

# Northwest Woodlands

A Publication of the Oregon Small Woodlands, Washington Farm Forestry, Idaho Forest Owners & Montana Forest Owners Associations

## ADDING TO YOUR WOODLANDS:

- Hot Air
- Insect and Disease Resistance
- Wildlife Features
- Fire Protection
- The Right Equipment



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Northwest Woodlands  
 4033 S.W. Canyon Rd.  
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**the Family Forest Owner**

**This magazine is a benefit of membership in**  
**your family forestry association**

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*Northwest Woodlands is published quarterly by the World Forestry Center for the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, Washington Farm Forestry Association, Idaho Forest Owners Association and Montana Forest Owners Association.*

*Other than general editing, the articles appearing in this publication have not been peer reviewed for technical accuracy. The individual authors are primarily responsible for the content and opinions expressed herein.*

# Adding Value to Your Forestland

By **KIRK HANSON**

**A** couple years ago I researched employment trends in Grays Harbor County, Washington, the county in which my forestland resides. What I discovered surprised me. All levels of government combined (local, state and federal) employ approximately 21 percent of the workforce.

Manufacturing (food, machinery, printing) employs 11 percent. The retail industries (auto, electronics, clothing, furniture) accounts for 10 percent. The health care and social serv-

es sector employs six percent. Professional services (real estate, banking) employ five percent. "Other" services and trades (repair and maintenance, membership organizations, wholesale, transportation, construction) employ 14 percent.

Finally, there are the natural resource industries, farming, fish and forestry sectors. Of the three, forestry employs 2.3 percent of the workforce. Eighty-eight percent of the county's 1.2 million acres are forested—yet only 2.3 percent of the workforce is employed in managing this highly productive natural resource.

I make this point to suggest that we may need to be more creative and entrepreneurial in how we think about the management of our forests. Our forests are highly productive natural systems. They provide the obvious timber from which we derive lumber for our homes and pulp for our paper products. They



*An auger is used to convert a field to habitat for the band-tailed pigeon.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRK HANSON

also provide non-timber forest products such as floral greens, edible and medicinal plants, mushrooms and craftwood. These are the commodities. Our forests also provide a less visible suite of services that are more difficult to quantify or value—services such as clean air, clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. As complex ecosystems, forests are incredibly productive, and perhaps in ways that we have not even learned to calculate. Yet we employ less than 2.3 percent of the workforce in their management.

We have come from an era where we have arguably over-exploited our



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forest resources and moved into an era where we are now underutilizing them. They are underutilized for their capacity to produce a variety of commodities, especially non-timber forest products, and they are underutilized for their capacity to provide ecosystem services such as wildlife habitat and carbon sequestration. Given the extraordinary productive capacity of our forestlands, we have a great opportunity to think more creatively about how they can be managed. If we approach this opportunity from an entrepreneurial standpoint, we have an even greater chance to create additional jobs and perhaps even chip away at the unemployment problem that is a corrosive factor in our rural areas.

It is in this context that I am excited to introduce this issue of *Northwest Woodlands*. The theme "Adding to Your Woodlands" inspired me to think about all the innovative ways that family forest landowners manage their lands. Within the following pages you will find great stories, tools and strategies for adding additional value to your forestland; be it economic or environmental value. To start off this issue, I'd like to share my own story of how I have begun to add a wider range of values to my own forestland.

### A Bit of History

It was my father who first began teaching me the value of what a forest can provide. I grew up in Minnesota and spent a great deal of my early life on my folk's 80-acre tree farm. They have a beautiful forest about an hour north of the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul that is comprised primarily of white pine, red and white oak, aspen and sugar maple. My fondest memories are of tapping the maples in the spring and collecting the sap in large bags. My father would spend the better part of a weekend in his sugar shack boiling down the sap to make maple syrup, which he later sold to friends and at bazaars.

For nine months of the year my father was an industrial arts teacher in a high school and taught woodshop. If



*Products of forest diversity: timber, medicinal, edibles, carbon sequestration and water.*

teaching adolescent boys how to operate high-speed machinery doesn't make you the world's most patient person, it'll drive you crazy. Fortunately, my dad is of solid Norwegian stock and therefore is genetically pre-disposed to be very patient. However, when he came home in the evenings he would go straight out to the woodshed and split wood for an hour to calm his nerves. My father's lesson: Heating your house with wood is cheaper and more therapeutic than taking up drinking.

We heated our entire house with firewood. So it's not surprising that one of my first jobs, along with collecting maple sap, was selling firewood. My father and I would go up to our forestland and he would thin the diseased and suppressed oaks, cut them into rounds and haul them back home where I would split them and dry them for a year before selling cords for \$45 to friends in our church.

During the hunting season my father leased the access to our woodlot to hunters. The cost of the lease to the hunters was the cost of the annual taxes

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF KIRK HANSON

on the land, usually a few hundred dollars. In more recent years he has begun harvesting the aspen on the land and delivering it to a local mill where it's sawn into lumber and kiln dried. Aspen has little commercial value in Minnesota other than as pulpwood. However, he uses the lumber to build school desks that are then shipped as kits to Haiti through a service organization that provides aid to impoverished countries. My father's lesson: Make the most out of your resources and share them with others.

Throughout the years as he slowly thinned the diseased and suppressed trees in his forest and thinned the over-mature aspen, he would come along in the gaps that were created and plant white pine. White pine was once the dominant species in the area, but was logged off in the early days. At that time, trees were not replanted after they were harvested, so a motley crew of species grew back, typically hardwoods that now dominate most of the forest cover in the Midwest. After 40 years of thinning hardwoods and planting white pine, my father's forest is now entering a unique stage of succession where the pine are once again beginning to emerge out of the canopy of the hardwoods, setting the stage for the forest to return to late seral, or old growth, conditions. My father's lesson: Manage your forest well by conserving your assets and planning for the future.

It's 40 years later and all the kids have moved on. My folks are wondering what to do with their land. I've moved west and have my own forestland to care for near the Willapa Hills in southwest Washington. My two sisters



PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRK HANSON

*Thinning young alder stands to promote timber quality.*

are in Colorado and have their own families and busy lives. My folks look out of the edges of their forestland and see housing developments encroaching across the road where once there were cornfields. They don't want the forest they've tended for so long to become a generic housing development. So they are going to get two more values out of their forest in the coming years. First, they are planning to sell the development rights to their land to the Minnesota Land Trust in exchange for a perpetual working forest conservation easement. This will allow them to eventually sell their land to another like-minded individual without fear that the forest will be developed. The second value they will receive is less tangible, but perhaps more valuable than the compensation they will receive for the development rights, and that is the satisfaction and peace of mind that the past 40 years spent thinning trees, planting new ones, and improving the quality of the forest for future generations will not have been in vain. My father's lesson:

Your most important asset is your natural capital.

So the values that my parents added to and received from their forest have been both monetary and soulful. They've sold maple syrup, firewood, hunting leases, and soon a conservation easement. In the process, the forest has nurtured their spirits and provided them an opportunity to practice their conservation ethic.

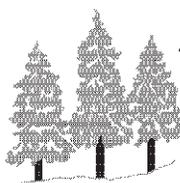
### **My Land**

A little over 10 years ago I purchased 40 acres of regenerating forestland in the Chehalis watershed. About three years prior to my purchase it had, for the most part, been clearcut. When I arrived on the scene there were very young, very small Douglas-fir seedlings struggling to push their way up through a tough combination of grasses, blackberries and other competing vegetation. Initially, even though I was thrilled to own the land, I was disappointed with the condition the land had been left in after the previous owner harvested. My first impressions were that this new forest lacked biodiversity and it would take decades before I would have anything to harvest.

In the intervening 10 years I've been quite busy managing the regenerating forest that has emerged between the firs. Within a very short span of time alder thickets sprang out of the ground in areas where the soil had been exposed. I've been thinning these thickets every three years or so, cutting the poorer quality trees into firewood. Some of the larger alders I high-stump, leaving a three- to four-foot high stump into which I inoculate edible and medicinal mushrooms that begin producing within a couple years and can produce for nearly seven years. The largest and straightest alder I'm leaving to eventually become saw logs, and in some places I'm even letting them overtake the Douglas-fir in order to diversify my forest investment portfolio.

Bitter cherry has emerged in pockets across my land. When the cherry is young, its bark is a beautiful shiny crimson color. I've been harvesting the

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small-diameter trees that are beginning to be suppressed by the now 25-foot tall firs and giving the poles to a friend who makes rustic furniture and interior furnishings for homes. As I begin to prune the Douglas-fir, I make holiday wreaths and garlands out of the boughs. Often I do this with other neighbors and it's a great social tradition around the holidays. In amongst all this new diversity



*This stool was made from bitter cherry.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRK HANSON

of trees can be found an amazing variety of edible and medicinal plants such as trailing blackberry, blue elderberry, salmon berry, huckleberry, devil's club, rose, oyster mushrooms and others. Some of these items I harvest for my own use, some I've allowed friends to harvest who make medicinal tinctures and teas for sale.

In some pockets along the edges of the forest I've begun planting additional native trees and shrubs that provide wildlife forage. A couple years ago I received funding through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program to add habitat for the band-tailed pigeon. The pigeon has become rare in our area because it's big, about two burritos worth, and has been hunted aggressively over the past several decades. Conversion of diverse native forests to Douglas-fir plantations has also dramatically reduced the pigeon's forage. The pigeon feeds on blue elderberry, acorns, cascara berries, bitter cherries and other mast. Having an interest in agroforestry, or forest farming, I've selected some tree and shrub species from which I can later derive useful products. The blue elderberry is medicinal and makes good wine. Cascara bark can still be harvested and sold to manufacturers of natural medicines. The bitter cherry produces a high-value craft wood. Oak can be copiced for small-diameter poles.

One of the most significant lessons

I've learned over the past 10 years of managing a Douglas-fir monoculture is that left to its own devices it doesn't stay a monoculture for very long. With a helping hand, the diversity can be enhanced tremendously and within that diversity lie many opportunities to harvest items that can either be used or sold. This harkens back to something my father said along the lines of, "We are never without opportunity; we just have to recognize the opportunities that exist and act upon them."

### **Adding New Market Opportunities**

A couple years ago I began to participate in a regional membership program called Northwest Certified Forestry ([www.nwcertified.org](http://www.nwcertified.org)), which caters to my entrepreneurial interests. NCF is dedicated to helping small forest landowners add revenue streams to their forests by engaging in new markets for conservation-based forest products. Two emerging market opportunities for landowners are selling Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified forest products and carbon credits. Although my forest is young and I do not expect to harvest or sell timber for another 5-10 years, I felt that it was important to position myself and my land to be eligible for these new markets.

There is a growing movement to distinguish consumer goods that are produced through environmentally and socially equitable means. This is most prominent in the organic foods industry and the Fair Trade movement. Both of these programs bring the consumer into the equation by typically charging 5-15 percent more for a product and sending some of that price premium back to the landowner. With the additional revenue, landowners can better afford to keep their lands in production while continuing to protect natural resources. Due to the high value of organic food, the organic foods industry is now growing at a rate of 30 percent per year and is one of the single largest contributing factors to the current renaissance of small, family owned farms.

Small forest landowners, on the other

hand, have lagged behind this growing movement to differentiate their products in the marketplace. That is beginning to change, however, now that FSC and other certification schemes has become available to small landowners through group certification programs, which simplify the process of becoming certified and help landowners market their forest products. Given the stewardship ethic with which most small forest landowners manage their lands, FSC certification is easy to achieve. Markets for FSC-certified forest products are rapidly growing in the Northwest and could become a similar catalyst for small forest landowners as organic certification has been for small farmers.

Organizations such as Northwest Certified Forestry and others are also researching the potential for carbon markets to add another revenue source for forest landowners. With the eminent threat of global warming, one of the most effective strategies for removing excessive carbon from the atmosphere is by sequestering it in standing timber and wood products. Although offsetting carbon emissions is not required of U.S. industries, some forward-thinking companies are beginning to voluntarily purchase carbon credits. This is creating a pool of funds that can be used to pay landowners who go "above and beyond" the status quo to sequester more carbon in their forests. Landowners who are FSC certified meet this definition and therefore may be eligible to receive additional revenue through the sale of carbon credits.

### **In Conclusion**

My father practiced a conservative approach to forest management. His view of conservatism was borne from the necessity of having to conserve resources while growing up during the great depression. Make the most of what you have, add value where possible, and continuously seek opportunities. ■

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