

York Water District recognized for outstanding tree farms

By Marci Hait

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YORK - The York Water District always places an emphasis on the importance of its reservoirs, but it seems as though the agency's tree farms have been in the spotlight recently.

Last month, the YWD placed first in the county and was a runner-up for the state's 2004 Outstanding Tree Farmer contest.

Shortly thereafter, Superintendent David Michniewicz got word that his group had been certified with the Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine (SWOAM).

"This is really a matter of pride for myself and the board of trustees to receive an honor like this," he said.

Trees throughout the watershed's 1,700-acres of land have been harvested since 1974, and Michniewicz said accolades like the Outstanding Tree Farmer award and certification with SWOAM are proof that the YWD is committed to responsible forest stewardship and best management practices.

The Outstanding Tree Farmer plaques were awarded to the district as part of the Maine Agricultural Trade Show, held at the Augusta Civic Center on Jan. 14.

Forest resource consultant David Parker, who has worked with the YWD for more than 26 years, began the lengthy application process for this competition.

"The committee that inspected it was composed of foresters who were all retired so there's a lot of years of experience on that committee and I respect that," said Parker. "It's an honor because it means that I have been recognized by my peers essentially."

Parker said he's spent a lot of time overseeing the annual harvests, but "the honor really belongs to the landowner (YWD) because they have been a willing partner to have all this work done and to let the forest grow. ... The fact is, it's well-managed."

Much like the Outstanding Tree Farmer prize, a certification from SWOAM means that professionals have walked the land, researched the landowner's management plans, and concluded that good forest management practices have been used to aid in the biodiversity of the environment.

Michniewicz said Parker has been a huge part of the woodland's success, but the YWD's land wouldn't be as pristine and well-kept without the efforts of Reserve Police Officer Gary Stevens, who patrols the acreage day in and day out.

Stevens, who has worked at the Water District for 21 years and now holds the title of assistant plant operator, said he's really proud of the agency's accomplishments.

"You can know what you're doing and think you're doing OK, but to have someone tell you you're doing a good thing, that means a lot - it means a lot to me," he said.

Stevens said while he's out patrolling the property he hears a lot of comments, some good and some bad, regarding the harvesting.

Most people, he said, don't even realize the woods they're hiking in have been harvested. Others, he said, assume the worst when they see the remaining tree stumps.

"This puts to rest some of the complaints you hear," said Stevens. "With these awards, I would hope that people will realize that we are serious about protecting the land out there and I think this will show that we are serious about it and plan to continue this work, which is better for the wildlife and the forest itself."

To contact Stevens, or report any problems on the watershed, e-mail him at gsteven@yorkwaterdistrict.org or call him at 451-8107.

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