



Kentucky  
Woodland  
Owners  
Association

## Ecosystem Services

by Frank Hicks, KWOA President

[www.kwoa.net](http://www.kwoa.net)



Recently, I went to my farm, Cedar Riffle Farm, with plans to do some timber stand improvement work. A small timber sale about three years ago has left some areas that are being overrun by small stinkwood trees. (I know that the *Ailanthus altissima* is often referred to as Tree-of-Heaven, but I refuse to apply that name to such a pernicious weed.) Anyway, just as I was about to start work, the weather changed to one of those heavy thunderstorms that necessitated a revised plan. Fortunately, there is always plenty of work to be done inside: sharpen the axe and chain saw, change oil in the tractor, sweep out the garage, etc.

After it rained hard for about an hour, the rain stopped and the sun came out. Walking out into the pasture, I noticed that the water in the intermittent stream that originates in the woods was murkier than it should have been. I followed the creek up to where it passes through a culvert under the gravel road that goes through the farm. There two streams of water merged. The torrent running down the road ditch was quite muddy. The trickle coming from the woods looked clean enough to drink. That stream drains a little more than 50 acres of mixed hardwoods on very steep land. That tract was clear cut in 1986, and was thinned for crop-tree release in 2008. The road ditch, which drains about two tenths of a mile of road, ran for about another half-hour and then quit. The stream from the woods was still trickling the next morning. I did not get around to killing any stinkwood bushes that day, but I did get to observe first-hand something the forestry professionals have been telling us for years. Forests help provide us clean water. And managed forests do that better than unmanaged forests. Yes, we will stir up some dust or mud for a brief time when management activities are happening, but most of the time the forest is cleaning the water that goes downstream.

As woodland owners we do not, and maybe never will, get paid for the ecosystem services that our forests provide. But we should never miss an opportunity to remind the people we meet that our forests do help to provide clean air and clean water for everyone. The Kentucky Woodland Owners Association works to promote good woodland management, to advocate for policies that will encourage such management, and to spread the word that well-managed forests are valuable to society as a whole. We should always take advantage of opportunities to gain a better understanding of the forest ecosystem, and keep in mind that a day in the woods is never wasted.

*Photo courtesy: Gretchen Carmean*

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