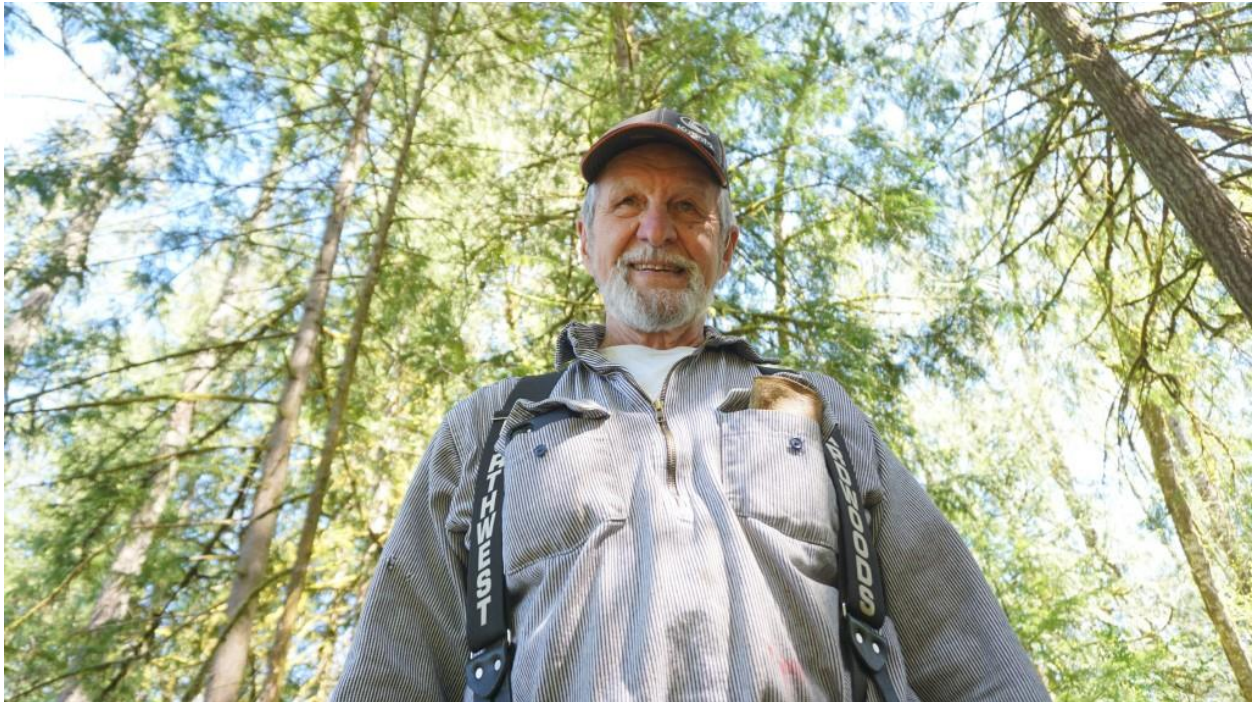


Storing More Carbon for Longevity and Health of Family-owned Forests

A Cowlitz Ridge Tree Farm Profile

By Jeff Gersh, Communications-Washington State Forest Carbon Work Group,

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Doug Stinson. (Jeff Gersh).

“I’m just a caretaker,” remarked Doug Stinson with the authentic modesty that comes from a lifetime of working in the woods. When asked his age, he smiled and glanced at his daughter, Ann, a co-manager of the property, who filled in the blank: “90 is the new 60.”

For first-time visitors, Doug’s opening question may be rhetorical, but it delivers a punch: “What would you rather have here?” he asked, as light drifts through the surrounding cedar grove. “Trees, or houses?”

The answer seems simple enough, but he pointed out that about 40% of neighboring tree farms have disappeared to development since his family purchased this property in 1971.

Other things have changed over the years, the most obvious being the amount of rainfall the property gets each year, about 44 inches per year, a drop of nearly 10 inches from those first years.

With less water, and summers that are warmer and longer by 4-6 weeks, trees can become stressed and more susceptible to insects and disease. So, the Stinsons are responding with alternative approaches, substituting ponderosa and western white pine in places that once grew fir, and planting incense and Port Orford cedar where Western Red cedar was common.

“Everybody’s on a new curve,” Doug said. “I’ve never seen the demand so high for foresters, silviculturalists and geneticists, because we have to reinvent what we’re doing.”



Future forest managers, Alder (left) and Azalea Adams, members of the extended Stinson family. (Jeff Gersh)

We have to plan for a future that we can’t know,” said Ann, the family historian and author of a critically acclaimed memoir, *The Ground at My Feet: Sustaining a Family and a Forest*.

“We must make our best guesses to outpace the changes.”

The Stinsons see promise in incentive payments for storing more carbon in family-owned forests. Until recently, payments for carbon storage, especially in the form of carbon credits, were only available to much larger landowners.

“People ought to look at carbon programs as an opportunity to better manage our woods, and to sustain ourselves long-term on properties that are at risk of development,” Ann said.

One way to store carbon more quickly is by thinning stands that are overstocked. “Think of a stand of trees like a carrot patch,” Doug added. “If you’re gonna have big carrots, you’ve got to thin.”

Of course, another outcome of thinning is the reduction of fire risk.

“When landowners understand that storing more carbon is really about making and keeping our forests healthy, I think they’ll want to participate in incentives to achieve that goal,” Ann said. “What a great thing if we could be paid to do some of this hard work.”

Doug agrees.

“There’s a fierce love of the land among family forest owners, but we don’t get much recognition for it. A carbon program would be an ideal way for the community to show us that the carbon we store, and the oxygen we produce has some value.”



(Left to right) Ann and Doug Stinson; Alder and Ben Adams. (Jeff Gersh)

This profile is part of a series produced by the nonprofit Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA), which supports the stewardship of small family forest owners. The 218,000 small forest landowners in Washington account for about 15% of the state’s forests—nearly 3 million acres. Each year these woodlands absorb an amount of CO₂ equal to the tailpipe emissions from 950,000 passenger cars while also producing roughly 15% of the harvested wood products in the state.

In partnership with the Washington Tree Farm Program and the American Forest Foundation, WFFA is developing policy recommendations for the Washington legislature to encourage the voluntary participation of small family forest owners in markets that pay for storing carbon; and, in management techniques that improve carbon storage. For more information, please contact Elaine Oneil, executive director of WFFA: eonil@wafarmforestry.com.