

North Woods Newsletter

Skidmore College <http://cms.skidmore.edu/sustainability/> Fall 2010

Nature Nuggets

✿ Yarrow & Meadowsweet are medicinal plants found in our own backyard that have been used for thousands of years.

✿ Some bats hibernate during winter while others migrate to warmer climates. All 6 species of New York's cave bats spend the winter hibernating in caves and mines where they live off of stored fat reserves. New York's tree bats spend their lives in places such as the North Woods, and then migrate to warmer climates for the winter.

✿ Only 14% of the world's forests are temperate deciduous forests which have leaves that change color in the Fall.

✿ For more information, please visit: <http://cms.skidmore.edu/northwoods/index.cfm>

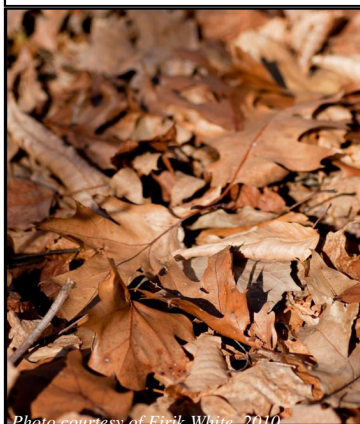
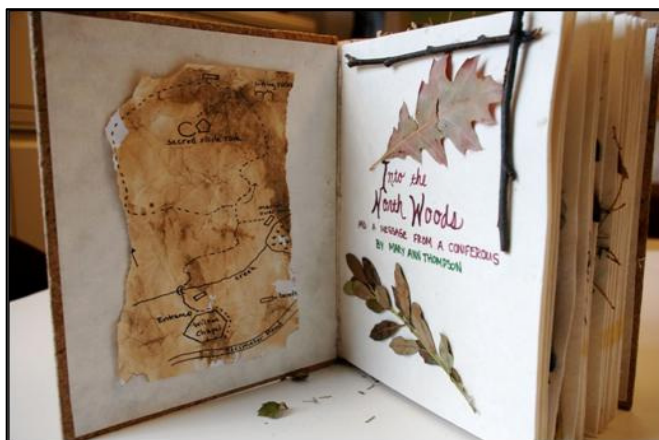


Photo courtesy of Erik White, 2010

Literature & the North Woods

"If we bemoan the loss of light as the day changes to night we miss the sunset"

Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge*



Photos for this story courtesy of Professor Michael Marx

The metaphorical leaves of a book come together with the real leaves of trees in the Literature for the North Woods Project that is part of EN 229 "Literature and the Environment." Michael Marx, Director of the Environmental Studies Program at Skidmore College and Associate Professor of English, has been teaching this environmental literature course for five years. The class asks students to "examine how literary works have represented nature and how these texts reveal environmental and personal values about the natural world in which we live." "The complete value of the readings," Marx explains, "cannot be fully realized unless we bring their themes and values to the environment around us." Thus the course includes a project where students creatively apply the literary ideas from the course readings to the College's North Woods. In addition to creative writing and GIS-enhanced reports about the North Woods, student projects have included paintings, photography, films, and musical compositions. The heightened awareness of the natural world students gain from the literature often informs new perceptions they have of their environment, particularly the North Woods. Continue reading on page 3....

Support Friends of the North Woods

By making a gift to the Friends of the North Woods, you help to fund the maintenance of the North Woods, the Stewards, and their projects.

Please join online at: <https://skidnet.skidmore.edu/AWC/makeagift.aspx> by selecting Friends of the North Woods in the drop-down menu. You may also purchase *Treasure in the North Woods* and/or *Wildflowers of the North Woods* in the Skidmore Bookstore, the proceeds of which directly fund these initiatives. For questions please contact Skidmore's Campus Sustainability Coordinator, Riley Neugebauer, at rneugeba@skidmore.edu.

This Fall, Keep a Look Out For...

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), or Sparrow Hawk, is the most common, and smallest, falcon in North America. It nests in trees, cliffs, buildings, and other structures. Most of these birds migrate south during the winter, but some will remain. Their call is a high-pitched “klee” or “killy”. They are likely to perch or hover over open ground as they search for prey.



The Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) is a common species of wren, the second largest after the Cactus Wren. It is noted for a loud song sounding like “teakettle-teakettle-teakettle”. They are found in our area and they do not migrate. Due to their temperature sensitivity severe winters can result in a large decline in their numbers for the following years.

Maple Trees can be found throughout the northeastern United States, with thirteen native species in North America. The Sugar Maple is the official state tree of New York, where, in 2009, 362,000 gallons of syrup were produced. (www.nysmaple.com). Increasing temperatures linked to climate change will impact where maples will be able to grow in the coming decades.



New Sustainability Coordinator



Photo courtesy of Eirik White, 2010

Riley Neugebauer has joined Skidmore College as the Sustainability Coordinator this November, taking over from the previous Coordinator, Erica Fuller. She will work closely with faculty, staff, and students at Skidmore to promote and create sustainable programs and behaviors. She will also look to work with the community on issues of interest as well, including the North Woods.

Some issues that she will be working on in the coming months include a climate action plan, campus composting, recycling, diversity and social justice and the linkages to sustainability, and sustainability education and awareness.

Riley's background is varied, and includes work and training in solar design and installation, community organizing, energy efficiency, youth leadership development, and a former sustainability position at American University in Washington, D.C. Riley feels that the campus had made a number of great commitments related to sustainability and has a strong desire to continue moving forward.

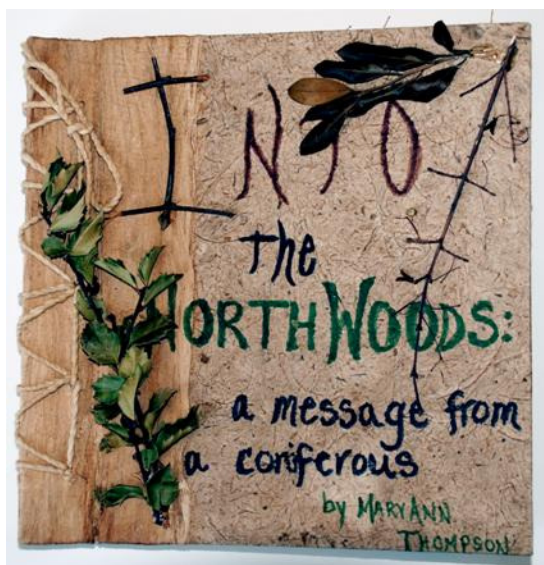
Specifically related to North Woods, Riley is interested to continue the Stewards program from last summer where student employees helped to maintain the North Woods area, as well as think about expanding the educational and volunteer activities offered.

Do You Have Ideas or Interests Related to the North Woods? Please get in touch!

Riley Neugebauer, Campus Sustainability Coordinator

Email: rneugeba@skidmore.edu

Literature & the North Woods Continued...



During the semester, students read poetry, mythology, fiction, essays, and nonfiction by authors such as Edward Abbey, Henry David Thoreau, Barbara Kingsolver, and Terry Tempest Williams. *Treasures in the North Woods*, by recently retired Senior Biology Teaching Associate Sue Van Hook, provides historical and environmental background on the North Woods.

When students in the current class were asked how the North Woods project and the class in general have changed their perception of the North Woods, many felt strongly that it had indeed shifted their feelings about this resource so close to campus. Sarah Risley '13 feels that the class and project allowed her to "better appreciate the North Woods on a deeper level. By placing the woods in the context of great works by Thoreau, Emerson, Leopold, etc., I gained a richer understanding of the North Woods as a part of the environment, and how this environment can lead to mental clarity and inspiration. ...I really enjoyed this project, and

felt that it was a wonderful way to get students actively involved in the woods creatively and intellectually."

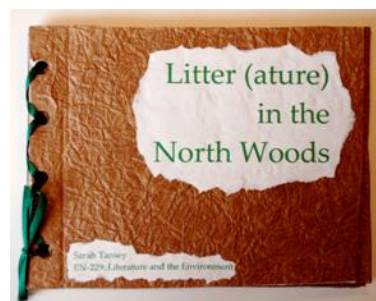


"Although I have always viewed the woods as a great place to hike or run, I now see it additionally as a place to meditate, collect my thoughts, and reflect on the questions presented to us by great environmental writers: 'To what end is nature?' and 'What is my place in the natural environment?'"

- Sarah Risley '13

"Every little pine needle expanded and smelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary."

-Walden, Thoreau 125



Trisha Carile '12 gained insight through reading "Treasure in North Woods," allowing her to learn "a great deal about the North Woods history as well as its natural biodiversity." Gabriella Stern '13 also reflected that the project "has forced me to look at the woods in a more creative and emotional way. The readings from class have definitely enhanced the way I look at the outside world. I typically saw nature from a scientific point of view, but now I can apply feeling to nature." Adam Schmelkin '12 is interviewing students on campus for his project in order to understand the multiple uses of the North Woods. Adam will "no longer take the North Woods for granted-it is such a convenient place to go relax, unwind, and be inspired..." Many students noted that they had already thought of the woods as a place for recreation, but that the class gave them the opportunity to understand it more as a place of meditation and awareness, increasing its value to them.

This course is another example of the many ways that the North Woods serves the community and the campus. The North Woods has allowed students to experience not just biology and ecology in the real world, but also literature, spirituality, and art. If you would like to learn more about this course or to attend this year's "Literature for the North Woods" student presentations, please note the information below.

Would You Like to Hear More From the Students?

Class Presentation of the Literature for the North Woods Projects

December 17, 9am to Noon

RSVP to Professor Marx at mmarx@skidmore.edu or by phone at 518-580-5173