

People & Places

RAISING BOGWOOD

Couple restores wetland prairie, improving fire resiliency on 80 acres

By **GEORGE PLAGVEN**
Capital Press

SCIO, Ore. — At first, the idea seemed ludicrous to Shirley Jolliff and Lee Peterman.

As a couple of self-described “tree hugging dirt worshippers,” Jolliff and Peterman were loathe to cut down any trees on their small woodland property near Scio, Ore., which they have affectionately named “Bogwood.”

But to enhance and restore Bogwood’s namesake wet prairie, Peterman said they had no choice except to remove all invasive species such as English hawthorn, Himalayan blackberry and Scotch broom.

Then they would need to thin the overstocked groves of hardwoods and conifers, allowing native plants to thrive while opening habitat for a rich diversity of wildlife including owls, hawks, bald eagles, coyotes, deer and possibly even a prowling bobcat.

“Our goal, we call it the five B’s: birds, bats, bees, butterflies and Bambi,” Peterman said. “There is so little native habitat for critters ... we can’t save the world, but we can do a little bit in this little part, and do what we can.”

Jolliff and Peterman got help from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, which paid for them to do the restoration work — largely by hand — through the agency’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP.

The project began in June 2017, and finished last fall. The couple was recently named 2020 Linn County Tree Farmers of the Year by the Oregon Tree Farm System, which is administered by the Oregon Small Woodlands Association.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Lee Peterman, left, and Shirley Jolliff purchased Bogwood in 2013. It is near Scio, Ore.

Wet prairie habitat

Coming to Oregon from the San Francisco Bay Area and Monterey, Calif., Jolliff and Peterman were eager to embrace a rural lifestyle.

In 2013, they purchased 80 acres in the Mid-Willamette Valley, about 25 miles south of Salem, and immediately fell in love with the lush green landscape.

It was Jolliff who came up with the name Bogwood.

The property is a perfect rectangle, roughly a quarter-mile wide and half-mile long, that gradually climbs 100 feet to a tree-lined ridge surrounding the mostly flat center.

That ridge essentially funnels moisture from heavy rains into the “bog,” where it sits until slowly draining into the local watershed.

“It’s basically like a bowl,” Peterman said. “It’s not a bog in the traditional sense. It’s just an area that’s damp most of the year.”

Before they arrived, however, the property had been extensively logged, altering its natural character. Peterman said they knew they wanted to restore the ecosystem, but admitted they had no idea where to start.

They joined the Oregon Small Woodlands Association in 2014, a move that

Peterman said unlocked a wealth of information. “It was like opening a book for the first time,” he said.

The association encouraged Jolliff and Peterman to contact NRCS, which proposed the 22-acre wet prairie restoration. Initially, Peterman said they looked at creating a white oak savannah, but that didn’t seem to make as much sense.

With funding from EQIP, Peterman took on the task of thinning trees and removing invasive species, while Jolliff followed behind replanting native trees and shrubs such as red elderberry, red osier dogwood, Douglas spirea and mock orange.

The couple also built a series of beaver dam analogs along a seasonal creek to hold back water, allowing it to remain on the property a little longer for the benefit of plants and animals.

“There is so little (wet prairie habitat) left,” Peterman said. “Up and down the valley, it’s just been wiped out.”

Wildfire resiliency

Walking through a grove of Douglas fir and Willamette Valley Ponderosa pine near the property’s farmhouse, Peterman identified the smaller and scrawnier

trees that have suffered due to overcrowding. He plans to remove them as part of a second round of EQIP funding — this time to promote wildfire resiliency.

“They’re really just taking up resources that the other trees need,” Peterman said. “Even though logging is not our goal, neither is letting the resources be sucked up by trees that are never going to be fat and happy.”

Jolliff and Peterman landed the second EQIP award in the summer of 2018. Part of the work involves cutting smaller trees and branches 10-11 feet off the ground, preventing wildfires from climbing into the tree canopy where they can swell into massive, fast-moving infernos.

While Peterman initially grimaced at cutting down trees, he said they try to replace and replenish as much wood as they can back into the forest.

The couple has reused branches and limbs to build the beaver dam analogs, as well as “bio-dens” scattered around the property, offering refuge to birds and deer. EQIP grants also paid for essential equipment, including a 5-horsepower electric sawmill and electric chainsaw,

Western Innovator

SHIRLEY JOLLIFF AND LEE PETERMAN

Owners: Bogwood.

Size: 80 acres.

Location: Scio, Ore.

Projects: Restore wetland prairie for native species and wildlife, and improve wildfire resiliency across property.

Accolades: 2020 Tree Farmers of the Year, Linn County.

which Peterman has used to fashion wooden fencing and bird boxes.

For several years, Jolliff and Peterman have also provided sturdy hardwood branches to an artisan in Eugene, Ore. who makes 19th-century style brooms. The broomsticks are especially popular with people who play Quidditch, a fictional-turned-real sport from the Harry Potter universe.

“We have our sticks from Bogwood all over the world,” Peterman said.

While the EQIP project for fire resiliency will expire this year, Peterman said their work as tree farmers is never truly finished. There will always be more trees that need to be thinned, and more areas that need to be replanted.

“I have worked almost all my life in various physical jobs,” Peterman said. “I have never in my life worked harder physically, but I can literally and honestly tell you I’ve never been happier at anything I’ve ever started and done.”

Wilco nets record sales, income in 2020

Farm stores, e-commerce experience surge

By **GEORGE PLAGVEN**
Capital Press



Sam Bugarsky

Wilco, an agricultural cooperative based in Mt. Angel, Ore., had record sales and income in 2020 despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The co-op held its 55th annual member meeting virtually on March 4, highlighting overall fiscal gains driven largely by the farm store sector.

Bart Walker, chief financial officer of Wilco, said net sales topped \$275 million in 2020 — an increase of nearly \$35 million, or 14.5%, over 2019.

Farm stores, which account for 80% of Wilco’s revenue, saw sales increase

by \$38.4 million, or 21.2%. That was driven in part by a surge in e-commerce prompted by the pandemic, with online sales increasing \$11.3 million.

“We saw a significant increase in e-commerce demand beginning in March,” Walker said.

Record sales were matched by record net income for the co-op, Walker said, which grew to \$8.2 million. The largest area of growth, again, was seen at the farm stores, which improved by \$10 million over 2019.

Sam Bugarsky, president and CEO of Wilco, said they originally anticipated a downturn in business amid the pandemic. Instead, COVID-19 actually benefited the industry as more people, confined in

lockdown, began working on home improvement projects and took up new hobbies like landscaping and gardening.

“Really, the industry drove that difference for all companies like us,” Bugarsky said.

Though delayed by several months, Wilco did open two new farm stores last year, in Petaluma, Calif., and Lake Oswego, Ore. Two more stores are slated to open in 2021, in Sonora, Calif. and Yakima, Wash.

Other aspects of Wilco’s business also saw growth in 2020. The co-op’s joint venture with Valley Agronomics improved by \$1.4 million, as did the fuels division by \$18,000.

Hazelnut Growers of Oregon, however, saw a \$3.7 million decline in income. Bugarsky and Walker pointed to low kernel prices and limited sales opportunities, with retailers less willing to carry new products on their shelves while struggling to keep up

with runs on food staples and items like toilet paper during the early days of the pandemic.

Bugarsky said it is no secret Hazelnut Growers of Oregon has not performed as well financially as they expected. In response, Wilco hired the Mountain Group, a business consulting firm, over the winter to conduct a study of the hazelnut business.

Upon further review, Bugarsky said they feel HGO is on the right track, and continuing to develop new branded retail products is their best path to success. But it will take more time and investment to get to profitability.

“It’s a long game,” he said. “It takes time to develop new retail products, and get distribution established.”

Wilco and the Mountain Group are now working to find a minority investment partner for HGO that can help accelerate the business’ development. A deal could

be announced sometime later this year, Bugarsky said.

Bugarsky said they are looking for a partner with a proven track record of successfully promoting retail products. “We think we’ll have a good idea in the next 6-8 weeks of where there will be interest,” he said.

In spite of the exceptional world, regional and local challenges of 2020, Bugarsky reiterated the co-op’s combined balance sheet is strong. Wilco’s board of directors have authorized paying out more than \$2.5 million to members.

Looking ahead to 2021, Walker, the co-op’s CFO, said he expects sales will continue to grow, albeit at a more moderate rate. E-commerce should continue to grow, he said, as should propane sales.

“Wilco is very well capitalized and financially strong,” he said. “Our debt level is moderate, and better than the industry average in the industries we compete in.”

Growers’ coolers do double duty for tree seedlings

By **CRAIG REED**
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — Not long after the coolers are emptied of summer and fall produce and products, the cool space on several farms becomes a transition home for seedling trees.

Those coolers are a stop between the nurseries of northern Oregon and southern Washington and the mountainsides of the Coast Range and the Cascade Mountains.

The digging and shipping of the seedlings, the majority of them Douglas fir, begins at the nurseries in December. In order to get the trees closer to their future homes, they end up at coolers at farms like Wesley Orchards and Norris Blueberry Farms near Roseburg and Fern Hill Holly Farm near Astoria, Ore.

The coolers are kept at 34 to 38 degrees.

“It’s just more convenient to have the trees at a centralized location,” said Ben Christiansen, a forester for Barnes & Associates, a company that manages 80,000 acres of southwestern Oregon timberland. “Then we don’t have to drive up to the nurseries every day. Those nurseries don’t have the storage space. Having these farms with their coolers is convenient for us.”

Beginning in December and then a couple times a week, seedlings are delivered in bulk by semi-truck and trailer to the coolers. During a normal planting season from December to April, the Norris coolers store 1.5 million young trees for five timber companies, Wesley Orchards stores 1.5 million trees for five companies and a few smaller timber owners, and Fern

Holly stores 2.5 million trees for two companies.

In the past, Kruse Farms of Roseburg stored seedlings in its cooler for a timber owner until that company built its own cooler. Evan Kruse said the farm’s cooler is available to storing seedlings.

“We want to provide a service, help these timber companies out and make it easier for them to get the trees every morning,” said Paul Norris, owner of Norris Blueberry Farms.

Norris said he was approached several years ago about the use of the coolers.

“They came to me and said, ‘Hey, you’ve got coolers. Can we use them?’” Norris said.

While providing a service, storing the seedlings is diversity for the farms, earning revenue and extending the use of its facilities beyond the summer and fall harvest seasons.

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

TUESDAY-THURSDAY, MARCH 16-18

Oregon FFA State Convention (virtual): Convention 2021 will be virtual due to current COVID restrictions. Website: <https://oregonffa.com/state-convention/>

TUESDAY-THURSDAY, MARCH 23-25

Public Lands Council 2021 Legislative Conference (virtual): The conference will focus on legislative strategies to advocate for the livestock industry in the nation’s capital. Website: <http://www.publiclandscouncil.org>

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

Practical Sensory Programs for Factories and Quality Managers (online): 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. The Practical Sensory Program course is designed around a learn-and-apply model. Each participant will get a kit to have hands-on activities to reinforce the concepts learned. He or she will walk away with practical skills that can be applied immediately. The course fee is \$285/each individual. Contact: Catherine Cantley, 208-426-2181, catherinecantley@techhelp.org

FRIDAY, APRIL 16

AgForestry Leadership Class 41 Graduation: 5 p.m. Red Lion Hotel, Wenatchee, Wash. Celebrate the graduation of AgForestry Leadership Class 41. This celebration was rescheduled from its origination April 10 date. Table sponsorships are available. Cost: \$60/adults, \$20/child. Website: <http://agforestry.org/graduation-class-41/>



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Tom Miller

Miller wins \$500 Coastal Farm & Ranch gift card from Northwest Ag Show

Capital Press

Tom Miller of Turner, Ore., won a \$500 gift card from Coastal Farm & Ranch courtesy of the Northwest Agricultural Show.

A chance to win the gift card in a drawing was offered to everyone who registered for the Northwest Ag Show, which was online this year for the first time ever.

The ag show has been at the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center the past two years, and will return there next year.