

Land Use and Ecology at Evergreen Farm

As it is in much of Sterling and the surrounding communities, the history of Evergreen Farm is one of agriculture. The 1800's and early 1900's were a time of dairy farming on this land. Because of the rocky and hilly terrain, cultivation was difficult. Pasture for cattle from a farm on Chace Hill Road took much of the area now planted with Christmas trees. A very small apple orchard appears to have been established where concolor firs are now growing – on the left side of the road heading up the hill opposite the parking lot.

The need for this land for pasture diminished or ceased about 1910. We know this by observing the forest. As you look at the forest surrounding the plantations, you can see many trees that are 80 – 90 years old. This mix of hardwoods and evergreens is the result of what is called secondary ecological succession. Primary succession occurs on a barren or lifeless surface, such as a gravel pit. Secondary succession occurs where there had already been a plant and animal community. Secondary succession in New England is rather famous and is known as “Old Field Succession.” It occurs when fields or pastures are abandoned and a predictable mix of plant and animal life “succeeds.” The first plants to appear in the field would be grey birch, pin or red cherry, poplar and white pine.

Today, little remains of that forest – with the exception of white pine – because those species need full sunlight. In fact, you can now see some sugar maples scattered about which would indicate a “Climax” forest. In a climax forest, the same species will dominate the land for hundreds of years, barring any major disturbances by wind, fire or man. Primarily, however, Evergreen Farm's forest is in an intermediate seral stage. This type of forest is a mix of red maple, black, white and red oak, white pine, black birch, pignut hickory and white ash.

Animal species change along with the vegetation. Because of so many oak trees and acorns, the present forest is attractive to deer, grouse, wild turkey, squirrels and other related species. We encourage a variety of wildlife by planting or saving crab apple, black walnut, butternut, flowering dogwood, blueberries and grasses – not to mention the Christmas trees!

To attract our feathered friends, we have put up many bird boxes and encouraged the growth of plants such as arrowwood, winterberry, maple leaf viburnum, alternate-leaved dogwood, hickory, oak, grapes, white birch, poplar and partridge berry. You may have noticed many trees have been left in the plantations for the benefit of the wildlife. These trees compete with our Christmas trees for sunlight, water and nutrients.

In summary, we have attempted to preserve and enhance the plant and animal species found on the farm in addition to maintaining the land's beauty and productivity. Thank you for visiting and enjoy the holidays!

Bill and Julie