Site Visit Report

Newport Forest Sunday March 22 2009 2:00 - 5:15 pm

weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 66%; BP 100.6; NNE ≤ 25 k/h; ovcst; T 7° C
purpose: trail maintenance
participants: Brian, Kee

The ground has dried considerably since our last visit, yet has remained soft enough, as we came in, for me to drive on top of the ridges created during our last visit, flattening them down once again. As soon as we arrived at the trailer and cut the engine, we heard it -- rather them: the Western Chorus Frogs have started, making the spring official, as far as Pat & I are concerned.

We went into the Blind Creek Forest (BCF) along Edgar's Trail (ET), taking with us our tools and a quantity of rope. Our first job was to raise a 25-foot ash that had been crushed to the ground by last month's massive flood + ice cakes. We lashed the tree to a larger neighbour. The base is severely splintered, but there is enough continuous cambium for the tree to survive, OTBE. (This has worked several times before.) We cut & cleared for a time just 100 m from one of the most vocal of the ponds, with approx. half a doz. males calling there and making a deafening racket with their pocket-combs. (P) We cleared another 2-300 m of trail, taking us to the base of the Hogsback (HB). We left one large log and two jackpots for the chainsaw students to practice on at the end of March. In the course of this cleanup, we noticed several American Beeches that I planted 3-4 years ago, shooting forth buds once again and noticeably larger. (P) One required a splint-job.

The HB trail was clear and in need of only minor work, thanks to its elevation above the flood. The Riverside Forest (RSF) was another story. It was just as bad as the BCF had been. We lost the trail completely in several places, the landscape an alien jumble of great swathes of branches, mounds of cornstalks and other agridebris. We made no cleanup here, merely noting the amount of work that would be required. This degree of maintenance is only necessary every ten years or so, at a guess. We hope that the TTLT will have the resources to deal with such events. (volunteers won't do) Otherwise, we'll just have to abandon the trails and let everything regrow. One telltale sign of such a flood event is the numbers of saplings (10'-25') bent over by the weight of ice that formed during the crest of the flood. Hundreds in any direction you looked. I reflected that this might explain a common feature of Box Elders in a northern riverine forest* setting; most of them lean, some at a considerable angle. It would take only occasional floods like the last to produce the phenomenon.

Back in camp we rested in the Nook, noting the chippies all busily filling their buccal carpetbags with birdseed. A lone Red Squirrel watched from a distant tree, waiting for us to leave. The sun came out and the air temperature rose to 9° C during this period. The river is now only a metre above normal levels, while the creek is pretty much back to normal.

* this is a US-based classification system that we use exclusively. The NRF ecotype can be found (for example) along the banks of the Mississippi from approx. the state of that name up into Beech-maple zone which includes the Thames watershed in SW Ontario.

IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge) *(click on image to enlarge)*

Vernal pond (in middle distance) with active chorus frogs in it.

copper-coloured buds on American Beech sapling -- coat as backdrop