

## Agricultural Environmental Management



### *Over the River and Through the Woods*

By Barbara Silvestri

As winter blankets New York, it's a perfect time to consider the gifts that nature provides to our families. The forest land on many farms is one of nature's gifts, providing wildlife habitat, scenic beauty and income opportunities from forest products. Farm families across the state care for the forest land on their farms by managing these resources responsibly.

In recent issues we have talked about New York's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program and the tools AEM offers to help farmers protect water quality. This time we turn our attention to AEM's *Forest Management Worksheet*, which guides farmers in a quick evaluation of the ways their forest management practices are benefiting the environment and identifies potential pollution risks.

Proper forest management can boost a farm's bottom line while protecting forest health and water quality. Timber harvesting and other forest management activities can have minimal impacts on water quality if properly planned and carried out. However, problems can arise from improperly-designed and constructed logging roads, skid trails, log landings and stream crossings, which can cause excessive soil and stream bank erosion. The resulting sediment deposition in streams and other water bodies can damage fish habitat and spawning areas, and result in flooding downstream. In addition, removal of trees in streamside riparian zones can raise water temperatures, negatively affecting fish and other aquatic life.

Whether you are actively harvesting forest products or just thinking about ways to care for the forests on your farm, the *AEM Forest Management Worksheet* can help you assess how forest management practices affect water quality. A conservation professional from your County Soil and Water Conservation District or another local AEM partner will come to your farm to complete this free, confidential assessment with you.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts have many helpful resources that can assist with forest management. Soil maps, topographic maps, wetland inventories and classified stream maps can all help identify high risk areas before logging begins, thus preventing most water quality problems. Districts can also assist landowners in ensuring that a forested buffer zone is maintained along streams to protect stream banks from erosion, filter pollutants, and provide shade to keep the water cooler during the summer months for aquatic life.

The State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) also provides assistance and resources for forest managers. Many forest owners are particularly excited to find out about New York's Forest Tax Law that provides tax relief for forests that are sustainably managed. To be eligible you must own fifty contiguous acres of forest land and have a management plan prepared by a forester and approved by your NYSDEC Regional Forester. More information on the forest stewardship assistance available through NYSDEC can be found at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4972.html>. Your Conservation District representative can also fill you in on the opportunities provided in New York and put you in touch with your regional contacts.

AEM Risk Assessments, including the *Forest Management Worksheet*, are confidential and free of charge. Simply call your County Soil and Water Conservation District to schedule an appointment! To learn more about AEM, view the Worksheets, including the *Forest Management Worksheet*, or to locate your District office, visit: [www.nys-soilandwater.org](http://www.nys-soilandwater.org).

In the next issue, we'll look at the ways AEM is helping New York farm families take stock of the multiple benefits they provide to the environment and their local community, and how AEM supports farmers in spreading the word about their good work!

*Barbara Silvestri is the Information & Education Program Coordinator with the NYS Soil & Water Conservation Committee in Albany, NY. She can be reached at 518-457-3738 or [barb.silvestri@agmkt.state.ny.us](mailto:barb.silvestri@agmkt.state.ny.us).*