



featured

Land manager's advice springs

By Bill Kohlbrand

An original homestead cabin from the 1890s is a reminder of the first logging on the ranch near Farrall, just this side of the South Dakota border in northeast Wyoming, where Pete Harper was raised.

Since that cutting of timber for ranch buildings, there have been three logging phases; the first had no planning, but the thought put into the last two over the past 50 years earned Pete and his wife, June, the first Forest Stewardship Award from the Wyoming State Forestry Division (WSFD) last September.

Pete, who turned 89 this year, shared some of what he learned in more than a half century as a land manager.

"The best thing a landowner can do is to learn everything he can about logging before starting a project," he says. "Know what you want to achieve, and then find professional help. Finally, have the trees marked (to cut or to leave) to get the best results. It's worth the money you



This stand of trees was thinned in 1980. Note the recent new growth to the left.

spend having it done. What you leave is more important than what you take."

Served in World War II

Pete's family moved to the ranch from South Dakota in the 1930s. Primarily a cattle and grain operation, Pete's dad, Elmer, tried raising about everything, including hogs. Pete left college December 7, 1941, to enlist in the

Army Air Corps. He flew P-38 fighters and served during World War II as an instructor of American and free Chinese pilots. He married June after the war and settled on the ranch. They have been married for more than 63 years. He still holds a pilot's license but no longer flies.

Pete talks of the first logging he was involved in during the 1940s when, as

he described it, "loggers just cut big trees on the easy ground."

"There wasn't much management involved," he notes, "but it brought a little money in."

Pete was a progressive producer and participated in many soil and water programs through the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service), and

landowners

from half-century of experience

the Farm Service Agency.

Pete raised small grains and hay, and experimented with terraces, rotation grazing, field mulching, special planting drills, windbreaks, and any other practice that would protect his precious soil. He received several awards from the Redwater Conservation District for his efforts. He also had a contracting business building roads, dams, and terraces for neighbors.

Foresters Help Develop Plan

In 1978, Pete met a pair of young foresters at church. One forester happened to work for the WSFD in Newcastle. The other worked for Homestake Mining and Timber. The pair wrote a management plan for Pete based on his objectives, which focused on improving grazing and improving road access. He entered a 20-year management agreement with the mill, which then marked the timber and made sure the job was done according to the agreement. The mill had 20 years to complete the

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Peter Harper

logging, with the large first cut done immediately. Pete helped build an extensive road system, which improved access to the property and helped fire control.

Pete followed up by doing a pre-commercial thinning of the remaining small trees. Thinning reduces competition between trees but also improves grazing, water yield in springs, and reduces fire danger.

The WSFD set up the thinning practices, and the Farm Service Agency provided the cost-share money. Pete and a hired man did the work and received cost-share money through the Forestry Incentives Program.



Photo courtesy: The Sundance Times

Pete and June Harper accept the Forest Stewardship Award from Bill Kohlbrand, left, Wyoming State Forestry Division district forester. The logs for the cabin were cut on the ranch in the 1890s. The award is the first given by the division.



Ponderosa pine can be hard to regenerate when bur oak (foreground) shares the site and shades the understory.



A key to timber management lies with what is left versus what is removed. This stand shows a healthy overstory with some pine and bur oak regeneration.

Puts Forest Stewardship Plan in Place

In 2003, a professional forester recommended another logging treatment. Pete once again enlisted the help of the WSFD, which wrote him a Forest Stewardship Plan. The stewardship plan is a multi-resource plan that considers the objectives of the landowner, what the landowner has to work with, and provides a map for meeting those objectives. Pete's objectives broadened to include forest health, fire risk reduction, and wildlife habitat enhancement.

Armed with a plan and lessons learned from the first two logging treatments, Pete worked with the contractor.

"I was out there nearly every day with soft drinks and rolls," he says, "talking to the loggers and getting the job I wanted."

Following the logging, Pete burned the slash piles, seeded roads and landings, and had thinning and fuels work done through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP) with NRCS providing the money and WSFD doing the field work. The EQUIP program provides technical, financial, and educational assistance.

At the end of the sale, Pete put rolling dips in the roads to help shed water off the roads and control erosion. After burning the slash piles, he seeded or graveled the roads and made repairs as needed.

Here is Pete Harper's anatomy of a successful timber sale:

- Learn about your resources
- Fine-tune your objectives
- Seek professional help, such as from the Wyoming State Forestry Department
- Create a long-range management plan
- Have the trees marked by professionals
- Actively manage the job
- Reinvest the profits in thinning
- Treat the weeds and plant the landings

Sources for help

Wyoming State Forestry Division (<http://slf-web.state.wy.us/forestry/programs.aspx>)

Wyoming Game and Fish Department (<http://gf.state.wy.us/index.asp>)

Wyoming Natural Resources Conservation Service (www.wy.nrcs.usda.gov/)

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