



Spotlight on a Forest Steward/Tree Farmer Paul & Diane Cockrell

Thanks to Paul Cockrell for this submission



Paul and Diane Cockrell met while attending college at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in the mid 1980's. Paul obtained a degree in Construction Administration, and Diane went on to earn a Master's Degree in Animal Science. They took numerous trips to Montana to ski and backpack, and it wasn't long before the young couple moved out west to live in Moscow, Idaho. In 1998 they relocated to Montana and have lived here since.

The past 11 years, they lived in Hamilton. Paul is a self-employed building contractor and Diane works at Rocky Mountain Lab as a research scientist. They have no children, but have always been dog (specifically Lab) owners. They currently have two black Labrador retrievers, Molly and Sara, who both very much enjoy forest management! "They are very accomplished at the scatter part of the lop and scatter technique. If only I could train them to pile the branches," says Paul. "They are also very good at making sure I stop at the coffee shack for biscuits on the drive home!"

Molly and Sara

Treated area, note the two deer



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“In 2008 we bought 160 acres of recreational property in the Blackfoot corridor, midway between Bonner and Potomac. We like to camp, hunt, and hike, and figured it would make a fine base to do it from. I was also fascinated with trees,” says Paul. We have heated our home with firewood for many years, and having spent a career working as a carpenter, Paul considers trees to be “the ultimate renewable resource.” “I bought a Wood-Mizer portable sawmill to convert the dead and dying trees into lumber for some of my construction jobs.” Projects have included building a barn, a cabin, a garage, many fences, and furniture.

Tree species on the property consist mostly of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir, along with some pockets of lodgepole pine, and western larch. Wildlife on and around the property include deer, elk, bighorn sheep, moose, both black and grizzly bear, coyotes, wolves, cougar, turkey and grouse. Paul is member of the Wild Sheep Foundation, and they always enjoy seeing the bighorn sheep. A dramatic die off of the local bighorn herd several years back, has unfortunately made those sightings less frequent in recent years. Birds are common, with bluebirds, western tanager, and cedar waxwings being some of Paul and Diane’s favorites. They have placed several bluebird nesting boxes on the property, with good results.

Having 160 acres of forest land, and not a lot of forest management experience can be overwhelming. So in 2011, Paul signed up for the Forest Stewardship class being offered in Corvallis that year. “It was a very

Paul built a barn, a shed, and furniture with the wood from his forest



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good learning experience, and led me to sign up for the MSU Extension mini courses, and whatever other forestry educational opportunities came along.” Both Angela Mallon, and Peter Kolb made site visits to the property and gave Paul encouragement and shared their valuable wisdom. “We enrolled our property in Montana Tree Farm, and it has given us the opportunity to meet many like-minded people.”

A couple years ago, Paul became involved with the Montana Forest Stewardship Steering Committee (MFSSC), and it has been a rewarding experience. Highlights so far have included a tour of the F. H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Companies new co-gen facility, and a tour of Stoltze’s Haskill Basin property that was being evaluated for the Forest Legacy Program. Last spring (2014), Cindy Bertek worked with Paul to use their Rainbow Ridge Tree Farm as the host site for the Missoula Forest Stewardship workshop field training. “It was a very large class and very rewarding to see so many people interested in forest stewardship,” says Paul.

To date, Paul and Diane have thinned about 40 acres of the property, cleaned up a bunch of slash, taken out some old barb wire fencing, and have tried to battle the noxious weeds. “This year I plan to declare all-out war on the weeds,” says Paul. “I am starting to see the results of good forest management and it encourages me to do more and learn more. I recently bought a used wood chipper and plan on working it hard this spring.”

Thinning the trees and
burning the slash



Chipping the slash



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Future plans are to continue to work towards creating a healthy, productive forest, capable of providing a sustainable supply of wood products with the best possible wildlife habitat. Recently, over 100,000 acres of neighboring Plum Creek Timber properties have been sold to the Nature Conservancy. Paul and Diane are looking into the possibility of placing their Tree Farm in a conservation easement.

A flush of forb growth where the forest was thinned and debris removed



Note from MSU Extension Forestry: Four Forest Stewardship workshops are offered annually, see the calendar at www.msuextension.org/forestry All family forest owners are encouraged to attend as well as Tree Farmers and second/ third generation Forest Stewards and repeat attendees.