Boyers named Tree Farmer of Year for lifetime of work

By Mary Miller
East County Journal

Imagine planting a crop and waiting 40 to 50 years before harvesting begins. That - in a nutshell - is tree farming, Randle residents Merc and Nina Boyer said, who received the Tree Farmer of the Year award from the Lewis County chapter of the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA) on Feb. 2 at the Veterans Memorial Museum in Chehalis, Washington.

The Boyers explained that tree farming is a "multi-generational" endeavor because of the long crop-rotation time. What they plant now will benefit their children and possible future grandchildren.

The Boyers currently own four tree farms. They purchased and inherited 51 acres near Porter, Washington in Grays Harbor County, which covers the Chehalis River Valley and where they built a home and raised their family. This property goes back in Merc's family six generations to the 1880s.

From 2009 to 2015 they bought three more properties: two parcels are located in the Randle area - 20 acres on Kiona Road, where they built a cabin and spend much of their retirement time, and 37 acres on Cline Road. They also bought 20 acres in Pierce County.

Merc obtained his first piece of forest land when he was 23 years old, in 1976, when his grandfather, Maurice Boyer, sold him 20 acres of the Porter parcel. The land had been logged off by a timber company and not replanted, Boyer said, "It wasn't required then." His grandfather challenged him, "See what you can do with it. It's yours.'"

Boyer continued, "I went to work, a young, single man, and started clearing the brush and making piles and burning. I ordered some trees and replanted it into Douglas fir."

Ric Hallock | East County Journal

Randle residents Merc and Nina Boyer are currently busy planting trees on property they own along Kiona Road, like the Western white pine sapling in the foreground.

When he and Nina got married in 1980, they continued planting trees on the land together. They have planted more than 20,000 trees. He commented, "That's a lot of bending over and digging holes."

Boyer described what is involved in tree farming, "To plant the trees you have to control the (existing) vegetation either mechanically with a brush cutter or chemically spray. And then you thin and you prune - you might do a pre-commercial thinning, you might do a commercial thinning. And you stay the course and hopefully you live long enough that you can get a crop before you die."

He and Nina have now "lived long enough to harvest a crop of Douglas fir," which they did in 2016.

Boyer said that one of their objectives "is to use our tree farm as an experimental forest, a laboratory for learning. So we try new innovative things that may or may not work."

When they harvested the Douglas fir, they decided to do a mixed-species plantation - Western red cedar, three different varieties of alder and Western white pine - which improves forest health and combats

See **Boyers** *Page 2*

Boyers: Enjoy wildlife they catch on camera and see

Continued from page 1

the dryer summers.

Boyer explained that when he was younger, "Alder was considered a weed and I actually was paid through a (government) program to cut it down, burn it, kill it. Fast forward 30, 35, 40 years, it's now a very valuable crop. And the Douglas fir that I planted got root rot and we had to log that prematurely because the trees were dying.

"Well, Alder is immune to root rot - so, guess what? The government that paid me to get rid of Alder is paying me to plant alder." He said Alder is used for pulp, furniture and veneer.

Another endeavor they are involved with is combatting climate change with tree farms. Boyer explained, "Studies suggest that every mature tree sucks in carbon (dioxide), which helps fight global warming, and gives off enough oxygen to supply four adult humans for a year."

He said that one of the best things you can do to fight global warming and improve air quality, is "to plant and nurture and grow trees." The Boyers have planted enough trees to support 80,000 people.

Boyer added, "There's a growing trend to extend the crop cycles (up to) 60 or more years because you are sequestering and storing carbon for a longer period of time."

He is involved with WFFA in working with the State of Washington - coming up with proposals to provide incentives for small tree farm owners to make carbon sequestering a primary objective in their forest management.

Merc Boyer courtesy photo | East County Journal

Celebrating the Boyers being named Tree Farmers of the Year are, from left: Chris Starling, Kelly Boyer Starling, Merc Boyer, Nina Boyer, Rachel Boyer, Auston Cason. Not pictured are Bryce and Ann Jacobson Boyer (who live in San Diego).

The Boyers also follow the four objectives for forest management put forth by the American Tree Farm System - wood, water, wildlife and recreation. The Boyers adhere to these objectives by supplying wood to local mills, taking care of the streams, ponds and wetlands on their land and enhancing their property for wildlife.

Nina said their son-in-law set up critter cameras around their property which have captured images of cougar, black bear, bobcat, coyotes, deer and elk. They haven't seen Sasquatch yet. "We're still watching," she noted.

"A recent activity that we've gotten into since retirement," Merc said, "is bird watching. We've identified between 40 and 50 different species of birds of on our tree farm here in Randle." One of their photos, of a cedar waxwing, was used for the American Tree Farm System's annual calendar.

Nina has also gotten into beekeeping on the farms. She explained, "We have started pollinator trees that help the bees - Linden, Hawthorne and Twisted Locust. Those are supposed to produce a lot of nectar for the bees and pollen."

And they now manage their tree farm for pollinator plants too, such as salmonberries and huckleberries. Nina explained that they have to balance the blackberries though, which are a favorite of the bees but also encroach on the trees.

Along with personal recreational use, the Boyers have opened their land to the public by providing tours - last summer of the farm in Porter, and on June 20 they will be hosting a tour of the Kiona farm.

The Boyers are being considered for the Washington state WFFA award - the annual meeting takes place in Olympia on May 22.

Contact their tree farms at mercboyer@gmail.com.