

# Tree Farmers of the Year

## Dan & Diana Pace



Tree Farmers of the Year Dan and Diana Pace didn't start out planning to be tree farmers. They didn't really have a plan. When Dan suggested they buy a few acres for their retirement, it sounded like a good idea to Diana and it has been a growing adventure ever since. In 2013 they bought a 200-acre farm in Evensville,

TN just up the road from Yuchi Wildlife Refuge, with rolling hills and lots of potential. Eighty timbered acres had been harvested at some point many years before, never replanted, and since degraded. Other than a few acres being mowed for hay, the farm was derelict. The fence rows and forests were choked with stumps, blackberry bramble, privet, poison ivy, kudzu and all manner of damaged and undesirable species of trees. What fences were there had trees as posts, and most of the property was so overgrown it was inaccessible.

"First, to see what he had to work with, Dan hired a dozer and driver who, working for ten weeks, cleared existing fence rows, cleared around the barn so we could use it and demolished two derelict houses on the property. We pulled endless amounts of tires, metal, appliances and trash out of ponds, woods, and streams, and made endless trips to the recycling center. While the dozer worked, Dan planned setting up pastures and hay fields with the County Extension agents and NRCS agent Cameron Delligatti, developing a wildlife management plan with TWRA, and setting up a Forestry Plan with Diana Gennett of Gennett Forestry Consulting LLC.

Eventually the dozer work ended and the labor continued with Dan doing the work with his John Deere 5100M with pallet forks, multiple chainsaws and weed eaters with metal blades, and lots of blood, sweat and tears, as they say. And fires. We have the Tennessee State Online Burn Permit service on speed dial! We've also worn out one John Deere "Gator" and purchased one to replace it as well as one for Diana to work in her bees so she wouldn't have to keep borrowing Dan's while he was out cutting in the woods.

"With no previous experience it was vital to have a Forestry Management Plan in place. The Plan gave

us the structure we needed, and the Standards gave us the direction to start off, and kept us on track. Diana Gennett's help has been invaluable, helping us to define our objectives and prioritize our work. We were able to enhance our goals as we progressed: identifying areas to do replacement plantings, identifying desirable species and species to cull. The Plan provided us options, such as to improve and stock our ponds with bass, catfish and bream, to add pollinator habitats to benefit our apiaries, and to add two native prairie grass paddocks. As we have progressed, the environment and wildlife have benefited from our improvements: increased numbers and healthier deer, increased wild turkey, increased songbirds, heron and sandhill cranes, not to mention turtles, frogs and rabbits. Even the soil condition has improved."

One important aspect of forestry value that Diana emphasizes in her public education endeavors as President of Rhea County Beekeepers Association is the tie between bees and trees. "Few people understand the impact of forests on pollinators. Trees are one of the earliest and most important forage sources for honeybees in spring." Diana campaigns for greater public awareness and understanding of the importance of maintaining and improving our state's forests for the benefit of pollinators. The Paces currently keep 40 hives scattered around the woods' margins on their property and harvested 500 pounds of honey from their bees this year. Another overlooked benefit of land and forestry management and stewardship!

Sadly, few things progress smoothly according to plan, and the Paces have suffered setbacks. "From 2014 through 2017 we encountered drought on our farm of varying severity. Then in 2018 we suffered a severe thunderstorm with straight-line winds that destroyed 150 trees. Some had been drought weakened, some had been damaged by previous deforestation, some were of poor marketability. But many were our best hardwoods. After that year's losses, we hand planted over 400 white pine seedlings in the area cleared by the fallen trees only to have them grazed by deer – a victim of our own success. Lastly, rather than replant the white pine this year our efforts have been, by necessity, concentrated on solving the problem of

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oak wilt that has stricken our largest surviving stand of oak. We'll continue relying on Diana Gennett's help and resources to develop the Plan to overcome this problem too."

The Paces will continue with a Management Plan: working to complete replanting of degraded areas in desirable species, continuing to reclaim overgrown areas and replant in desirable species, working toward replacement of trees lost to wind damage and oak wilt. "The fight against kudzu, privet, and 'Tree of Heaven' will continue as will our family's deep enjoyment of the hunting, fishing, and natural beauty our tree farm affords us. To us this is all a part of our Stewardship. We take immense pride in what we have accomplished here; when the neighbors recognize our contribution to the betterment of our area, and when the Yuchi Wildlife Resource Officer and the Sheriff stop by to thank us for our hard work. Life is definitely as much about the journey as the destination.

Thank you, Tennessee Forestry Association for this honor, and thank you Diana Gennett, Forestry Consulting LLC, for helping us develop and institute our Management Plan."



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1. Pace Farms
2. Bee hives on tree line, at distance
3. Pace pond
4. Bushhog management
5. Clover meadow
6. Bulldozer fire invasive management
7. Tornado damage
8. Woodland view