

A Pioneer Family Farm at 150: Report to our communities

WILMA GUTTRIDGE AND GILBERT SHIBLEY

Editor's note: *The Shibley Family LLC owns and manages 322 acres in Springwater, comprising roughly half the area of a wider spread of forest properties owned by various family members. About three-fourths of the property is forested, mostly in 60 to 70 year old mixed conifer stands, with the remainder in Douglas-fir and Western redcedar plantations ranging in age from five to forty years. What follows is a statement reaffirming the family's commitment to the land for the long-term, following a management plan that calls for harvesting no more than growth while working to diversify the age classes of the stands. The business structure was a sole proprietorship until 1994, when a limited partnership was set up on a 20 year term.*

The Shibley land in Springwater has been in farm and forest production since 1864. This year the family renewed its promise to the land and each other to proceed on toward the next half (or full?) century in a similar mode. The business entity and some of its ownership has been changed but our family has renewed a commitment to keep the core half of this historic property intact, in productive natural resource use, and in family ownership.

We converted this week in the state's eyes from a Limited Partnership to a Limited Liability Company (LLC). In our accountant/tax preparer's eyes it is a minor, almost meaningless change. In our attorney's eyes it is a more up-to-date and flexible form for being a family business. We see it as a good tool for our family's stewardship of the land. We as a family have grown up and out to become not just a nuclear family in a house on the farm. That was what we had experienced as children, as had our parents and grandparents. Now we are a three-generation mix of occupations



Shibley family farm and forest in 1925. Snags on the right are from a 1902 fire.

spread into several states. Not all current descendants of our parents are owners but all are still part of the family and most have some emotional ties to the Shibley Place, rooted in Springwater.

Our family business may someday even have owner/members in other countries, but hands-on management will need to be local. This is our home base, our home on the planet, our place. It was aptly named Forest Home Stock Farm in the 1920s by our dad and Grandpa Shibley. Springwater is our geographic community. Our church here is celebrating its 125th year. It has changed a lot too, with active members from miles away. Our extended family, including our mother's family, the Becks, is a community of interest as well as genetics. Our family is also part of other communities of interest in this county, especially the Grange, Clackamas County Farm Forestry Association,

and two resource stewardship organizations (Soil and Water Conservation District and Clackamas River Basin Council). Only some of us who participate in these communities own shares in the new LLC.

We are reporting to "our communities." Last evening we celebrated with a dinner for four and wanted to share with you how much and why we felt like celebrating. This week was the culmination of about a year of thinking, meeting and planning for how to keep the whole thing working for the family and the land. We spent a lot of time as General Partners, asked a lot of time from our other Limited Partners, and paid for a lot of time by our accountant and attorney. We think we have a solution that will be good for you folks in our various communities as well as for our family and our property.

There were two main projects in this whole process. One was figuring

out how to pay the six of thirteen owners who wished to have their smaller shares bought by the Partnership and thus to not continue as members in the new LLC. The other was shaping the terms of an Operating Agreement for the LLC to fit our family and our business goals better than the previous document (a Partnership Agreement which was due to expire on Friday, October 17.) Both projects took much time and effort. Meanwhile, we conducted the Partnership's ongoing farm/forest operation while trying to not neglect each of our own separate properties and homes. Plus still do most of our usual volunteer community roles. Whew!!!

The young folks cooperated and so did our house mates and celebratory dinner guests, Gary Guttridge. (Wilma's son) and Barbara Shibley (Gilbert's wife). The old folks are tired and the rains have started. The chair by the fire will feel good now as we reflect on the past and plan for the future. We like and need the support of folks in all our communities as we sustain the land legacy. Soon, we hope to find new legs of leadership to carry the baton forward.

A local old-growth forest may take 200 years to develop. That is about seven generations of people. This family currently has several sixth generation members and one seventh. Some of those will someday own shares in the LLC. We two are of the fourth. As we look back to the four great-grandparents who settled here we also like to look forward to showing the Shibley Place to some great-grandchildren. This year as we celebrate 150 years we two stand halfway to that seventh generation. We are pleased to manage what we were given and do so on behalf of the first, the seventh and all other generations who will keep loving this land, this special place.

The authors are Managing Members, Shibley Family LLC. ■



Nice 100 year old timber getting 2nd thinning after seeding in after the 1902 fire.



Gilbert and grandsons explore history of family forest together.