

Keasey Century Farm *continued from page 10*

Ralph Keasey, it wasn't until the railroad came through in the 1920's, providing transportation to the local sawmills, that harvesting timber became economical.

Dennis Nelson is currently the acting caretaker of the property. According to Nelson and Ralph Keasey, farming and raising cattle just wasn't economical

before him. As part of their coursework, Nelson and Keasey both created documents that give a legal and historical description of the property, helping create a documented history of the land and the family that owns it.

A walk around the Keasey property is a tour

provide fire protection.

The property has two older stands of native trees, one that is about twenty acres and one that is almost thirty acres. Those stands were harvested in the 1940's and 50's, and have naturally regenerated. They have been commercially thinned and salvage-logged over the years, leaving what Nelson describes as beautiful stands that are over sixty years old. Nelson would like to see these last remaining stands of native timber conserved and, hopefully, sustainably harvested as needed.

There are only a handful of old growth trees still surviving on the property, including a massive 200-plus foot cedar Nelson showed me that he guesses is at least 500 years old. Massive stumps nearby give visitors an idea of the magnitude and the amount of timber that grew here at one time.

The future of the Keasey family corporation and the farm property, though not in jeopardy, is somewhat questionable. Because so few family members still reside in Vernonia and actively participate in the operation and maintenance in the farm, Ralph and Caroline Keasey wonder who will look after the property after they are gone. Dennis Nelson is now in his fifties, and although he once worked as a timber cutter, he considers it a young man's job and wonders how long he will be able to actively manage the property himself. He hopes his three daughters might develop an interest in the property and choose to be actively involved in its management someday.

The Keasey family are one of the pioneering families of the Vernonia region, a family that still lives, works and plays, not just in the area, but on the property their ancestors developed. Their family story is one of perseverance and dedication, and about caring for their land.



A natural wetland provides scenic beauty and wildlife habitat.

and the property was reverted back to timber. "They planted almost all the old cow pastures-- all the cleared ground that had been laboriously cleared by previous generations of Keaseys," says Nelson.

Around 1980, the family corporation had to make a large payment on a piece of property that they had purchased and added to the farm, and the property was mostly clear cut and the timber sold at that time to make the payment. "Right now, most of the property is plantation growth that is about thirty years old," explains Nelson. Ralph Keasey, along with most of his siblings, and some nieces and nephews, replanted those

of an outdoor paradise, with historic relics and logging history on site, as well as wildlife and beautiful natural features.

A huge old barn sits behind the original farm house. According to Nelson, the barn had to be moved when the railroad line was constructed. Today, it still stands, along with the farmhouse, as a testament to the historic nature of the farm.

The property is about a mile in length, running along Rock Creek, so there is well over a mile of creek frontage as Rock Creek meanders through the Keasey farm. Salmon, steelhead and trout run upstream through the property, with gravel spawning beds visible along the waterfront. Deer, elk, cougar, bear and other wildlife roam the landscape. Nelson, who has been involved with the Izaak Walton League and the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council for many years, has done numerous riparian restoration projects on the property over the years, planting and maintaining new trees along the banks, often battling local beaver to keep the trees alive.

The property has a few springs on-site, including the historically relevant "Cold Spring" that provided water for travelers on the road and area residents over the years, and still provides good quality water year-round. The property also has numerous wetlands, including an area that was dammed by the railroad grade, creating a large pond that is used by ducks and other waterfowl.

And, of course, that Oregon-American rail passage, which runs east to west through the property, is maintained by the family to provide access to some of the more remote areas. "Mostly, we use it as a hiking trail, but we can drive it if we need to log," says Nelson. Nelson says there are also a number of logging roads that were built the last time the property was logged in the 1980's, which he deliberately keeps clear for hiking and future logging projects, as well as to



Current caretaker Dennis Nelson stands near one of the last remaining old growth cedars on the property. Nelson estimates the tree is at least 500 years old.



trees.

Dennis Nelson, who married Dick and Marge Wysong's daughter, Schann, is maintaining the old farmhouse and watching over the property as caretaker. Nelson recently gave me a tour of the 390-acre property.

Nelson says he has actively helped manage the property for a number of years and usually participates in small thinning projects that take place regularly to provide income. A number of years ago, Nelson took the OSU Extension Service Master Woodland Manager course, the same course Ralph Keasey took