

## **Walk With A FAP Forester: *Firsthand experience from Ben Stein of Montcalm and Kent Counties***

I recently had a site visit with a landowner that started like any other; the landowner just acquired a property and was interested in hearing more about the Qualified Forest Program (QFP). The property was about 70 acres of rolling oak/hickory forest, a stone's throw from the Flat River. It had been harvested just prior to purchase, but fortunately for the landowner, it was a conservative operation removing only 24in. diameter and larger trees. The landowner purchased the property partly for hunting but also to provide habitat for all forms of wildlife.

Throughout our walk along the recently used forest trail system we touched on the usual topics: tree identification, herbaceous plants, invasive species, and different forest management systems. We talked in depth about QFP, and the various requirements and expectations associated with the program. Afterwards the landowner determined that the program probably wasn't for him. He didn't really need the tax relief. His main interest was getting sound help from the right place. He shared his desire to be a steward and give something back to the land. We shared mutual sentiments about the gratification that comes from investing some sweat equity into a woods. I explained the American Tree Farm System to the landowner; a program where a landowners forest management practices are periodically audited by a forester for compliance with laws, BMPs, and sustainability standards. This is exactly what this landowner was looking for. He wanted some assurance that he was doing right by the land. I find this type of landowner especially enjoyable to work with. Their intentions are pure, their objectives straightforward, and their comments are gracious.

Many relationships with landowners end after the initial site visit, but this particular landowner asked if I would like to visit the property again in a year or so to check on his progress. "My pleasure" was my response. I left the landowner with publications on the various invasives we encountered, a historical description of his forest type, and a quantitative assessment of the wildlife habitat in his current woods. I'll continue to work with the landowner on his Tree Farm Certification and I sincerely look forward to many follow-up visits.