

Watershed Steward: Kent Mason

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The Kent Mason Family owns a forested tract along Piney Mountain just north of Thurmont in northern Frederick County. This property serves as a getaway for the family who frequently visit to escape the hustle and bustle of the city. The property is being managed for old growth and there are some large oak and white pine trees on the property. This site was once densely populated by hemlock but many of these trees were killed by the hemlock adelgid, an insect that has caused significant mortality of hemlocks in Frederick County. Despite this mortality, a number of young hemlocks persist in the understory. Some day, hopefully, they will return to a place in the canopy.

The Mason property is being managed for old growth and there are some large oak trees present. The Piney Mountain area is one of the few places in Frederick County where White Pine is naturally regenerating in large numbers.

This forest contains many of the elements that woodland inhabiting wildlife need, such as a structurally diverse understory, hollow den trees, dead standing snags, large logs lying on the ground, open “light gaps” in the canopy, and a diverse range of species. Mr. Mason indicated that the property also contains a large Blue Heron Rookery. The early spring allows family members to see the nesting birds. Once leaf-out is complete it is hard to see the birds but the sound of the young nestlings permeates the forest according to Mr. Mason.

Many of the standing dead hemlock are being used by woodpeckers and other animals.

The Mason family harvest some firewood from this property for their own use and have cut up some of the numerous hemlock snags that were partially fallen and lodged in other trees, thus reducing the “vertical fuel load” in the forest. As such, if a forest fire were to start, the fuels would not carry the flames up into the canopy.

Keeping fallen material close to the ground will reduce the fire danger and provide a desirable habitat feature.

The family obtains firewood from this forest.

The Mason family is one of many owners of forest land who provide numerous environmental benefits relating to water and air quality, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, forest products, and open green space which benefits all of society.