Plowshares Land Trust Takes a Hit!

Home to Anathoth Community Farm and Nukewatch Slammed by 100 mph Summer Storm

On July 19, a storm with 100 mph straight-line winds and localized twisters smashed across the Plowshares Land Trust, where the Nukewatch office is located, downing over 1,000 trees and forever altering the landscape and the skyline. Nobody here was injured, and the five houses we've built here were spared serious damage. A few outbuildings and pieces of farm equipment were tossed like salad. Garden hoop houses, the mobile chicken coop, a tool shed, an outhouse, and a couple of hay wagons were either broken up or knocked over or both.

There were so many trees downed across paths and roads that several days of cutting and hauling were needed just to walk between houses, get to the office, move cars, and get out of the driveway. As we go to press, our wood splitting machine was only just freed from the fallen oaks, ash, elms, and birches that had it surrounded.

Retired Nukewatch co-director Bonnie Urfer, whose house is 300 yards from the office, was at home during the howling tempest and heard the "locomotive noise" associated with tornados. Bonnie said, "The worst part only lasted ten minutes"—an amazingly short maelstrom considering the depth of the damage. I was at the Büchel peace camp in Germany when the storm hit, and over the phone everybody at the farm said there was no reason to change my ticket and hurry back, "because it is going to take years to clear the trees."

This is the emotionally hurtful reality of living so close to the woods and spending so may days out in them. Living here on the Land Trust for 30 years, and collecting fire wood for as many as three houses and the sauna, has taught me a lot about our nearly 30 acres of trees, and the damage to our little patch of forest is overwhelming. Nearly every big oak and maple—including the biggest—was blown down, many of them well over 100 years old. A week later when I got home, Barbara Kass met me in the driveway and said, "All your friends are gone."

Long, 40-foot-tall windrows of pine and spruce that we'd planted to keep paths and the driveway free of winter snowdrifts were toppled or snapped. Amazingly, some 600-pound, oversized round hay bales were tossed around and even thrown into the trees like beach balls.

We are lucky that no one was hurt and that houses or cars weren't smashed. But it's also fact that material things can be fixed or replaced, but the big trees are really gone.

Besides the new office that we build in 1998, Nukewatch's single largest investment here—the $38,000 solar panel array that produces more electricity than the whole farmstead needs, including the Nukewatch office—was somehow spared any damage, even though four tall trees stand directly behind it. In September we cleared everything within 50 feet of the panels in anticipation of the increasing frequency and strength of chaotic wind storms.

We wish to thank people who've come out and helped clear roads and paths, free-up fences and trails, and cut and split stove wood including: Barb Katt and Randy Surbaugh, Oma "Vic" McMurray, Chris, Mike, and Kristen Boland, Jen and Paul Vos Benkowski, Chris Paul, Sadie Green, Jeff Peterson, José Morales, Andrew Claeys, Adina Stackhouse, Greg Klave, Kurt Seaburg, Jason Malmquist, Michael Aldarbrook, Joel Kilgour, Drew Anderson, Donna Howard, Shelly Braecken, Chelsea Froemke, Maweja "Mo" Henderson, Günes Henderson, Kenji Xiong, and Leela Xiong. — ***John LaForge***

Clockwise from top left: the only tamarack we had; great red oak; six ash together; Nukewatch office roof had only light damage; oaks, maples and ash missed the solar house; 10,000-watt solar array was spared; all 25 big red oaks look like this; and heavy bales were tossed into the windrow. Photos: John LaForge and Bonnie Urfer

Nukewatch's 10,000-watt photovoltaic system (left), which powers the office and the whole land trust, was only made possible by a generous bequest from Ethel and Carl Sanjines.