

The Forest Steward's Journal

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The MISSION of the Forest Stewardship Foundation is to “educate and inform landowners, natural resource professionals and the general public about the science and ecology of forest lands, the many values derived from forested lands and the principles of sustainable forest land development.”

DISCLAIMER: As in the past, we again advise that this information is submitted for your interest only. The Foundation's mission, as indicated above, is to “educate and inform”, not to advocate or persuade. The Foundation takes no position, either endorsing or opposing, approving or disapproving, any of the assertions or arguments in the contributed information.



From the Chair

Who would have thought after the wet spring we had in western Montana that we would end up with what appears to be possibly a historic fire season. Just shows we can never be sure of the weather. At this point fire restrictions are going in place and for those of us who live in the Wildland Urban Interface we had better be prepared for the worst. That means having already prepared our house and property for a wildfire, having an evacuation plan and being prepared to leave upon an evacuation order. Today's advice is, leave your home in “survivable” condition where you have a reasonable expectation that your home can survive a wildfire. You can find out more information on improving the survivability of your home from a wildfire at firesafemt.org.

On a different note, we are pleased to have Glenn Marx's article, “Facts or Fiction. Land trusts and Conservation easements” in this issue. Glenn is the director of the Montana Association of Land Trusts and a board member of our foundation. Our foundation remains dedicated to preserving our forested lands and keeping private forests in the family. That is why we will continue to sponsor the popular Ties To The Land workshops, which help landowners in that difficult decision of passing the land on to the next generation. At this time we have not decided the location of the 2018 workshop.

We welcome new board members Lorrie Woods and John Chase. Lorrie introduces herself in her article “Education for All”. John is a retired high school teacher from Great Falls and forest landowner in Kalispell. Both Lorrie and John bring valuable insights to our board. Welcome aboard Lorrie and John.

Gary Ellingson reports on another successful Forest Landowners Conference. This is our signature event and one that wouldn't be possible without Gary and Northwest Management, Inc. As I have so often said, we would not be successful without having numerous partnerships like this one.

If you have subjects that you would like covered in our journal please contact me.

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8th Annual Montana Forest Landowner Conference- Another Success!

By Gary Ellingson, Vice Chair

Approximately one hundred forest landowners, natural resource professionals, contractors, sponsors and vendors gathered in Helena this year to attend the 8th Annual Forest Landowner Conference sponsored by the Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation and Northwest Management, Inc. The theme was “*Becoming a Better Forest Steward*”. The agenda included a dozen speakers who addressed a wide array of topics ranging chainsaw maintenance to how Montana’s fire professionals prepare for wildfires.

Especially rewarding this year was the support received from a wide range of sponsors many of whom also had displays at the conference. We would like to especially thank Weyerhaeuser, MT DNRC, Sun Mountain Lumber, US Forest Service, Montana Society of American Foresters, Roseburg Forest Products, MT Forest Owners Assoc., MT Women in Timber, MT Tree Farm, MT Logging Assoc., F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber and the MT Wood Products Assn. We would also like to thank Small Lot Wood Tools and Monture Creek Land Management, Inc. for their support as vendors.

Celebrating 14 Years of Dedication



Forest Stewardship Foundation treasurer, Linda Leimbach received an award this spring for 14 years of outstanding service.



SK Fingerjointer

By Ed Levert, Chair

If you're looking for a unique wood product, SK Fingerjoint operation in Libby is the place to go. This value added operation was once a part of the huge Libby mill facility. SK Fingerjoint manufactures long length dimensional lumber (2X4-2X12) in lengths up to 40' long. The operation takes a dimensional board, removes defects and puts the pieces back together into one board. The resulting product can be as long as you like and this is partially where these unique boards find a market. Their product is used in tall walls, floor joists, roof rafters and also have been used in glue laminated beams. Another aspect of the finished product is that you have little to no wane and always have a straight edge for building with.

After Stimson Lumber permanently closed all of its Libby operations in 2008 the finger jointer sat idle until in 2014. At that time Dan Kneller and Ben Scott took the giant step of putting the operation back into production. Today Dan and his brother Dave, own and manage the operation. SK is one of only 3 long length dimension finger jointers in the United States. Employing 20 people the mill is able to produce 20 Million Board Feet a year of finished lumber. Unfortunately the 2x4's and 2x6's don't come from the Libby area. Most of his lumber supply comes from Canada planed and #2 or Btr grade. Interesting, most of the lumber is "white woods" or spruce, lodgepole pine and the true firs. His market is primarily located in the southern coastal areas of the United States.

Described by one former lumber man as a mechanical genius, Dan recently constructed a boiler to heat and generate power for his facility. Another recently added product are pellet bricks, which are similar to presto logs, but in brick shape. With a supply of waste wood this is just one more way to improve the bottom line. So far his total production of these bricks is being bought in the Libby area.

Hopefully SK Industries will continue to expand its operation and eventually be able to tap into Libby's abundant wood supply.



Alword Lake conservation easement in northwest Montana

Fact or Fiction: Land Trusts and Conservation Easements

By Glenn Marx, Montana Association of Land Trusts

The first Montana conservation easement was created back in 1976, and even though since that date a couple thousand landowners have worked with land trusts and public agencies to populate the Montana landscape with close to 2.5 million acres of conserved private lands, there are still many myths and misunderstandings about how land trusts and conservation easements work.

This special article for the Montana Forest Stewardship 1 takes a look at some of these myths or misconceptions through a series of 10 Fact of Fiction statements.

10. Fact or Fiction: All land trusts are pretty much the same.

Fiction. Land trusts vary widely in the areas in which they work, the focus of their work, and the diversity of projects they work on. Three quick examples: The Nature Conservancy is an international land trust working in Montana that focuses on specific areas and key wildlife species. The Montana Land Reliance is a statewide land trust that works only in Montana to primarily conserve agricultural lands and open land. Gallatin Valley Land Trust is a local land trust that works out of Bozeman and features a strong community trail program in addition to land conservation. While there are professional and operational consistencies among land trusts, there are also very distinct approaches to open land conservation.

9. Fact or Fiction: All conservation easements are pretty much the same.

Fiction. A conservation easement is a willing buyer-seller negotiated transaction, and because landowners have different management goals, different financial situations, different property types and different family situations, conservation easements differ greatly in wording and intent. While conservation easements contain common components and some basic elements, they are also written with the landowner's expressed land management and financial goals in mind.

See "Fact or Fiction" continue on page 5

8. Fact or Fiction: Conservation easements can help reduce estate tax exposure and assist with succession planning.

Fact. Sometimes a landowner will work with a land trust on a conservation easement specifically to reduce estate tax exposure and/or to facilitate the transfer of property to the next generation. It should be pointed out that a conservation easement does not reduce property taxes.

7. Fact or Fiction: Conservation easements are just for rich people.

Fiction. Conservation easements can provide a wide range of benefits to landowners, and a recent tax policy change approved by Congress and signed into law expands federal income tax provisions to benefit the traditional “land rich, cash poor” landowner. Depending on the value of the conservation easement and the financial situation of the landowner, it is possible to zero out income taxes for up to 16 years.

6. Fact or Fiction: Montana’s conservation easement law is based on property rights.

Fact. The Montana Open-Space and Voluntary Conservation Easement Act passed the legislature in 1975 and after four decades of use has clearly stood the test of time. The Act allows a very limited role for government, allows flexibility within the context of a conservation easement, and has worked well for Montana landowners and Montana land conservation.

5. Fact or Fiction: Conservation easements were created to conserve forests as well as farm and ranch lands.

Fact. Conservation easements are designed to keep land open and producing all the goods and services that flow from open land...clean water, wildlife habitat, forest health and wood products, farm and ranch products, scenic views and much more. Land trusts have been quite successful at working with large industrial and small and family lumber companies on projects that provide forest conservation and timber volume to mills.

4. Fact or Fiction: When a landowner works with a land trust or a public agency to create a conservation easement, that landowner loses his or her property rights.

Fiction. The action of placing a conservation easement on private land by a landowner is the exercise of a property right, not the loss of a property right. The easement is negotiated by the landowner and land trust or public agency to reflect the landowner’s wishes, consistent with the purpose of the easement, and consistent with state law. Typically, a conservation easement will restrict, not eliminate residential development of the property, depending on the landowner’s management goals. The only way a conservation easement can be considered the loss of a property right is to also consider residential subdivision of the property as a loss of a property right. A conservation easement is not a regulatory tool. It is the product of a voluntarily negotiated agreement.

3. Fact or Fiction: Conservation easements turn private land into defacto wilderness areas.

Fiction. Across about 2.5 million Montana acres conserved by conservation easements you’ll see cattle and pastures, irrigation pivots, agricultural outbuildings and equipment, timber harvests, four-wheelers, horses, machinery, crops and more. An important goal of a conservation easement is to help keep families and their forest or agricultural operations economically viable now and into the future.

2. Fact or Fiction: There is an abundance of information available if a forest or agricultural landowner is interested in learning more about a conservation easement.

Fact. A conservation easement is typically permanent, and is an agreement – a contract – that should be taken seriously and wide deliberation. Landowners should conduct extensive research about conservation easements, land trusts, the financial and tax ramifications of easements, and much more. Landowners should consult with a variety of professionals – attorney, banker, financial advisor, perhaps a Realtor, land trust staff and board members, agriculture groups, landowners who have conservation easements, landowners who oppose conservation easements, and more – to expand their knowledge about conservation easements and their confidence in proceeding toward an agreement.

1. Fact or Fiction. Montana is a nationally recognized leader in both the quality and quantity of private land conservation.

Fact. Montana is among the top states for the number of acres conserved through easements, which demonstrates the stewardship commitment of Montana landowners and the dedication of land trusts and public agencies toward cooperative, voluntary, incentive-based conservation. Montana is also tops in the nation in the number of acres conserved by easements held by accredited land trusts, which speaks to the professionalism and integrity of the land trust community.

Conservation easements present a valuable and beneficial opportunity for landowners and for Montanans who cherish open land. But easements are not simple, they take time to negotiate and complete, and are not a good fit for some landowners. The more a landowner knows about conservation easements, the better. And that's a fact.

Education for All

By Lorrie Woods

As a new board member, I want to thank you all for the opportunity to serve this group of landowners. It is a privilege and honor, and I hope my contributions will bring some value to the members.

A quick introduction- I have been a professional forester since 1977, working in forest management, silviculture, inventory, and access during this career. I have helped with the Forest Stewardship Program, on and off, since 1993. I have retired, but am currently helping the Montana Logging Association (MLA) with the Accredited Logging Professionals (ALP) program. Which brings me to the topic of this article!

The basis of the ALP program is to further educational opportunities for MLA members and others who are interested in our forests. Topics range from contracts to silviculture. It seems to me that Forest Landowners have this same goal. It's a goal of continuing education. To that end, we all can benefit from classes that are made available by all organizations in our state. Our goal in 2018 is to maximize educational opportunities across our state so that all can benefit. Just as an example, I will share some information about MLA continuing education from this spring. Once the 2018 MLA schedule is completed, that will be shared so if Forest Landowners have an interest, they can attend.

See “Education for All” continue on page 7

The Montana Logging Association holds most educational opportunities during “spring breakup”. MLA members come together in our workshops to increase their knowledge and awareness of the business. The level of professionalism of these members continues to go up and it shows in who they are and all that they do.

In 2017, there were 432 total participants attend the workshops. Some people attended more than one, and when you take that into account, 334 different loggers this spring through our ALP workshops. That is a great tribute to all of those who participated, as it takes time and money to do this. It also takes dedication to the profession and the drive to learn more about our business! Keep this in mind if you are going to hire any work done on your property!

As in the past we had a variety of classes. To summarize...

- We held 4 BMP/SMZ workshops around the state with a total of 140 people attending;
- We held 4 Drugs and Bears workshops with a total of 42 attending;
- Active Sustainability Workshops were held in Missoula and Columbia Falls with 42 attending;
- One Splicing and Rigging workshop introduced 9 members to the art of cable and line proficiency;
- Electronic Log Devises for trucks workshops were held in 2 locations, helping 58 log haulers understand this impending regulation; and
- Log Yard Safety workshops had 144 loggers in attendance.

As you can see we covered topics focused on the environment, safety, legal, and business topics that applied to both ALP and PLH (professional log Haulers). Instructors for the above mentioned workshops came to us from private businesses, MSU Extension, Weyerhaeuser, USFS, DNRC and the Rocky Mountain Elk foundation... as well as the Counties who support the Drug Task forces. These folks are an important part of our continuing education and we appreciate their participation and support!

We will continue to touch different topics as we move ahead into 2018. We had 4 MLA members attend the Forest Landowner Workshop and a few attend the Society of American Foresters Meeting in Missoula.

We are trying to get the word out for all educational opportunities as we are made aware of them. My hope is that we will be able to do this for the Forest Landowners as well, and we can all learn together.

The benefit of including, but also reaching outside the Forest Landowner Workshops is that each event presents an opportunity to hear a different perspective and network with others who are also interested in forest management. If you have ideas or concerns about topics that would benefit the forest Landowners please let us know and we will try to address the needs in a workshop for 2018.

Spring of 2018 seems far away, but we will start now, to ensure the education in the spring is of the highest quality and the most appropriate to help you in your continuing education.

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The Forest Steward's Journal is a publication of the Forest Stewardship Foundation. Comments, articles, and letters to the editor are welcome.

Should you join the Forest Stewardship Foundation?

By joining us you become a part of a small but energetic organization that gets things done. We are all volunteers, but since 2011 we have been able to co-sponsor the Helena Landowner Conference and several "Ties to the Land" workshops. We have also contributed, as funding is available, to MSU Extension Forestry to help fund stewardship workshops. Plus, twice a year we publish and distribute over 1,300 Forest Steward's Journals.

We know money is tight, but our dues are still only \$25. We currently have 100 members so you can do the math and see that we don't have much of an operating budget once we publish and mail the Journal. Your membership means a great deal to our continuing success. Please consider joining the foundation by completing the membership application form/envelope found in each winter's edition of the Journal.

Current members and Journal recipients please note: Help us control our printing and mailing costs! Would you prefer electronic or printed copies of the journal? Or perhaps be removed from our mailing list? Please send an email noting your preference to: Linda Leimbach, Treasurer, plleimbach@gmail.com.

<http://www.ForestStewardshipFoundation.org>

Thank you sincerely for your help.

Ed Levert, Chair

