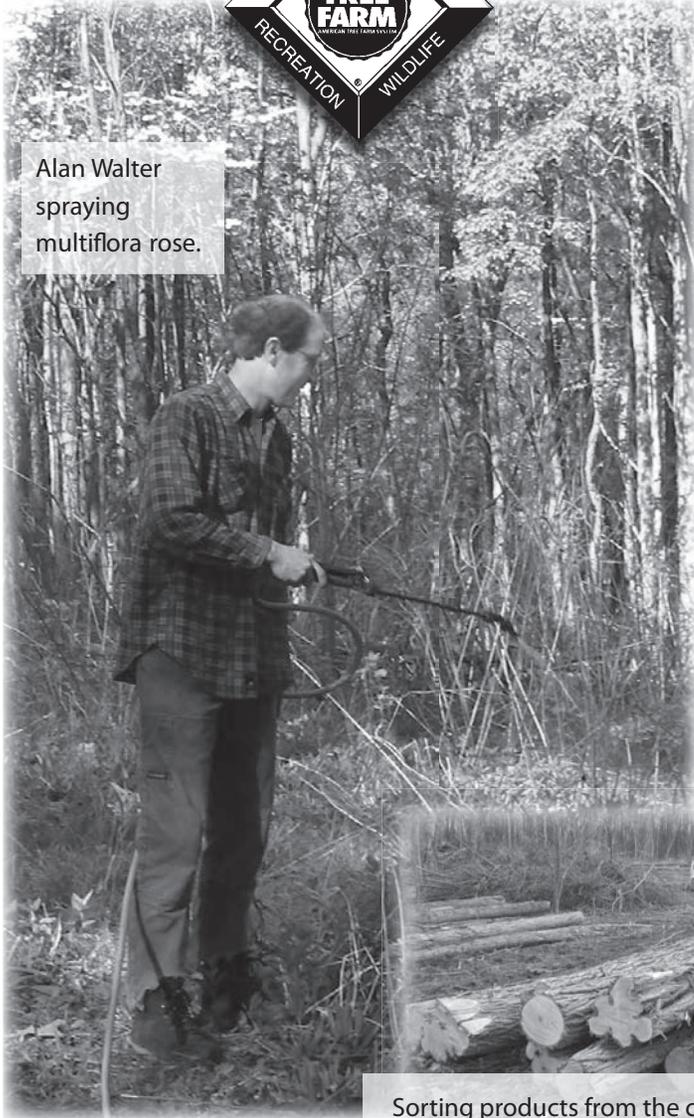


# Sycamore Hill



Alan Walter spraying multiflora rose.



Sorting products from the clearcut on Sycamore Hill Tree Farm.



Find it interesting how some events go in circles. In 1898, the little town of Scio, Ohio in Harrison County found itself in the midst of a massive oil boom with 250 oil wells sprouting up inside the town and over 1000 producing in the immediate area. It lasted only two years, but today the Utica shale play is causing another oil and gas boom.

In the late 1980s, Alan Walter found himself looking for a chunk of land to purchase to “protect.” In his mind, timber harvesting was a bad thing and wildlife needed areas of woods to live and be safe. After buying some land, he sought advice from ODNR, OSU Extension, and others who talked to him about managing the resource. He gradually started to understand how the forest works and how wildlife interacts with it. He began to create cover for wildlife, install birdhouses, and tackle out-of-control grapevines which had overrun the woods as a result of prior poor forestry practices.

In the 1950s, multiflora rose was introduced into Ohio for wildlife habitat and as a living fence. Alan found out the hard way that the grapevine tangles had been perfect roosts for birds that gorged on multiflora rose hops. After the grapevines were killed and sunlight flooded the forest floor, multiflora began totally overtaking his beloved woodlands. What once was thought to be good for the environment circled around to not be the case, and Alan undertook a new battle to eliminate the invasive rose.

Throughout those struggles, though, he continued to visit other tree farms, read and attend educational sessions, and slowly change his perspective from protectionism to multiple-use management.

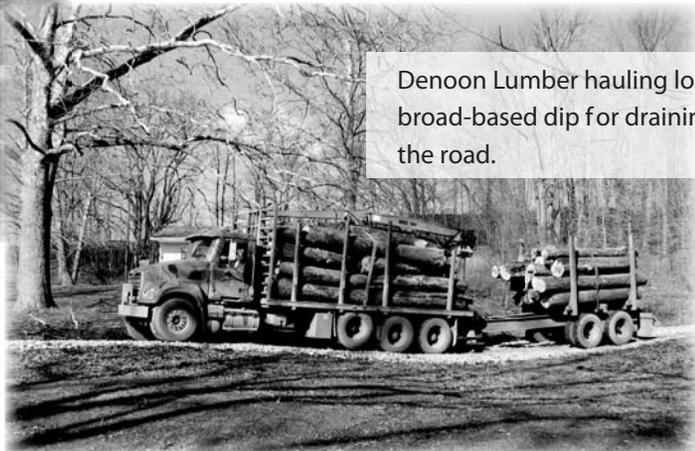
Today, Alan is the owner of the 150-acre Sycamore Hill Tree Farm and 2015 Ohio Tree Farm of the Year. These circles in life aren't predictable and, 25 years ago, Alan would have never believed that one day he would clearcut some of the timber on his property to benefit wildlife. I suspect he is no different



Chesapeake clearing timber from the future roadway to create the access to drill for oil on the Walter property. In the background is the Utica East Ohio Harrison Hub fractionation plant.

Photos provided by Alan Walter unless otherwise noted.

Denoon Lumber hauling logs. Note the broad-based dip for draining water off the road.



# Tree Farm

Ohio's 2015

# Tree Farm of the Year

Jeremy Scherf  
ODNR Division of Forestry

than many woodland owners. He also would have never guessed that a 14-acre deforestation project would be thrust upon him. This recent development is a Utica oil well pad and a massive access road which took out 14 acres of timber. Not to be deterred, though, he began reforesting the road cut within months of the disturbance.

In reality, Sycamore Hill Tree Farm is a typical eastern Ohio woodland. Evidence of the past – 117-year old oil boom scars, livestock grazing, and timber high-grading – is there, but these are fading with time. Timber stand improvement, timber growth, and a careful timber harvest have improved the forest while erasing many of the scars. Today, the forest is a mix of sawtimber size oak and hickory, old fields now reverted to red maple and black cherry, and a few pockets of planted pine probably left from a high school FFA project.

Alan became involved with ECOFA, the East Central Ohio Forestry Association, and has been an officer for the last 15 years, playing an integral part in the success of the group. He continues to learn through field days and seminars and attendance at National Tree Farm Conventions.

Alan has benefited from Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program funding, the latter helping him create a 3-acre clearcut to improve habitat for wildlife species dependent upon early successional habitat, especially songbirds.

During the Tree Farm of the Year tour at Sycamore Hill Tree Farm, you can learn how Alan marketed the products from this small clearcut, including sawtimber, firewood, hops poles, and fence posts. Visitors will also enjoy learning how he has virtually eliminated multiflora rose, and seeing the evolution of the sprayers he used to handle the job.

Come join us on September 19th as we take a trip to shale country in eastern Ohio to learn more about the management of this property, fracking in the oil and gas boom and how you should prepare for it, and how you can manage your property for non-game wildlife species. 🍁

*Jeremy Scherf has been a service forester with the ODNR Division of Forestry in eastern Ohio for 14 years. He was the Ohio and North Central Region Tree Farm Inspector of the Year in 2004.*



New oil well road.



1890s era cypress oil tank. Photo by ODNR