

Mother Nature knows how to manage forests much better

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It is not uncommon to find foresters, writing in professional journals, arguing just this: There is no such thing as Mother Nature anymore!

What could they be thinking?

Their explanation is that forests have been the target of so much intervention in the last 200 years that they can no longer survive without constant human “management.”

Foresters, some have argued, are the new “Gods of the forest.”

But not everyone who studies nature believes that this thinking is on target. Without question, in many areas of life, human knowledge is extraordinary.

But supreme?

We are just beginning to understand many things about forests. Only recently have forest researchers discovered that trees “communicate” with one another. One tree may send out a chemical signal to adjacent trees through underground fungal networks, for instance, to warn of an insect attack. Trees that receive these signals respond with a chemical defense to ward off the threat.

Trees share nutrients to keep each other healthy. And it appears that some trees, called “hub” trees, are key to the health of an entire network of trees around them.

And nobody knows yet why oaks drop a lot of acorns only some years — or even when this acorn “boom” year is likely to occur!

Those who study trees point out that Mother Nature, for millennia, has done an extraordinary job with her forests. Jess Riddle, a consultant for Georgia Forest Watch, explains that “Nature has a much better track record at managing forests than human beings do.”

Pull out forest invasive plants? Sure. Protect young tree seedlings from deer browse? Sure. But do these in a way that works with Mother Nature — not trying to replace or outdo her.

The goal of Friends of White’s Woods for the last 30 years is to trust that Nature knows how to manage our Nature Center much better than people ever will.

Less than 3 percent of Eastern U.S. old growth forests remain. On behalf of future generations, it is time to let some of our forests mature — again.

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