



Northeast

Bob Playfair

“Do It. Just do it!” says Bob Playfair. His advice to future tree farmers comes from his experience nurturing the trees that have nurtured him and his family through the generations. Tree farming is a livelihood handed down to Bob by his grandparents, who purchased the farm in 1910. Bob was born on the farm in 1932.

Long before Bob was born, his parents were involved in forestry. His bond with the forest is genetic. Bob, “My mother, Alexy was born in Chewelah, Washington where her dad was in the sawmill business. At the age of 12, her job was firing a steam engine with wood to power the family mill.”

Bob’s father Ralph bought a half section of timber, cut railroad ties and sold cordwood delivered to town for \$1.50 per cord. Somewhere he found time to marry Alexy in 1928. The first winter they were married they logged 100,000 feet of ponderosa pine to his uncle’s mill with two horses, one dog, a crosscut saw, two axes and a bobsled.

In 1950, Bob went to Washington State University and the University of Idaho, where he graduated in range management in 1955. After two years in the U.S. Army and five years on the family farm, he left to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Yakima. After two years in Yakima, he moved his growing family to Lame Deer, Montana. They spent two years on the Northern Cheyenne and 10 years on the Crow Reservation.

Elmer Kegel certified the tree farm in 1962. Bob, “Eight inch and above white fir logs were bringing \$25 in the deck before July 1, and \$5 less after that date. During the certification process Armillaria root rot was identified in what is now the Sherwood Creek demo forest.”

In 1976, Bob moved to Coeur d’Alene, Idaho to work on the Coeur d’Alene Reservation at Plummer. Since the location was right over the border from their tree farm in Chewelah, Washington, the family used the weekends to catch up on 25 years of neglect. Bob retired from the BIA in 1987, to work full time on his tree farm.

Bob became actively involved with WFFA (Washington Farm Forestry Association) when Mick Lewis, Maurice Williamson and other cohorts twisted his arm to take over the Chapter presidency from Steve Konz. Bob says it’s been a long haul since that initiation, which culminated into a two-year stint as state president from 2002 to 2004.

He is currently managing 3,300 acres in partnership with his sister Thelma Fry. They have brought her five children and his four into the corporate ownership and some of the management duties. Grandchildren are also being employed and the great grandchildren are out practicing their chops, literally, chopping trees and burning brush for marshmallow and weenie roasts.

“I guess sawdust runs in my blood.” – Bob Playfair.

UP THE CREEK TREE FARM: GENERATIONAL

Ralph Playfair, 1905-1955

Alexy Playfair, 1908-1977

Bob Playfair, born July 25, 1932

Joy Playfair, born July 26, 1935

President WFFA, 2002-2004

President Northeast Farm Forestry, 1994-1998