

Profiles

IN



CONSERVATION

Finding His Peace in the Woods

By Glenn Rosenholm

Monideep Dey's spirituality and strong affinity for nature prompted him to buy 21 acres of mostly forested land years ago in Yellow Spring, WV, and he's loved roaming his land ever since.

Dey was born and raised in a place half a world away where clouded leopards and rare red pandas trek the woods.

"My school was in the foothills of the Himalayas, where the land is famous for growing Darjeeling tea leaves. As a kid in India we would go on a lot of outdoor trips," he added. "They had a lot of camping and hiking trips



Monideep closely examines the new growth on a recently planted redbud tree in a tube, which is used to keep deer from eating the leaves.



Monideep Dey.



A wooded mountaintop provides a scenic setting for a small statue of Shiva.

through my years in school. It's very scenic out there and it brought about my feelings for the outdoors."

He left India at age 16 before finishing high school, he said. "I went to Europe for a couple years and then to Canada for undergraduate studies. After that I went to the United States for graduate studies. I've been in the United States since 1975."

His lifetime of accomplishments since leaving India is probably more than the collective achievements of most families. No one would ever call him a "slacker" or "under achiever."



Two young boys walk along the tea gardens of Darjeeling on the southern edge of the Himalayan Mountains. (Courtesy photo by Daniel Beckham)



An Indian elephant in the forest. (Courtesy photo by Yathin S. Krishnappa)



Snow leopard. (Courtesy photo by Eric Kilby)



View of beautiful Mount Kanchenjunga off in the distance. This was Dey's view of the Himalayas.

In Canada, Dey earned an undergraduate degree in nuclear physics from Queen's University. He later earned a master's degree in nuclear engineering from the University of Michigan. Today Dey also holds dual doctorates in philosophy and nuclear engineering.

After college, he worked in the States for more than two decades for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as a nuclear engineer before retiring from civil service in 2006. He was also a guest lecturer at the National Institute for Standards and Technology. After that, he served for 3 years as the chairman of a working group on fire safety standards for the International Organization for Standardization out of Switzerland.

Even as a "semi-retired" person, Dey still runs an economic development consulting business, Deytec, Inc., and he publishes a quarterly e-newsletter on public policy, regulation, and standardization, and another on fire safety engineering. When not otherwise occupied, he spends some of his free time volunteering. Notably, he is the founder and chairman of the Smriti Sasanka Memorial Mission for the alleviation of poverty in rural villages in India. He also volunteers for the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Foundation in Washington, DC, as well as at his local church.

Perhaps then it is his normal day-to-day brisk pace of activity that causes him to appreciate the quiet serenity and slower-paced lifestyle he finds on his forest land.

"I have 21 acres, about 19 acres of which is forested," he said. "I live in my house on my land. It's a mountaintop property on a ridge and it extends into a valley. The land is not very steep. I have a mix of pines and oaks."

He said he bought the land in 2001. "When I was working at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission I got this flyer from the developer of the land. I came out, and it was very quiet, peaceful. I found a moment of peace there, and I decided to buy that land. From 2002 to 2006 I came out to my land on occasion and walked the trails."

Seventeen years later he has no regrets about his land investment, he said.



Dey worked 22 years for the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and is familiar with the operation of nuclear reactors like these.

“I couldn’t live without it. It’s one of the best things I did. I’m also a spiritual person, and nature is spirituality. I see a strong tie between nature and spirituality. The American Indian shares that view. They believe nature *is* God. Ralph Waldo Emerson also wrote a lot about the ties between nature and spirituality.”

Dey’s land was once owned by the Westvaco Lumber Company, which sold 3,000 acres to a developer who divided it into 100 lots, all on the same mountain. The lots range in size from 20 to 80 acres today.

“The reason I chose a smaller and more level property was that I wanted to enjoy it,” he said.

His land is roughly rectangular in shape and extends from the top of the ridge down to the valley. Its interesting features include rock outcrops, which are part of the same rock outcrop structure known locally as McKee’s Rocks. “It runs along the side of the mountain property,” he said. “The forester who did my forest management plan told me about it.”

Dey lives on the land about half the time today.

“I lived on it (full time) from 2006 to 2013. Then there was a fire in my house created by lightning, so I couldn’t live there for a year. I used to live in Winchester, VA. Now I have a place in Ashburn, VA, so I spend half my time in the city [Ashburn] and half the time on the land.”

“I’m single. Divorced. I live by myself. I try to enjoy a lot of solitude,” he added, chuckling.

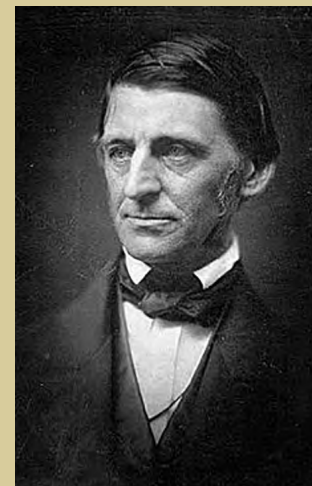


Dey’s home in the woods sits on a hill.



A view from the mountaintop reveals forested ridges and valleys in the distance.

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A photo portrait of Ralph Waldo Emerson.



Sunlight streams through the forest on Dey's land.



A marker for Rock Trail is aptly situated next to a large pile of stones, which is part of a rock outcrop.



Mountain laurel bushes add color to Dey's forest.

"In the forest, you see the power of nature. We had a 2-foot snowfall and it was so quiet. When it rains, it's all falling on soft surfaces. It sounds beautiful. It's a soft, soft sound."

Managing the Land

Dey has been actively working to improve his land over the years. "I manage my land for recreation, water, wildlife, and the environment. I'm a certified tree farmer. In 2006 I had the Forest Stewardship plan written. It needs to be rewritten. I improved the land for those reasons."

"First thing I did was remove some trees," he added. "The land wasn't in really good shape. There was way

more black gum trees there than there should have been; it was way out of proportion. My forester suggested putting diversity back in my forest. We cut a lot of the black gum down. With the logs and branches of the black gum I built brush piles for wildlife. That was about 7 to 8 acres."

"Then I planted native [and other] trees to bring back diversity," he said. The varieties include dogwood, persimmon, crabapple, Chinese chestnut, sugar maple, hawthorn, sawtooth oak, hazelnut, redbud, and fringe tree.

"The chestnut bushes are supposed to produce a lot of chestnuts for wildlife," he said. "I brought back diversity in the forest through the clearing, thinning, brush piles, and planting trees (3 years old now)."

He said he noticed that it was quiet in the woods when he built the house in 2006, but building the house disturbed the forest. "Then I noticed in 2013 when I started the [forest management] work, now you can hear the birds a lot more than ever before. You can see hawks and eagles flying over it. In the past 2 to 3 years I noticed this change."

He added that the sounds of the forest are becoming livelier as the diversity builds up. "The improvements worked."

"I like promoting it and viewing it; I'm not a hunter," he added. On his land today he has a lot of deer and small bobcat, as well as coyotes, wild turkeys, grouse, and more diverse species. The new sounds and sights of wildlife confirm the increased diversity.

"There are so many sounds. One of my joys is to listen to the sounds of the water. We get a lot of snow here. In the forest, you see the power of nature. We had a 2-foot snowfall and it was so quiet. When it rains, it's all falling on soft surfaces. It sounds beautiful. It's a soft, soft sound."

He also built walking trails on his land. "I got this book from my library about managing woodlands, written by two Canadian guys. They recommended that if you wanted to enjoy your woodlands, you have to build trails. I built three miles of trails. I walk those often now, and it promotes recreation and enjoyment. It also helps me to check on some of my plantings and to identify problems."

He added, “A few years back there was some brownish reddish shades showing up on the pines. I had someone check it out.”

Dey said he is trying to gradually improve his landscape to make it even more scenic. “I have a view of the mountain. So I do ‘viewscaping’ to create views,” he said. “You cut some, but not too many, trees to enhance the view. One of my neighbors cut down too many trees, and he probably doesn’t have much wildlife habitat left.”

Active Forest Landowner and Community Member

He said he takes part in the U.S. Forest Service national [Forest Stewardship Program](#) and the West Virginia Forest Stewardship Program, as well as projects with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“I’ve gone to workshops ever since I bought the land in 2001. The West Virginia Extension Service, State, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and [U.S.] Forest Service have a lot of workshops available for landowners. I learned a lot. I didn’t really know a lot. I went to one workshop; now I’m going to host a workshop this month. I have experience to share and I’m glad to do that,” he added.

Dey discussed some of his recent experiences and observations on his land with visiting guests when he hosted a Woodland Stewards workshop on his property on August 25. “[West Virginia University

A trail marker marks the path through Dey’s forest. This spot marks the high point of Dey’s land.



Dey takes a walk in the woods to check out his recent tree plantings.

“I think for people living in the city there’s something missing in their lives. Owning land you have a place to go in and be close to nature.”



Monideep sits on a folding chair in his forest and takes a break, enjoying the view.



Green moss carpets the forest floor on Dey’s land.





A bear strolls along the trails on Dey's land.

Forest Extension Specialist] Dave McGill conducts those workshops through the West Virginia Stewardship Program. He prepared a flyer for my workshop, and there was an article on *Hampshire View* promoting it. Forty people attended, and all said they enjoyed the event a lot. ”

Dey also belongs to the [Potomac Appalachian Trail Club](#). “I’m involved in their activities, and I’m involved in their workshops, too. They are part of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which had the biannual conference in Winchester, VA, back in 2016. I actually held a workshop for attendees at my property. I talked about my land management objectives. Then I took them for walks on the trails, and they all loved that.”



Dey speaks to forestry workshop participants about his work in the woods.

In addition to roaming his woods, Dey goes to a church in Washington, DC, for reflection. “It’s called the Self Revelation Church of Absolute Monism. It’s a universal philosophy. That’s where I learned about Ralph Waldo Emerson. The church has meditation, but I also go to other meditation groups.”

“I’ve always been a spiritual person. Some of it I got from my school that was run by the Jesuit priests. Though I don’t believe in one religion, I picked up on their spiritual messages,” he said.



Visitors walk up a hill in the woods during a tour of Dey's land.

“I would recommend owning land to other people even if they didn’t want to do anything with it,” he said. “Being in nature makes you understand life more. If you go to these activities, it makes you think about nature more. I think for people living in the city there’s something missing in their lives. Owning land you have a place to go in and be close to nature.”

Today, Dey finds peace and serenity while roaming his West Virginia woods. He communes with nature and bonds with wildlife there. Sure, there are no elephants or tigers along his trails today, as in the India of his youth, but still he calls it home.



Dey speaks with visitors to his land about the improvements he made in his forest.

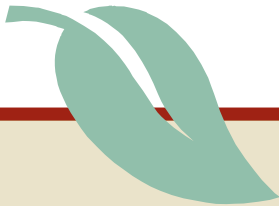


Dey's daughter Neela (right), son-in-law Trevor (left), and grandsons Ray and Louis (left and right) pose for a picture in the woods.



Future forest stewards: Dey's three grandchildren enjoy spending time in his woods.

All photos courtesy of Monideep Dey unless otherwise indicated.



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Monideep walks on a trail back to his home.

Dey shared a quote from Henry David

Thoreau: "Ah! I need solitude. I have come forth to this hill at sunset to see the forms of the mountains in the horizon — to behold and commune with something grander than man. Their



A portrait of Henry David Thoreau.

mere distance is an infinite encouragement. It is with infinite yearning and aspiration that I seek solitude, more and more resolved and strong."