



Spotlight on a Forest Steward/Tree Farmer

Jamie Yule

Cindy Bertek

Family forest owners' objectives often reflect the individual's history. Every landowner has a story and is unique. This is Jamie Yule's story of how she came to own her family forest, her little piece of heaven, five forested acres on Flathead Lake's Finley Point. But first, a bit of historical perspective.

Many years ago, near the town of Choteau, Montana, Jamie's father, Jim Yule, left his family's ranch and began studying at Teton County High School. He lived with the school principal, A.B. Guthrie Sr, and worked for his room and board by doing various chores which often included looking after the Guthrie children., including A. B. (Bud) Guthrie Jr. (author and subject of "Under the Big Sky"). After Jim was graduated, his mentor, Mr. Guthrie, advised him to pursue higher education at Montana State University in Missoula (now U of M). With determination, his diploma and \$5.00 in his pocket, Jim made his way to Missoula where he called upon President Oscar J. Craig and asked for admission to the University. Jim matriculated into the Engineering Program where he stayed until the end of his junior year. Family responsibilities required him to leave school and he never had the opportunity to complete his baccalaureate degree. As soon as he could return to Missoula, he went to work for the United States Forest Service (USFS).

Jim was given the charge of surveying the still-new USFS lands in Montana for the purpose of mapping the national forests. Packing up the mules and pack trains was hard work. Jim thought it would be much easier to make maps from photographs taken from an airplane; unfortunately his superiors regarded it as an impractical idea. Well, **they** didn't have to walk the back country with mules and be out in the elements for days on end! Jim went down to Bob MacKay's photography shop on Higgins Avenue where Bob set him up with a box camera. Next, Jim paid a visit to Johnson Flying Service. Bob Johnson took to the idea of taking pictures from the air so strongly that he cut a hole in the bottom of his plane, mounted the box camera, and...the rest is history.

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Jamie Yule

Around this time Jim acquired two parcels on land on Finley Point: five acres on the shore for recreational purposes, and 10 acres inland which he began converting into an orchard, in the hope that it would provide retirement income. Soon though, Uncle Sam had an important job for Jim creating maps of important World War II sites, including islands in the South Pacific, from photos taken from planes. When the war ended Jim returned to Montana and found the orchard in a shambles. The fences were down, and there were bears in the trees. The properties continued to go without stewardship for decades. Presently the orchard property has 14 apple and two pear trees still bearing fruit for the bears.

Meanwhile Jim's daughter, Jamie, grew up in Missoula and earned a BA in Home Economics at MSU (now U of M), and an MA in Home Economics Education at the Ohio State University. Later she was awarded the Ph.D. from Michigan State University with emphases in secondary education, educational psychology, and family ecology. She taught home economics for three years at Great Falls (MT) High School and then moved east to do instructional and administrative work at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania for 38 years.

Jamie returned to Montana permanently in 2004. She saw that the property she and her sister had inherited from their parents was in need of stewardship and took a first step by enrolling in the 2006 Yellow Bay Stewardship Workshop, 10 miles away from her Flathead Lake property. Jamie said, "After the workshop I wanted to take care of the land because I loved it. I hadn't realized the land needed my stewardship. This is not just wild land unaffected by changes humans brought. I need to be smart and do what I can to be a good steward." Jamie began working with a time-line to realize the goals she had written. Her five acres comprise three management units, and thus far she has stayed on target with the time-line she established for reaching the goals outlined in her Forest Stewardship Plan.

The property has ponderosa, Douglas fir, aspen, cottonwood, hawthorn, chokecherry and other indigenous trees as well as some Norway maples that Jamie and her father planted years ago to mark the boundary they had surveyed. The shorelines of neighboring properties to the north and south are heavily lined with cement reinforcement and break-walls, but Jamie's shoreline is secured with rip-rap which makes this property an inviting corridor for deer, skunks, and grizzly bears to access the water's edge. Water fowl, song birds, and raptors reside and hunt along the shore. Up the rise sits a small cabin and bunkhouse.

The orchard property was recently sold and Jamie focuses her efforts on the lake property. In spite of the small size of her property, Jamie's stewardship activities are numerous. Based on the advice of stewardship advisor, Sam Gilbert, Jamie elected to leave dead and down material along 12 feet of shoreline as a refuge for mergansers, Canada geese, osprey, eagles, and song birds. She installed rip-rap along the shore to prevent erosion. Much of her focus is on weed management, primarily knapweed and thistle. To date, she has

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removed and burned more than 90 wheelbarrows of thistle! Over the course of two summers Jamie and friends have put sweat equity into hand-clearing the ground of potential fuels from fallen trees, limbs, and dead branches (except along the shoreline). Jamie planted ponderosa and Douglas fir as well as western larch, plantings that require hand-watering during the summer months their first few years. Bird boxes were mounted for the western blue birds, tree swallows and chickadees.

In 2000 Jamie elected to selectively harvest dead, sick and dying timber on the “upper bench” of her property. This resulted in removal of 80% of the trees, which was followed by systematic replanting of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine each subsequent year. While many did not survive because of water shortage, intense heat and competition with grass, Jamie reports that the trees remaining after the harvest have developed thick, well-shaped crowns. Jamie has improved the take-rate of subsequent replanting efforts by hauling water to give seedlings a leg-up.

Jamie has watched as her efforts come to fruition. The trees are increasing in growth and vigor, birds and animals continue to use the property, the planted trees are growing well, the weeds are diminishing, and the blue birds are nesting. If you look closely, you may see a hammock near the shore, and in it, Jamie watching the pine trees sway and the osprey and eagles fly along the shore.

Jamie serves as an active member on the MT Forest Stewardship Steering Committee.

Note from MSU Extension Forestry: Five 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.