

Parson family stays true to its roots after 60 years

by Mark Freeman
Mail Tribune

ASHLAND, Ore. (AP) — When Jud Parsons took over management of the family's forestland on the flanks of Mount Ashland in the 1950s, southern Oregon was in the midst of a timber boom that saw clear-cuts on large swaths of private and industrial forestland with few reforestation successes.

Parsons saw this cut-and-run mentality of the time and he wanted no part of it for a simple reason.

"We didn't want to run," Parsons says.

Six decades later, the family's Mountcrest Forest remains a working piece of land where selective logging without clear-cuts allows for sustained timber production, with a light hand and an eye toward more than just the bottom line.

The family's approach has created healthy habitat for rare threatened and endangered animals, as well as clean water for wild salmon, in 1,771 acres smack-dab within the land bridge between the Klamath, Siskiyou and Cascade mountains.

And it's going to stay that way.

A new and unique \$2.5 million conservation easement arranged by The Pacific Forest Trust and funded primarily with public money ensures the forest will remain in timber production but that it won't be broken up or developed and that the Parsons family ethic will govern here in perpetuity.

Selective logging will be done to enhance

stands, leaving trees for rare Pacific fishers to snooze their days away on mistletoe brooms normally removed as parasites and a light touch on the ground to continue delivering clean, cold water that has become a rarity for wild salmon and steelhead, particularly in the Bear Creek Basin.

"It doesn't mean we can't harvest, but it'll be a lighter harvest," says Parsons, 82. "It'll have all those benefits, no matter who owns it."

Five years in the making, the easement creates a model for how private, working forests can simultaneously be managed for the public benefits of better wildlife habitat and watershed health — stewardship values largely left to public lands.

"Wildlife don't care about property lines," says Constance Best, the San Francisco-based trust's co-chief executive officer. "It's where the habitat is, and Mountcrest has a lot of great habitat because of the way it's managed. But there was no guarantee it would be around tomorrow. That's how conservation easements can help preserve habitat and reward (landowners) for doing good things for wildlife and watersheds."

The easement was funded by \$1 million in Land and Water Conservation Fund money through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, as well as \$900,000 from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Best says. The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust each contributed \$300,000, she says.

The easement's appraised value was more than \$3.4 million, with the difference listed as a gift from the Parsons corporation, Best says.

Most conservation easements are to keep lands "forever wild" or to strip off development rights, Best says. This is the first time in Oregon a publicly funded easement has gone to land that will remain in forest production.

"In this case, it's used to keep the land in excellent management," Best says.

The Parsons family bought the first piece of Mountcrest in 1919, with a consortium of family members eventually adding more parcels. However, several clear-cuts on the property in the 1940s didn't fare well in their eyes.

Gophers, deer, drought and weeds all conspired to cause setback after setback in replanting efforts, Parsons says.

"We saw all the problems with reforestation on the work done back in the 1940s," Parsons says. "It was difficult."

Eventually the forest was leased for grazing, in part to reduce wildfire threats in grass and brush areas within the old clear-cuts, Parsons says.

In the 1970s, the forest moved more toward timber production — all selective logging, Parsons says. Last year, the family logged 223,000 board-feet of mostly Douglas and white fir, Parsons says.

"That was a fairly light year, but we've probably never taken more than 500,000 (board-feet) in a year," he says.

Marty Main, who is the Parsons family's consulting forester, says the logging focuses on

removing trees that compete with older, larger trees that create forest conditions that promote rare species like fishers and foster cold, clean runoff to streams.

That's the opposite of conditions during the cut-and-run 1950s. (Parsons) and his family didn't do that and that's to their credit," Main said. "His choice not to liquidate it is the story. That's why this conservation easement means so much."

In 2013, Parsons as well as three other family members bought out the forest's remaining shareholders and began negotiating the easement with the trust.

"We bought it with the intention of having a conservation easement to protect it," Parsons said.

The land historically had been a land bridge for everyone from Native Americans to Hudson Bay trappers crossing between the Siskiyou, Cascade and Klamath mountains. Today, Pacific Crest Trail hikers traverse the southern corner of Mountcrest Forest.

It remains an important bridge for wildlife, connecting the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest to the flanks of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

Those aspects will remain for current and future imperiled wildlife seeking habitats like a still-productive Mountcrest, Main says.

"Jud and his family from the inception have managed for a host of values, including wildlife," Main said. "He has a long history of attachment to his land and the critters there, and he's sincere about it. It's pretty cool."

Today in History: by The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Jan. 31, the 31st day of 2018. There are 334 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 31, 1958, the United States entered the Space Age with its first successful launch of a satellite, Explorer 1, from Cape Canaveral.

On this date:

In 1606, Englishman Guy Fawkes, convicted of high treason for his part in the "Gunpowder Plot," was set to be hanged, drawn and quartered, but broke his neck after falling or jumping from the scaffold.

In 1797, composer Franz Schubert was born in Vienna.

In 1865, the U.S. House of Representatives joined the Senate in passing the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution abolishing

slavery, sending it to states for ratification. (The amendment was adopted in December 1865.) Gen. Robert E. Lee was named general-in-chief of the Confederate States Army by President Jefferson Davis.

In 1917, during World War I, Germany served notice that it was beginning a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare.

In 1929, revolutionary Leon Trotsky and his family were expelled from the Soviet Union.

In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Gold Reserve Act.

In 1945, Pvt. Eddie Slovik, 24, became the first U.S. soldier since the Civil War to be executed for desertion as he was shot by an American firing squad in France.

In 1961, NASA launched

Ham the Chimp aboard a Mercury-Redstone rocket from Cape Canaveral; Ham was recovered safely from the Atlantic Ocean following his 16 1/2-minute suborbital flight.

In 1971, astronauts Alan Shepard, Edgar Mitchell and Stuart Roosa blasted off aboard Apollo 14 on a mission to the moon.

In 1980, Queen Juliana of the Netherlands announced she would abdicate on her birthday the following April, to be succeeded by her daughter, Princess Beatrix.

In 1990, McDonald's Corp. opened its first fast-food restaurant in Moscow.

In 2000, an Alaska Airlines MD-83 jet crashed into the Pacific Ocean off Port Hueneme (wy-NEE'-mee), California, killing all 88

people aboard.

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush, speaking at the Nevada Policy Research Institute, said he would not jeopardize security gains in Iraq by withdrawing U.S. forces too quickly. Pop star Britney Spears was taken from her home by ambulance to UCLA Medical Center, where she was held for a week for psychiatric evaluation.

Five years ago: Chuck Hagel emerged from his grueling confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee with solid Democratic support for his nomination to be President Barack Obama's next defense secretary. A gas explosion caused three floors of the headquarters of Mexico's national oil company Pemex to collapse, killing 37 people. Caleb

Moore, 25, an innovative freestyle snowmobile rider who'd been hurt in a crash at the Winter X Games in Colorado, died at a hospital in Grand Junction.

One year ago: President Donald Trump nominated Neil Gorsuch, a fast-rising conservative judge, to the U.S. Supreme Court. Singer and bassist John Wetton of the rock group Asia died in Bournemouth, Dorset, England at age 67.

Thought for Today: "The third-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the majority. The second-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the minority. The first-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking." — A.A. Milne, British author (born in 1882, died this date in 1956).

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