Washington FARM FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

# The Hanson-Fox Award

The Hanson-Fox Award honors individuals who exemplify exceptional energy, dedication, and service to Washington State's small forest landowners. The award is named in recognition of two larger-than-life Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA) members, Nels Hanson and Sherry Fox, whose commitment and leadership continue to inspire the organization. On February 6, 2026, the WFFA Executive Board (EB) established the Hanson-Fox Award, which will be chaired by the current State President. Each spring, the State President will select EB members to determine the awardee(s) to be honored at the WFFA Annual Meeting.

**Nels Hanson (1918-2014)**

Nels Hanson's life touched many aspects of the small forest landowner community in Washington State. He taught or established schools that many of us attended; he helped negotiate legislation that still benefits us; and he established magazines and newsletters that inform us today.

He began his career teaching school in Randle, where he met his wife, Phyllis. After a stint in the Army during WWII, they continued teaching in Randle where they taught many students who went on to work in the woods or the local mills. Later, he served as State Supervisor of Science and Mathematics for the Superintendent of Public Instruction. In 1966, Nels became the first President of Community College District 12, which included Centralia College, Olympia Technical College (now South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC)), and the Garrett Heyns Education Center at the Washington Correction Center in Shelton. Both Centralia College and SPSCC have educated many WFFA members.

Over the years, Nels and Phyllis saved their pennies and purchased forest land, even hiring their students to plant trees over Christmas breaks. Nels became deeply involved in forest politics through the WFFA. In the early 1980s, there had been a push from environmental coalitions to shift Forest Practices Applications (FPAs) to the Department of Ecology. In 1984, Nels was instrumental in helping the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) retain authority over FPAs. He also helped successfully lower the timber tax from 6.5% to 5%. Nels served as the Executive Director of WFFA for over twenty years, including a concurrent stint as President. He also sat on the Washington Forest Protection Association Board from 1984 to 2003. Further details on his legislative accomplishments can be found in the WFFA book, *Stewards of the Land*.

In addition to his political and educational work, Nels established the quarterly *Northwest Woodlands* magazine in 1985 and edited the WFFA *Landowner News* from 1985 to 2003.

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**Sherry Fox (1951-2015)**

Sherry's life was a profound example of dedication to her community, both the local community of Toledo and across the wider Washington small forest landowner network.

After moving to Lewis County with her husband, Tom, Sherry served as the volunteer coordinator for the Toledo School District and volunteered extensively in the classroom. She was also instrumental in founding the Toledo Food Bank in 1987, leading the organization as president and in several other officer roles for over 25 years.

Once their children, Sean and Alicia, left for college, Sherry shifted her focus to supporting small forest landowners in Washington State. She held multiple volunteer leadership roles for the WFFA at both local chapter and state levels from 1993 to 2002. She served as the WFFA Policy Coordinator from 2002 to 2010 and represented small forest landowners and contract loggers on the Forest Practices Board from 2001 to 2008. Sherry's leadership was a testament to her commitment to ensuring small forest landowners remain a critical and viable part of the forested landscape of Washington State.

Sherry and Tom were also highly active in the Washington Tree Farm Program. Their stewardship of Tagshinny Tree Farm earned them recognition as the Lewis County Tree Farmers of the Year (2003), Washington State Tree Farmers of the Year (2004), and both Western Regional and National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year (2005). Notably, they were the first small forest landowners in Washington to receive a Habitat Conservation Plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, agreeing to protect specific endangered species on their tree farm.

Beyond her public service, Sherry was a pillar of strength for Tom, Sean, Alicia, and her five grandchildren. She worked side-by-side with Tom to establish and grow their forestry business, Tree Management Plus, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2029. With their daughter, Alicia, and grandsons, Bennett and Camden, joining the company, it has become a proud three-generation business.