stands of unproductive highland tag alder and small thin popple (aspen) stands. Cutting, shearing and/or mulching to create forest openings and encourage young growth and regeneration were the order of the day. Doing so would encourage woodcock propagation, Warbler production, and help all sorts of other species currently unable to use the thick, unproductive jungle of overgrown brush.

After a few calls to the WI DNR biologists, USDA representative and our county forester, we felt the program had great merit and that portions of our property were well suited for YFP work. We signed an application, hosted a site survey and met with the USDA officers like Bob Plawski in Medford, Wisconsin and Jeremy Holtz, the regional biologist with the WI DNR in Rhinelander. Impressed with the dedication, passion and skills of all the staff members, we waited and hoped. Soon after, we received great news - the parcel had been accepted into the new YFP program and young clearings were going to happen! We were assigned a farm number and signed off on the documents that would provide us a contractual stipend to undertake the cutting. Let the work begin!

In mid-December of 2014, we contacted yet another wonderful man in the YFI process. Gary Zimmer is with the Ruffed Grouse Society and also a Wisconsin Natural Resources Board member. The USDA office had provided Gary’s contact information and suspecting he was a kindred spirit, we called him first. Gary was a wealth of information and through him, we were introduced to a gentleman named Mike Riggle. Mike’s a semi-retired veterinarian - with an easy smile, a big heart, a penchant for heavy equipment and a love of the land. A bird hunter, self-made arborist and conservation minded guy who “just wanted to give something back”, Mike showed up just before Christmas with a big Terex Skid Steer and a mulching attachment the size of a Zamboni. The machine is owned by the RGS and Mike provides his time, skill and effort to do the actual work. Having walked the site previously with us, Mike went to work with the big mulching machine.

During two outings totaling about 12 hours, Mike created a 5-acre young forest right before our eyes. Contoured edges along a river bank, big trees left for cover, irregular borders and wide openings in the canopy. We marveled at the immediate difference. An area that had been virtually in the chokehold of a tangled mess of older growth alder and spindly aspen was open to the general wildlife public! Light penetrated much of this area for the first time in over a decade. In fact, we witnessed signs of deer, grouse, rabbit and fox tracks in the new cut within 48 hours of completion and even got to see a fisher working the edge of the river on one of the days we worked with Mike - a first glimpse for us in the wild!

We’re told by Gary Zimmer at RGS that the woodcock will use it right away next spring. They’ll be heard “peenting” in the warm April nights and we can’t wait to watch and listen.

The warblers, hares, foxes, fisher, grouse, deer, turkeys and others will benefit greatly. In 3 to 4 years, the woodcock will nest and live there seasonally and this will help them prosper and just maybe do a little bit to help reverse their long-term population decline.

We encourage each and every RGS member and landowner to investigate the potential for your own involvement in this very fulfilling program. You can find out much more about YFP and how to get started by visiting the Young Forest Program website resources listed below. We heartily urge you to do so; you’ll be helping the birds and animals and we downright guarantee that you’ll feel better about yourself and your own sporting heritage. All of us ask our conservation organizations to help swing the balance in our favor as sportsmen, hunters and lovers of wild spaces. RGS has responded to our pleas. Will you answer the call?

FOR MORE YOUNG FOREST PROGRAM RESOURCES, VISIT:
www.dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/youngforest.html
www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/wi/newsroom/releases/?cid=STELPRDB152028