

# Conservation Showcase

## A harvest of benefits, memories: Program paves way to protect private forest resources

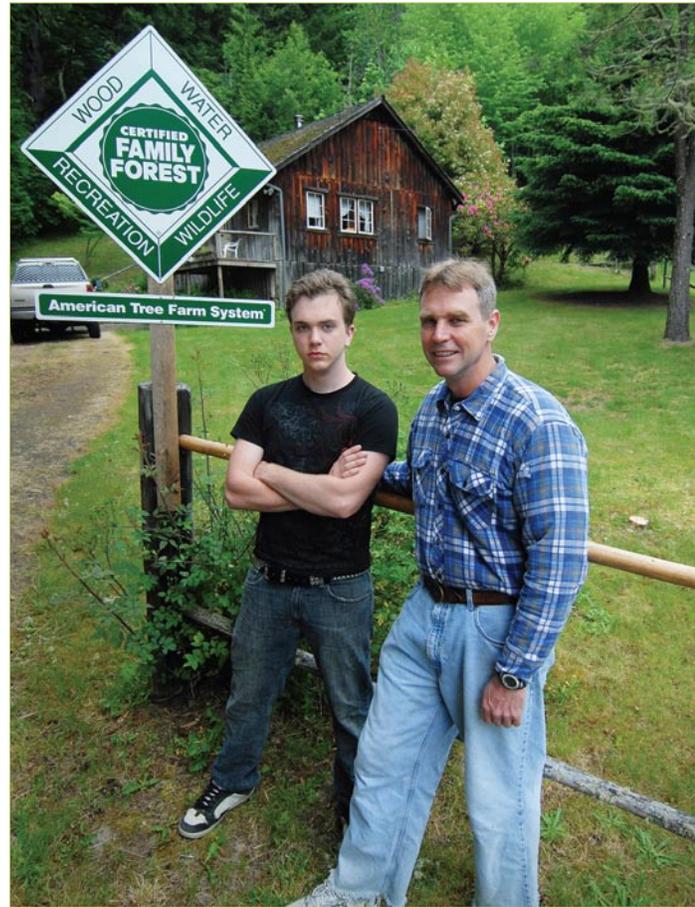
**F**orests yield, among other things, wood products, wildlife habitat, oxygen and water. But for John Keller, perhaps the most important thing his forest produces is memories.

As a child growing up in the 1960s and 70s, he and his family made frequent treks to the forest his grandfather owned in Cowlitz County, Washington. Working along side his father and grandfather – playing, exploring and wandering for hours under the forests’ canopy – young John developed a deep and lasting attachment to the land.

A father himself now, Mr. Keller hopes he can instill that attachment to the land in his three children – Theresa, Jim and Billy. “Bringing them up here to recreate, to float the Kalama river and to do a little work is a bald-face attempt on my part to connect them with the land,” Mr. Keller says. “So when a real estate developer shows up on the doorstep, and I’m no longer here, my kids’ appreciation and love for the land will be deep enough so they won’t just see the dollar signs.”

Mr. Keller’s attachment to the land transcends the forest’s monetary value.

“I have a very strong philosophical leaning that it’s not just what you can make off the land, but what the land can inherently do for you emotionally and spiritually,” he says. For the Keller family



*John Keller (right) and his son Billy, are pictured here outside the family’s forest cabin in Cowlitz County. For four generations, the Kellers have enjoyed recreating in, and caring, for their privately owned forest.*

“The forest is a place to rest and kick back, enjoy and develop a sense of place.”

-John Keller, landowner



he says, the forest is a place to “rest, kick back, enjoy and develop a sense of place.”

Mr. Keller, who is a trained forester, also believes the land can more than pay for itself through judicious timber harvests. “Through small clear cuts and thinning – practices that can actually improve wildlife habitat – we can protect the

led Mr. Keller to seek technical and financial assistance through USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Nick Somero, a resource conservationist with the NRCS says erosion from forest road run-off is a significant resource concern for many private forest landowners. “Erosion adversely affects water quality in streams that run throughout Washington’s forests,” he says. “Additionally, water affects the load bearing strength of a road, and saturated road surfaces can quickly become deeply rutted or even impassable.”

To avoid road erosion problems, NRCS’ Somero recommends landowners manage the water intercepted by the road and inventory roads during and immediately after significant storm events for damage.

But more importantly, Somero recommends designing new roads properly before construction.

“Well designed roads reduce erosion and maintenance requirements by avoiding steep grades that induce high water velocities, which cause erosion and excessive damage to the road surface,” he says. In addition, Somero says well designed roads avoid sensitive areas like streams and wetlands, and incorporate grade breaks to control water volumes.

But for those forest landowners, like the Kellers, whose forests roads were already built when they took over stewardship



NRCS resource conservationist Nick Somero, left, and John Keller review the forest’s conservation plan, which serves as a blueprint for planned conservation activities.

aesthetic values we like, and bring in a check from the mill now and then, too,” he says.

That income is necessary to help maintain the health of the forest – and to maintain the critical forest roads – which are often the most capital-intensive aspect of forest management.

In fact, it was his concern about the erosion from those forest roads that

of the land, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) can be an important source of technical and financial assistance to help improve those roads.

“The folks from NRCS took a good, common sense approach,” Mr. Keller says. “They were interested in seeing that the resource was protected. That was pretty impressive.”

Mr. Keller says the application and follow-up paper work took a little bit of time, but adds he had lots of help from the NRCS through this process. “People didn’t leave me hanging,” he says. “I really thought it was a great experience. I couldn’t have completed the project – and had it turn out so successful – without cost-share funding and the technical expertise that was available to me through the NRCS’ EQIP program.”

Like other land stewards, Mr. Keller can’t know with certainty if subsequent generations will have the same love and emotional connection to the land that he does. But he’s optimistic that the land will stay in good hands for at least another generation.

“Realistically, I can only hope for a generation or two before someone comes along who just sees the money,” he says. But until then, the Keller forest will continue to yield a bounty of beauty, wildlife, fiber and – most importantly – memories.

*Written by Ron Nichols,  
Public Affairs Officer, June 2009*



*Thanks to the technical and financial assistance provided through NRCS’ EQIP program, Mr. Keller has installed cross drains and culverts that have markedly reduced forest road erosion.*