



# Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards Program

by Billy Thomas

Photos courtesy: Billy Thomas

*The first class of Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards at Robinson Forest pause for a picture along with instructors from the Kentucky Division of Forestry and UK Forestry Extension.*

Neighbors helping neighbors is a great way to explain the Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards Program recently launched by UK Forestry Extension in close partnership with the Kentucky Division of Forestry. The goals of this new program are focused on cultivating a group of people who embrace woodland stewardship, want to learn more about sustainable woodland management, and are willing to share what they learn with others. The rationale behind this program is that too few woodland owners are managing their woodlands and most are unaware of the wide variety of support available to them. In addition, a very limited number of foresters and other natural resource professionals are available to serve the estimated 450,000+ Kentucky woodland owners, and peer-to-peer learning has proven effective especially with a group of highly motivated individuals who want to make an impact. The Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards program teaches woodland management practices and skills and in return participants agree to apply these principles to property they own or manage and to actively encourage others to practice sustainable woodland management.

On June 12, 2015, more than twenty woodland enthusiasts descended on UK's Robinson Forest in eastern Kentucky for a multi-day intensive training on a wide variety of forestry practices that can be implemented in Kentucky's woodlands. The training workshop emphasized woodland management practices that have proven successful. In addition to visit-

ing several woodland management demonstration areas, the Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards attended lectures, contributed to team activities, and participated in hands-on learning opportunities. Equally as important as the technical woodland management practices covered during the workshop is knowing who can help, what they can do, and how to work with them to get additional assistance. To facilitate these connections Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards were introduced to the more than twenty forestry and natural resources organizations and programs that are available to assist Kentucky's woodland owners. Not only do we want Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards to have a firm technical understanding of woodland management practices, we also want to empower them so they can return to their local communities to serve as ambassadors for sustainable woodland management across the Commonwealth. The program will help Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards see the potential in their woodland and others' and prepare them to recommend appropriate professional assistance and resources available to Kentucky's woodland owners so they can better manage their properties.

The Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards have already begun seeking opportunities to make a positive difference on woodland management in their communities. We believe that these Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards have the potential to become an invaluable resource for fellow woodland owners. We are planning to host another training workshop next year and look forward to meeting and working with the Class of 2016 Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards. For information about the program and to connect with some of the Class of 2015 Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards please visit [www.kentuckywoodlandstewards.org](http://www.kentuckywoodlandstewards.org).

**About the Author:**  
*Billy Thomas, Extension Associate with the University of Kentucky Department of Forestry works primarily on non-industrial private forest issues and is the associate editor for the Kentucky Woodlands Magazine.*

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*Kentucky Master Woodland Stewards attended lectures, participated in training exercises, and experienced several demonstrations including this one where Dr. Jeff Stringer was instructing them how to evaluate log quality.*