

TREE FARMING: A Voluntary Conservation Program

by Richard Lewis



Key figures in the history of American forestry assembled at Montesano, Washington, June 23, 1951, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Weyerhaeuser Timber Company's Clemons Tree Farm. Chapin Collins, chairman of Tree Farm Day, assists Mrs. Charles H. Clemons in unveiling a plaque that commemorates the 1941 beginnings of a nationwide program of private forestry. Collins had originally suggested naming the tract in honor of Clemons, a pioneer logger, and later he had been managing director of American Forest Products Industries, the organization that sponsored the American Tree Farm System. In the left background is William B. Greeley, chairman of the board of AFPI and former chief of the Forest Service. In the right background is Dr. Wilson M. Compton, former secretary-manager of the National Lumber Manufacturers Association and then president of Washington State University, and Clyde S. Martin, former chief forester for Weyerhaeuser.

FHS Collection

The American Tree Farm System®, which this summer celebrated its fortieth anniversary, is an outstanding example of “forest history in the making.” Tree farming™ is a voluntary, nationwide conservation program that is sponsored and supported by the forest products industry. Its goal is to provide trees for the future by recognizing and encouraging good management of privately owned timberland.

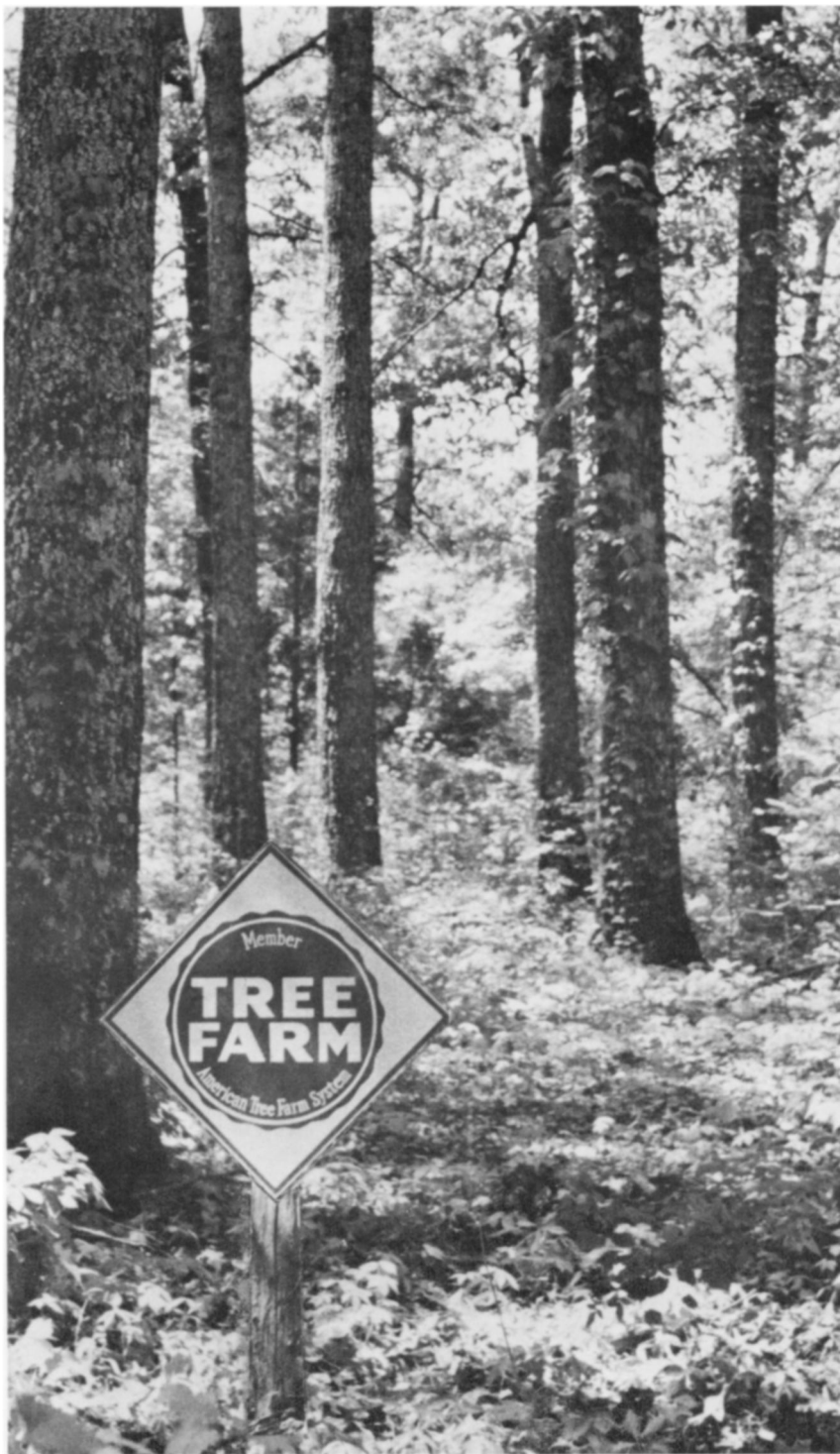
The Tree Farm® movement reflects a historical shift in American attitudes toward forest resources—from “timber mine” to “tree farm.” The first expression of the concept may never be determined, but it clearly preceded establishment of the tree farm system by several decades. In 1917 for example, M. L. Alexander, commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Conservation, advocated “timber farming” on cutover lands. Author Stewart H. Holbrook and forester William B. Greeley used the term “tree farmer” in 1929 and 1931, respectively. Gifford Pinchot, the very symbol of forest conservation in America, wrote in 1935: “Wood is a crop. Forestry is tree farming.”

The traditional honor of being “Tree Farm No. 1” has gone to a 120,000-acre, partly cutover tract of the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company in Grays Harbor County, Washington. Heavy use by hunters, fishermen, berry pickers, and vacationers had posed a fire hazard, so the company appealed to the public for cooperation in fire prevention. When the company placed the property under forest management in 1941, Chapin Collins, then editor of the local *Montesano Vidette*, suggested naming the tract in honor of pioneer logger Charles H. Clemons. The idea caught the public's fancy. At the public dedication on June 12, 1941, Governor Arthur B. Langlie prophesied, “The Clemons Tree Farm . . . may set the pace for millions of acres of such lands throughout the state.” Indeed, by 1981 there were 622 tree

farms in Washington State covering 5.4 million acres. Nationally, the system embraced 82.2 million acres belonging to 41,657 owners.

The attention attracted by the Clemons Tree Farm spurred broader-based efforts in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere. On December 26, 1941, a West Coast Tree Farm Program was established for the Douglas-fir region of western Oregon and Washington by the Joint Committee on Forest Conservation. This group represented the West Coast Lumbermen's Association and Pacific Northwest Loggers Association (predecessor of the Industrial Forestry Association) and worked with a special committee of the Willamette Valley Lumbermen's Association. The Joint Committee established criteria for certification of tree farms and approved sixteen applications on January 20, 1942. The sixteen tree farms totaled 726,617 acres. Through a quirk, Clemons was the seventeenth West Coast Tree Farm to be certified, on September 28, 1942. Issuance of certificates was further delayed until February 16, 1943, when an official insignia of the emerging American Tree Farm System could be included. At that time, however, the Clemons Tree Farm received Certificate No. 1 in recognition of its role in sparking the national program and for being the first to come under forest management.

Meanwhile, other regional and state groups launched similar programs. The Western Pine Association certified its first property on September 24, 1942—Weyerhaeuser's 450,000-acre Klamath Tree Farm in eastern Oregon. In the South the tree farm program began in Alabama on April 4, 1942 under the sponsorship of the State Chamber of Commerce. With a boost from the National Lumber Manufacturers Association and lumber journalist Stanley F. Horn, the first dedication exercise was held at Brewton, Alabama, where W. T. Neal, Earl M. McGowin, and numerous other lumbermen assembled with Governor Frank M. Dixon and



FHS Collection

state forestry figures to celebrate the tree farm idea. In the same month the Arkansas Forestry Commission undertook sponsorship of a program, and the first tree farm in that state was certified on June 6, 1942. Before long the Southern Pine Association assumed sponsorship of the program for the whole region.

The effort to create a national program had already begun. The National Lumber Manufacturers Association (NLMA), at the urging of the Joint Committee and other western members, officially resolved in November 1941 that a nationwide tree farm system be established. In the following year, the American Forest Products Industries (AFPI), then a subsidiary of the NLMA, accepted responsibility for the American Tree Farm System. At first, AFPI simply registered all tree farms and publicized activities of participants in the program. Under this loose sponsorship, the program spread by 1946 to about half of the states, each developing its own organization and criteria for certification.

The early tree farm movement was primarily limited to large company holdings on which modern forestry was already being practiced in varying degrees. It was an inspired public relations program, but it nonetheless met criticism from some quarters. Forest Service Chief Lyle F. Watts attacked it in 1943 as an attempt by industry to avoid federal regulation of forest industry lands. The charge was partly correct, for the Forest Service did advocate regulation of logging, and AFPI was at the forefront of industry's strategy to blunt the campaign through public relations programs that stressed their conservation achievements. The tree farm movement itself provided an excellent opportunity to demonstrate industry's ability for effective self-regulation, and this point has been made on many subsequent occasions.

In 1954, in order to provide a truly national system, the trustees of AFPI approved the "Principles of the American Tree Farm System." Although

revised through the years, the major criteria for AFPI tree farm certification have remained essentially the same: the property must be privately owned, managed for the growth and harvest of forest crops, and protected adequately from fire, insects, disease, and destructive grazing. Significantly, harvesting practices must assure prompt restocking with desirable trees.

To implement these regulations in the late 1950s, AFPI assumed the administration as well as the sponsorship of the program in states east of the Rocky Mountains. Local sponsorship was placed in the hands of state forest industry committees composed of representatives of AFPI member companies. (In the West the program continued to be sponsored and managed by the originating organizations—the Industrial Forestry Association in the Douglas-fir region, the California Redwood Association in the redwood region, and elsewhere by the

Western Pine Association.) Under AFPI leadership the system soon expanded to every state in the nation.

The 1960s were years of rapid change in the forest industries. Numerous mergers created companies with broadened outlooks and national interests. Seeking to meet the changing needs of its constituents, AFPI reorganized in 1969 as the American Forest Institute (AFI). The state forest industry committees were dissolved, and local tree farm sponsorship shifted back to independent state associations. The original regional associations continued in the West.

The reorganization of AFPI and the changes in local sponsorship had a traumatic effect on the American Tree Farm System. The trees kept growing, to be sure, but the record-keeping system nearly collapsed until, during the early 1970s, AFI computerized its tree farm records. A new tabulation showed some 36,000 members of the system,



The California Redwood Association sponsored and managed the tree farm program in its region. Standing before the tree farm sign of the Union Lumber Company, Ft. Bragg, California (ca. 1950), are C. Russell Johnson and Otis R. Johnson of Union; Sherman A. Bishop, executive vice-president of the California Redwood Association; and Emanuel Fritz, forestry adviser to the association and professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

FHS Collection



The American Tree Farm System celebrated its fortieth anniversary on June 12, 1981, on the tree farm of T. O. Perry near Creedmore, North Carolina. Posing for photographers are, from left, Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina; George H. Weyerhaeuser, president and chief executive officer of Weyerhaeuser Company; Andy Griffith, North Carolina tree farmer and 1981 spokesman for the system; and host T. O. Perry, North Carolina's outstanding tree farmer in 1978.

Warren Uzzle Photography, courtesy of Weyerhaeuser Company

but records for 6,000 of them could not be located and more than 20,000 tree farms had not been inspected for five years or more. If the credibility of other AFI programs—in particular a new forest industries communications project—was to be maintained, the tree farm system had to undergo a thorough renovation.

AFI began a massive campaign to reinspect every tree farm in the nation. Properties that no longer met the criteria were dropped from the rolls. Only about ten states still had functioning tree farm organizations, so AFI concentrated on revitalizing existing committees and reestablishing those that had become defunct. Grants and other incentives expanded the activities of committees, and thousands of foresters from government, industry, and consulting firms volunteered their time to make necessary inspections.

By the mid-1970s, the integrity of the national system had been reestablished, and the program was once again growing. Adding new members, however, was not as important as quality performance in forestry. Landowners had to demonstrate that they already had accomplished certain forest management goals before they could qualify for membership. Reinspection of each tree farm by local sponsors at five-year intervals guaranteed that landowners would have continued contact with foresters and the latest tech-

nical information, and that records would be kept up to date. The emphasis on quality also found expression in "Outstanding Tree Farmer" competitions, which became national in scope by 1976.

The tree farm program was originally developed to demonstrate that privately owned forestlands could be managed efficiently and in the public interest. Although virtually all early tree farms were owned by industrial firms, the program was gradually extended to nonindustrial forestlands in recognition of their importance in helping to meet the nation's wood needs. Today some 52 percent of all certified tree farms (more than 20,000) are woodlots of 100 acres or less, and the tree farm program has been a useful tool to encourage productive management of these small tracts.

The American Tree Farm System today embraces forty-five active tree farm committees, and there are certified properties in all fifty states. About 10,000 foresters volunteer time to operate the program. The green and white diamond-shaped sign, boldly marked "TREE FARM," is a nationally recognized symbol of private forestry. It is a visible declaration by some 40,000 owners that they believe in forest management and are growing trees for the future. □

AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM

Year	Number of Tree Farms	Total Acreage
1941	1	120,000
1945	945	11,134,950
1950	2,935	22,933,130
1955	7,534	37,838,910
1960	19,341	54,524,830
1965	27,309	65,345,574
1970	33,688	74,637,297
1975	31,667	76,343,741
1980	38,926	79,606,485

Further reading: Paul F. Sharp, "The Tree Farm Movement: Its Origin and Development," *Agricultural History* 23 (January 1949): 41-45, was an early project of the Forest Products History Foundation, forerunner of the Forest History Society. William D. Hagenstein, "Tree Farms: How They Started," *Western Conservation Journal* 14 (July-August 1957): 7-9, 56, 58, and Hagenstein, *Tree Farms—Greener Every Year*. The H. R. MacMillan Lectureship in Forestry, 1977 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1977), reflect the perspective of one who was involved with the West Coast Tree Farm Program from its beginning until his retirement as executive vice-president of the Industrial Forestry Association in March 1980. There is no book-length historical study of tree farming. Additional information on the American Tree Farm System is available from the American Forest Institute, 1619 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.