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Summer 2022

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BY RITA HITE
 PRESIDENT & CEO
 AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

Perhaps my favorite act in these first six months as President and CEO of the American Forest Foundation has been connecting with our stakeholders—especially our landowners and donors. Already, I have heard new perspectives from forest enthusiasts, like yourself, on how you are thinking about the urgent, but incredible opportunity ahead to steward your land for generations to come. Top of mind for folks—*where can I find revenue streams to help me care for my land? What can I do in the face of our changing climate and increases in catastrophic wildfire? How can I make sure my efforts today have a long-lasting impact in the future?*

In this edition of *Woodland* magazine, we introduce you to an inspiring array of donors and family forest owners from across the country who are on the frontlines of these issues. We've also brought you stories showcasing the ways that AFF is working to support America's family forest owners in delivering meaningful conservation impact.

The first story you will read in this issue is about two remarkable women, Elaine Chipman and Kathryn Clarke Albright, who recently made gifts of land through AFF's Seedling Society. These women had the foresight to think about their legacy and who will be responsible for the health and resiliency of their

land in the future. Their confidence in AFF to steward their land—or find the appropriate people who will—is what inspired them to make these generous donations. If you're not familiar with the Seedling Society, I hope you'll take the time to read about these commitments beginning on page 5.

A different perspective on legacy, on page 13 of this issue, you'll find stories about the experiences of four landowners who are rolling up their sleeves and teaching their families and communities about the importance of sustainably managing their trees long-term. Last, we also wanted to provide a summary of our annual leadership conference, which you can find on page 17, an event where we recognized and shared stories about the work being done here and now that will have a lasting impact on tomorrow.

More and more, I am hearing from landowners who are witnessing the impacts of our changing climate first-hand in their woods—and they want to do something about it. When it comes to mitigating climate change, our forests are our nation's largest terrestrial "carbon sink," continuously taking carbon out of the atmosphere and storing it in our trees and forest products. More importantly, studies suggest that the percent of carbon currently being stored in our forests could be nearly doubled. But for many landowners, they need the technical assistance and funds to super-charge this potential in their trees.

This is why the Family Forest Carbon Program is so relevant. It is an initiative for small-acreage forest holders with as little as 30 acres that pays landowners annually to implement climate-friendly forestry practices that go above and beyond what is otherwise common practice—and offers lots of professional expertise and support over the next two decades.

Continued On Next Page

Enrolled landowners are improving the overall health of their forest, increasing the value of their trees, stimulating the local economy, and helping to fight the global climate crisis (by increasing the carbon we capture and store), all things that help your land have a lasting legacy. What better way to secure that legacy than to have a landowner participate in a program that not only benefits the land today but also the Earth their great-grandchildren will inherit? You can read more about it and about a couple of landowners who are currently in the program, Pam Byrne and John Huerta, beginning on page 10.

Another opportunity I had to connect with family forest owners was on a trip to California. During this trip I spoke with some of the leaders in the state's forestry sector where we discussed how family forest owners can be a part of the solution to catastrophic wildfires and its impact on climate. It seems that every fire season is more devastating than the last. Breaking the cycle is a must, which is why we are all in on collaborating with partners to take a landscape wide, proactive

approach to building resiliency. And we are seeing this proactive management approach work. For example, in 2021, when the Dixie Fire was ravaging California, the active management work that Sutter Rodger and her family conducted with the My Sierra Woods program resulted in green tree stands and structures still standing after the fire tore through their land. On page 19, you can read more about, and see, the impact proactive fuels reduction work has on family forests. Sutter Rodger's advice on active management in that article is a reminder we all need, "Do it now," she insists. "Make it your top priority. We have more extreme weather, a lack of resources for firefighting, and lots of beautiful forests."


Thank you for all of your notes of encouragement, your emails and phone calls over the past six months and the ways you have reached out to our policy, program and philanthropy staff to engage with us. Your support, stories and insight are paramount as AFF is tackling these challenges today and into the future we share together. 🌲



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FEATURE

Long-Term Legacy

Donations of Land Today Help Promote Better Forest Stewardship in the Future

BY MARY LOU JAY

PHOTOS OF DALTON RIDGE PROPERTY GENEROUSLY DONATED BY ELAINE CHIPMAN

Like a carefully nurtured young tree, the American Forest Foundation's legacy giving program, the Seedling Society, continues to grow. That's great news for AFF and for the family forest owners who want to see good stewardship of forestlands continue down through the generations. The members of the Seedling Society, who have made or pledged monetary or land donations, are helping to fund AFF's support of family forest owners through programs that address issues such as climate change and biodiversity.

"The generosity of the members of the Seedling Society is incredibly powerful, especially in this exciting time of change for AFF both internally and externally," said Rita Hite, president and CEO of AFF. "The Seedling Society is all about having a lasting impact on our ability to help family landowners steward their land into the future in a way that has a positive impact on our planet."

The Seedling Society achieved a big milestone this spring when Elaine Chipman, owner of forested property in New Hampshire, became the first family forest owner to complete the donation of her land to AFF.

Elaine bought the property more than 50 years ago. Although she never got to spend as much time as she had planned on her property, she always cared for it. So when her husband of 38 years, Dr. Charles Donaldson (Don) Chipman died in 2013, she began thinking about her own estate plan. She wanted to ensure that her New Hampshire property would remain a forested tract after her own passing.

In a serendipitous moment, Elaine came across an article in *Woodland* magazine about AFF's Seedling Society and its new legacy land donation program. She knew then she had found the perfect solution.



Views from the Dalton Ridge property in New Hampshire which was generously donated by Elaine Chipman.

CHANGING PLANS

Elaine learned to ski in college, and continued to be an avid skier in her 30s. After she taught her first husband how to ski, the couple decided to purchase land close to the slopes, intending to build an A-frame house where they could stay during their trips.

"We just wanted a couple of acres of land, but then we found this plot of land near Dalton in New Hampshire. It was a quick claim deed, and I paid \$4,000 for what was described as 40 acres more or less," she recalled. "It's a great wood lot; it's up on Dalton Ridge, and it looks into the state of Vermont."

A bear lived on the property, and there was a beaver dam and a cellar hole from some long-abandoned property. "So it had a lot of history on it," Elaine said.

Although Elaine did spend some time on the property hiking and enjoying the trees and wildlife in the following years, she never did get the opportunity to build the A-frame. When she and her husband divorced, "He ended up with the car, and I ended up with the woodlot," she said. When she had the lot surveyed at that time, she found a bonus; the "about 40 acres" lot ended up being 50 acres.

After her divorce Elaine, who was a medical technologist for 20 years, transferred to a new hospital. There she met and later married Don,

who was the hospital's chief of pathology. While he enjoyed the outdoors, he preferred the beach to the forest.

"He had a house on Nantucket and no interest in downhill skiing at all. I did teach him to cross country ski, and we used to go around to different country clubs in the winter. But when he took off from work, we spent summers in Nantucket," Chipman said. Between them the couple had three children, a daughter and two sons.

BEING A GOOD STEWARD

Elaine developed an appreciation for the land and its creatures as a zoology major at the University of Maine. "I'm passionate about the planet, and what's being done to it," she said. "I think we're destroying the planet faster than it can be restored. Our children and great grandchildren are not going to have a great planet unless people do things to help one way or another. We all have that responsibility."

She followed that philosophy as a forest owner. She hired a local forester, Charlie Baylie, who put in a hiking trail and walked the acreage. He advised Chipman when it was time to log trees or do other maintenance work on the property. Chipman herself became a certified Tree Farmer, and she and Don were active members of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.

Honoring A Loved One's Vision

John and Kathryn Albright were forest novices when they bought 148 acres of mostly wooded land in Craig County, Virginia, more than 20 years ago. "It was a passive investment. Neither of us knew much about the land, because we grew up in the suburbs and lived in the city as young professionals," said Kathryn. When they bought the land, John was working in Chicago as an architect, commuting regularly until he retired to Blacksburg in 2009. Kathryn is currently Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Architecture in the College of Architecture & Urban Studies at Virginia Tech.

In their early years of ownership, the couple mostly hiked the land. "Our land backs up to the Jefferson National Forest, and there's a place we call the Benches, three land terraces. We used to go up and sit and have really great discussions about what was on our minds," Kathryn recalled. John also learned to hunt, which he had never tried before.

Over the years John began spending more time on their forest property, and even built a small barn where he would sometimes spend the night in a hammock. He educated himself about the land and worked with Denny McCarthy, a senior forester with the Virginia Department of Forestry, on management plans for it.

"I think he surprised himself in finding the joy of learning about the landscape. He would walk the land with the state biologist and the forester, and then when we took walks, he would tell me about the hardwoods we had on our property—different types of oaks, ash, maple, cherry, and walnut to name a few," Kathryn said.

John Albright's work on the land was rewarded in 2013, when the farm was certified by the American Tree Farm System. Then, after his sudden death in 2019, Kathryn received an outstanding forest steward award from the Virginia Forest Stewardship program, a recognition of the time and effort her husband had put into managing their family forest.

To honor John's memory, Kathryn Clarke Albright has chosen to donate their property to AFF after her death. "John really wanted the land to remain like it is," she said. "Although there is a conservation easement on the property limiting building on the land, donating it to AFF will protect the property even further."

In the meantime, Kathryn has become more involved with the property's management. At the time of John's death, he was working on a plan to clear some acreage and create a wildlife habitat. "I've met with the forester, and he walked the land with me and told me what he and John had discussed. I decided to go ahead with the plans he had made," she said.

The project she is undertaking, with the assistance of the Virginia Department of Forestry, is the creation of a four-to-five-acre pollinator meadow for butterflies along the frontage of the property. The process of creating the habitat, which can take two to three years, includes clearing the land, removing the invasives and planting wildflower seeds.

The completion of the pollinator meadow will be a beautiful tribute to John's vision for the couple's forest acreage. Kathryn's planned donation of this land to AFF's Seedling Society will be a fitting way to honor John and extend his commitment to forest stewardship into the future.



John Albright enjoying the outdoors at the Meadows of Dan in Virginia.



John Albright on his tractor on their Tree Farm.



The front gate of John and Kathryn's Tree Farm in Craig County, Virginia which Kathryn Clarke Albright has generously donated and will honor her late husband, John Albright.



One incentive to keep the land was the very low property taxes she paid on it each year—just \$28 for all 50 acres.

A few years ago, Baylie wrote to her and said he was getting old and could no longer walk the property. So Elaine, who is now almost 90, knew it was time to make some decision about its future.

“With my three kids scattered around the United States, I thought it better if I dealt with the property myself. I’m sure that if I passed away and they got the property they would sell it for house lots, which is not what I wanted. I wanted it kept as green trees,” she said.

Elaine did look into other options for donating her land, including the New Hampshire Forest Society and the University of Maine, but neither turned out to be feasible. It was then she saw the article about the Seedling Society and its gift of land program.

“I thought it was a really good solution,” she said. “When you think about your last desires on this planet, you just want to make sure that everything is put in place.”

In her conversations with AFF staff members, she emphasized her vision for the future of her land. “I told them I knew they were going to resell it, but I really wanted to keep this old forest as much as possible. It’s too easy to cut down a tree, and it takes too long to grow a tree,” Elaine said. “They told me they would sell it to one person and they’d have a codicil on it saying it was not to be developed.”

The attorney who handles her estate worked with AFF on the paperwork for the donation of the land, which is now valued at over \$70,000.

It’s not always easy being the first person to go through a new program, but Elaine was “an absolute delight to work with,” said Beth Riley, AFF’s Director of Philanthropy. “She and her attorney and all of the AFF team have learned so much through this process about how to execute the necessary paperwork. We are so appreciative of her patience as we work through this remarkable opportunity for AFF.”

Making a legacy donation of her land to AFF’s Seedling Society has been Elaine’s way of ensuring that the property will remain a family forest for the decades to come. She also knows that the money that AFF gets from the sale of her land will go towards its programs, which are designed to help forests stay healthy so they can continue to benefit the planet.

Since Elaine now lives in a retirement community and has access to transportation, she has also donated her car to the local PBS station. “It’s just one person doing one little thing, like turning off the water when you’re brushing your teeth,” she added.

“I have a passion for the environment, and when you’re passionate about something you really try to make things better,” she said. ▲



AFF Policy Team Update

BY JAMES MCKITRICK
SENIOR POLICY MANAGER,
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

With midterm elections fast approaching and the looming potential for a flip in party control, the 117th Congress continues its work this summer on many hot topics including aid to Ukraine and the nation's continuing COVID-19 response. Beyond these headline efforts, however, the American Forest Foundation's Policy team and Advocacy Leaders network are continuing to lead the way for forests in several important policy discussions around Capitol Hill.

Even with the unique dynamics of an election year, early summers on Capitol Hill routinely herald a flurry of activity around federal funding priorities. Despite the Build Back Better Act meeting its end earlier this year, there appears to be a glimmer of hope that Congress will continue forward with landmark investments in public and private forests. At the time of this writing, quiet negotiations are underway on Capitol Hill. The Policy team continues to monitor this development closely and has been busy engaging Members of Congress on funding for existing programs that are so critical for family and individual forest owners.

Congress has also officially begun its efforts on the next Farm Bill, the major priority setting bill for conservation and forestry policy. Expected to be a year-long effort to complete and pass the legislative package, AFF along with our Forests in the Farm Bill coalition has been fast at work developing positions and strategies that will ensure that the bill fully supports the critical role of our landowners in the forest carbon, wildfire mitigation, and biodiversity spaces.

Voluntary carbon markets and AFF's Family Forest Carbon Program continue to be a top policy priority for the team this summer, as well. We are continuing to work with Congressional leaders to pass the bipartisan Rural Forest Markets Act, legislation that would help unlock carbon market opportunities for family and individual forest owners. In addition, as enrollment in the Family Forest Carbon Program expands to states beyond the Central Appalachian region, the Policy team is quickly moving to engage state and local policymakers to grow awareness and support for this critical program.

The Policy team continues to be busy working with AFF's Wildfire and Biodiversity teams on the state level in addition to engagement on Capitol Hill. With open budget seasons across the states, we are working tenaciously to ensure more state resources are available for family forest owners to complete more wildfire mitigation and improve wildlife habitat on their land. California—an unfortunate focal point for the ongoing wildfire crisis—continues to be a large focus of AFF's work.

The summer has also been marked by new engagement with state and national leaders in forestry and agriculture as AFF continues its round of introductions of new CEO, Rita Hite. Growing our key relationships across the US will open the door for new partnership opportunities and—alongside the work of our Advocacy Leaders—will ensure that family forest owners remain a policy priority for elected leaders. ▲

FORESTS & FAMILIES

Meet Pam Byrne and John Huerta of West Virginia

BY CALVIN TRAN
MARKET DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR,
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

Hiking up to the peak of their property, John lets out a bird call and checks for avian neighbors in the trees ahead. A few blue jays call back in unison. Fourteen hundred feet back down the slope, Pam is at home focusing on one of her passion projects. Today it's stained glass. Tomorrow it's wood crafting. "It's important to have good projects to do once you retire," said Pam, "otherwise retirement becomes work again!"

Since 2004, Pam Byrne and John Huerta have enjoyed a pleasant life in the high altitudes of Elkins, West Virginia. The two are an active outdoors couple and lifelong advocates for the environment. They worked for environmental organizations across Washington, DC earlier in their careers, and are still active members of many conservation associations today. When it came time for retirement, they sought a quiet place in the mountains where they could reconnect with the land and comfortably begin the next chapter of their lives. That's when they discovered Elkins. Here, the land provides access to their favorite hobbies and outdoor activities. From hiking and birdwatching to being the wild inspiration for Pam's paintings and woodworking, every day is a chance for new possibilities.

Pam and John are committed to staying active in their retirement—including in their environmental stewardship. In addition to the plot their home was located on, the couple was able to purchase a few

neighboring plots, previously owned by lumber and coal mining companies, in the years following 2004. They steered the trajectory of their land's future in a new direction, away from commercial timber harvest and towards a focus on forest health and amenity values. John repurposed the old logging roads that once carried heavy machinery up the mountain to cut trees into exercise routes for the couple and their dog to hike up every day. Now, Pam and John wanted to see how they could improve their forest. That's when they learned about the Family Forest Carbon Program.



AFF forester Garrett Hamilton measures the circumference of a tree to determine the property's eligibility for the Family Forest Carbon Program.

Ownership of land comes with incredible benefits. If you treat your land right, it can provide you so much value in return. However, it also comes with its challenges. Without the proper care and technical expertise, maintaining large areas of natural landscapes quickly becomes a slippery slope, full of uphill work and hidden surprises. The couple was excited to own their acres of incredible wilderness right in their backyard. They wanted to do as much as they could to promote the health of their woods and its native species—without making it a full time job. And as with other landowners, invasive plants and animals are of growing concern for the two as well. Pam and John are well aware of the thorny bushes and invasive insects slowly eating away their natural landscapes. They quickly realized they needed help to understand their woods better and how to treat them for improvement. So when Pam and John learned about the Family Forest Carbon Program, it wasn't long before they became early adopters of the program for their state.

By enrolling in the Family Forest Carbon Program, Pam and John unlocked the tools needed to improve their woods and sustain their favorite outdoor activities. They were seeking a program that supported the healthy growth of the trees on their property while also preserving the option for small harvests in the future. Every so often, Pam will carefully select a tree to cut for her wood crafting projects and personal uses. The Family Forest Carbon Program's approach to improved forest management gives them the flexibility to pursue their personal goals with the woods while steadily improving its environmental quality and carbon sequestration rate over time.

The program also provides the couple with financial support to achieve their conservation goals for the land. While they already had a long-time consulting forester they worked with, the Family Forest Carbon Program covered the costs for the forester's work and any needed updates to their forest management plan. The program also offers an annual stipend—calculated based on the carbon sequestration rate of their woods—that the couple can put towards spending on new equipment and additional improvements to their land. Pam and John plan to use this stipend to combat the invasive species encroaching on their property. Knowing they have funding and technical support is one less thing for the couple to worry about. They can hike more confidently and pursue their passion projects easier knowing their land is in good hands.



Forest owner, John Huerta, walking their property in West Virginia with AFF Director of Carbon Market Development, John Ringer.



Forest owner, Pam Byrne, talking with John Ringer, AFF's Director of Carbon Market Development.

In the long term, Pam and John hope to do their parts in being the best advocates for the environment they can be. The history of Elkins, West Virginia is of rich wilderness and natural history. With the help of the Family Forest Carbon Program, the two are beginning a new legacy for their land – one that preserves its rich history and improves its environmental quality for future generations. What will be the story of this land ten years from now? Only their imaginations can limit the possibilities. It's one more "good project" that Pam and John are excited to pursue. And they've already begun sharing the good word—inspiring friends and neighbors to consider the program for their woods and beginning new chapters of their own.

If you are landowner interested in the Family Carbon Program, visit familyforestcarbon.org today to see if you are eligible. 🌲

The Family Forest Carbon Program helps landowners **care for their woods while helping the planet.**

In addition to the habitat and quality water family forests provide, they also help the planet by sequestering and storing carbon. The Family Forest Carbon Program creates a marketplace for landowners by selling carbon credits to environmentally-conscious companies who are working to reduce their carbon footprint, so landowners can bring in income to help them achieve their goals for their land.

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A Walk in the Woods

Family Forest Owner Perspectives

BY TOM GRESHAM

Chris and Christina Anderson

Chris and Christina Anderson are keeping in mind a simple phrase as they begin to teach their two young daughters about stewardship of the land, particularly as it relates to the family's 232-acre Tree Farm located on east Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau, "Use it but care for it."

"A lot of times we as a society will use up the land and waters and we'll miss the caring part, but the caring part is really where the enjoyment comes from," Christina said. "That phrase, 'Use it but care for it,' is what being a steward of anything really is. And that's why we call our farm CRC Stewardship Ridge."

Chris's parents first purchased a 147-acre portion of the property that would become CRC Stewardship Ridge in 1995. Chris has managed the land ever since. He gradually grew more educated in the intricacies of tree farming out of necessity, motivated in part by the regional pine beetle devastation of 2000, and managed and expanded the property over the years guided by a management plan. In the ensuing two decades, Chris has hand-planted thousands of trees, including indigenous saplings, shortleaf pines and loblolly pines. The property earned American Tree Farm certification in 2012.

"The ultimate goal was to create a multi-story, multi-aged, mixed hardwood and shortleaf pine property," Chris said. "To date, the entire 232 acres is now fully involved in the forestry Tree Farm, minus the homestead areas."

Christina and Chris agree their devotion to the family property has been "a labor of love."

"It's been a lot of work to get here, and it's going to take a lot of work from here forward," Chris said. "But we love it."

Chris said the couple has taken advantage of "every program available" from both the Tennessee Division of Forestry and the National Resources Conservation Service, resulting in steps ranging from prescribed burns to monarch waystations and meadow areas that have been replanted with native pollinator plant life. In addition, the Andersons have been highly active advocates for the state's Tree Farmers, including Chris serving as the American Tree Farm System state chair in Tennessee.

"There's been a lot of tree planting done here, and now it's more or less about the maintenance and management of it all," Chris said.

The Andersons love to hunt, fish, hike and ride the trails in their side-by-side vehicle, and both Chris's parents and his brother also live at CRC



Christina and Chris Anderson with their two young daughters, who are already learning to be good stewards of the family's Tennessee Tree Farm. *Photo Credit: Christina Anderson*

Stewardship Ridge and actively enjoy it. In that spirit of recreation and engaging with the land, Christina said she and her husband feel passionate about getting their daughters out on the property and teaching them about its distinctive wonders so that they will understand and appreciate them.

"We know how special it is for us to have the opportunity to have access to the outdoors every day," Christina said. "It's a huge blessing to have that availability to get out whenever and however and how often we choose to. We feel very blessed and fortunate to be able to have this opportunity to share this with our little ones."

Jody and Jim Kerns

Jim and Jody Kerns bought their first 35 acres of land in Edgewood, Iowa, in 1986 when they were newlyweds in their early 20s. Coincidentally, Iowa State University held a forestry field day soon after the purchase. The Kerns attended out of curiosity and immediately recognized the promising forestry potential of their property.

"It really spun into a passion for us after that," Jody said.

Today, the Kerns own approximately 300 acres of timber, along with Conservation Reserve Program and prairie land. They have expanded their property with careful planning and hard work over the years. In fact, they have done all their tree plantings themselves, often with the help of their six children, who now range in age from 31 to 16. The children were tapped to work on the property in part because Jim and Jody thought it was important for them to be engaged in taking care of the family land.

"We wanted to build a legacy with our children that's for our children," Jim said.

The Kerns have aimed from the beginning to grow high quality hardwoods, particularly walnut and oak, while caring for the land and using it for recreation, especially hunting.

"We learned that we could accomplish both of those goals," Jody said. "We could grow high quality trees while using the property with our family. Over the years, that's been critical to us—to raise our kids to have fun out in the woods while still caring for the land the way that it should be cared for."

Community also has been at the core of their approach to their land. The Kerns host two annual field days on their property for schoolchildren, and activities include tree planting sessions, a native plant walk, searching for animal tracks, a nature art project, a nature scavenger hunt and a bonfire (with s'mores). In addition, through their encouragement, a nine-week high school environmental science course is based on their property, giving students intricate insight into forestry that they can carry to college. Not to mention regular visits by the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts and 4-H, among other groups.

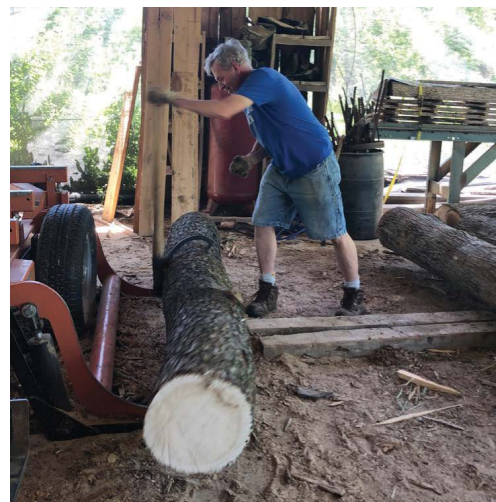
"It's just kept growing and growing," Jim said. "We've felt like we're fortunate to have this great land, so we should share it."



Jim and Jody Kerns during a tree planting.



Jim (and his sack of morels) standing next to a 41" red oak tree. They love the challenges of growing high quality oak and Walnut trees in their woodlands.



Jim rolling a log he harvested onto the sawmill. Not only do they love to grow trees, they also enjoy doing salvage harvests and using the wood for special projects.

The Kerns, who have been honored as both the Iowa Tree Farmers of the Year and the North Central Regional Tree Farmers of the Year, managed a tree planting last fall that was their first in several years. All six of their children participated, as did two sons-in-law and a daughter-in-law. Even their young granddaughter was there playing in the dirt (a grandson has since been born). Jody and Jim could sense a growth and maturity in their kids and their relationship to the work, as though they were taking more ownership of the effort than they had when they were younger and were enlisted to help.

“It was one of those wild moments where as a parent you go, ‘Wow, they get it. They understand what we’re doing and what this is all about,’” Jody said. “You could see their appreciation for it, and that was just really special for us.”

Struck-Riddick Family Forest

Carl Struck and his wife, Johanne Riddick, love edible mushrooms. When they bought 40 acres of forested land in northern New Mexico in 1987, they would walk across their property looking for the tasty fungi. For the owner of land that was rich with trees, it gave Struck a different outlook from the start.

“Most people are looking up at the trees all the time, but I was looking down at the ground,” Struck said. “It changes your perspective.”

Struck became highly attuned to the condition of the soil on his property, particularly the abundance of patches of bare mineral soil wherever there was a clearing in the forest or where the litter was not landing on the ground. The Struck/Riddick family forest, which is located 8,500 feet above sea level, largely comprises ponderosa with juniper, gambel oak and white fir understory. The land is semi-arid and had been overgrazed “pretty badly” by sheep in the first half of the 20th century, Struck said. The project of healing and strengthening the soil has been an ongoing project for Struck over the past three decades—one that he loves.

“It’s a wonderful thing to have a small piece of land of your own like these 40 acres,” said Struck, who studied forestry in college. “I get to experiment a lot, try different things, and I love that. It’s very rewarding.”

Struck’s efforts for his soil have been based on the tenets of regenerative agriculture, especially what he calls the number one rule: “Keep your soil covered.” Among the most important steps that Struck took was using a wood chipper to chip the slash generated on his land and then distributing those chips on bare soil, cooling the soil and making it better able to absorb moisture.

“It’s hugely satisfying to cut a tree down, pull the chipper right up to the tree, put the branches in the chipper, load up my truck with the chips and then drive around and put them down wherever there’s a bare mineral soil patch,” Struck said. “I love that process.”



Carl Struck and Johanne Riddick bought their northern New Mexico property in 1987. *Photo Credit: Johanne Riddick*



Carl Struck and Johanne Riddick have developed a wildlife pond in a meadow that has enriched the biodiversity of their property. *Photo Credit: Johanne Riddick*

Before he was a Tree Farmer, Struck worked as a songwriter in Nashville, writing songs for such artists as the Judds and Lee Greenwood. Struck put those talents to work to write and record a song, “Trees,” which touches on his belief in the importance of the human-nature connection. The song, which is available on Soundcloud, includes such memorable lines as “Trees/Silently giving/A model for living/Without making a fuss.”

The Struck/Riddick property became a certified Tree Farm in 1992, and they were named New Mexico Tree Farmers of the Year in 2019. They also were honored as New Mexico Healthy Soil Champions. Struck and Riddick hosted a free summer camp for children for years, and they continue to invite groups to camp on the land or hold picnics and retreats. They developed a wildlife pond in a meadow that has enriched the biodiversity of their property, making for a particularly good centerpiece for a visit.

“We love the opportunity to share all this with people in our community,” Struck said. “Every time someone comes here, I get another chance to share with them what we’re doing here and why we’re doing it.”

Pam Wells

When Pam Wells talks about her favorite topic, Wells Demonstration Forest, the 1,058-acre parcel she owns in Maine with her husband, Bryan, one phrase gets repeated often, “I just love it.”

Wells has an abiding affection for her land, and she aspires to explore every inch of it, letting her curiosity steer her in whatever direction it fancies. When she wanted to catch sight of a bobcat she knew to be on her property years ago, she visited a blind every day for six weeks until she not only got to see it but captured a pristine photo of the creature with her long-lens camera.

Depending on the day and season, she might take her dog, Rosie, a Nova Scotia Duck Toller, on a walk through snow-covered trails or allow her to splash through Sunkhaze Stream, which runs through her property. Wells is always on the lookout for flowers, mushrooms and a range of wildlife—from salamanders, snakes and wood frogs to moose, grouse and deer. The property’s proximity to the adjacent Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge means that it is blessed with a particular abundance of wildlife, said Wells, an accomplished and avid photographer who has donated images to conservation organizations.

“We have just so much of everything,” Wells said. “It’s great.”

Perhaps most important of all of Wells Demonstration Forest’s riches are the trees.

“I really love those trees. All of them,” Wells said. “I just want to be outside with them all the time.”

Wells grew up in Bangor finding refuge in the woods and vowed at a young age to own her own forest. Wells began her career working in the children’s mental health field for 20 years after earning a master’s degree in social work at the University of Maine. Eventually, she returned to school to take forestry and river ecology classes. She also volunteered at Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.



left: A yellow warbler spotted at Wells Demonstration Forest. Pam Wells is an accomplished photographer who has donated images to conservation organizations. *right:* A broad wing hawk seen at Wells Demonstration Forest. Pam Wells relishes the opportunity to seek out wildlife on her property year round. *Photo Credits: Pam Wells*



Pam Wells and her husband, Bryan, bought Wells Demonstration Forest in 2004. *Photo Credit: Pam Wells*

She and Bryan purchased their property in 2004. A logging company had clear-cut the land, and the Wells went to work restoring the forest—work they have diligently continued in the years since. The Wells have welcomed the public to their property over the years, and Wells has held forestry workshops and mentored women interested in the field who have since advanced to become professional foresters.

Wells has worked closely with forester Kirby Ellis on management of the property with a focus on sustainable forestry. Wells, who was named Maine’s Tree Farmer of the Year in 2017, loves being a hands-on forester, particularly using a chainsaw—“I love the way the trees smell after you cut them,” she said.

Wells enjoys the collaboration that managing the land requires, too.

“It’s really interesting,” she said. “And I love getting together and just saying, ‘We’re going to figure this out.’”

Wells said no matter the time of year or weather she remains excited to get out and explore. It’s an escape that reliably delivers. Her cell phone doesn’t work out in the forest, she notes.

“And I just love it.” 🌲



Creating a Community of Engaged Family Forest Owners at AFF's 2022 National Leadership Conference and Virtual Landowner Convention

BY ANGELA WELLS

DIRECTOR, AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

“We have to find ways to tell more people our story,” so proclaimed author and second-generation family forest owner Ann Stinson in her keynote remarks to a group of over 200 family forest owners and forestry professionals at AFF’s National Leadership Conference and Virtual Landowner Convention, held March 30th, 31st, and April 1st this year. During her 45-minute address, Ann wove together excerpts from her book, *The Ground at My Feet: Sustaining a Family and a Forest*, called on her experience as a schoolteacher to lead the crowd in small-group exercises that evoked their own creativity, and reminded us that the way we care for forest land is entwined with the way we care for the people around us.

This was just one of many highlights of the three-day event, which kicked off with a day of learning and sharing between American Tree Farm System (ATFS) staff and volunteer leaders from 35 states. Together, they explored the conference’s central theme of how to create and sustain a community of family forest owners who are connected to the resources they need and a group of supportive and knowledgeable peers to help them reach their objectives. When asked for their definition of engaged, ATFS state program leaders brought forth descriptions like, “committed,” “involved,” “active,” and “ready to work.” Later, small groups offered insights on the types of resources and support necessary to cultivate and sustain an engaged conservation base that is essential to ensuring that family forests continue to be productive, healthy, and a legacy for the people who steward them.

The evening of the second day brought together ATFS leaders and members, as well as participants from the Family Forest Carbon Program, developed by the American Forest Foundation and the Nature Conservancy, to recognize the

achievements of several distinguished caretakers of family forest land. Bob Burns and Mary LaHood of South Dakota were honored as National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year (see spring issue of *Woodland Magazine*), while Hunter Fodor of Michigan was presented with the National Inspector of the Year Award. Greg Marshall, longtime Tree Farm supporter and employee of the Florida Forest Service, received the National Leadership Award. In addition, AFF presented a special recognition in the form of a Lifetime Achievement Award to Kathleen Wanner, who will retire this year after a career of advocating for family forest owners as the executive director of the Vermont Woodlands Association.

The final day of the conference comprised content by landowners, for landowners, with a diversity of presenters from around the country made possible by the circumstances of a virtual gathering. Concurrent sessions addressed topics including family legacy on forestland, the ways in which family forest owners are opening their woodlands for community benefits, woodland owner-made products and marketing, and the use of trail cams, drones, and mapping to catalog the diversity of family forests. In the final session of the day, formal presentations gave way to virtual networking rooms in which participants sought or offered advice and commiseration with their peers on the issues most important to them. Based on the activity in these sessions one thing is certain: there is no shortage of stories or storytellers within the ranks of people who care for family forest land.

Moving forward, AFF hopes to offer more opportunities for learning and sharing in different formats, especially those that connect us over different geographies. We hope you can join us for a virtual or in-person event coming to your neck of the woods soon. ▲

IMPACT FEATURE

A Sanctuary of Green in a Charred Landscape

BY LAUREN BRENNER, PHOTOS BY JADE ELHARDT

In 2021, when the Dixie Wildfire ravaged northern California, Sutter Roger's forest became one of the few places in her community where stands of green trees remained.

"The Forest Service side is black; not a tree left," Sutter described the Plumas National Forest land adjacent to her property. "So we feel really lucky. It's a little sanctuary up here. There was a lot of burning, but we still have green trees."

The small sanctuary of Sutter's property—Coppercreek Camp—isn't by luck. Instead, it's thanks to her family's proactive effort to manage their forestland and the support of the American Forest Foundation's My Sierra Woods Program.

Sutter's grandparents bought the land more than 70 years ago to start a summer camp. Her grandfather cleared room for cabins and gathering spaces then had the remaining forest logged to thin out the stand and provide room for new growth. Sutter's mother also maintained the health of the forest through logging and other management practices.

"Outside of our area, there's a bit of a dirty connotation with the word 'logging,'" Sutter admitted. "People think you're clear-cutting the whole place. So instead, I tend to use 'thinning' or 'forest management' when I talk to people."

Sutter understands the knowledge gap between the general public and forest management best practices. She also knows the challenges private forest owners experience in learning how to begin managing their land.

When Sutter Rogers and her husband Taylor took ownership, they knew they couldn't leave their forests' health to chance, but they also knew they couldn't handle the task independently.

AFF has 40 years of experience helping landowners overcome barriers to forest management—such as high costs of treatments and difficulty accessing technical assistance. "Most landowners know they want something done, but they've heard it's expensive, and you have to trust who is coming on your property. So getting started can be intimidating," admits Chantz Joyce, AFF's California Conservation Manager and Registered Professional Forester. "We launched the My Sierra Woods Program to help landowners take that initial step and to support them through the complex and expensive process of fuels reduction."

PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE

Best practices for forest management have evolved considerably over the last century, and forestry experts advocate a return to historical methods for protecting forest health and mitigating catastrophic wildfire risks.

For generations, Native Americans stewarded the land. A key component of their stewardship practices included prescribed burning, where they would selectively burn specific landscapes once a generation to remove the dead trees and little shrubs, create wildlife habitat, and prevent accidental wildfires.



The Rogers Family (right) meeting with their forestry professionals on their forest property after the Dixie Fire.

When European settlers arrived, they feared forest fires and eliminated the practice of monitoring but not extinguishing wildfires as a management style. The creation of the Forest Service in 1905 effectively eliminated all prescribed burning until the late 1970s.

The Forest Service policy combined with a severe reduction in strategic logging on national forest land led to two generations' worth of fuels to build up across the landscape, making modern forest fires hotter and far more dangerous to manage. Dead trees, low shrubs, and small trees act as a ladder for manageable understory fires to reach the canopy and become raging "crown" fires—which burn hot and move quickly across the landscape.

This is not just a federal lands issue. When logging stopped on national forest lands, mills left the area, leaving private forest landowners with nowhere to take their trees and no way to pay for clearing. Today, more than one-third of the acres at a high risk to fire are on private lands.

Recent wildfires are evidence of this reality. Nearly 1 million acres burned in the Dixie Fire in 2021; a grim milestone for a single fire event, but not an outlier. The National Interagency Fire Center no longer considers fires that consume more than 100,000 acres exceptional. Instead, they've become common events.

CULTIVATING A HEALTHY FOREST

Landowners can improve their forests' resilience through science-based management practices.

In California, private landowners have access to several programs administered by the state and federal government as well as private organizations to improve forest health, soil health, and water quality. These programs connect landowners with technical experts and often help offset the costs of treatment projects.

Sutter knew the risk of a fire devastating Coppercreek Camp wasn't a matter of if but when. So, in 2019, she and Taylor start-

ed to make some calls to their local Fire Safe Council, Natural Resource Conservation District, and Fire District Association. They wanted to take action to protect their forestedland.

Sutter and Taylor filed for a federal program called the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The program is one of many administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service to incentivize private landowners to take action on their land.

But unfortunately, the grant was limited. "Our property is over 200 acres. The NRCS program granted us resources for something like 20-40 acres and required hand-thinning. We quickly realized that wasn't practical for the rest of our land," recalled Sutter.

Luckily, the contractor she worked with knew about another opportunity, one that offered help with mechanical thinning—the My Sierra Woods program.

"The My Sierra Woods program allowed us to use mechanical labor from a local business. That made thinning our entire forest a quicker and easier job," described Sutter. "We started with 40 acres in Phase 1, then added another 60 to 80 acres in Phase 2. With mechanical labor, we were really able to treat a majority of the property quickly, rather than taking years to do it by hand."

My Sierra Woods was created in 2017 by AFF, in partnership with CAL FIRE and the California Tree Farm Program, with the goal of helping private forest landowners take action to reduce risk and restore forest health. In 2018, the My Sierra Woods partnership received a \$9M California Climate Investments Forest Health Grant to deliver technical and financial

assistance across 12 northern California counties—Siskiyou, Modoc, Trinity, Shasta, Lassen, Tehama, Butte, Yuba, Plumas, Nevada, Sierra, and Placer.

Over the last four years, My Sierra Woods has connected over 500 landowners collectively owning 360,000 acres with technical assistance through registered professional foresters. The program has further supported 200 landowners, collectively owning over 19,000 acres, in conducting fuels reduction treatments on their land.

“We recognize it’s not an easy process to find those resources and access them. That’s where we come in—our program coordinates the agencies and experts. We smooth out the process, so it’s streamlined, which often helps minimize the cost along the way.”

After My Sierra Woods connected all the dots, Coppercreek Camp was ready for action. In Phase 1, the program helped Sutter and Taylor thin out 40 acres of forest on the outskirts of their camp area. By doing this, they created a mosaic style, meaning they removed some trees from the stand to reduce density and improve the growth of healthy trees.

Closer to the camp buildings, they thinned the trees, but not as intensely. More clusters of trees were allowed to create a natural feeling for campers. Some small and medium trees were kept, unlike the method around the outskirts of the camp.

By the time the team could start Phase 2 on Coppercreek Camp, the effects of the pandemic had reached the timber market. With nowhere to send the logged trees, the plan shifted. Instead of a full thinning treatment, the 60-some acres in Phase 2 focused on clearing

and chipping underbrush and smaller trees.

According to Sutter, the difference between these management practices is evident in the aftermath of the Dixie Fire.

WEATHERING THE DIXIE FIRE

On July 22, 2021, the Rogers’ received their first evacuation notice. The Dixie Fire, which started earlier that same month nearly 60 miles away, was now within striking range of Coppercreek Camp. Nearly an unheard-of spread for fires in the area.

“It would have to be a mega-fire to get to us,” Sutter recalled thinking when she heard the evacuation notice. “We’ve had a lot of fire in that area before and never worried about them getting to us.”

One side of their property held a burn scar from a fire the previous year and they recently had their forest thinned. Even though Sutter felt their property was safe, the family decided to follow the evacuation notice and move their horses off their land in an abundance of caution.

When the evacuation order lifted on August 1st, Sutter and her family returned to their home. There was still an entire town between the Dixie Fire and Coppercreek Camp; Sutter didn’t feel their land was under severe threat. Even when an evacuation order returned for their area, the Rogers’ decided to hold out. Taylor is a volunteer firefighter who had access to information and real-time data on the fire—the family felt safe.

By August 3rd, however, the weather had shifted.

“This time, the wind was blowing, and the weather was extreme,” Sutter said. “We felt a shift in seriousness and decided to leave.”

Sutter and their two children evacuated to a friend’s home while Taylor waited for the worst at the local fire department. The family, separated, hoped for the best but braced for the worst when they heard the fire had finally arrived at their property.

“It was too dangerous for firefighters to do anything at our property,” Sutter said. “It was the classic fire story you hear now—fire tornadoes and all of it.”

The Dixie Fire covered a significant distance in one day, reaching Coppercreek Camp on August 4th. Unfortunately, it would be two days before firefighters—including Taylor—would be able to reach the property safely.

“It was tragic. It was crazy,” Sutter said, still in near disbelief of the damage. “The initial call from Taylor was, ‘I’m alive, I’m here trying to get into camp, but the power lines are down, flames are everywhere.’ He said our house survived. It’s in the forest on the edge of the thinning.”

Over the next three days, Taylor returned to the property for as long as it was safe. Each day, he discovered more of the damage done by the Dixie Fire.

The creek that runs down two sides of the property—where mechanical thinning wasn’t possible—acted as a wick for the flames. The forest in that area burned the hardest. It took with it the cabins and bike house with nearly no trace they had ever existed.

By the time Sutter could safely return to the property, the smoke had cleared. Looking out from the ridge, she could see the small patches of green trees. The mosaic-style thinning worked—the trees on the outskirts of the camp remained.



According to Sutter, the difference between these management practices is evident in the aftermath of the Dixie Fire. The thinned areas withstood the wildfire better.

AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

Today, the national forest around Coppercreek Camp is a sea of black spires and scorched soil. The concern now for the landscape is soil erosion, dead trees near buildings, and the loss of habitat.

Though, the process of rebuilding a forest isn't as simple as rebuilding a home. Without assistance, forested land can take 20 years or longer to return to some normalcy after a wildfire.

Sutter and her neighbors are waiting on a decision about a class-action lawsuit in response to the wildfire. But she's also looking to public and private programs that can help her family replant trees and help with the natural regeneration of the forest.

"We want to get rid of the burned stuff before the next fire season and replant," explains Sutter. "But we don't know how to do that the right way."

Despite the work ahead for Sutter and her community, she's optimistic about the future.

"The Forest Service side is black, not a tree left. So, we feel really lucky, and we will rebuild,"

Sutter said with an audible sigh of relief. "There's another property down the street that thinned their forest. That property and ours are the only dots of green in this blackened forest."

Nearly a year after the devastation, the Rogers family are turning their attention to their community. Even though their summer camp business won't return, they still have their home and some green, and now they're looking for ways they can help others.

"Our goal is to provide housing for rebuilding crews and anyone who needs it," Sutter said, knowing many of her neighbors would need help in the aftermath of the Dixie Fire.

Sutter and the team at My Sierra Woods know landowners have concerns about changing their forests. But Sutter's not shy when she talks to neighbors and forest owners about their management options.

"Do it now," she insists. "Make it your top priority. We have more extreme weather, a lack of resources for firefighting, and lots of beautiful forests."

Owning forested land—especially in the arid landscapes of California and of the rest of

the western US—requires active management. "The reality is that most forest landowners need to take some action on their land," Chantz clarifies. "If you can't see into or through your forest, that's a sign," describes the veteran California forester. "You want to see places where sunlight is hitting the ground, you want bigger trees spaced out, and you want to walk through the forest without battling big brush."

The American Forest Foundation continues to expand efforts to support private forest landowners in the West, and going forward will be focused on addressing the wildfire challenge from a landscape perspective—not just a landowner-by-landowner patchwork. AFF will be collaborating with the Forest Service through their Wildfire Crisis Strategy, as well as other local and state partners, to create fire resilient landscapes.

Best practices for managing your forest depend on a handful of variables, including the current health status of your forest, the slope of your property, and what you as a landowner want to use the land for. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The only bad option is doing nothing. Just ask Sutter.

"You may not like the initial look of a cut tree stump, but it allows for more sunlight and protects your land. The benefit is worth it. You have to do this now. If you don't, you can see what will happen."

If you own forestland in the Western United States, connect with your State Forestry agency or local Resource Conservation District to learn about what steps you can take to manage your forestland and what financial and technical assistance options are available for your property. 🌲

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—Adam Lord, AFF Giving Tree Member, Arlington, Virginia

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