association, Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and Federation of Nova Scotia Woodland Owners with funding from the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. A major goal of the free program is to enhance the information provided in the NSDNR’s Woodlot Management Home Study series through a series of field days throughout the province. The outdoor workshops bring the topics in the Home Study series to life in a woodland setting, allowing participants to ask veteran landowners about their successes and failures, and see the fruits of their labours first hand. The program partners with woodlot ‘mentors’ around the province to host these field days. OPDF was planning to take advantage of the excellent opportunity to host more people on site, and sent OPDF past-president Kate Campbell to take part in the training mentors need to attend in order to qualify for the program. Kate worked with NSWOOA staff to plan a field day for September 10<sup>th</sup> on Roads, Trails and Bridges. Due to poor pre-registration numbers, this field day has been postponed until spring 2017.

A Lichen Field Identification Workshop, organized by the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and hosted by OPDF, was scheduled to take place on November 19<sup>th</sup> but was cancelled and tentatively postponed to





## GOING FORWARD

We have had a busy and exciting year at the Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest and have much to look forward to in 2017. We plan to continue cleaning up and expanding our Otter Ponds Trail Network with a series of work parties throughout the year. We plan to start by tidying up the 3km of trail already roughed out and then begin construction on several more of the trails outlined in our new Trail Master Plan.

Otter Ponds plans to host another Boundary Line Maintenance course for interested woodlot owners this spring, as well as our annual field day in either summer or fall 2017. We hope that several of the cancelled events from fall 2016 will be rescheduled for spring and summer 2017. Staff will work with these groups to coordinate and plan these events.

At the October 2016 Board of Directors meeting, Dale Prest presented a proposal for a partnership with the Northern Hardwood Research Institute. The NHRI is a privately funded institute studying how to better manage hardwood forests, specializing in silviculture prescriptions based on site-specific characteristics. Dale believes that there is great potential for us to benefit from this knowledge by proposing Hawboldt's Farm Hill as a demonstration site. The board accepted Dale's proposal to work with NHRI to propose a prescription for that site, including a framework for baseline data collection and monitoring. Dale will continue working on this project in 2017.

After review by the OPDF executive, the new Otter Ponds website went live at [otterponds.ca](http://otterponds.ca) in March 2017. After review by the full board, staff will announce an official launch of the website, inviting the public to visit it. Staff will continue to update and monitor the website.

Clare Robinson will continue in her role as Forest Education Program Coordinator until the end of her contract with the EAC in May 2017. As part of this contract, Clare will continue to outline and develop educational programming for classroom visits and students visiting OPDF, as well as identify and apply for grant opportunities to enhance these and current educational programs.

OPDF remains committed to managing for and improving wildlife habitat. We hope to host annual bird counts at the monitoring sites selected in 2016 and maintain a database of all data collected. We will continue to work with Randy Lauff on his Boreal and Saw-whet owl monitoring programs.

With our new trail system in the works and additional support for our educational programs at OPDF, we expect that 2017 will be another busy year for the project and that we can draw more visitors to the site than ever before. We hope to market the Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest as a destination like no other in Nova Scotia.



## Appendices

### Appendix A. Presentation Schedule for 2016 Fall Field Day

Time	Tour Leader	Topic
10:30am	Dale Prest	Carbon Offsetting- The Acadian Forest Carbon Initiative
	Kate Campbell	Roads and Water Crossings
	Wade Prest	Bridge Construction
	Andy Kekacs	Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest's Approach to Forest Management
11:30am	Dale Prest	Carbon Offsetting- the Acadian Forest Carbon Initiative
	Kate Campbell	Roads and Water Crossings
	Dan Hutt	Trail Planning and Construction
	Andy Kekacs	Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest's Approach to Forest Management
	Clare Robinson	Forest Walk for Kids
12:30-1:30pm	Lunch Hour	
1:30pm	Wade Prest	Bridge Construction
	Matt Miller	Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest's Approach to Forest Management
	Dan Hutt	Trail Planning and Construction
	Clare Robinson	Forest Walk for Kids
2:30pm	Clare Robinson	OPDF BioBlitz Results- Implications for Management
	OPDF Staff and Board Members	Open Discussion with Otter Ponds Board Members and Volunteers

