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TREE FARM BULLETIN, October 2008

Greetings,

On October 4th about forty Tree Farmers, foresters, and others enjoyed the hospitality of Joe and Carol Stehling on their Hidden Lake Tree Farm as they were honored as Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year for 2007.

It was a beautiful fall day. The Stehling property is at over 10,000 ft. in elevation and consists of about twenty acres of Engelmann spruce forest. A short slide show was given that showed what the forest looked like before the Stehlings began their work of thinning the forest. The before and after shots were truly amazing. An overgrown forest turned into a forest of neatly spaced trees. The Stehlings also had some amazing shots of wildlife that had visited their property including a curious bear and a bobcat.

After the slide show Joe led the group on a tour of the property. The thinning that has been done has opened up the forest and provided light and moisture for a lot of ground vegetation to grow. The before slides showed that before the Stehlings began their improvement work the forest floor was devoid of ground vegetation. Now there is almost 100% cover by grasses and other plants. This will help to keep soil and moisture on the property. Douglas fir seedlings have been planted and appear to be doing well. This will lead to a more diverse forest in the future. Joe pointed out a few spruce trees that had been blown over in a fierce windstorm. This is not an unusual occurrence in spruce forests where the trees are very shallow rooted. The blown down trees have been cut up and removed as firewood.

After a catered hot lunch by Mr. C's of Raton a short awards presentation honored the Stehlings. They received a $350.00 gift certificate from Stihl, a major sponsor of the Tree Farm program, which will no doubt be put to good use to purchase Stihl products to be used on the property. Mr. Bill Conley, Colfax County Commissioner offered a few remarks about the importance of forest management to our soil and water and thanked the Stehlings for all their efforts in managing their property.

As the wind began to pick up people headed on down the mountain. That evening snow fell for the first time this season at the Stehlings. A nice footnote to an enjoyable day in the woods. Thanks again to the Stehlings for having us and we wish them well with their future work on managing their forest. In the woods the job is never done.

(From left to right: Harry Morrison, Carol and Joe Stehling)

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT TREES?

How did we find out about the trees of the Coal Age? Lumps of coal and rock dug out of coal mines reveal countless impressions of parts of trees and other plants, such as leaves, stems, seeds, roots.

How can the Forest Service Administer such far-flung forests? By decentralization, and delegation of authority to those on the spot. Less than 2 percent of Forest Service personnel is in the small coordinating office in Washington. This wise policy was established by the first Chief of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, in 1908, under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt. His instructions: "Each locality to be dealt with on its own merits."

Is there a tree that owns itself? Yes. In Athens, Georgia, stands a white oak tree which nobody can legally cut down because nobody owns it or the land on which it stands. Many years ago a farmer who owned it stipulated in his will: "In consideration of the great love I bear this tree and the great desire I have for its protection for all time, I convey to it entire possession of itself, and all land on eight feet of the tree on all sides."

What product comes from tree sap? Maple sugar is a product of true sap. Other products such as resin, turpentine and rubber are from special pockets and not from the sap system.

Are fungi ever beneficial to trees? Yes. Despite causing deadly diseases, their help to trees outweighs their harm. The underground cottony threads of many of our common mushrooms unite with the roots of important trees (including beech, oak, pine) causing them to grow faster, more healthy. This is called mycorrhiza, meaning "fungus-root." The fungus substitutes for some of the tree roots and works more efficiently. It is said that the flourishing southern yellow pines depend on mycorrhiza for their existence.

In the absence of fatal events, would trees live forever? The philosophical answer to this could be yes, based on the fact that all the living cells are renewed each year, fresh and young. The bristlecone pines are over 4,000 years old and who can say how long they will live if spared destruction by the things that usually deal death to trees? The practical answer is that trees do suffer the infirmities of old age leading to death. The rate of food-making by the leaves is much slower in older trees than in younger ones. Older trees do not produce new and vigorous shoots. Wood-making cells slow down. Dead branches increase as growth decreases. Wounds do not heal as easily as on young trees.

Platt, Rutherford 1992. 1001 Questions Answered About Trees. Dover Books. 318pp.