



SOUTH DAKOTA FAMILY FORESTS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

July 2020

Bi-Annual Newsletter

South Dakota Tree Farmer of the Year—2020 Harry & Barb Ayer

It is with great pleasure that the South Dakota Family Forests Association, administer of the South Dakota Tree Farm program, announces that Harry and Barb Ayer have been selected as the Outstanding Tree Farmers for 2020. Harry and Barb were selected because of their commitment to forest stewardship and long-range, conservation values.

The Ayer property has been managed under a written, Forest Management Plan, since 1981, and a Forest Stewardship Plan, since 1994.

In fact, their commitment to their property transcends generations, as Darrell Ayer, Harry’s father, was selected the “Statewide Outstanding Tree Farmer” in 1985. The Ayers have exhibited an extraordinary passion to improve their property through forest-stand improvement, hardwood enhancements and meadow-ecosystem improvements. In recent years, the Ayers have done an extraordinary job of improving and expanding aspen stands. Their activities have included removing competing conifers and fencing existing aspen stands along with planting and protecting new aspen trees. As South Dakota Family Forests Association members, the Ayers are playing an important role in maintaining a healthy, sustainable forest in the Black Hills.

In addition to receiving a plaque recognizing their achievement, the Ayers will receive a \$250 gift certificate from the Dakota Equipment Rental Chain Saw Center in Spearfish. We sincerely thank Darrin Donat, of Dakota Equipment Rent Chain Saw Center, for this generous contribution.

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TREE RING RESEARCH

While on a camping trip through the Southwest this February my wife Mary and I stumbled upon the University of Arizona Laboratory of Tree Ring Research in Tuscan. The laboratory is the world's first, largest and preeminent center dedicated to dendronology, the science of using tree rings to investigate climate, ecosystems, and human societies, and their interactions. Tree ring science was invented at the University of Arizona by the pioneer of dendrochronology



A.E. Douglass, originator of the science of tree-ring dating. He founded the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research in 1937 as a project looking at fire scars and ring spacing to better understand past climate and fire patterns in Arizona.

They have expanded to worldwide research from 6000 year old Bristlecone Pines to wood from sunken Roman barges and log tombs from Biblical times. Their research has been able to pin down dates for ancient volcanic eruptions and learn how the sun's radiation has changed in the past.

We were lucky enough to be traveling through Tuscan on one of the three days a month that docent-led tours are offered and were able to reserve a spot on the tour that morning because of a cancelation. Our luck took a dip when we found our 4x4 diesel with a roof rack wouldn't fit in the multistory campus parking garage next to the laboratory. It wasn't long before a helpful campus patrolman guided us to a nearby parking lot reserved for faculty and radioed in our license plate number so we wouldn't be ticketed. By the time we arrived at the building, however, our tour had already entered the lab which is not open to the public.

Happily there was plenty to see in the museum part of the lab which is open to the public, including an impressive cross section of a 1700 year old Sequoia. The lab shared the remaining cross sections with laboratories and scientists around the world. After about an hour of perusing the exhibits we were about to leave when the tour group came out of the lab and the tour leader gave a closing talk about the Sequoia. We stayed and listened in and she happened to notice our SD Family Forest shirts. She came over, asked about the organization and tree farming and decided to give us an unscheduled private tour of the lab. What a wonderful way to end the morning and also to be able to spread the word about our organization.

If you go, the museum is open daily, but the tours are on the 2nd Tuesday, 3rd Wednesday and 4th Thursday of the month. The website is ltrr.arizona.edu and phone number for reservations is 520-621-0984.

Email is outreach@ltrr.arizona.edu.

Be sure to allow extra time for parking!



Thoughts from the Stump (literally)

I would imagine almost everyone has said more than once. “Wow, what a strange year!” Covid 19 has really thrown most of us for a loop and created a significant change in our “Normal Behavior”. I know it has impacted me and also SDDFA. For the last 3 months we have been kind of in a holding pattern trying to find a place to land. Finally now, we are trying to get back on track and make our organization work for our members.

Well, I would like to circle back to early March when the SDDFA leadership participated in a day and half retreat at the Spearfish Canyon Lodge. The “Retreat” was centered on developing a 3 year Strategic Plan for our organization. It is important to note that SDDFA had participated in an earlier “Retreat” in 2015 which had a tremendous positive impact on our organization’s success over the last 5 years.

My hope is that our 2020 Strategic Plan will provide us with as much positive guidance. We were honored to have Mutch Usera, Program Manager of Community Relations at Black Hills Energy facilitate this very rewarding event. Mutch is very experienced in delivering these programs and did a great job. We thank him for his time and effort and we also want to give shout out of thanks to Black Hills Energy for allowing Mutch to provide this service.

We had a terrific group of 14 motivated people participate in the retreat. Our first task was reviewing our last strategic plan and we found that we had accomplished almost all of the 5 year goals and objectives that we had set. Mutch then guided us through a S.W.O.T. analysis of our organization. S.W.O.T. stands for Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats. Once we were done with S.W.O.T. we all had a much better understanding of SDDFA. The next phase of the retreat, Mutch helped us develop 6 Goals or Focus Areas. Goals are like choosing the right road which will take you where you want to go. As Yogi Berra said “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else”

We developed six goals which had to be S.M.A.R.T. or Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. The six goals are:

Produce a branding campaign that will increase the awareness of SDDFA in the Black Hills region and across the state.

Actively recruit new members to SDDFA leadership positions who have special skills and talents

Support the mission of SDDFA through proactive Advocacy Programs

Grow and engage membership through effective events and programs that will keep members active.

Target and enroll potential non-tree farm owners into SDDFA that may have direct relationship with and/or interest in privately owned forests.

Ensure that SDDFA has adequate professional staffing to ensure the success of our organization.



It was an incredible useful day and half and we all emerged energized and focused to make SDDFA an even more effective and successful organization going forward.

Then Covid 19 hit and we lost 3 months to inaction and not knowing what was going to happen next.

Well, it is time to get back to work and start down the road of success and to carry on our **Mission Statement**.

“To provide members the tools, voice, and networks to practice stewardship of natural resources for sustainable forests”. Bill Coburn, CF Chairperson, SDDFA



MANAGING YOUR FAMILY FORESTS

I have been writing Forest Management Plans for private landowners for over 40 years and one of the most important initial tasks that I do is to help the landowner(s) identify the **Goals** and **Objectives** for their forest. Understanding the landowners priorities and vision (Goals) for their forest influences how I evaluate their forest during my survey and also on deciding what type of forest management treatments I will recommend.

You may think to yourself I am not a forester and I do not know how to set up **Goals** and **Objectives** for my forest or that I have never even thought about **Goals** for my forest. It's important to understand that forest management **Goals** are relatively easy to create because they are general in nature, broad in scope and really, just common sense. An **Objective** is more specific, short term and written to support achieving the **Goal**. Your forester should be able to assist you in identifying your goals and then formulating the objectives on how to achieve your goals.

A good example of a goal is the following. A landowner states that he/she wants to "Reduce the risk of severe wildfire on their property". This would be a **Goal**. An **Objective** that would support this **Goal** would be "Increase the spacing between the tree canopies to 15 feet on gentle slopes up 20% and to 20 foot on slopes greater than 20%."

You may notice that I did not say "Decreasing the risk of wildfire." **Goals** need to be achievable. It is extremely hard to reduce the risk of a wildfire occurring since it is generally beyond our ability to control if, when and where wildfires start. A more reasonable and achievable **Goal** is "Decreasing the risk of severe wildfire." You can actually reduce the severity or intensity of wildfires by how you employ supporting objectives. Some additional objectives could include reducing the amount of dead organic material (slash) on the ground, reducing the amount of ladder fuels, improving the mix of hardwoods, especially aspen, and allowing for grazing of grass and forbs by cattle. There are other objectives that could be listed but the most important item is first identifying the **Goal**.

Another **Goal** might be to "Reduce the risk of trees being infested with mountain pine beetle." Fortunately this **Goal** ties in really nicely with "Decreasing the risk of severe wildfire" because many of the objectives are the same i.e. increasing the spacing between the trees. An additional objective would be to improve the age distribution of your forest. Mountain pine beetles focus their attacks on overstocked immature to mature sawtimber trees greater than 9" diameter breast height (dbh) that are around a 100 years old or older.

"Protecting the aesthetics of your forest" is always a popular **Goal**. Objectives could be to make sure that nice looking, quality trees are left or by ensuring that trees along your skylines are not negatively impacted by harvesting.

MANAGING YOUR FAMILY FORESTS PART 2

Another tactic (objective) would be fringing the harvest areas by reducing the harvest intensity along the edges of a stand of trees including keeping the heavier limbed trees to screen (maintain horizontal density) the harvest areas. One of my favorite objectives would be to keep a good representation of big trees, especially old ones on your property. I call these trees “Legacy Trees.” On my own property, I am actually managing the surrounding area around these trees to promote their long term health and survivability.

“Improve wildlife habitat” is another goal that is very common. This is somewhat harder to achieve in that not all wildlife like the same habitat. It becomes easier if you know what type of wildlife you want to favor. Let’s focus in on whitetail deer. Whitetails like to hang out in areas where there is hiding cover, thermal cover, forage and water all within close proximity. The hiding cover does not have to be a large expanse of dense cover but should be just big enough to give the deer a feeling of security. Deer are foragers and like to eat a combination of forbs, brush and some grass so opening up the canopy to allow for more sunshine and moisture to benefit the ground vegetation. Another objective would be to reduce the tree stocking on your south aspects so that the sun’s radiation will melt the snow and keep the slopes open during the winter. These open hillsides, along with the solar radiation, help deer survive the long winters. You can achieve these conditions by how you manage your forest.

One of the primary goals on my tree farm is to “Maximize the timber production.” What else would you expect a forester to do! On my property about 90% of the trees that I am precommercial thinning are less than 3 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh). I know that the average site index on my property is around 70. This means that the average codominant pine tree will grow to about 70 feet in height in 100 years. Research done on the Black Hills Experimental Forest indicates that on site index 70 lands the maximum cubic foot growth per acre occurs at around 140 square feet of basal area per acre. I am spacing my leave trees at approximately 10 feet apart from each other because when these trees grow to about 8” in dbh (minimum commercial size) in about 20 years the average basal area will be about 152 square feet. At this point, my plans are to commercially thin the stand back to about 80 square feet per acre.

Other Goals that you might consider are “Improve forage production for livestock”, “Improve watershed production”, “Protect water and soil resources”, “Maximize financial return”, and/or “Improve forest diversity”. This is not by any stretch a complete list.

Hopefully this will get you started on creating your own set of **Forest Management Goals for your Family Forest.**

Bill Coburn, CF, President, Black Hills Forestry, Inc.

PARKS BRIGMAN TAKES NEW POSITION AS AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM (ATFS) REGIONAL MANAGER



Parks Brigman has left his position as the Forest Stewardship Coordinator with the South Dakota Department of Agricultural Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry to join the American Tree Farm System as their Western Regional Tree Farm Manager. Remaining based in Rapid City, Parks will focus on strengthening, growing and increasing the impact of the ATFS network in eleven western states. He replaces the previous Western Regional Tree Farm Manager Angela Wells who is now the Director of ATFS. The South Dakota Family Forests Association expresses its sincere gratitude to Parks for his invaluable contribution to forest landowners in South Dakota

and wish him the best as he shares his talents and expertise with the western region of tree farm organizations. Parks, we look forward to future collaborations and know we'll run into you wherever good BBQ is served!

SDFFA BIDS A FOND FAREWELL TO ALLYSSA GREGORY

By Mike Ray

In praise of a civil servant.

My family first considered turning our property into a Certified American Tree Farm some fifteen years ago. The task of finding the right forester to help tackle the challenge of a proper management plan on a thin budget with an unclear return on investment proved too daunting. We gave up the idea at the time. The change in South Dakota state law opening the door for small family farms to achieve agriculture land status, alongside the prospect of having to sell off parts of the land to afford increasing property taxes, prompted us to examine the subject again in late 2018.

In the winter of 2019, I was put in contact with Allyssa Gregory – she showed up on our family property in the middle of a snow storm and hiked the entire perimeter for an initial survey. She then sat down with us at the kitchen table and laid out the steps she would take to certify our tree farm. Her patience, perseverance, and willingness to help gave us a great deal of hope and reassurance that this was the right path forward. In the summer of 2019 Allyssa and an intern spent several days working on our property. The comprehensive and detailed forest management plan that resulted from their diligent effort taught us things about our own land that we had not known in three generations of ownership. We will use her work to guide our management of this property, and all the flora and fauna that we steward, for years to come.



Civil servants like Allyssa Gregory, and the government programs they work for, need to be cherished and held up as essential for the proper functioning of our society, economy, and standard of living in this country. The work of Allyssa Gregory (and so many others in government service) is a prime example of how a government of the people and for the people should work. Allyssa's expertise and hard work is literally saving our small family farm. Her effort allows us to keep this highly valuable land in the beautiful Black Hills free of development for future generations to enjoy and benefit from. And for this, we will be forever grateful.

Allyssa Gregory is the State of Maine's new MidCoast District Forester, working out of the Jefferson, Maine office of the Maine Dept of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. SDFFA thanks Allyssa for all her extraordinary work on behalf of South Dakota forest landowners and wishes her the very best in the future. Allyssa, the members of SDFFA will miss you - please let us know when you're visiting the Black Hills, we'd love to say hi!

2020 NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

This year, the American Forest Foundation (AFF) and American Tree Farm System (ATFS) welcomed more than 250 attendees including ATFS committee leaders, inspectors, and placed-based conservation partners to Baltimore, MD for the three-day 2020 National Leadership Community Conference (NLCC). The event focused on how we together, collectively as a community, can strengthen, grow and increase our conservation impact.

Many of the sessions focused on exploring the range of programs, tools and strategies AFF and ATFS have created to help landowners through their journey to forest stewardship. These include, innovative tools for foresters to help them engage a wider array of landowners, best practices for promoting diversity and inclusion among all landowners, programs to help connect with more landowners when resources are limited, new programs to unlock additional funds for landowners to help them cover the cost of management, and developing strategies to ensure that properties are able to be passed on to the new next generation.

Parks Brigman and Allyssa Gregory attended the conference representing SDDFA. Joining them in Baltimore was Abby Walther, former RCF intern and student mentor Abby Walther. Parks and Abby gave a presentation on the mentorship program that SDDFA and RCF have had for the past 3 years. Abby was even able to connect with the program administrator of the Wisconsin Tree Farm program in an effort to plan an inspector training for the forestry club at University of Wisconsin. Also of interest, Wyoming tree farmer Ed Mignery was recognized with the National Leadership Award, which recognizes the efforts of extraordinary volunteers for their leadership in motivating other volunteers, educating landowners and accomplishing his or her state committee's forest conservation goals. We're still awaiting word on where 2021 NLCC will be held, but we look forward to sending some of our great SDDFA leaders!



SEND US PHOTOS OF YOUR SOUTH DAKOTA FAMILY FOREST: WOOD, WATER, WILDLIFE, RECREATION, and **YOUR** FAMILY. Email your photos to: SDtreefarm@gmail.com

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