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## TREE FARM BULLETIN

### SPIRIT HILL FAMILY FOREST

### CARL STRUCK, VADITO NEW MEXICO

#### EARLY YEARS

The Spirit Family Forest, owned by Carl Struck and Johanne Riddick, is a 40 acre forest is located at 8,500 ft. on a mesa 3 miles southeast of Peñasco, New Mexico. A narrow-gauge railway operated by the Santa Barbara Pole and Tie Company was present on the Struck property for a number of years around 1910 when the old growth forest was originally logged. There are numerous industrial archeological artifacts on the land from that time. Around the 1950's the 2nd growth was logged leaving very thick natural regeneration of ponderosa pine. From an unknown early date to the present, "open range" cattle have grazed most of the forest. Approximately 10 acres of the 40 have been cross fenced (and not grazed) for about the last 30 years.

During the late 60's and early 70's the property was used as a hippie commune and numerous small structures were built.

Since purchasing the land in 1987 most of the hippie structures were demolished or renovated and in 1990 the Strucks built their passive solar home and a passive solar woodworking shop. In 1992 their Forest Stewardship Forestry Plan was completed and work began on forest restoration practices.



#### RESTORATION PRACTICES

Between 1993 and now seven thinning practices of 2½, five, and six acres have been implemented, each having been completed to New Mexico State Forestry Division standards. Also, two micro fire breaks have been established as well as forest access road improvements. In 2010 a ½ acre, 11 foot deep wildlife pond was excavated with the advice of the New Mexico NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service). It has been a great pleasure to watch life flocking to this new year-round water source! At present it is only partially full due to the unusually dry weather experienced since its construction. This spring the Strucks purchased a wood chipper and began a new chapter in their forest experience by experimenting with mycoforestry techniques. Mycoforestry is the use of fungi to sustain forest communities. It is implementing forestry practices utilizing fungi to transform woody thinning waste (i.e. slash piles) into rich forest soils to promote grass, shrub or tree growth. It's a great way to avoid hundreds of slash piles scattered throughout the woods (potential fuel for fires) or burning those slash piles, which is time consuming, dangerous and leaves ugly burn scars for many years. The Strucks only been chipping our piles for a few months and they are very pleased with the results already! Chip mulch for their gardens, beautiful paths

and grasses coming back to chip covered bare spots are just a few of the advantages to this practice. The Strucks have loved picking and eating wild mushrooms for years so the idea of encouraging mushroom growth by inoculating chip piles with their favorite fungi is a definite bonus!

Adding mycoforestry to their tool box is not only fun and fascinating but has opened their eyes to a new way of looking at and working with the forest. The Strucks have started an experimental mycelium garden to see which species work best in their environment!



### **CAMP COLIN AND YOUTH**

In 1990 the Strucks invited their nieces and nephews, as well as some neighbor kids, to camp for a week in the forest. The next summer they called and asked “when is summer camp and can we bring a friend?” That began a wonderfully rich experience that 23 years later still continues. “Camp Colin”, as it has come to be called, now involves over two dozen campers invited, free of charge, for one week each year. They have a fabulous “staff” of volunteer adult helpers and, former camper, teen helpers that guide the kids through morning classes in woodwork, art, improv theater and building (a large recycled bottle and can structure called the ‘Spirit House’ that has become the “spiritual heart” of the camp). Campers age 7-13 then spend the afternoon in activities ranging from cooperative games to nature hikes or swimming (in the new pond!) as well as other crafts or activities that the “staff” would like to share with the campers. Evening activities might include scavenger hunts, skits, and storytelling or capture the flag and end with singing around the campfire. In addition to forestry talks throughout camp, each year the 13 year olds participate in special forestry projects. In 2010 a film crew documented our summer camp in a 20 minute DVD called “Good Things Start Small”.



In addition to the “camp” the Strucks offer their forest to other groups for meditation retreats, school expeditional learning experiences and other groups needing a forest get-away with minimal rustic infrastructure. The Strucks feel living on their beautiful patch of forest is a gift and an opportunity to give something back to the planet in some small measure. Through patient stewardship and sharing their enthusiasm and space with those interested in a forest experience, they feel a connection with this land in a way that’s difficult to explain but they are sure is shared by all tree farmers across the country!

**FROM THE CHAIRMAN:** I would like to thank Carl Struck, Vadito, NM for submitting the story of the Spirit Tree Farm. As mentioned in the August Bulletin I would like to feature a tree farmer periodically in an issue to showcase the variety and depth of the family forests/tree farms in the New Mexico Tree Farm Committee. Please consider submitting your story with some photos of your forest. Before and after photos would be ideal. Do not worry about format, grammar or sophistication. I only need raw data and your story. You may use this story and the one in the May and June Bulletins on the Gene Harling Tree Farm as guides on the type of information to submit.