



Olympic

## **John Kingsbury**

After teaching math and science to junior and senior high school students for one year, John Kingsbury decided to move into the woods and work as a forester.

John graduated from Gig Harbor Union High School in 1943 and then served three years in the U.S. Army. John, “I was a bomber navigator on the island of Tinian. We saw some history. The atomic bomb was flown from our island. In the fall of 1946, I got back just in time. I hadn’t been discharged yet when I enrolled at Washington State University (WSU) in Pullman.”

John describes his timber industry roots, “I was born and raised in Crescent Valley, just north of Gig Harbor. My dad was a marine engineer, but he had been a logger and my grandfather was a pioneer logger back in the days when they used horses and oxen. Pope and Talbot were logging their old growth timber during the 1930s. That really intrigued me, to see all those trucks going by. Sometimes they’d haul a big donkey engine and I’d go up in the woods and watch them, which I realize now was very dangerous.

“I think that all my life I wanted to be a forester, but in my youth I didn’t know what a forester was. It wasn’t until I got into high school where we had to write a paper on what we wanted to do for a civics class. It was there I read *Gifford Pinchot* and other forestry books, and I knew that’s where I wanted to go.”

John graduated from WSU in 1951 with a teaching certificate and a BS in Agriculture. He majored in forestry, but WSU didn’t have a forestry degree program at the time. John started teaching in the fall of 1951 in Castle Rock. One year later he took on a job with the Division of Forestry in North Bend as a forest practice forester. A month into the job a farm forester position opened up in his area, and he took it.

John, “It was a wonderful era. It was after WWII and there was a feeling that we were running out of timber. So, the federal government was giving money to the states to operate a

program called “Farm Forestry” in some places or “Service Forestry” in others. The idea was that you were a government employee and your job was to go out and work with people to help them manage their wood lots, market their products, and improve their management generally. It was all aimed at growing and producing more timber.”

John was hired as a farm forester as part of the formation of the Kitsap County Farm Forestry Association. Kitsap County Extension Agent Dino Sivo originated the effort, as did many other county agents in Western Washington, by forming a citizen’s Forest Advisory Committee in the late 1940s. Within a short time the advisory grew into the County Farm Forestry Association and eventually into the Washington Farm Forestry Association.

An early impetus in the organization was to fight rapidly rising property taxes. The State Legislature progressed with the passage of the Open Space and Designated Forest Lands laws. Because of his job, John took part only in an advisory role, helping to guide rural landowners and keep the trees growing. John, “A lot of that forestland didn’t have merchantable timber in those days. The old growth timber in this area was mostly harvested in the early 1900s, probably influenced by the needs of WWI, and continuing until WWII.

“In the ‘50s and ‘60s there were mostly real young trees; not a lot of merchantable timber. It was a busy time. I hardly dared to go to a meeting or have a field tour because I’d get so many requests from people I couldn’t keep up with them.” John later became the district timber management forester and ultimately the district administrator for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

“When I came to work here people said, ‘You’ll never grow timber on the Peninsula again, the soil is too poor.’ We all believed that for some years. Then we started selling Christmas trees. Some of the guys fertilized the Christmas trees and it showed what you could do by fertilizing on that highly glaciated, poor, hard-pan soil. Sometimes when they fertilized the darn trees grew too fast and got away from them. We learned that by using management practices, such as fertilization and thinning, we could grow excellent, high-quality timber.”

Early in his career John decided that if he was going to tell people how to manage their forests, then he should have some land of his own to practice on. John, “I don’t know what I ever would’ve done with my life if I didn’t have this place. My kids are feeling the same way. It’s such a part of our life, and we would die if we didn’t have it. That’s how we feel, all of us.”

John and his family live on 100 acres in Kitsap County he and his two sons manage. One of his sons is a logger and cuts firewood. John’s other son grows Christmas trees, and his daughter is diving into the politics of tree farming, learning what’s behind policies and regulations and the impact it has on small landowners.

John has formed a limited family partnership with his children, where each person owns an equal and undivided interest in the 100 acres they have. He and his wife are the general partners and the ones to call the shots until they are too old to do so. It’s John’s dream and desire for it to stay timberland. This dream is getting increasingly difficult as the area becomes more developed. Frequently, they are offered substantial sums of money by developers who have grand visions of creating elite neighborhoods.

John holds firm to his dream of saving the forest, recalling a story of how the forest saved a man, “I had a call from an old man west of Bremerton, and he said, ‘You know, I only have a year to live. I had an apple orchard over by Yakima and I got cancer and the doc says that’s it. I decided to come over here and stay with my sister for my last days.

‘I got used to seeing these cars going by with these bunches of green stuff on them. So I asked around and people said that those are brush pickers, hauling their brush into the shed.

These guys make some pretty good money.’ Earl thought he ought to do something to wile away his time. I told him that I’m no brush picker, but I can show him what they do. So we went out in the woods. To make a long story short, Earl bought more land, picked brush, and lived into his ‘90s.”

John’s advice to prospective tree farmers or woodlot owners is to do it! But it’s not going to be easy and you have to make sacrifices.

#### FIVE SPRINGS TREE FARM

John A. Kingsbury, born May 4, 1925

Margaret (Peggy) Campbell, June 30, 1930

Original Member Olympic County Farm Forestry

OCFFA Tree Farmer of the year, 1993

*“When spring came and the kids were all standing there looking out the windows at the hills, and thinking about freedom from school, I was standing right with them, thinking the same thing. I was meant to be in the woods. I love kids and loved working with them, but the woods are the place for me.” – John Kingsbury*

