

Stumbo and Harris are County Tree Farmers of the Year

Jim and LaVonne Stumbo of Jacksonville are the 2012 Jackson County Tree Farmers of the Year. Joining them as the 2012 Josephine County Tree Farmers of the Year are Harriet and Lary Harris of Wilderville. The awards were announced at annual meeting of the Jackson Josephine Small Woodlands Association in late January.

Each year, a County woodland owner is chosen as Tree Farmer of the Year by a team of local judges and is advanced to the state competition as the county representative. This important award is one way in which we, the woodland owners and professional foresters of Jackson County, recognize excellence in woodland stewardship as well as leadership within the local woodlands community. The judges for this year's awards were Lee Winslow of the Oregon Department of Forestry, Marty Main, Small Woodland Services, Inc., Bill Collins, forest landowner and past Tree Farmer of the Year winner, and Max Bennett of the Oregon State University Extension Service.

Traditionally, the Tree Farmer of Year program has been a joint effort of the Oregon Tree Farm system and Oregon Small Woodlands Association. Officially, the Tree Farmer of the Year designation is conferred by the Oregon Tree Farm system. It is possible that a county winner could win the state title, advance to the regional competition, and ultimately become a national winner. This has in fact happened with three Oregon Tree Farmers of the Year, most recently with the Bentz family in Linn County.

Jim and LaVonne Stumbo purchased their 40-acre property in the Forest Creek drainage near Jacksonville in 1993. At the urging of mentor and friend Bill Mackenzie, they began attending OSU Extension workshops, joined the Jackson County Small Woodlands Association, and immediately began doing what they had spent a life doing—stewarding and caretaking—only this time rather than attending to a large group of parishioners or elderly citizens, they began a process of caretaking their 40 acres. They completed a Forest Management Plan in 1994 and, following that plan, completed a small timber sale later that year, removing dead, dying, diseased, defective and otherwise suppressed conifers while releasing the larger and more vigorous of the hardwoods and conifers. Many would have stopped there and waited for 20 years and the next opportunity to harvest, but Jim's childhood farming background wouldn't let him rest and he began an ambitious undertaking of not only noncommercial thinning his entire 40 acres, but aggressively removing and utilizing almost all of the resulting slash for firewood, even though the access for such endeavors required removal, often by hand, over long distances on steep slopes. In that process, they solicited help from local individuals, schoolkids, contractors and the Jackson County Community Justice Crew, many of whom not only found out that a 60+ year old minister would not only work all day with them, but work harder than they did and yet, with the help of LaVonne, still offer a great meal at the end of the day.

Their commitment extended well beyond their 40 acres, however, and two years running, Jim Stumbo served as President of the Jackson County Small Woodlands Association, as well as providing counsel and insight for a number of other beginning small woodland owners. Jim and

LaVonne are excellent examples of small woodland owners that began with limited knowledge, but through hard work, perseverance and a commitment to education and stewardship have helped provide an example of how to move mountains (even if one of those mountains is slash!) and in the process end up with a beautiful, diverse, healthy forest. Congratulations, Jim and LaVonne!

Lary and Harriet took over management of a 120-acre property west of Grants Pass from Lary's parents in the mid-1990s. With a management plan written by Marty Main in hand, the Harris's tackled the steep slopes clothed in dense stands of small trees, interspersed with lots of brush. Dozens of acres have been thinned over the years, with small trees used as firewood or laid crossways on the slope in Harriet's trademark approach to reducing erosion. Much slash has been piled and burned. In addition to reducing the fire hazard, this work has greatly improved tree vigor and growth. The Harris's have worked with ODF extensively to utilize cost share grants to help accomplish the work. Other projects have included road improvements, erosion control and installation of a rain catchment system.

Lary and Harriet make a unique team of complementary interests and talents. When the visitor arrives, it's common to be greeted by Harriet in work clothes, a drip torch or chainsaw in hand. Meanwhile Lary is often at work in his large shop, welding a newfangled piece of custom forestry equipment to help manage the property, like his pick-up mounted log loader/skidder that is a novel low cost solution to moving small trees on steep slopes.

In addition to her work on the property, Harriet is a graduate of the 2008 Master Woodland Manager program. She has hosted numerous tours and classes on her property to demonstrate thinning and other practices to new and inexperienced owners. She has also served on the Medford BLM Resource Advisory Committee for several years.

The Stumbo and Harris's exemplify the do-it-yourself, hardworking approach of southern Oregon woodlands. If you see them around, congratulate them on a job well done.

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