



A family's lasting legacy

In the Columbia River valley the Wolfendens tend to the land in multiple ways



Troy Wolfenden gets ready to transport a load of selectively harvested logs from WL 450 to the mill. Troy and his brother Warren are second generation woodlotters, and the third generation to look after the family land.

By SARA GRADY

Few areas of the province could be more intensely populated with multi-generational woodlot operations than the Columbia River valley. Given the rugged beauty of the region, and the abundance of natural resources, it's small wonder that so many kids growing up in the mountains surrounding Golden carve out their futures in their own backyard rather than leaving home.

For Don Wolfenden's sons, Troy and Warren, there's no better place to make a life than on Woodlot #450, which they inherited from their father nearly a decade ago. The Wolfendens' woodlot is the quintessential example of a family farm, providing multiple economic opportunities for the family and locals, as well as careful guardianship of a Crown resource for all British Columbians.

The family's connection to the land began with Don's father, a cattle rancher. Don and his brother took over their father's ranch as

young men and set about growing the business, adding a dairy farm to the mix. Forward-thinking entrepreneurs, they were the first ranchers in Canada to import the robust Charolais cattle from France.

Economic imperatives led them to work as guides for a local outfitter in the shoulder season, and by 1979 they had acquired the business – Beaverfoot Outfitting, which delivers big game hunting experiences for an international clientele – and built a guest lodge. (The family no longer owns the lodge, but Troy has continued as an



Ryan, left, and Michelle Wolfenden are being raised the same way their father and grandfather were — to understand and care for the land that supports them.

outfitter for the past 12 years, guiding visitors through the terrain he knows so well.)

Looking at trends in the lumber industry in the early 80s, Don saw an opportunity to build his farming business, and secure the health and sustainability of Beaverfoot's territory. In 1985 he acquired Woodlot #450 (then classified as a Farm Woodlot), a 600 hectare plot surrounding his lodge, adding to his quarter section of private land.

With this move, Don insured that the Crown forest could be managed in a way that didn't result in unsightly clearcuts or other environmental or aesthetic degradation. Woodlot owners have the option of taking their five-year allowable annual cut in one year, but the Wolfendens scale their logging activities year to year, carefully

maintaining visual quality on the woodlot while still drawing revenue from the timber.

Long-time woodlot owners like Don have witnessed the ebb and flow of policy shifts as the woodlot program has evolved. There have been times when the program seemed designed perfectly to encourage farmers to capitalize on their private holdings, maximize returns from Crown land, and provide a valuable service to the public in a practical framework. And, there have been times when the laws – looking like one size fits all across the entire forestry sector – have created a maze of bureaucracy not easily navigated by the average farmer.

The intense administrative duties introduced during the mid-90s with the Forest Practices Code made something of a red-tape nightmare

for woodlot owners, who were accustomed to having the benefit of the doubt on their woodlots. After all, what would motivate a farmer to destroy their own property, parcels of land they had committed to protect and, in the majority of instances, resided on with their families?

Adherence to the Code, among other policy initiatives, created a layer of paperwork that many farmers have entrusted to Registered Professional Foresters (RPF). The “chartered accountants” of the forestry industry, they help guide woodlot owners through the catacomb of online reporting and government regulations. The relationship between an RPF and woodlot owner is one based on trust and mutual respect.

Troy and Warren are optimistic about the shifting trend in accountability and reporting for future woodlot operations, probably due to the introduction of the Forest and Range Practices Act in 2004. They sense that policies are once again zeroing in on the unique relationship these special foresters have with their land, easing some of the administrative burden.

In the meantime, the Wolfendens will continue to care for their land, logging with a small crew, transporting with the truck they purchased three years ago, shaping their woodlot to realize the greatest value from the timber while preserving the rugged terrain for which the region is renowned.

And while Warren and Troy keep day-to-day operations running, Don, now retired, will continue to watch over their small Christmas tree farm, a strip of land underneath a powerline on the woodlot. The shaping, pruning and thinning now results in appealing trees to sell to the locals later. Last year's proceeds went towards a grandchild's gymnastics club. Don hasn't decided who this year's beneficiaries will be. But you can bet the community will benefit, because that's at the heart of a woodlot owner's promise to the province.



FEDERATION OF BC WOODLOT ASSOCIATIONS

381 Pheasant Road • Williams Lake, BC, V2G 5A9
Tel: (250) 398-7646 • Toll Free: 1-866-345-8733
Email: gen_manager@woodlot.bc.ca • www.woodlotbc.ca

WOODLOT PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

P.O. Box 23011 Plaza 33 Postal Outlet
Kelowna, BC V1X 7K7
Phone: (250) 961-0271 • Email: cjmclary401@gmail.com