

Bringing Forestry Back to the First Yale Camp and Bringing the Conservation Debate Back to Grey Towers

by Peter Pinchot '97

For the first twenty-five years of this century, Yale Foresters learned their basic field skills at the Yale Forestry Camp on the property of James and Gifford Pinchot in northeastern Pennsylvania. This was also the site of the Milford Experimental Forest, probably the first forest experiment station in the nation, where Yale students and faculty studied methods of regenerating a secondary forest. Across the Sawkill Creek from the Yale Camp, perched on a hill overlooking the town of Milford and the Delaware River was Grey Towers, Gifford Pinchot's lifelong summer home. Throughout his long career in forestry and politics Gifford used Grey Towers, with its imposing setting and fifty rooms, as a salon to bring his friends and colleagues and engage in stimulating discussions about conservation and political issues. The Pinchot family, Grey Towers staff, and Pinchot Institute for Conservation, are in the midst of bringing both these traditions back to life.

The nine descendants of James Pinchot still own 1,400 acres adjacent to Grey Towers which includes the Yale Campsite and the former Milford Experimental Forest. After a four-year family debate about the future of the land, we are in the process of donating a conservation easement to the Natural Lands Trust in Philadelphia, which will permanently protect this historic forest from development. The family has decided that the most appropriate use for this land is to reestablish a working research forest. Thus the conservation easement includes an unusual set of provisions which will make the land permanently accessible for long-term forest research projects. In effect, the family is giving up the right to close the land to ecological research.

In cooperation with the Pinchot Institute we have decided that a focus on biodiversity restoration and community forestry would be most relevant to the Pocono region and to the programs of the

Pinchot Institute and Grey Towers. The Poconos are in the midst of a sweeping change in land-use, typical of the urban-wildland interface, where the landscape is being fragmented by many residential subdivisions. Only 70 miles from New York City, the Poconos are one of the fastest-growing exurban regions in the Northeast. The economy is dominated by tourism, recreation, and second family homes, all of which are directly dependent on the esthetics and environmental quality of the region and on the perception of its state of wildness. Fortunately, over 30% of the land is in public ownership, and there are still many large tracts of privately owned land. However, there are probably only one or two decades of opportunity to conserve enough of the landscape in blocks of contiguous forestland to sustain the diversity and richness of the forest and river ecosystems. The challenge is to stimulate a regional dialog about stewardship and to create a pattern of collaboration between private and public landowners that can begin to reverse the trend towards fragmentation of the forest. To help stimulate this process, the Milford Experimental Forest will focus on active restoration of the diversity of the forest and on forming collaboration with private and public landowners to translate restoration methods to the landscape scale. The first step in this direction is already underway — addressing the overabundance of deer that has virtually eliminated the forest understory in our forest. Grey Towers staff and Pinchot family members have gathered two years of deer population data through pellet analysis and have established permanent vegetation sampling points to record changes in the impact of deer browsing. This fall we are conducting a large, managed hunt with archery and rifle hunters and have established a check station to record age



Broadway camp

photo courtesy of Grey Towers

and fitness data of the deer that are culled. We cannot manage the deer density on our land without expanding the hunt well beyond our property boundaries. Thus we are collaborating with Penn State Forestry Professor Grace Wang, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, The Sand County Foundation, and local hunting organizations to develop a community-based deer management program with adjacent private and public landowners so that we can collectively manage deer at the landscape scale.

Another focus is on restoring the American chestnut to the forest canopy. We have begun creating a GIS map of the location of the chestnuts stump sprouts remaining on our land. Working with the Connecticut Agriculture Research Station, we may fence some of the chestnuts, treat the trees with the virus that induces hypovirulence in the chestnut blight fungus, and then test out different silvicultural schemes for helping the chestnuts get up into the canopy where they can produce viable offspring. Ultimately we plan to introduce some of the blight resistant triple back-cross Asian-American hybrid trees being bred by the American Chestnut Foundation and let them interbreed with the native chestnuts with the hope of producing a locally adapted provenance of blight-resistant trees. In the short-term, the American Chestnut is a charismatic tree species that stimulates great interest among landowners and the act of its restoration can help catalyze community stewardship of the regional forest.

The Pinchot family has also made a commitment to restore some of the Yale Forestry Camp trails and buildings and open the site to visitors at Grey Towers so they can learn the history and methods of practical forest conservation. Fifteen years ago the FES Class of 1980 stimulated interest in this idea when they developed a plan for an interpretive trail system with demonstration stands that reflected different philosophies of forest management. This fall when Ed Brannon, Bruce Larson, and Mike Dombeck



Field work at Grey Towers

photo courtesy of Grey Towers

brought their forest management policy class to the camp, several class members enthusiastically volunteered to help our family reconstruct the wooden classroom building before the reunion in 2000. George Thomas, University of Pennsylvania professor of Architecture, has surveyed the site and is helping to work out how to make a practical historic recreation of the original structure.

A New Program for the Pinchot Institute at Grey Towers

In 1963, when my father, Gifford Pinchot, Jr., donated Grey Towers and 101 acres to the U.S. Forest Service and helped establish the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, he envisioned that Grey Towers, could be used to bring intellectuals and natural resource leaders together in an informal setting to discuss the big questions about national and global conservation. During the last five years, under the leadership of **Al Sample '80** the Pinchot Institute has grown rapidly into an organization with fifteen staff members. It has become a prominent player in shaping the dialog about emerging issues in forest conservation. The Institute has an impressive list of recent accomplishments. It pioneered a new model of collaborative leadership that is being put into practice in many parts of the nation, facilitating the

certification of 2.1 million acres of the Pennsylvania State Forest for sustainable forestry. It also released a compendium of innovations in land stewardship contracting, and evaluated the adequacy of curriculums in forestry education. However, with its focus on national policy and its offices in Washington, the Institute has so far made little use of the Grey Towers site for its programs.

With the major renovation at Grey Towers engineered by Ed Brannon, the mansion is finally being reconfigured as a conference center with a second office for the Pinchot Institute. This makes it possible for the first time to follow through on the vision my father had when he gave Grey Towers to the Forest Service. While the Pinchot Institute will continue its primary work in conservation policy in Washington, Al Sample, the Pinchot Institute Board, Ed Brannon, and I have had several discussions about what programs to embark on at Grey Towers after the renovation. We are in agreement that Grey Towers would be particularly suited to an ongoing series of seminars that would attempt to redefine the core concepts of conservation towards providing a common language for a greater portion of the stakeholders in conservation policy issues.

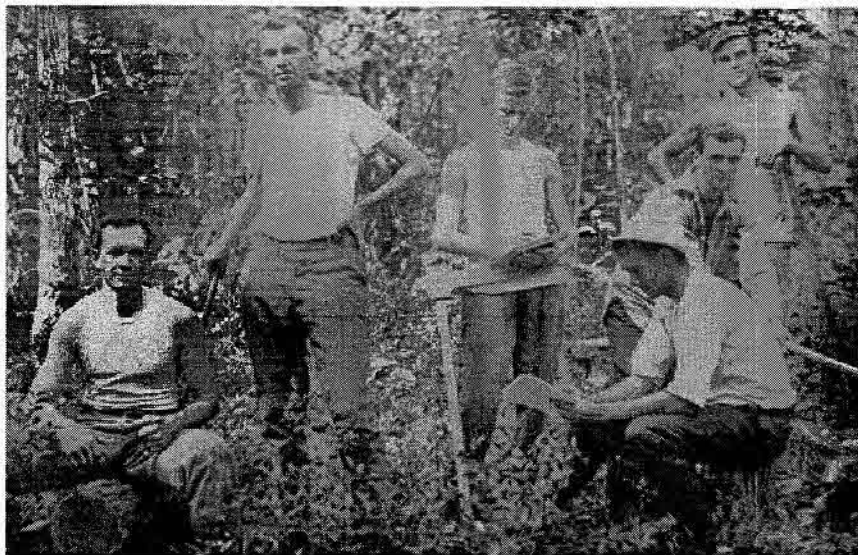


photo courtesy of Grey Towers

Students out in the field

At the opening of this century, when the Western frontier was closing and a wave of deforestation and forest fires was sweeping across the nation, there was a profound philosophical and political debate about the relationship between people and nature. No consensus on natural resource policy was possible without some resolution about how human society could be organized in a world of limited resources. Gifford Pinchot and many others helped articulate the foundations of the utilitarian, scientific, progressive model of resource management which became the dominant theme of conservation for much of this century. One hundred years later, in a postindustrial society that has lost its faith in the rational management of resources by a professional elite, there is no longer a dominant conception of conservation or resource management to which a majority of citizens subscribe. We are again in a period of profound philosophical and political debate about the human relationship with nature. Concerns about biodiversity, ecosystem sustainability, climate change, over-regulation, property rights, social equity, and access to the bargaining table signal a watershed in human values and in the role of conservation institutions. Thus, reaching consensus on natural resource policies is often virtually impossible.

Grey Towers, with its majestic setting and its palpable history of the birth of conservation, is an ideal setting to convene a series of extended discussions that touch on the biological, economic, theological, political, and sociological dimensions of new models of conservation that are more relevant to the current circumstances of the world. Informal discussions among small groups of leaders, intellectuals, and activists may start inside Grey Towers and migrate to the cascading waterfalls and quiet pools of the Sawkill Gorge or even to a canoe trip down the Delaware River. Yet Grey Towers is only 70 miles from New York City and its airports and 120 miles from New Haven.

The Pinchot Institute, Grey Towers, and the Pinchot family plan to develop active partnerships with universities and conservation organizations to reestablish the Milford Experimental Forest and to establish Grey Towers as a viable conservation seminar center. It is especially important to us that we reaffirm the historic relationship with the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Student and faculty projects at Grey Towers and the Milford Experimental Forest are welcome. Convey any ideas, suggestions, or questions about programs at Grey Towers, to Ed Brannon Pinchot Institute at (address), or Peter Pinchot (peterpin@aol.com).

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to leadership in conservation thought, policy and action. The Pinchot Institute was dedicated in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy at Grey Towers National Historic Landmark in Milford, Pennsylvania, historic home of conservation leader Gifford Pinchot, to facilitate communication and closer cooperation among resource managers, scientists, policymakers and the American public. The Institute continues Pinchot's legacy of conservation leadership as a center for policy development in support of sustainable forest management. Major programs include:

- *Institutional and Policy Changes to Implement Sustainable Forest Management*
- *Improving Forest Stewardship and Sustaining Rural Communities*
- *Developing Collaborative Models of Conservation Leadership*

The Pinchot Institute today carries out its work both at Grey Towers and at office and conference facilities located in the Resource and Conservation Center in Washington, D.C. For more information please contact:

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