



West Virginia's balsam fir trees are very predictable and reliable in producing cones every five years. It was in 1991, 20 years ago, when we first collected, and in 1996 when we last collected cones from these trees, the southern-most balsam fir trees on the continent. We collect the cones, extract the seeds, and grow seedlings for our red spruce ecosystem restoration efforts, which balsam fir is a component of. Beyond ecosystem restoration, our balsam fir conservation efforts have two additional purposes; 1.) the species is in decline from an exotic insect pest called the balsam woolly adelgid, and 2.) over-population of white tailed deer have hampered natural regeneration from over-browsing.

On July 23 & 24, we held a volunteer cone picking event that was very productive. We were able to collect several bushels of cones which will hopefully allow us plenty of seed to grow restoration seedlings as well as bank some seed for the future. This fall, in October and November, we will begin the important work of collecting red spruce cones, which is a little easier because we don't need to climb the trees as we do with the balsam fir. Rather, we collect them from the ground where they end up after the red squirrels cut the cones. On September 17, we will also have our annual Fall tree planting event on the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. See the Mountain Odyssey schedule of outings for more information if you'd like to get involved and help out.

