The 2011 maple sugaring year was a bumper year for Lusscroft Farm.

Last year sap collection in buckets and bags was converted to an on the ground pipeline system. Beginning in December 2010, lines were moved above ground and attached to trees. During President’s Week, the installation of the sap pipelines and tapping of some 200 trees was completed. All pipelines were placed for gravity flow to holding tanks.

Sap was collected daily and sometimes twice a day depending upon the weather and transported to a surge tank at the sugar house using a motorized mule. Boiling sap at the evaporator generally started between 6:00 AM and 7:00 AM each morning and lasted into the late evening hours. The hours were long and tiring for the workers who were all volunteers. Special thanks go out to Roy Rohel a FLA landowner, Dan Tassey a District NJ Forest Fire Warden, Joe Bruschetta a SAF member and consulting forester, Wayne Martin a FLA landowner, Mike Wittrien a FLA landowner, and Frank Hennion past chair of NJDSAF. Volunteers gave over 960 hours of their time over a 4 ½ week period.

On February 25 th enough sap was collected to begin boiling in the evaporator. On February 28 th the first batch of syrup was produced and continued each day forward until March 21 st shortly after the sap stopped flowing. A Sugar Maple Syrup Open House was held on March 12 th and 13 th and attended by 350 people who were able to see sap collection, boiling down, and maple syrup production as Joe Bruschetta conducted educational tours of the sugar bushes and sugar house. There were also 50 visitors that stopped by before and after the open house days.

This was an important year for maple sugaring at Lusscroft. The operation received a $2,000.00 grant from the Allegheny SAF to purchase much needed equipment. Among the items purchased were a finisher and bottling unit, collection and holding tanks, and a sap refractometer for measuring the sugar content of sap.

Another important event was this year; three FLA landowners brought sap to the sugar house for processing into syrup. In total, over 2450 gallons of sap were processed of which half was from the FLA landowners. A total of 54.6 gallons was produced of which 39.1 gallons was sold and 15.5 gallons returned to the FLA landowners.

The cost of processing for the FLA landowners was that Lusscroft received half of the value of the sap. Each landowners’ sap was tested daily for sugar content using the sap refractometer. Sugar content of the saps ranged from 1.9% to a high of 2.6% which was function of the sugar bush and weather.

A second case study by Butch Stryker of Stryker Forest Products detailed his firm’s methods for controlling non-native plants. Following a delicious hot luncheon, the forest stewardship portion of the meeting was wrapped up with a presentation by NJFS Supervising Forester Jon Klischies, Science Director for the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team, on identification and control of non-native and invasive plants. He spoke on the importance of controlling emerging exotic plants in the state.

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The annual business meeting followed. Membership anniversary awards were presented to members Tim Slavin, Joe Bennett, Greg McLaughlin, James Kereszteny, and Peter Steger. Discussions focused on NJ forest issues and the role of the NJDSAF going forward. The Division’s activities during the past year were summarized and priorities for 2011 were selected.

A discussion among the members involving the future of forestry and the direction of the Division during this difficult and challenging time wrapped up the business meeting. Another successful silent auction closed. Evaluations indicated the meeting was well-received. Although the NJ Division membership numbers are down slightly, the Division is strong, with many experienced and committed professionals willing to contribute and lead.