



Meet the 2011 Washington Tree Farmers of the Year

By Kimberly Mason / For The Chronicle, Monday, June 20, 2011

Bryon and Donna Loucks have been opening their tree farm home, their hearts and sharing their extensive knowledge of the forest with eager and energetic young Adna 5th grade students every June for 21 years.

Their active involvement in community outreach and education, combined with the years of hard work that they have poured into the gentle care and maintenance of their 207-acres of ever growing, ever changing forested land, has earned them the title of 2011 Washington State Tree Farmers of the Year.

The Tour

When the bus load of Adna students arrived at the B&D Tree Farm just before lunchtime on June 8, they had already been briefed by teachers Toni Moran and Cheryl Gibson. They had started the learning process. As the students gathered at the “Big Bear” to listen to the welcoming words of Bryon Loucks, they were ready and able to answer many of the questions that he put before them.

Children raised their hands enthusiastically, eager to share their new understandings of the ways of the woods.

Bryon Loucks pointed to the bird houses and newly planted trees, to the taller trees behind them and the clear-cut land beside the forest and gave an overall picture for the children to begin the day's educational hike.

“We have had this farm for over 20 years,” Bryon Loucks said. “And not just because we like the birds and the wildlife, although we do, but we want to make money from the trees. That's why it's called a farm.”

As the tour commenced, the children were separated into small groups of six or seven, each led by an experienced forest guide. Bryon and Donna Loucks — Bryon, a retired forester, and Donna, a retired forestry librarian — each led their small groups into different directions into the forests, clear-cuts and trails of the Loucks' 160-acre working tree farm.

Within moments of taking to the trail, the children were still raising their hands with enthusiasm. This time, however, they were bursting with questions. Donna Loucks was forced to repeat the phrase, “We'll get to that,” several times — her smile as broad and eager and the children's happy grins — before the students were able to settle in and take the trail and the facts one step at a time.

The Loucks had placed placards along the trail, clearly labeling native plant life and other interesting encounters along the way.

The trails led through wide, beautifully groomed pathways under enormous Douglas fir tree stands. They also wound up narrow trails through the bushy understory of wild land and down into deep, damp gullies.

By the time the Adna school children emerged from the forest two hours later to gather again around the big bear, it was clear that they had absorbed the words and the walk into their young minds. They were bursting with excitement.

“I was surprised how so many of them were really excited about playing in the clear-cut,” said Bryon Loucks.

Many of the children took home rounds from the cut trees, eager to show their parents how they had learned to count the rings to tell the age of the trees.

The Loucks shook their heads in wonder and smiled as they waved goodbye to the children at the end of the day.

“In light of how close they are to getting out of school,” said Bryon Loucks, “I'm always surprised at how closely they pay attention.”



Netting protects newly planted trees from deer browse damage at the Loucks tree farm west of Chehalis.



The Loucks often harvest just five to 10 acres of trees at a time at their tree farm west of Chehalis.



Bryon Loucks, owner of the B&D Tree Farm west of Chehalis, started a recent tour of his award-winning tree farm by gathering Adna fifth grade students in front of a carved bear for a brief introduction to the day's activities before they separated into smaller groups to walk the 160-acre tree farm. "In light of how close they are to getting out of school," said Loucks, I'm always surprised at how closely they pay attention."