



# John Wilkinson

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John Wilkinson, a native Oregonian, grew up on a small family farm near the Snow Peak Logging Camp where his father Ray worked as a logger and heavy equipment mechanic. After graduating from Stanford University with an MBA in 1965, John had a choice of employers. He and his wife Judy preferred Pacific Northwest-based companies since they wanted to remain near family. When Weyerhaeuser offered John a position, saying “yes” was an easy decision. They moved to Tacoma, Washington where John joined the Weyerhaeuser Timberlands Division.

John’s 40-plus year career in the forestry industry started even before joining Weyerhaeuser. For two summers during college he worked for the Linn County Fire Patrol and another summer he set chokers at Willamette Industries’ Snow Peak Logging Camp. He also washed Wimer Logging Co.’s trucks on weekends during his four years in civil engineering at Oregon State University. It was this combination of on-the-ground experience and academic training that John brought to his new job.

In 1965 Weyerhaeuser was preparing for a major strategic and organizational realignment. The company’s directors adopted the brand-new high-yield forestry (HYF) model that called for greater forest management intensity and productivity on all the company’s timberlands. On each timberland property, target forest conditions were to be achieved by using up-to-date forest research, operational experience, and following optimized biological and financial simulations. The HYF team was led by Senior Vice President Harry Morgan, Jr., and John joined the team as a junior member. He recalled Weyerhaeuser Timberlands as being an exciting place to work in the late 1960s.

One of John’s early projects was with Weyerhaeuser’s Forest Research Center to test thinning of a 30-year-old Douglas-fir stand near Longview. This involved marking, logging, collecting data on the logs shipped to the mill, evaluating the lumber produced and documenting the remaining stand. Many such trials were repeated to inform subsequent planning. In 1969 John accepted the position of timberlands manager for eastern Oregon. His responsibilities included implementing HYF on the 600,000-acre tree farm, as well as overseeing all logging and forest management activities. Early results proved favorable; however, after only one year, John was asked to accept a new position: general manager for Weyerhaeuser’s Asian operations.

Weyerhaeuser had production companies in Malaysia and The Philippines, but was then negotiating a major concession agreement with the Indonesian government to create a joint venture, International Timber Company of Indonesia (ITCI). John had to leave for Jakarta immediately to participate in negotiations and start-up planning.

Reflecting upon the work involved to establish and start up ITCI, John said: “It was very challenging work for all in those years.” The base of operations was on the east coast of Borneo, which had no modern infrastructure. All roads had to be built from scratch in a heavy clay soil that John recalled as being the “the worst mud you have ever seen - and it rained almost every day!” When John first traveled to Balikpapan,

Indonesia in 1970, the Army DC-3 landed on a runway made of WWII pierced-steel planks, and war damage remaining from the 1945 Battle of Balikpapan was still evident all around the airport.

Negotiations and management of ITCI proved to be difficult and unusual. On the board of ITCI were two generals from the Army of Indonesia (IRDA). One of John’s counterparts, Army General Anwar (who eventually became his friend), had been a guerilla fighter for most of his adult life and was, in John’s opinion, “a very tough little guy.” During one meeting that erupted into a dispute between two army factions, General Anwar slapped his 45-service pistol down on the table to settle the matter! John took that cue to quickly excuse his team. They departed under the watchful gaze of a soldier mounted on an army tank stationed in the compound. “A lot of difficulties were encountered with ITCI and we made several mistakes in pushing such an aggressive start up, but it did come together and operated successfully for many years,” John said.

The Wilkinson family returned to the United States in 1973 and settled in Aberdeen, Washington where John became a vice president and manager of the Twin Harbors Region. The Region consisted of the Clemons Tree Farm, two logging camps, sawmills at Raymond and Aberdeen, and the pulp mill at Cosmopolis. John’s responsibilities included managing the tree farm and all production factories. Two years later John was recognized with a special “President’s Award” for his success in achieving targeted region-wide performance objectives.

After three years at Twin Harbors, John became the manager of the Southwest Washington Region, which was centered at Longview. This region was much larger and more complex. It included 500,000 acres of high-site land, six sawmills, two plywood plants, log exports, and a pulp and paper complex that operated seven paper machines. Improvements came slowly but steadily including a substantially strengthened management team at Longview. The 1980 volcanic eruption of Mount St. Helens drastically changed John’s priorities! The eruption caused the loss of 65,000 acres of old growth and regeneration timber, two logging camps, a railway, log decks, and much logging equipment. Weyerhaeuser also suffered major disruptions to all facilities and operations at Longview. John credits Jack Shoening, Jim Rombach, and Ted Nelson and their teams for rising to the challenge and managing the work necessary to recover and resume operations. Salvage logging took three years to complete, and replanting the blast area spanned seven years. John was a key figure in subsequent court cases that arose out of the disaster. When lawmakers debated the creation of the Mount St. Helens Volcanic Monument, he gave testimony to both houses of Congress, emphasizing the need to balance volcanic preservation with the ongoing value of retaining and rehabilitating productive private forestland in the area.

Weyerhaeuser later promoted John to the position of senior vice president in charge of its six Western Region Operations in Oregon and Washington. With that promotion came a transfer to the company’s headquarters in Federal Way, Washington. Six years later, Weyerhaeuser’s Timberlands, Wood Products and Paper businesses were reorganized again, and John assumed leadership of the newly estab-

lished Oregon Division with its headquarters at Springfield, Oregon. He described the Oregon Timberlands team as a “high-performance organization” and the best he had managed. He noted the efforts and successes of colleagues including Jim Rombach, Martin Lugas, Jack Taylor, Jim Bradbury, Kelly Conover, and Janet Hatcher in achieving Weyerhaeuser’s objectives in Oregon. John notes that employees there worked a record 1.3 million hours with no lost-time injuries. His team produced excellent operating results and completed projects including the Coos Bay Spotted Owl Habitat Conservation Plan and the establishment of the Oregon Forest Resources Institute. John also managed company-wide fiber supply for the Weyerhaeuser Paper Company during those years and as a special project he successfully divested Weyerhaeuser’s last remaining Asian operation, Kennedy Bay Timber, in Malaysia.

John’s Weyerhaeuser jobs included work with the forestry sector and with governments in Oregon and Washington as an advocate for the value of sustainable working forests. In 1988 he became a director of the World Forestry Center and chaired the executive committee for two terms. He was a long-time board member of the Oregon Forest Industries Council and did a stint chairing its board. In Washington he served on the Washington Forest Protection Association board and became its chairman. He also led efforts to establish the Oregon Forest Resources Institute. As for why he volunteered his time for these groups, John said, “I saw the need and the opportunity to work with these and other organizations to favorably influence the business opportunity for forestry in both states.”

Looking back upon his career in the forestry industry, John remains convinced that everyone benefits from highly productive, managed forests. “Everyone wins in the long run—the landowners, working families, dependent communities, and the nation—from highly productive forests that sequester carbon and produce employment as well as habitat, cool water, low-energy building materials, and more,” he said. “We must continue to find ways to provide needed wildlife habitat and the other benefits of forest land on the same acres that grow highly productive forests for human use.”

John retired from Weyerhaeuser in 1996 but did not remain retired very long. Within weeks, the JELD-WEN Company, which produced windows and doors in North America, offered him a position of vice president to expand their business interests in the Pacific Rim. With his extensive contacts and experience working in Asia, John was a natural fit. He led the establishment of manufacturing and distribution companies in Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia and set up an international supply management organization. After nine years with JELD-WEN, John accomplished the work that had been asked of him and retired for a second time in 2005.

John quickly recognizes the support of many fine people who helped him during his 40 plus years in the industry, but none nearly as much as his wife Judy. He says that “since 1963, she has been a constant support in many important ways. Thank you very much, Judy.”