

Belton Family Forest, OR

Pacific West Region Forest Statement

By Carol and John Belton

History of property:

The Belton Family Forest property has gone through some dramatic changes within the last 120 years. This property is located on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountain Range at an elevation of 1600 feet. It was late in the 19th century when a very hot and destructive wildfire burned many thousands of acres of forest in this area. It was also about this time Samuel Brown was one of the most active medical doctors in Portland, Oregon.

Large trees and forests were less valued at that time than vacant land where the early pioneers could grow their food crops. One of Dr. Brown's patients gifted 400 acres of timber property as payment for some medical bills. After his death Dr. Brown's niece Mae Brown Belton and her husband Howard Belton learned that the forest property had been transferred to county ownership for payment of back property taxes. The Belton's purchased the property from the county and Mr. Belton quickly learned current management practices from a friend in the Department of Forestry, Oregon State University.

Some of the largest trees had survived the wildfire and a mixed-species forest had been regenerated by seeds brought in by wind. The resulting forest was very dense and the trees were becoming overcrowded as they grew. Many of the Douglas-fir trees needed more access to sunlight. After the property had been transferred to the Belton children, John converted his portion of the property to a mixed species-mixed age forest (suitable habitat for a wide variety of species) with a longer crop rotation resulting in larger trees (greater than 100 years). John Belton purchased an adjacent property (80 acres now designated as Sandy Trees Inc.) for a total of 200 acres under his management. This has forced him to develop niche markets for the larger logs and minor species so that his cash flow is adequate to cover his higher management costs.

Current Practices and Objectives:

After the first commercial thinning (1967) all subsequent thinning has been from below to remove smaller trees which have lost their access to direct sunlight as well as stressed or damaged trees. Most of the current forest has been commercially thinned nine times over the last 60 years. The remaining Douglas-fir trees are large straight trees with an ample population of shade tolerant species (red cedar and western hemlock) growing under the upper fir canopy. The added property Sandy Trees Inc. was clearcut about 1945, long before the Belton involvement, and not replanted. The resulting mixed species forest was of marketable size but most trees were of low quality. Our management has resulted in a clearcut harvest and replanting with a mixture of genetically superior trees. This 80-acre parcel should be ready for the first commercial thinning in about 20 years (about the year 2025).

Two small streams flow through the Belton forest property and are significant contributors to the water in Cedar Creek, the only water that supplies a large state salmon hatchery five miles down stream. John Belton tested the water in these two streams and found reason to believe that the cutthroat trout showed very poor growth rates because they were lacking vital ions in the water. Historically marine ions may have been transported by mature spawning salmon in these small forest streams. Around 1900 weirs and a small dam were installed at the salmon hatchery to block fish passage upstream to our forest property because it was learned that about 4% of the salmon returning from the sea each fall had a bacterial disease in their kidneys. The current manager at the hatchery has been justifiably concerned that the young salmon produced at the hatchery not be exposed to this potentially lethal disease. This has required that all salmon carcasses be checked by a licensed fish pathologist prior to placing them in the streams to restore water quality. This requires much more time and effort to maintain a balanced forest ecosystem but some improvement in the trout food chain has been observed after three years of this study.

At the present time this unique and balanced forest management has been recognized by a number of organizations. The following organizations (American Tree Farm System, Clackamas County Farm Forestry Association, Forest Guild, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), National Woodland Owners Association, and Pacific Forest Trust) have listed the

Belton Family LLP and Sandy Trees Inc. as trend setters in this region. These properties are managed to provide the highest quality in wood, water, wildlife and recreation for enjoyment by the community. Each year the Belton's host educational tours and share their knowledge of this unusual forest management. Forest Statistics and Documentation

- Acreage: 200
- Forest Type: coastal douglas-fir
- Model Forest Manager: John Belton
- Primary Uses: timber, stream habitat, wildlife, aesthetics
- Certification: Logs FSC certified
- Affiliations/Links: American Tree Farm System, Clackamas County Farm Forestry Association, Forest Stewardship Council, National Woodland Owners Association, and Pacific Forest Trust

Downloads of documents and maps

- Forest Brochure
- Lessons in Forestry
- Tree Farm Calendar