

North Central

## Don McClure

“My Dad was a homesteader and my Grandpa was a homesteader... back in the mountains,” recalls Don McClure. He continues “There wasn’t even a road there for 14 years, so they had to take their plow and everything on packhorse; regular pioneers. Dad received 120 acres from my grandpa for a wedding present and my parents



inherited land from an old homesteader who didn’t have relatives. They took care of him.”

Nestled in central Washington’s mountains near Nespelem, lives a classic cattle rancher named Don McClure. His face is a mask of his father and grandfather, who worked the same land in the same climate. Don’s grandfather, William McClure, came from Indiana and settled in Spokane, Washington. William and his son Robert (Don’s father) moved to the mountains to homestead. William and Robert McClure never lived on the homestead as a family, but spent enough time there to “prove up” the land.

Don describes his father’s logging days, “He logged with horses. He skidded about two million board feet with horses. To load them they had to hook a chain underneath a truck or a wagon, put two poles up and then they would put the chain under the log and run the chain clear up over the load and pull it with the horses. They didn’t have any other way to load it. It was very slow. In fact, I still have that chain.”

Don graduated from high school in Okanogan, Washington in 1946. He met his wife Gerry when she was ten years old and her father lived on the ranch and worked construction on the Cooley Dam. They got married when Don was 21 and Gerry was 19.

In 1957, Don and Gerry made their first land purchase from a Native American named Barney. Barney had bid \$11,000 on the land and logged it off leaving the small trees. He sold Don the 160-acre parcel for \$10 an acre. That same year, the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) started a program that paid ranchers to prune and thin the thickest stands of forest. Don, “We did about 400 acres of pre-commercial thinning. We pruned some of it up with spurs, climbing up to 30 to 40 feet high. We didn’t use a saw, we just chopped the limbs off as we went up.”

Don continued to learn about forestry and tree farming from various sources including the SCS, independent research and being involved with the Washington Farm Forestry Association. The entire McClure family own about 4,000 acres of land, so Don had no shortage of places to apply his knowledge. Don, “There wasn’t much farmland on the homestead and it is miles from town at a high elevation of 3,500 feet. We’ve lived six and a half miles up the valley since 1922. We have many a cattle ranch. We bought this one, which was homestead in 1940 for \$2,000 and the timber company bought four million board feet of pine for \$3,500.”

Don McClure maintains his 4,000-acre ranch as a sustainable yield, thinning and clearing any trees that pose a problem. “I thought we should go back about every 20 years. But, if you go

back every five years, you'll find trees that need to be harvested – if you have a good stand of timber. Just keep weeding the forest and keep it healthy.”

Don details a management rule of thumb, “In Eastern Washington the roots go out as far as the branches. If the limbs are touching, then they're robbing each other. You can have two trees close together, but you have to have some room around them. The rule of thumb for planting a 10-inch tree is to change the height in inches to feet, where 10 inches equals 10 feet. Then you add 9 feet. So, they should be 19 feet apart. You want to have them close enough together so they will grow tall and not bushy or multiple limbed, to make better quality wood.”

Don's life in the Okanogan inspired him to co-author a book with Jon Evans, titled “Homesteader's Son: the Indians the Cowboys, the Homesteaders and Me.” A second book, “Family, Friends and Funny Stories” is by Don and Dave McClure. Copies of the books can be obtained from Don directly at POB 169, Nespelem, Washington 99155.

One of Don's stories involves a porcupine contest, “There used to be a lot of porcupines but we had porcupine contests. That was way back in the '60s and '70s. I won the contest one year; I turned in 75 porcupine noses. You cut the nose off and you got 50 cents a nose. And then if you got the most porcupines for the year you got a gift certificate for \$75. The year before a guy with 150 porcupine noses won it.

“We hardly ever see a porcupine any more. I saw one dead on the highway a long ways from home the last two weeks, but I haven't seen a porcupine this year. They were really a bad problem because they'd ring these young pines up toward the top. The top would die and the sap couldn't go on up. The big saw mill in Omak sponsored the contests if I can remember right.”

**MCCLURE TREE FARM :**  
**GENERATIONAL**

William Collin McClure, 1858 - 1927

Eslie McClure, 1857 - 1933

Robert McClure, 1896 - 1977

Meryle McClure, 1900 - 1989

Don McClure, born February 15, 1928

Gerry Booth, born August 5, 1930

President Okanogan Chapter (now  
North Central), 1990

