

Sharing Woodland Experiences: Four Couples Tell Their Stories



From left to right: Brian & Mary Blakeley, Steve & Lois Raether, Dennis & Julie Waterman, Dick & Charlotte Thompson.

Time is set aside on Thursday evening of the annual meeting for WWOA members to share their experiences and thoughts about their woodlands. This year four couples discussed their woodland experiences, philosophies and goals.

Brian and Mary (Mierow) Blakeley of Boyceville explained how their two families have been involved in forestry for 150 years. It started when the first generation of Blakeleys arrived in the 1850s and worked in the woods as loggers for the Knapp Stout Company. Later in the 1930s, Brian's dad's family planted trees in northern Wisconsin as members of the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC). In 1984 they were named Dunn County Tree Farmer of the Year.

In 1926, Mary's father started working at the Sterling Pulp and Paper Company in Eau Claire and retired 43 years later. Although Brian and Mary moved to Texas, where they taught at the university level for 30 years, they are now

back in Wisconsin living on Brian's father's property. The theme of forestry as a family tradition will remain strong.

Dennis and Julie Waterman of Cameron described a tranquil side of their woodlands. Dennis is a retired WI DNR forester and works now as a forestry consultant. Julie is definitely more interested in growing flowers. They have a 20-acre prairie/flower garden that is adjacent to their home and their family enjoys hiking, hunting and camping on the tree farm.

Each Halloween, the Watermans design a haunted forest through their woods and take the grandchildren on spooky wagon rides. Other times of the year, they set up family workshops for planting, pruning, and making firewood. Other groups besides the family are welcome.

The Watermans love to share their tree farm with educational groups, flower garden clubs, and prairie enthusiasts. Dennis sums up his philosophy by say-

ing "A tree farm is more than just growing trees, it's more than boards and cords."

Steve and Lois Raether of Chippewa Falls enjoy the natural beauty of their woodland while actively growing timber. Steve's interest in forestry began when he won a 4-H sponsored trip to Trees for Tomorrow back in the 1950s. The Raethers started buying land in 1968 and own several parcels in Chippewa, Dunn, Burnett and Eau Claire counties.

One of these parcels was owned by Steve's former employer and Steve actually planted the trees that are now growing there. He has plans to do a harvest there very soon.

Steve talked about another harvest that occurred recently. The area was wet and contained a lot of black ash. However, the process had to wait for the ground to freeze up for the season before the hand cutters could get in and complete the harvest.

Dick and Charlotte Thompson of Lake Geneva own several parcels of land throughout the state which they actively manage with timber sales. However, their main concern is how to keep the timberlands and leave a forest legacy to their children and grandchildren. To solve this problem, they formed a Family Limited Partnership (FLP) with the family members.

Dick and Charlotte are the general partners of the FLP whose responsibility is the debts of the business. They also operate the business for the benefit of the limited partners, who are considered investors. Limited partners (children) have no liability for the debts of the partnership.

All partners meet at one of the Tree Farms over Columbus Day weekend. The spouses of the children are not invited and discussion is centered on generating income from the land for the higher educational needs of the family.

The Thompsons distributed handouts describing the legal process necessary to form a partnership (FLP). Charlotte also adds her own rules to this process. She says "We will pay for their schooling if the grandchildren promise no tattoos, no smoking and the girls will not get pregnant."