

## Field Notes - Summer 2005

### Summer in the Forest: of New Fields, Nineties and Tent Caterpillars...

With the arrival the year's first heat wave we are underway with some new projects to complement the summer work routine. A walk through on the Lower Loop this June might have turn up an unusual sight: a tractor cutting furrows in a large clearing along the trail. This activity completes the processes of establishing an open meadow around the existing weather station lot. Once this grass cover has been established, we will partition the enlarged field into about a dozen demonstration plots where the early stages of old-field succession will be monitored. Each year one or two of these front yard sized plots will be released to grow naturally. In time, this will create an array of plots of various ages and resultant plant and insect assemblages that will form the basis for biological investigations by faculty and students.



Speaking of fields, this spring an energetic team of students from the Environmental Planning course began the process of planning the future of the newly acquired Wire Bridge Farm parcel. This group spared no effort in surveying a vast population of potential users and other relevant parties--ranging from professors, to staff, to students, to administrators, neighbors and even legal advisors. The team then devised an ambitious plan that integrates recreational elements and teaching into a research program on field dynamics. The HMF Users Committee is currently reviewing the proposal and will decide on a final plan for the site in the

coming year. To see the Wire Bridge Farm for yourself, take the scenic 35 minute stroll along the Ford Glen Brook and Hoosic River trails to a large clearing at the edge of the woods.

This spring's annual flush of new leaves brought with it a rather unruly forest visitor: a hoard of forest tent caterpillars numbering in the millions. This larval form of a small woodland moth is in the second year of a periodic invasion of the northeast. As of June it was difficult to walk through the forest without catching some of these black, white and blue caterpillars on your shirt or in your hair as they dangled from the trees above. These hairy, two inch long defoliators were munching virtually every tree in sight, although they showed a special preference for sugar maple, oak, aspen and birch. Their effects, a loss of vigor and growth in our resident trees, will be felt during the length of this infestation; there is also some concern in the region that maple sap quality and yields may be reduced in the coming years. If the pattern from past invasions (the last outbreak occurred during the Nixon Administration, hmm...) holds, we expect this eruption to be over within two or three years and most of the trees to survive, albeit in a somewhat depleted condition.

In other news, I will be away on leave during the fall and winter study period; however most of the forest programs will go on under the guidance of Interim Manager Tom Merrill.

Drew Jones  
HMF Manager



Caterpillar defoliation along Northwest Hill Road