

Richard F. Smith

1911-1988

Richard Smith once took a visitor aside and remarked, “Every day, I’m doing a job that I love to do; I’m out in the woods a lot of the time, where I love to be.”

As a young man, Smith developed an early passion for America’s woodlands. A lifelong student of forestry, he was devoted to small woodlands and the small woodland owner. And for much of his professional career, he was best known for championing an individual tree selection management system.

Richard F. “Dick” Smith was born on July 3, 1911 in Bedford, Pennsylvania, to Edgar and Mabel (Kinsley) Smith. He was one of four children.

In 1918, Smith’s father moved his young family to the community of Salem, in neighboring Ohio.

There the young Smith attended both grade school and high school. During his high school years, he worked for a local pharmacist and, for a brief time, considered pharmacy as a career. But that soon changed. He learned that pharmacists with college degrees were making \$25 a week, at best.

Still, the Depression years of the early 1930s offered little hope to a young man in search of work. In 1933, following both instinct and opportunity, Smith entered the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a new government program designed to bolster the nation’s infrastructure and to put people to work. In the CCC, Smith supervised road

crews in southern Ohio, Virginia and Kentucky.

He later was assigned the tasks of planting trees and practicing silviculture in the oak-hickory woodlands of his native Midwest. It was here that Smith found a liking to woods work and pursued a succession of woodland management projects following his CCC assignments.

Eager to advance his career, Smith entered Ohio State University for a two-year forestry program, which he followed with forestry studies at the University of Montana in Missoula. But the outbreak of World War II urged him to a higher calling.

He enlisted in the U.S. Navy where he served honorably for nearly four years and saw active duty in the Pacific Theater aboard the USS Bach and the USS Block Island.

After the war, Smith returned to Montana where he met Ruth Troxel. They were married in Billings on January 16, 1946. Shortly afterward, the newlyweds moved to Seattle where Smith had the opportunity to attend the University of Washington and graduated with a degree in forest management in 1947.

The following year, Smith accepted the position of county forester for Clark County, Washington, based in Vancouver. The program was part of the farm forestry system administered by the Division of State and Private Forestry, USDA Forest Service

Region 6, which includes Oregon and Washington.

Smith worked with private woodland owners, promoting the benefits of forestry and educating them in techniques of forest management.

By 1950, Smith's dedication to small woodland management earned him the notice of his peers. His name surfaced as the leading candidate for a newly formed cooperative organized by the Soil Conservation Service for Skagit and Snohomish counties, Washington. Smith accepted the challenge and became general manager of Western Forestry Co-op, with headquarters in Burlington.

With his recognized dedication and purpose, Smith took to the field, helping woodland owners in management, utilization and marketing of forest products.

In short order, Smith's work again earned him recognition and advancement. In 1952, he accepted a position with the well-known forest consulting firm Mason, Bruce & Girard based in Portland, Oregon. The Smiths moved to the nearby community of Sherwood and, by applying his skills and efforts, Smith soon became a partner in the firm.

During this period, the Smiths also had begun their own family, with a daughter, Linda Lane Smith and a son, Mark.

It was during his years with Mason, Bruce & Girard that Smith became interested in and revived a little used forest management system of individual tree selection. He recognized the system was not suited to large industrial forestland owners of the western

forests, but he believed it was an ideal tool for the small private woodland owner.

Smith's system was a variation of a selective harvest method developed by Danish forester C.D.F. Reventlow in the 1970s. In adapting this "Danish method," Smith also found a colleague and supporter in Flemming Junckers. Junckers, a Danish landowner, later hired Smith to manage his forestland holdings in Denmark using individual tree selection. More than just business, theirs was a friendship that would last a lifetime.

In 1955, bolstered with confidence, Smith purchased a tract of timberland east of Sandy, Oregon, for \$17,000. It scaled at 1 million board feet. Through meticulous records of timber volumes, costs and revenues, Smith demonstrated the success of his system over three decades of ownership and use.

He began to champion his cause in earnest, encouraging small woodland owners to adopt the method for their own forestlands. The management strategy, Smith noted, retains the forest infrastructure, with minimal disturbance during harvests.

Much like Smith's own approach, the concept of individual tree selection was straight forward and simple. Rather than clearcutting a tract, he encouraged a distribution of tree growth of all ages throughout a stand.

Smith cited two criteria when selecting a tree for harvest: It must enhance the growth in trees around it and, secondly, the tree must be mature to the point where it will return the maximum dollar. The result is a continuous multi-layered canopy that includes snags and other understory vegetation.

In 1961, Smith took a bold move and sought to create his own company that would assist small woodland owners. He named the new start-up Woodland Management, Inc.

Using his organizational and forestry skills, Smith steered the company through solid successes for more than two decades.

In 1982, he sold the company in order to begin Individual Tree Selection, or ITS, a new forest management business based in Portland. Through his new company, Smith continued his crusade for the individual tree selection method, while hosting scores of visitors over the next several years to his beloved forestland. In his unassuming manner, he gently lectured those visitors about his successes and encouraged the use of his system that “puts money in the bank and leaves trees on the stump.”

Greater than his solid belief in individual tree selection, Dick Smith “had a high degree of trust and legendary integrity.” Said Scott Ferguson, Smith’s longtime ITS associate. Those who knew Smith would not hesitate to do business on a simple handshake.

Despite the demands of business and professional duties, Smith always found time to actively participate in his community. He was a 39-year member of the Society of American Foresters and longtime member and past chairman of the Portland Chamber of Commerce Forestry Committee. He was a charter member of the Western, now World, Forestry Center and helped develop the center’s Magness Memorial Tree Farm.

He was active in the Calvin Presbyterian Church in Tigard, the Sherwood Grange, served on the Sherwood School Board, was a member of the Sherwood Kiwanis, and a

member of the University Club of Portland, Phi Sigma Biological Society and Tau Phi Delta Forestry Fraternity in Settle. In addition, he served on the board of directors for the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI), Oregon Parks Association, Issac Walton League, and Audubon Society.

In all, Richard Smith’s career as a forester, self-taught researcher, and woodland management crusader spanned more than a half century.

In his later years, at a time when most men spent their hours in leisurely pursuits, Smith continued to champion his cause, promoting his individual tree selection management and working for the benefit of the small woodland owner in America’s Douglas-fir forests.

With loving memory and respect, given by his loving daughter, Linda Lane Smith.