

**My Memoirs  
of the Dobb Property  
Dobb Forest Stream**

**Mike Dobb**

## SUMMARY OF MICHAEL JOSEPH DOBB

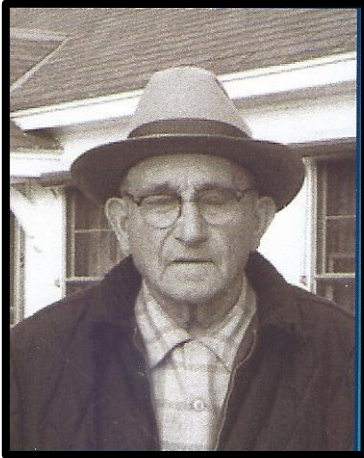
Born in Virginia, Minnesota on January 31, 1951 to George and Joan Dobb. As a young boy, the family moved to Sumner, Washington. Attended the Sumner School District and graduated from Sumner High School in 1969. In 1973 earned a BA degree in Recreation Administration from Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. Married Marcella Wagy in September of 1979 and became parents to Briana Dobb on June 12, 1983.

Retired with a very diversified employment background that included 32 years of full-time experience in the parks and recreation field, employed by three different government entities: Superintendent of Recreation for Pierce County Parks and Recreation Department (1985-2005); the City of Lynnwood, Recreation Manager (1975-1985); and the Bainbridge Island Parks and Recreation District, Recreation Supervisor (1973-1975). Held a number of leadership positions in regional and national parks and recreation associations that included being elected President of the Washington State Recreation and Parks Association (WRPA). Special recognitions included receiving the Honor Fellow Award, WRPA's Highest Award.

In 1996 became a third generation owner of 320 acres located in Koochiching County, Minnesota. A member and affiliated with American Tree Farm System and Minnesota Forestry Association. Presented by the American Tree Farm System was awarded the State's highest honor by being selected the "2017 Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year". Enjoy annual visits and the opportunity to make decisions leading to the best resource and wildlife practices while maintaining natural continuity for the land.

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# Three Generations of Ownership



**Michael James Dobb**



**George Michael Dobb**



**Michael Joseph Dobb**



It's August 2012 and I am thinking it is time to use my personal knowledge and experiences to assemble information about the Dobb property located in Koochiching County of northern Minnesota and specifically the Meadowbrook Township. The memoir is based on what I have come to know and value worth remembering to pass onto other family members.

My grandfather, Michael James Dobb, acquired the first portion of the property in 1919: 160 acres from Peter Olson (refer to Book 33 D, page 472); in 1920 120 acres from Jessie Armstrong (refer to Book 40 P, page 114) and in 1965, 40 acres were purchased through a tax forfeited process (refer to Book 115 D, page 353). A total of 320 acres had been acquired. In 1944, my grandfather, through a "patent", acquired another 40-acre piece (Book 48 D, page 228) that was then tax forfeited in 1966. The 320-acre property features three distinctive habitats: grassland/farmland, forests, and wetlands. The first aerial photo taken of the land in 1940 shows the property consists of about 65% grassland / farmland, 25% timber, and 10% wetland. Wildlife is abundant with white tail deer, grey wolves, game birds and evidence of moose, black bear and more. Two streams flow through the property in a northwest direction. According to the State, both are unnamed streams with one classified as a DNR Public Water Way. However, locals refer to the stream located furthest south on the property as Meadow Brook.



**Unnamed stream on north end of property near homestead site**



By the early 1920's, a home was built along with horse and cow barns, small out buildings, saw mill, and a well installed on this land. Water was pumped from a well and outhouses were used for sanitation. The location of the homestead was on the west side of State Highway 71 along County Road 77 and near the stream flowing furthest north on the property across from the Piekarski residence. The house and buildings were dismantled around 1943, with all the material moved onto 80 acres near Orr, MN, on which my grandfather acquired timber rights. That material was used to build a small sawmill on the property. Around the same time, he purchased 120 acres in the Crane Lake area about 20 miles north of Orr.

In the early 1930's, easements were acquired for Highway 71 to be improved splitting the 320 acres nearly in half, amounting to 19 acres plus easement for a power line. My grandfather retained the timber rights in the easement corridor. Of particular interest, my grandfather had secured a contract with Oaks Construction of Minneapolis to provide "knot-free" aspen used for building Bobby Blocks, little square toy blocks with numbers and letters on them. During 1942, my grandfather was hired by Oaks Construction as the Superintendent for road construction of the first phase of the Alaska Highway and the relationship led to the Bobby Blocks contract. Now home for my grandparents and their four sons (George, Jim, Don and Francis) became Littlefork, MN where they purchased a house on Main Street. For a detailed history of the 320-acre property, the Abstract Title needs to be read and a copy obtained through Koochiching County Courthouse.

The following is a summary of the property's history from the time I was born through my ownership of the land. My earliest recollection is of the late 1950's and early 1960's when each summer my parents, George and Joan Dobb, would drive from Washington State to Minnesota to visit their parents (my grandparents). My grandparents lived in Littlefork, MN. Depending on the season, family members would go and walk the 320 acres, take pictures, and pick wild strawberries or blueberries, chat about the first homestead and the life they lived on this property. In the early 1960's, my grandfather would talk about gifting me a portion of the property so I would one day move back and live on the land and raise my family...I was probably around 15 years old. The 320 acres are made up of four different parcels: 160, 80, 40 and 40 acres. The property ID numbers can be found on the tax notices. Around 1966, I was gifted 40 of the 320 acres located in the most northeast section of the property. For what it's worth, the

amount of the property tax was based on less than \$1.00 per acre. My grandfather gifted my dad 280 acres and Uncle Don the 120 acres near Crane Lake. My grandfather passed away in March of 1969.

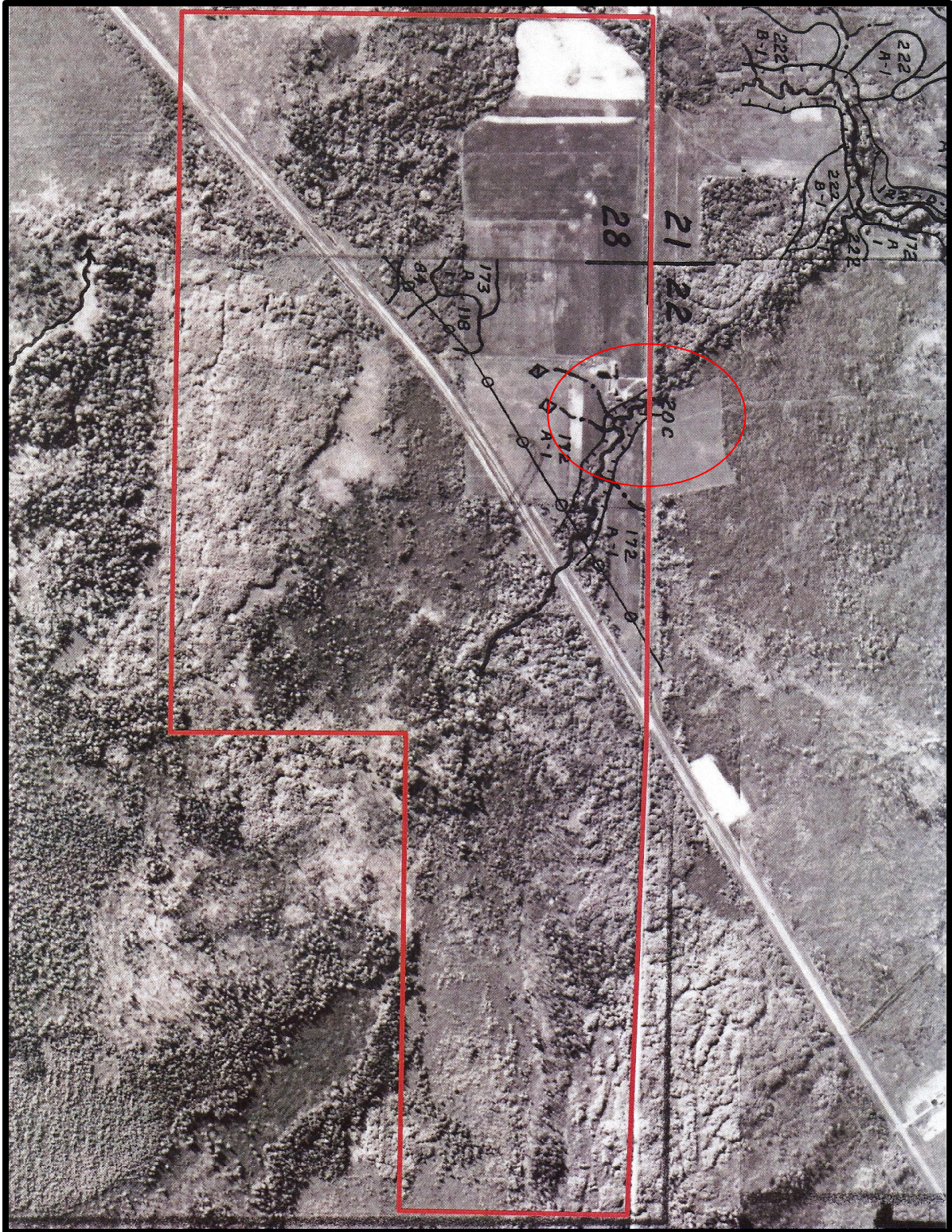
In the mid to late 1970's, I became a bit more interested in the property. My dad would speak to me about gravel, timber, peat, water and other land resources. I can remember making inquiries about aspen because of current abundance, and Dad would talk about his plans to have a large-scale timber removal project that included my 40 acres. My dad was so bothered by the increase in taxes and land management challenges that, on several occasions during the 1980's, he listed the property with a realtor. The property never sold, and with Dad in his retirement years, money became increasingly important. In 1993, he contracted with Potlatch Corporation to have all the timber removed. Potlatch contracted Elmer Dobbs of Littlefork to do the job. Approximately 130 truckloads of timber were removed and a check was issued to my father for \$24,000. In 1995, the 280 acres was listed with a real estate agent, this time my dad having luck. With the property priced competitively for the area at \$22,000, my father had a potential buyer.

From time to time throughout his ownership, Dad would ask me if I was interested in purchasing the property. His feelings became stronger to keep the property in the family. Now with the opportunity to sell, I felt he became nervous. I can remember my Uncle Don telling me of conversations with Dad suggesting he gift the property or sell it to me at a bargain since it was gifted to him. Taxes and management of the land had become major concerns but the thought the property should remain in the family was now at the forefront. Dad said to me it would be best having a family member with ownership of the property, and if I were to purchase it, a discount would be offered. In 1995, his offer was a purchase price of \$20,000 to be paid in three years with no interest. The discount was about 10% off his selling price. Now married, I approached Marcy and asked her what she thought. Much of the discussion was centered on our finances. Both of us had good jobs and being "frugal", I had more than enough to pay a lump sum. An investment in Boeing stock that increased sharply during the mid-1990s provided the money to purchase the property. The biggest selling point was the fact no money would be lost because the cost of land should always rise. I knew with proper land management a supplemental income source could be realized for us and future generations. In addition, it would benefit my parents' retirement

savings. A purchase agreement was signed in 1995 with the 280 acres sold to me with the terms being \$12,000 down and \$4,000 for the next two years. It was fully paid for in 1997. A third generation of Dobb ownership was about to begin.

To follow will be a year-to-year description based primarily on my annual visits to northern Minnesota. Highlights include accomplishments with the land and those supporting the efforts to: 1) improve timber quality and future income while considering resource values like aesthetics, wildlife and recreation; and 2) be a good steward for timber and wildlife management in a balanced fashion and maintain natural continuity.





**1940's aerial photo of the property with homestead and buildings**





**2009 aerial photo of the property with homestead and buildings demolished**



1996

Now owner of 320 acres in northern Minnesota, I feel more connection to the family. It was March while Briana was on spring break that Marcy and I decided to fly to Minnesota to visit my Grandma and see the land first hand. My dad was with us for the trip and spent most of the time in Virginia with Grandma and Uncle Don. I remember the white-knuckled flight vividly from Minneapolis to Duluth. We flew all the way to Duluth only to be turned back because the plane could not land in the snowstorm. Several hours later and on a second attempt, we made it. Marcy, Briana and I traveled to International Falls with my dad and Don met up with us in Littlefork the next day. I knew it was extremely important to develop contacts in order to learn "best practices" to manage the land and achieve its greatest potential.

On the first day, Dad introduced us to Raymond Johnson, a former employee of my grandfather who had worked with my dad in the forest. Later, Raymond became the Koochiching County Land and Forest Manager. He knew where the property boundaries would be. Together, we explored the land located 4.5 miles south of Littlefork with Raymond on his ATV. My gut wrenched seeing the area where in 1993 timber was removed even though new growth had started and a narrow buffer had been left alongside the state highway to mask the clearing. I understood trees needed to be removed because with age, they rot and wind takes them down. It was the thought of so many trees removed so quickly that was disturbing. That day we learned where the property boundaries were located and discovered a 10-acre patch of trees on the west side of the highway remaining. My dad showed us the water well and the homestead site and pointed out the beaver activity. Raymond suggested I contact Mike Eilers, Forest Technician from the local DNR office. We stopped by his office and introduced ourselves. Mike was aware of the property and the recent timber removal project.

The next day, we visited the property once again. He told me the timber my dad had removed was during the summer and said it should have been cut in the winter months. Supposedly, you never want to remove a tree during the summer as it diminishes future growth potential. In particular, logging during a wet summer with heavy equipment causes soil compaction and restricts good oxygen movement through the soil, important for the new growth. If a tree is cut when it is



dormant, the tree will spur the new growth at a much faster rate. This was a very important lesson learned. He then strongly suggested I have a Woodland Stewardship Plan prepared. The number of acres made the land eligible to have a plan developed providing a valuable guide towards its management at no cost, other than an encouraged donation. Mike placed the property on a waiting list. Mike became a friend and main contact. In the meantime, we walked the land around the homestead site and discovered where trash ended up. It was close to the well and along Meadow Brook. We noticed old bottles, tools, canning lids, and pieces of cooking ware. Finally, along with my dad, we went to the Koochiching County Courthouse in International Falls and made sure the property was properly placed under the new ownership. Later that year, I paid my parents the first payment of \$4,000.00 and began paying taxes. In November 1996, Mike Eilers contacted me and said he was certified and approved to prepare the Ten Year Woodland Stewardship Plan. It was completed in December and became my primary tool for managing the land. (Refer to the plan, inside notebook).

### 1997

Around January, I received in the mail a copy of the Woodland Stewardship Plan. I was impressed with the volume of information and how "site specific" it was to the land. The colored aerial photo was a bonus. Immediately, I focused on the description of tree types, their age and harvest recommendations. The plan's map defined the location of trees and acreage amounts. The plan had identified the 10-acre stand of combined aspen and balsam fir located on the west side of the highway in Section 3 on the plan's map. I made a call to Mike Eilers to verify. I asked him who could be trusted to remove the timber, with the intention of creating a timber removal agreement. Mike's recommendation was Mike Timmer, who had a small logging operation in the area. I contacted him, via phone; he visited the site, estimated the amount of timber (50 cords) and offered me the going rate of \$20.00 per cord. Now, I had to learn how to prepare a Timber Removal Agreement. It just so happened I had completed the American Forest Foundation Pioneer (PTF)/Certified Tree Farm (CTF) Certification Record and became a member of the American Tree Farm System, #6107. The property would receive the diamond-shaped sign stating the land was a Certified Tree Farm. As a member, I was entitled to receive a copy of the Tree Farmer magazine. The first edition featured a sample timber-removal agreement with the terms and conditions,

ideal for the job. (Refer to notebook for copy.) Perfect timing! So I prepared the agreement to have it ready when we met.

This trip was a summer vacation as both Marcy and Briana were along and included stops at relatives along the way. We visited my cousin, Tom Romens, and his family in Minneapolis, then onto Sullivan Lake in central Minnesota to stay with them at their cabin. Next, we dropped by Deer Park to spend time with the Michaloski clan on my mother's side of the family. We made our way north showing Briana the Michaloski Farm located in Buyck, Minnesota. Then, at International Falls for a stay over, I arranged to meet with Mike Timmer in Littlefork at the Big Spoon Cafe over breakfast to discuss the terms and obtain his signature. Later during our visit, we again spent time with Raymond Johnson and Mike Eilers. Raymond took me into the west side woods and pointed out white tail deer tracks and a narrow trail they created. Following the trail, Raymond showed me bark scraped off of birch trees. He went onto to explain a white tail deer recently removed velvet from his antlers by rubbing the tree, a technique used to polish the antlers. Raymond told me members of the deer family (moose, caribou and deer) shed and grow new antlers each year. Let's say, I did not remember learning that in school!

The following day, Raymond showed us signs of beaver activity: lodges, dams and a number of downed trees with their stumps looking like pencils that had been sharpened. We were taken to the west side of the property and shown a huge pond with a 12-foot beaver dam blocking the creek. He was licensed with the State of Minnesota to remove beavers. Raymond had taken beavers from the property over the years and wanted to know if I was "okay" with it. At that time, I inquired about obtaining a beaver pelt from a beaver taken from the property. Raymond then showed me how to set traps. I learned the beavers constantly build dams even near the front of the highway culvert (east side of the property) backing up water for miles. Fear of a washout of Highway 71 prompted the Minnesota Department of Transportation to dynamite the dams on a needed basis.



**Culvert for Meadow Brook flowing from the west to east side of property under Highway 71**





### **Beaver dam built in highway right-of-way creating large ponds and filling culvert**

Our time with Mike Eilers was spent looking around at future planting areas. According to the plan, the 40 acres was an old field and the former homestead was identified as a site to plant white spruce. He asked if I was interested and I told him I would have to know the specifics of how it could be done. Later, Mike told me about a west side neighbor Jim Staples who supposedly took a small amount of timber from my property. Mentally, I took note but decided to let it be. It was on this trip we would meet Jim Staples and Dean and Dawn Piekarski, all neighbors of the property. Jim lived in International Falls and reminded me of a hard working soul, and a "do what I want type of a guy". Dean and Dawn were young parents whose parents were long-timers in the area. Dean asked if he could hunt on the property, east side of Highway 71, and in return watch over the land and groom pathways that served to enhance habitat for wildlife. Before the end of the year, Mike Eilers sent information of a tree planting "cost share" program. After I completed the application (refer to notebook), it was approved. Finally, I paid my parents the remaining \$4,000.00. The property was officially in my hands.

## 1998

The timber removal inspired me to start a tree-planting project. In my eyes, it was extremely important to do. It was recommended in the Woodland Stewardship Plan to increase forest diversity and financial resources for the years ahead. The cost-share planting was a Minnesota Department of Natural Resource administered program. The assigned forester was Mike Eilers. Mike suggested Karen Thompson of Big Falls to coordinate the actual planting. After contacting her over the phone, I prepared and sent a Tree Planting Service Agreement. It was signed in January 1998. (Refer to notebook.) The approved planting consisted of 38,000 bare-root white spruce on up to 48 acres. The height of the trees would be 8 to 10 inches in height. Karen hired two planters who spent four days working long hours to complete the job. I wrote two checks: DNR Nursery for \$385.00 and the other to Karen for \$2,887.50. The Cost Share Program had saved me approximately 50% of the project's expense. With a payment from Mike Timmer in April for the timber removal project of \$1040.00, my portion for the tree planting costs was reduced by nearly another third – an overall true bargain. The planting was scheduled for spring.

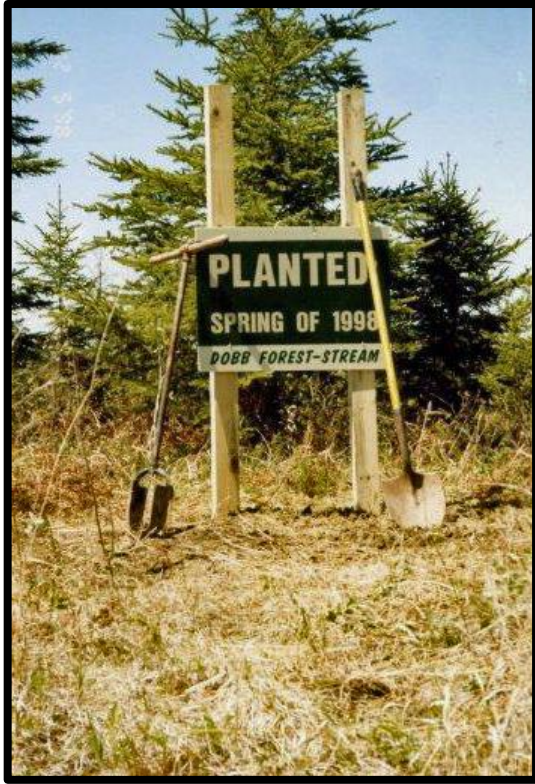


**My first timber removal project consisting of 6 acres in 1997-98**

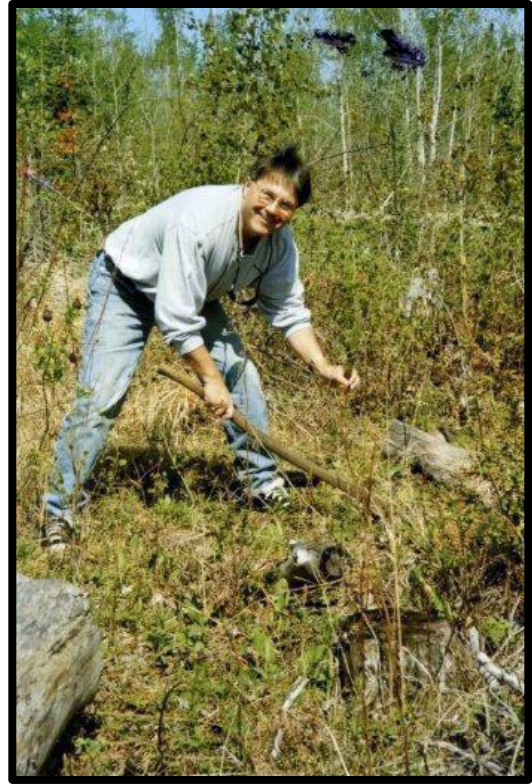
In the meantime, at home I began thinking about giving the property a name. I tossed out a number of ideas and Marcy and I decided on the name "Dobb Forest Stream". It had a good ring to it and recognized the family's name. For me, when those three words are said – “Dobb Forest Stream” – the name has a stronghold ranging from the sound of an attorney’s firm to the tone of an environmental cause. I designed and built two signs with wordage that stated “PLANTING Spring of 1998 Dobb Forest Stream”. The signs were green and white in color and measured around 3 x 2 feet. When I travelled to Minnesota in May, I packed them on the airplane and hoped the planting project had been completed. Instead, the tree planting had only just begun. I felt lucky as I was able to help plant a few of those trees on my property and see firsthand the job in progress. One of the two planters helped me install the signs, one on each side of the highway. More importantly, I was worried about the weather. Temperatures were warming up with limited amount of rain. In order for this to be a successful planting, rain was needed. Upon the completion of the planting, a rainstorm hit and temperatures cooled down to ideal conditions.

There were several other tasks I needed to do on this trip: 1) Inspect the timber removal project by Mike Timmer which I found perfect, meaning no damage and the best forestry practices used; 2) Visit Raymond Johnson and talk to him about the planting project, walk the land and, of course, have lunch at the Hometown Café; and 3) Check on the well site which was becoming an issue. During the time with Raymond, he shared about metal detecting the homestead area where he found old tools. He had sent my dad a special tool for the International Harvester used on the land. I had a metal detector at home and noted to bring it with me next year. Mike Eilers was out of state fighting fires and I did not meet with him on this trip. Returning home from the trip, I was particularly excited about the "Dobb Forest Stream" name. To maintain a strong family interest and pride in the property, I would have a "Dobb Forest Stream" hat designed. I hired Jake Lawrence of Puyallup, Washington to create the design featuring trees, a stream and the words "Dobb Forest Stream". This first edition embroidered hat would be beige and green in color. Family members would all receive one.





**Sign installed to recognize planting of 38,000 white spruce in 1998**



**Mike plants 1 of 38,000 white spruce in 1998**

1999

It was February and I drove by the Washington State University Extension Center located in Puyallup, Washington, a short distance from home. I took special notice of their tall aspen grove primarily because of my forest property. Through a phone conversation with John Johnson, a researcher at the WSU branch, I learned he was studying hybrid aspen. Several varieties were being developed and undergoing testing. WSU was attempting to produce a tree that would maintain quality and reach full growth in about ten years. It sounded positive to me. Explaining I had property in northern Minnesota, I asked if I could take and plant the heartiest species on my property. In return, I would share with him the results.

So in mid-September, I picked up a packaged bundle that I would plant, unfortunately an unsuccessful effort. In the meantime, I was informed about the

Minnesota Forestry Association and their partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension and the Department of Forest Resources. In May, I became a member and continue to be. This membership has become a valuable resource with a range of services such as forest ecology, wildlife habitat and forest management to tax and legislative issues. My grandma, Catherine Marie Dobb turned 100 years old on September 17<sup>th</sup> and my parents would be traveling with me to celebrate. The staff at the Littlefork Retirement Home did a fantastic job having her ready to join festivities that included candle-blowing, cake, ice cream and a room filled with flowers. Raymond Johnson, Uncle Don and Aunt Mary and their daughters were also there to join in the celebration.

Earlier that day, we visited the property. I believe it was my dad, Uncle Don and Raymond Johnson who joined me. My dad wanted to inspect the area where he had timber removed in 1993 to see the new growth. The aspen's growth was struggling making a comeback. While together, we all walked around the plantings of white spruce. You could barely see the trees and their new growth; the grass was taller than the white spruce. Raymond explained it was a good thing. The grass provided shade from the scorching sun enabling the trees a better opportunity to survive. I was starting to wonder if my tree planting investment would pay off. Both Dad and Don wanted to go to the homestead site, the old field and locate the water well.

The well had been installed in the late 20's serving the family into the 40's. My dad removed the pump in the late 80's during a trip to visit my grandma. When my dad removed the pump, a tree branch was inserted into the well's casing. The pump was hauled home and given to me. The pump was minus the handle and is a decorative piece in our flowerbed at our Sunner, Washington home. However, back on the property, the well had become an issue. With the current Minnesota law, my purchase of the property triggered a Minnesota water well status report. My thought was the well had value and, therefore, felt it should remain on record. In order to do so, each year the State's Water Well Maintenance permit was renewed and the yearly fee paid of about \$150.00, even though the well was not being used. In conversation with Norman Mofjeld, State Hydrologist, I now had to cap the well to obtain the 1999 permit and was given 60 days to complete the task. Otherwise, I would be required to seal and eliminate the well all together. The "branch cap" method, a stick shoved down the shaft was no longer

accepted. I contacted Mike Eilers and asked if he be willing to purchase a well cap and install it for payment. The cost was \$41.00 for materials and a check was sent for \$100.00. Task completed. I sent a photograph and copy of the invoice describing the well cap to Norm, and it was passed onto Koochiching County for their files.

Before I returned home, I met with Mike Eilers. We spoke briefly about the well issue; however, I focused on receiving Mike's comments regarding the new growth where Mike Timmer removed timber in 1998. We visited the site and the new growth was already half the height of the aspen where my dad had timber removed in 1993. What a difference tree removal in the summer versus wintertime made. Now on my fourth visit, I admit I am becoming attached to the land by taking more photographs; experiencing wildlife and watching the trees grow. Darn it though, I forgot the metal detector! On a sad note, my grandma passed away that December.

## 2000

Packing for this year's fall trip, I included my metal detector, a high-end Garrett. This machine can detect items nearly two feet buried under the earth. My focus was to be a happy hunter looking for treasurers mainly along the stream bank close to the homestead. During the evening, I flew into International Falls. The next morning, my first stop was at Raymond Johnson's home for a short visit to borrow a shovel and hand tools for help with the metal detector adventure. Raymond would later join me with his metal detector.

It was still early in the morning and, before heading out to the property, I decided to drop by Mike Eilers at the DNR office in Littlefork. He informed me the white spruce I had planted were doing very well. He would not be surprised if 70% of the 38,000 trees planted in 1998 would make it. That was a remarkable prediction to hear. By the time I arrived on the property, Raymond was there waiting. Knowing the success of the white spruce, I wanted to walk around and do an assessment with Raymond. Sure enough, standing just under the height of the grassland, I could see hundreds and hundreds of white spruce. Raymond pointed out the new growth that had taken place over the year. Though the couple of

inches did not seem like much, they were healthy. Purchasing the property looked as though it would be a prosperous investment.

It was time to metal detect – the main purpose of this year's trip. Raymond started in the area by the former cow barn and, in no time, found an old ax blade. It was after lunch Raymond headed back home. I told him I would drop by and return the tools I borrowed. I was pumped and ready to search for treasures and remained on the property at least three more hours under sunny skies and warm temperatures. Breaking a sweat did not bother me because at the end of day, I found several two-man saws, door hinges, a 1954 Minnesota license plate and lots of canning jar lids. Traveling back to International Falls that afternoon, I stayed at the Holiday Inn where I made reservations every year. I enjoyed the place because of its indoor swimming pool, which enabled me to swim laps. I have heard that if I picked up a "tick" in the woods, the water chemistry would irritate them enough to leave. Over the next several days I would continue to metal detect, take pictures and I return Raymond's tools.

On my final day, it dawned on me I wanted to install signs along Highway 71 to recognize family members for decades of ownership. How could it be achieved in a way as not to create a problem with neighbors or, more so, Minnesota DOT? On the flight back to Washington State, I was reading a magazine article about the upcoming Presidential election between Bush and Gore and the global warming issue. The article triggered in my mind an absolute "clever" way to describe why I bought the 320 acres. Of course! It was my global warming investment! With northern Minnesota being the icebox of the nation, it made perfect sense. When used, it brought smiles! The sign would say, "Dobb Forest Stream, Est. 1919, Dobb Family Tribute. "





**Treasures found metal detecting, buried on the Homestead site,  
dating back to the 1930s**

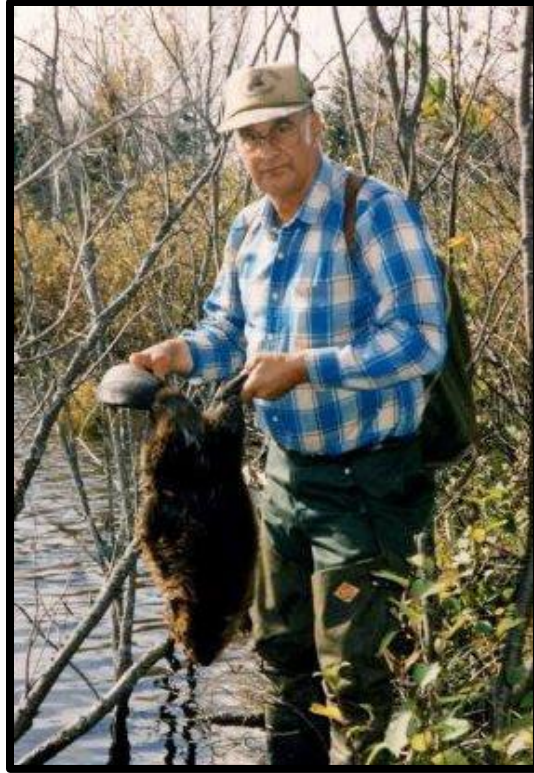
2001

It is the first part of September and I am thinking about the trip ahead. Then 9/11 happened, the unthinkable act of terrorism. Slamming of planes into each of the World Trade Center's twin towers and the Pentagon, I was devastated and nervous about flying. However, I thought the skies would be the safest means of travel after the horrifying attack. I decided to go but was not sure if I wanted to pack along my metal detector. Security at the airports was stepped up to the highest level in years, and I have always been one not to check in luggage. Included would be my metal detector though I was prepared to check it in if required. The metal detector passed through security. Coming and going, the flights were at only 50% capacity. During this trip, I spent a great deal of time

with Raymond Johnson walking around the property learning more about its history and special features. Raymond hauled out his ATV and made the exploring of the property very enjoyable. Specifically, he took me to an area on the east side of Highway 71 along the south boundary of the property. There, Raymond pointed out, were remnants of a foundation and wood burning stove where a cabin once stood. Years back, the cabin, no larger than a 12' x 12' structure, had burned to the ground. Raymond did not know anything about the history of the cabin nor have I been able to determine why it was there.

The next day we rode on the ATV along the State highway and power line right-of-ways on the west side of Highway 71. Raymond was telling me of a major beaver destruction and headed toward the area. The beavers had created at least a five-acre pond with a dam blocking the flow of Meadow Brook. Just outside the water edges of the pond were a large number of trees down. The gnawing marks on the stumps were evidence enough of the beaver activity. Raymond stated he would set traps during the upcoming beaver season. I asked him if I could have a pelt, as it would be special knowing the beaver was trapped on the property. He said that was doable. Leaving the area and along the right-of-way, I spotted what were large tire tracks leading into the land. An opening had been created with significant tire ruts affecting the ground. The damage concerned me because a newly established entrance could allow large vehicles to enter the property. Jim Staples, my neighbor to the west of me, was the culprit. Apparently, he wanted to build a trail extending from his property to Highway 71 and, in doing so, damaged the land. While on my visit, I tried unsuccessfully to reach him.

With one day to go before returning home, I wanted to metal detect. Again, I worked the creek bank near the homestead site. Among the items I found most interesting was a toy gun buried in ten inches of earth for the last 50 to 60 years. Because of 9/11, I decided not to pack the toy gun in my suitcase for the flight home but rather have Raymond coordinate the delivery via UPS. Once at home, I told my dad about finding the toy gun. When it arrived, I showed the gun to him. It was his when he was a boy! The final task was to write a letter to Jim Staples stating I had liability concerns and was very disturbed about the destruction he caused. I stated that in the future he would need to request and obtain permission. The letter was certified mailed. Verification was received that the letter had reached Jim.



## **Raymond Johnson traps and removes beaver from the property**

2002

It's January. I wanted to refocus on designing and creating signage with the intent to install it along Highway 71 seen from both the north and southbound driving directions. Specifically, the signs would distinguish property boundaries and ownership. Words chosen for the sign having significance to the family would become the greatest challenge to finalize. Ideas were tossed back and forth between family members. Keeping it simple and seemingly with the most meaning, three lines would appear on the sign: "DOBB FOREST STREAM, EST. 1919, DOBB FAMILY TRIBUTE". The meaning of those words went beyond the family but suggested responsible land management. The decision made me feel proud. Now how would they be built and installed? While skimming through the newspaper ads, I noticed Michael's Art and Craft store carried three-inch custom wood letters. Required letters and paint were purchased. My dad was recruited to paint the letters. Earth tone colors were used. With all the supplies, the cost of the two signs totaled \$375.00. Later, I would package the letters and have them ready for the fall trip to Minnesota.

While checking the calendar dates for the flight, my mom inquired about flying together and suggested the destination be Duluth allowing her to visit her sister, Nancy. My father's health prevented him from flying and it was comforting to know I could fly with her both ways. Before confirming all the flight arrangements, a friend of mine, Tony Merkley of Lynnwood, Washington, had time on his hands, so I asked him to join my mom and me. Never having been to the Midwest, he agreed. It was September and this time I had to use the flight's check-in system. My suitcase was packed with the metal detector and the box of letters. My mom, Tony and I were headed to Duluth. A change of planes in Minneapolis did not go smoothly. Flight interruptions delayed our arrival time in Duluth to nearly midnight. My Aunt Nancy was there to greet my mom and we were invited to stay overnight. Upon retrieving our luggage, we discovered the letters needed to construct the signs did not arrive. I was miffed. The airport staff on duty asked where I would be staying and I told them three hours away at the Holiday Inn in International Falls. They assured me the letters would be there the next day. Tony and I decided to make the drive in the rental car, and it was early in the morning when we arrived at International Falls. It was breakfast time and I treated Tony to some wild rice pancakes, a regional treat.

The first day, we drove to Littlefork and I introduced him to Raymond Johnson where we had a chance to catch up with Mike Eilers. Informing both of them of my plans to install signs along Highway 71, I also let them know I wanted to identify the south property boundary that neighbored Minnesota state-owned land. Because of Mike's position with DNR and knowledge of the area, his expertise was needed. He showed me the location to place the sign. Later that day, Tony and I walked around the property and I showed him the white spruce that was planted, waterways, and wildlife habitat features. It was late afternoon and we were both tired.

Before the trip, I had heard my cousin and his wife were going to be visiting the area from Georgia so I attempted to contact them. It had been decades since I last saw Jerry and I had not met his wife, Evelyne. I told Jerry I was planning a sign building and installation party for the next day. They would join us. We slept and slept some more getting up for a late breakfast. Actually, the Holiday Inn woke me stating a package had been delivered. It was the letters. Tony and I were on our way to the property with a stop at Larsen's Lumber in Littlefork for

supplies. The purchase included posts, boards, paint, lag bolts, glue, and nails. The rental car had become a utility hauler. Before driving to the property, I stopped by the Littlefork DNR office to borrow a posthole digger. Raymond also joined us to take pictures. Within half a day, the signs were painted and letters attached to the boards ready for installation. Arriving just in the nick of time were Jerry and Evelyne to assist. Both signs went up by early afternoon allowing time for metal detecting. Both Tony and Jerry were interested in my stories of finding old items and looked forward to exploring with the metal detector. Again, hunting around the homestead, we did uncover a 1955 Minnesota license plate along with ax blades. With the day coming to an end and before returning to International Falls, I made a final stop to see Mike Eilers. At that time, he mentioned to me a recertification for the American Forest Foundation Pioneer Certified Tree Farm was required. It allowed for updating the records of the original certification approved in 1997. Mike, familiar with the process, completed the paperwork. I signed the form and it was forwarded onto the proper State department for recording.

One day left before heading to Duluth, Tony and I went back to the property to take a few more pictures and a last time effort to metal detect. While working the areas next to the water well, I picked up on a strong read. Digging a good foot under the surface, I found a locket. Shaking, I could tell something was inside; however, it would not open. Not wanting to damage it, I did not try to pry it open. We eventually picked up my mom in Duluth, returned the rental car and boarded the flight back to Seattle. Arriving at home, I showed my dad the locket and he remembered an aunt who had lost it. It belonged to one of three sisters: Mary Ellen, Jewel or Louise Foley who all lived in the area. The locket had been buried for nearly 50 years. I took the locket to the jewelry store and they were able to open it. Inside was a disintegrated picture. Before the end of the year, I received a package in the mail from Raymond; it was a beaver pelt from a beaver trapped on the property. And for a Christmas present, family members received a photo of the “Dobb Forest Stream” sign.

## 2003

I learned in October, the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) scheduled their annual conference in Minneapolis. With nearly 30 years in the



public parks and recreation field, and having been elected President of the Washington Recreation and Parks Association, I decided to attend my first NRPA National Conference. Rather than making two separate trips to Minnesota, one to visit the property and the other for the NRPA conference, I arranged for vacation time to fly to International Falls a few days before its start. Aside from checking in with Mike Eilers and Raymond Johnson, I had only a day and half to spend on the property. First, I was curious how the signs held up to the brutal winter and to see if they were at all vandalized. I found the signs to be in nearly perfect condition. The letters where glued loosened up a bit and needed to be secured. That was done.

Additional time was spent walking through the planted rows of white spruce. They were healthy approaching knee-high and thoughts and conversations with Mike were around their future thinning. White spruce is a desired Christmas tree and from a recent trip to New York City, I learned the downtown residents paid as much as \$15.00 per foot. When the decision to thin needs to be made, having some white spruce be sold for Christmas Trees could be the solution. Now it will take another 50 years for the white spruce to be fully grown. I know I will not be around; however, the white spruce stand will become Briana's. When appropriate, I will refer to them as Briana's trees.



**Thousands of white spruce reaching knee high in 2003**

On every visit, I will stroll along the stretch of the county road or highway to pick up whatever litter I can find. I decided to focus on the edge of the county road and the ditch on the west side of the State highway. Between my northwest property line and the highway, the ditch runs over 2300 feet in length. Unfortunately, in the county's easement, I could not believe the debris tucked under the tall grass and cat tails on the bottom of the drainage ditch. With a sharp depth to the ditch of three to four feet, it was easy to see why TV's, dinette chairs, a hide-a-bed, and an assortment of other trash went unnoticed. The county road in this section has a dirt and gravel surface with limited vehicle use. You could never have spotted the eyesore while driving in a vehicle. Because it was so disturbing to me, I packed what I could in the rental car and hauled it away. The dumping was illegal and I reported the activity to the local sheriff. I was told Koochiching County is responsible for the maintenance and flow of water in the ditch. Due to recent increase in dumping fees in the region, illegal dumping was on the rise. To the contrary, very little litter can be found along Highway 71. Because I have four different approaches to the property, I have spent time walking the roadway. The heavy volume of traffic is one reason littering is discouraged. Occasionally, I would come across plastic water bottles, beer cans and broken glass. Overall, I believe people are conscientious and would rather not toss out their garbage. In addition, no fast food restaurant is within twenty-five miles of the area; food wrappers are nearly non-existent. As for the property, other than the established family dumping area from years ago, I have found no evidence of illegal dumping besides or along the roadways.

It was time to leave and fly back to Minneapolis for the 2003 NRPA Annual Conference. It was in November at home that I received an unexpected call from an Elizabeth Wallin of the MNDOT. Apparently, someone had filed a complaint about the "Dobb Forest Stream" signs. They were installed, supposedly, on the Highway 71 right-of-way. Elizabeth stated they would need to be removed. I then asked her the width of the right-of-way thinking I would relocate both signs. She was not exactly sure. I asked her who filed the complaint and she was unable to provide that information. She went on to say advertising "to sell" was not permitted on the highway right-of-way. Because she had a picture of the sign, she acknowledged I was not selling anything, rather paying tribute to the land and our family. I stated if required, I would move the signs but needed to know the width

of the right-of-way followed by a request for the Public Disclosure forms. This mechanism allowed me to receive information who filed the complaint. I definitely wanted to know who it was. Certainly, there were other signs along Highway 71 that advertised the selling of products and services. Months went by and the sign issue never came up again.

## 2004

Before the fall travels to northern Minnesota, I contacted my cousin, Jerry Bronikowski of Georgia to see if he had plans to visit the area and possibly coordinate a chance to meet. That was indeed the case. We arranged to share a room at the Holiday Inn in International Falls. The weather had cooled down a bit, but skies were blue and the colors of the foliage were vibrant. We stopped by Raymond Johnson's home and spent time talking about happenings taking place locally over the past year. Raymond was recognized as a historian for Koochiching County, always tracking down the lives of residents and their significance to the region. He could always tell interesting stories that captured attention particularly when it came to my family members. Jerry and I then headed to the property to check on the condition of the "Dobb Forest Stream" signs. We would end up repainting the signs and refastening the letters with glue. Anticipating the signs needed work, supplies were purchased at Polkinghorn's Hardware store in Littlefork. That store has been around since the 1920's and under ownership by the same family. Mike Polkinghorn operates the store and I knew him through my cousins Mark and Tom Romens who grew up in Littlefork. Polkinghorn's Hardware store is where I always tried to make needed purchases and that provided an opportunity to say "Hi" to Mike.

This trip I carried a camera rather than the metal detector. I wanted to capture pictures reflecting the various landscapes of the property, pictures striking enough to hang on the wall at home. Walking on the property, I was able to get snapshots of beaver activity, water flow in the creek along large rocks, wildflowers, colorful trees lining Highway 71 and the growth of the white spruce. Unable to get a picture of a deer on the property, I happily settled for a red-bellied woodpecker and wood duck, common to the area. Approaching dinnertime, Jerry and I drove back to the hotel, cleaned up and went out to have a walleye dinner.

On the return, I did notice large nesting boxes with huge openings attached to trees and learned they were home to wildlife like the wood duck.

Most visits, I would go to Ronnie's, a general store located in International Falls. They have the best selection of sweat and T-shirts featuring logos of the region. What attracted both Jerry and I was the walking sticks on display. When finished, the wood was light in color with distinctive dark diamond shapes. I inquired as to the type of wood and was told it was diamond back willow that flourished in growth throughout the area. I wondered if I had diamond back willow growing on my property and how it could be identified. This prompted another stop at Raymond's and he would meet us on site to show us the diamond back willow. Sure enough, there is an abundance of it, small to large in size. Jerry and I each selected top-notch stock to take home to make our own walking sticks.

Before heading back, I saw Dean Piekarski, the neighbor across from the homestead site. He was with his father Don and they shared with me their purchase of a large John Deere Tractor. Both are avid hunters and often times used my property. Don offered to maintain the forest opening and log landing sites where timber had been removed by my dad. This is the land on the east side of Highway 71. Though you could still distinguish the logging road and landing sites, the vegetation was growing rapidly and further increased the wildlife habitat that was very desirable. The forest openings are important because they generally contain forage grasses and legumes eaten by deer and other grazing animals. Since Don was retired, he had the time to do it free of charge and meet the requirements of the Woodland Stewardship Plan. The Piekarski family would continue to hunt, hopefully with greater success. It was a win-win situation.

Flying into Duluth, both Jerry and I were on the road to catch a return flight home. However, arrangements were made to stop in Buyck at our former Michaloski grandparents' home. It is now owned by another cousin Brian Eggert who purchased the farm and its remaining acreage along the Vermillion River. We had enough time to establish a fishing tournament of sorts. Jerry and I spent the day fishing, with him catching the largest and me the most. A wide variety of fish were caught that included pike, walleye and bass. We pledged to do it again with an invitation to the relatives. For the return flight home, I was now packing six diamond back willow sticks along with my luggage. I was bound and



determined to whittle, carve and polish walking sticks for Christmas gifts. Just days to go before Christmas, I finished three walking sticks, one for Marcy and I, a stick for Briana and for my parents. They included a leather strap with bead pieces and tagged with the year and from where they had come.

## 2005

It will be 10 years of property ownership for the 320 acres in September. Time has flown by. So before I make my next visit, I wanted to determine what it has cost me in taxes. The expense had amounted to approximately \$3,600 or \$360.00 per year. Knowing the total, it did not bother me. I consider myself lucky to be among few owning a large chunk of property and welcome the challenge to be a responsible landowner. I also feel both the County and State provide me adequate governmental services for the amount being paid.

There is one exception, the “pesky” fee I pay for the annual Water Well Maintenance Permit. To date, I have spent nearly \$1000, roughly \$150.00 per year and the well has been capped but not in use. No county or state official has come out to inspect the well. What I understood is I am paying for a government document stating I have a well not in use, and the State’s file is updated yearly. Funny thing, I don’t know if the well is even functional since it was installed in the late 1920’s. It may be time to seal the well and get rid of the well’s permitting fee. I will need to find out the requirements for sealing the well and who does such work. On my radar this trip is to gather information leading to a decision of what to do with the well. Taxes have crept up a bit and eliminating the well’s permitting fee will offset the increase.

In addition, I have again reviewed the Woodland Stewardship Plan for my property. There is a stand of 23 acres of mature aspen and identified for timber harvest. I also want to obtain Mike Eiler’s opinion from the DNR’s office as to whether or not it should be removed. I made arrangements to meet with Mike to discuss the recommendations of the plan. Actually four pockets of mature aspen needed to be removed. The timber amounted to nearly 250 cords. Approximately 1/3 of the timber is in the Highway 71 right-of-way. I learned property owners had the responsibility to maintain the right-of-way corridor; however, a permit and coordination is required through MNDOT with the objective to retain scenic

greenways. I agree with that wholeheartedly. Only mature and diseased trees and trees threatening the power lines must be carefully selected and removed. For some reason, cutting the trees was a difficult decision for me. It seemed like too many at one time. On my property, Mike pointed out to me several trees that were diseased. Later he drove me around and showed me what a recent windstorm did bringing down hundreds and hundreds of trees. Even more so, now it made sense and reinforced the fact if you follow best forest management practices, my decisions will be for the better. I did not make a decision to harvest at the time; however, given the information from the Woodland Stewardship Plan and guidance from a forest professional, I am ready to move ahead in 2006.

Next on the agenda was to find out who sealed water wells and how much it would cost. Mike told me the closest licensed well sealing contractor was located in Cook, 85 miles east. I decided the next day to travel to Cook and have a conversation about sealing the water well. The name of the business was KO Pumps and I spoke with Roger Sersha. Attempting to coordinate the sealing next fall was my goal. The date and time would be determined later. For now, to provide an estimate he needed to know the width of the opening and depth of the well. The well was about 65 feet deep. The cost was based on \$7.00 per foot to seal or \$450.00 plus travelling expenses. Roger said I should check with the State to determine if they provided matching dollars to seal the well. He was familiar with such programs. I felt relieved making the necessary contacts to get the water well sealed and possibly finding a way to be reimbursed for partial costs.

With one final day left, I found myself wanting to walk near the creek located near the homestead site. There is an area where the creek has a bend lined with boulders and various sized rocks. I picked one up less than the size of the palm of my hand and it had specks that sparkled. It was gray-pink in color, somewhat transparent. The rock went home with me so a geologist could inspect it and tell me what it was. The rock was mica. Mica is highly resistant to heat and used in electrical devices. Knowing I own the mineral rights and do not know where that will lead is daunting at best. Once home I decided to celebrate my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of owning the property. A new color cap, off white with the “Dobb Forest Stream” logo, was made and given as Christmas presents to family members.

## 2006

This will become one of the most important years to date. First and foremost, I retire from a 32- year career in public parks and recreation the end of May. I hope that there will now be additional time for tending to the tree farm business. Not sure. Not only is it a second decade of ownership but there is much to be accomplished.

Before travelling to northern Minnesota, I knew I needed to contact a number of people. Again, that annoying well fee came due, so I called Norm Mofjeld with the Minnesota Department of Health to learn the steps I needed to take to officially seal the well and meet all the state requirements. A licensed well sealing contractor would be necessary and part of the fee included their completion of a Well and Boring Sealing Record sent to the State. I told Norm I obtained a cost estimate from KO Pumps of Cook on my last visit. Norm said I should contact Pam Tomevi, Soil & Water District Coordinator with Koochiching County, to inquire about a cost-sharing program where the county pays up to 50% of this expenditure. Sure enough, I was approved for the cost-saving program. With dates established for my visit, I called and confirmed plans to have the water well sealed by KO Pumps.

A contact still needed to be made with the MNDOT to coordinate the removal of timber and include it as part of the 23-acre harvesting. Upon a bit of research, I discovered the person who would be coordinating the authorized removal of vegetation from the MNDOT right-of-way was Elizabeth Wallin. She was the same person I dealt with years back regarding the removal of the Dobb Forest Stream sign that never came up. Liz sent me all the necessary provisions and forms needed to be completed. A copy of all the completed forms and instructions are in the Dobb Forest Stream notebook. Now, I had a contract in hand to give to Mike Timmer, the logger who did the first timber removal project. All five days in late September were going to be busy.

When I arrived in International Falls, the first stop was Koochiching County Courthouse to meet Pam. The sealing of the well was ready to go. Later that morning, I stopped by Raymond Johnson's to obtain a bow saw to remove several small trees to enable the truck and pump to get close enough to the well to seal it.

Got it done. Then I travelled into Littlefork and met with Kolstad Olson of KO Pumps so he could follow me out to the well site. We previously calculated the amount of material that would be used and the truck was loaded. The truck was positioned to pump the sand material and in an hour and a half, the job was done. The invoice was for a total of \$475.37, less than expected. He charged me \$6.00 a foot or \$390.00, the permit fee of \$35.00 and a \$23.00 fuel fee to travel from Cook. Kolstad filled out the State's paperwork and submitted copies to both the County and State. Before leaving, he told me the well was shot and could not have been used. Finally, there is NO MORE WELL OR ANNUAL PERMIT FEE!! The next day, I stopped by Pam's office to provide her a copy of the invoice. Reimbursement for half of the cost would be received within two weeks from the County.

For whatever reason, Pam inquired as to what property tax program I was under and I told her forestry. She also asked me if I ever had looked into the Sustainable Forestry Incentive Act or SFIA. Perhaps I had heard about it but never knew the details. She explained that under government requirements, the State would pay landowners for proper management of land following the guidelines of a DNR Resource Management Plan, which I have done. The program is administered by the Minnesota Department of Revenue and payment is issued to the approved landowner each year. I discovered payment rates varied each year usually increasing in total and were based on acreage owned. If I had been enrolled, my payment would have been around \$1700.00 in the year 2006. That amount pays for all the yearly taxes and my annual trip to Minnesota. I had no problems accepting the conditions of the program and wanted to sign up. Pam directed me to Pam Rooney, the County Recorder. There, I provided proof of the Resource Management Plan and signed the Sustainable Forest Incentive Act Covenant approved by Pam and issued a copy to the State. All 320 acres were approved on October 25, 2006 and signed off by a Julie Rosalez, SFIA Program Administrator with the State of Minnesota. My first payment would be made in October 2007 and each year thereafter as long as I remained eligible.

The following day, I met with Mike Timmer to cover the terms of the logging removal agreement. First, I emphasized having a copy of the approved permit on hand during the time trees were being cut from the right-of-way. Secondly, once the right-of-way job was completed, I needed to be notified

immediately. In return, it was my responsibility to inform MNDOT so their forestry staff could inspect the job. This cut represented up to 250 cords or 25 truckloads, of which 25% was from the right-of-way was removed. The profit for me was \$23.00 per cord. Mike again arranged to sell the timber to Boise Cascade of International Falls, which specializes in using lumber for paper products. I learned that one cord of wood yields 942 one-lb. books; 61,370 #10 envelopes; or 1,200 copies of National Geographic; or 2,700 copies of an average daily newspaper. So the products made from my trees could be any of these items. Mike Timmer and I joined Mike Eilers of the local DNR office walking around the area to be cut and determined the best sites to serve as the landing areas, where the lumber would be loaded onto the trunk. The contract was signed.

The remainder of my time was spent inspecting the land and taking notes on the growth of especially white spruce and birch. Some outstanding growing years were fostered by the right amount of moisture, sunlight and temperatures. Accomplishments were many on this trip: a new tax classification, timber contract signed that included trees removed from the right-of-way, and sealing of the well. Big steps were also taken enabling all yearly property expenses that include Minnesota trips to be totally recovered. Through the elimination of the well permit fee, money was saved; and by the SFIA tax program becoming a new revenue source, money was gained.

However, there was still one other important issue to address. The first Woodland Stewardship Plan expired at the end of the year. I fully understood the importance of a long-term plan because the information is extremely valuable in achieving both the fiscal and resource management of the property. I contacted Mike Eilers to determine if he still could provide the essential DNR service. Mike gave me the contact information for Tom Crumpton, a prominent DNR planner. Tom, a professional land manager, owned a business called Woods, Wildlife, and Forestry & Real Estate Services of Birchdale. Through a phone conversation, arrangements were confirmed to have Tom prepare the second ten-year plan. All the necessary paperwork was received, completed and returned allowing Tom to proceed. That winter he would visit the site and offer a prescription of recommendations and alternatives for the next ten years. A current Woodland Stewardship Plan is vital to improved timber quality and future income while recognizing the importance of resource values like aesthetics, wildlife and



recreation. In addition, it ensures good standing with tax incentive and property enhancement programs. Wise and timely decisions were made in 2006.

## 2007

Tom Crumpton finished the Woodland Stewardship Plan in mid-May. We received a copy and distributed it to all the required government agencies for record. My next ten-year plan was now ready to be implemented. The plan prioritized wildlife recommendations and scheduling a tree planting in the near future. During past visits, I noticed large type birdhouses called nesting boxes. These particular nesting boxes have an exceptionally large entrance, a hole around three inches in diameter. Wood ducks, hooded and common mergansers often use these boxes. As recommended by the plan, installation of nesting boxes would be one of the wildlife enhancement projects. It was in June when an inquiry to Mike Eilers was made on where and how nesting boxes could be acquired. Mike recommended either Frank Swendson or Larry Peterson with the DNR Office located in International Falls. An email was sent to both and each returned a reply. Apparently, landowners are able to obtain the nesting boxes through their operation and are limited to one per year. I requested one to be set aside for pick up in September for installation on the property.

In order to stay in good health, I have taken up swimming laps at our local pool. I became acquainted with Bob whose last name is not recalled, who was an avid customer ink-pen maker. Upon seeing his work, I was very impressed with his wooden pens. I asked him what wood makes a good pen and told on the list was diamond back willow. Go no further because that triggered a request for Bob to make me two diamond-back willow pens with wood from the property. The cost was going to be \$35.00 for two pens and became family Christmas presents for the upcoming season.

For this year's trip, I would take the Piekarski's (who lived across the road from the property) up on an offer to stay in their cabin. I always wanted to get up early in the morning and be on the property when the sun came up in hopes of capturing a wildlife photo. A one-night stay was arranged with the remaining evenings at the Holiday Inn in International Falls. With several missions in hand, time had come for the annual fall trip. Upon arriving, the first stop was at the DNR

Headquarters in International Falls for the nesting box. Both Frank and Larry were in their offices and remembered the request. Frank was familiar with my property and suggested the nesting box should be installed along Highway 71 where a culvert crossed under the highway. On the east side was a picturesque setting of a wetland surrounded by forests. It can be best described as a “Kodak” area where photos have been taken and seen by vehicle traffic. Frank volunteered another nesting box in the following fall, which I accepted. Heading towards the property, I stopped by both Raymond Johnson’s house and Mike Eiler’s office. Both would eventually join me on site during my visit. Driving on the county road, I spotted Dawn Piekarski at home so pulled into their driveway. A ladder and hammer were needed to install the nesting box and I wanted to confirm the cabin stay for Thursday evening. Arrangements were made and installation of the nesting box was next. A tree was chosen having a good site line from the highway. By stretching the ladder, the nesting box was installed about 12 feet above the ground. I hope that a bird makes it a happy home.



### **Installation of nest box, a wildlife enhancement project for use by birds, such as wood ducks and mergansers**

Still on the east side, there lies a four-acre patch of black spruce. Never having inspected this area, I felt it was a good time to do so. This is an area of the property heavily covered with peat and the direct route to the black spruce is right

through it. I had taken no more than 20 steps and found myself up to my boot brim in peat material. It was much like quick sand and the wet rainy fall contributed to an unsuccessful effort to inspect this area. Being introduced to peat, I wanted to learn more about this natural resource. In brief, peat material is mined and not seen as renewable resource but a fossil fuel. Though there is abundant peat material on the property, my initial thoughts were to not consider mining it. Peat is a type of wetland that has extensive permitting and environmental regulations to follow. Peat is used for heat, power and potting soil products. When peat is processed, bricks and bales are created for the market. Supposedly, peat bogs are as fragile as rainforests. I am really uncomfortable with how you properly restore the land after peat material has been mined. I would definitely need further information to proceed in establishing this as a revenue producer. Enough for that day.

The next morning, Mike Eilers and Raymond Johnson are with me looking over the timber removal project by Mike Timmer. Unfortunately, he never got started. That was okay with me, other than needing to extend the terms of the agreement. This would mean contacting Liz Wallin with MNDOT. I made a call and the removal of timber on the right-of-way was extended through the year 2008. Mike had equipment failure during the logging season that hindered not only my timber removal but others as well. At least the timber-cutting project is back on track for the remaining part of fall and into next season. Before the end of the day, we hiked into the beaver habitat located on the west side of the highway. The five-plus-acre pond was gone. The land was now a shallow bowl shape and field of grasses. Apparently, the beaver dam broke and neighbors witnessed millions of gallons of water flow through Meadow Brook raising levels up to 10 feet. Dean Piekarski was apparently the first to discover what had happened and shared additional information with me. Beavers are not well liked in this neck of the woods due to their massive destruction of roadways and habitat. Beavers are part of the rodent family and are abundant. Some feel it was probably a good thing their lives were disrupted!

On Thursday evening, I stayed at Dean and Dawn's cabin. Earlier in the day, Mike Eilers invited me to his daughter Hannah's volleyball match. So that night I met up with Mike and watched the Littlefork High team play. They were ranked in State for their division, and Hannah was a senior being recruited by



various four-year colleges. Littlefork won the match and went onto State. Hannah became all-state player of the year, received and accepted an athletic scholarship to Bemidji State College. Morning came and I spent more time walking around the land taking pictures and noting the incredible growth of the trees. Where the white spruce were planted, I noted spaces where filled-in planting could be needed and other areas where thinning achieved maximum growth potential. Also, in conversations with Mike, Raymond and Dean, it was often discussed whether a cabin would be built on the property. My thoughts are “No”. It would be cheaper and more convenient to purchase a place in Littlefork. And the idea of having a cabin on the property strikes me as a liability and generating undesirable clutter on the property. I feel the property should be left in its natural state, as much as possible. The only structure I have not ruled out completely is a designed storage area for tools, an ATV and metal detector.

My last day, I saw Jim Staples, the neighbor on the west side. He wanted to show me where he thought the west property line was located. Several hundred feet in, he pointed to metal stakes he installed on what he presumed the property line. It differed from where my grandfather and dad showed me years ago. To say the least, I am skeptical. According to locals, Jim is employed by Boise Cascade in International Falls and does small timber removal projects on the side. Supposedly, his business practices are such that he has been incarcerated. It is an issue I will deal with in the years ahead. Shortly after returning home, a check was received from the Minnesota Department of Revenue for \$1664.00. It was my first Sustainable Forestry Investment Act payment!

## 2008

It was the end of February and a check from Mike Timmer was received for \$4,756.58. He had completed the tree removal project including the right-of-way property. Nearly 250 cords were harvested with Mike hauling it to Boise Cascade in International Falls. As required, I called Liz Wallin of MNDOT informing her that the job had been completed. I was anxious to inspect the outcome but I had a few items on my agenda before the next fall trip.

Throughout the spring, I hinted to Briana that I would like her to accompany me. Discussions went back and forth. However, the offer to pay and a getaway

were reasons enough to agree. For Briana, it was going to be a three-day trip while I stayed for six. Having her reacquaint herself with the property boundaries and be introduced to many of my contacts, I felt, was a smart idea. Furthermore, planting trees together would be a worthwhile activity and bonding experience for both of us. I like physical labor because of the exercise and getting your hands dirty but planting trees is a new appreciation for all those who make a living that way. Through phone calls, I obtained the name of Steve Vongroven, Supervisor for the Minnesota State Nursery and placed an order for forest tree planting stock consisting of 100 black ash, 200 Norway pine and 200 white spruce. Delivery would be coordinated with our date of arrival. The arrangements were to send them to the DNR Forestry Office in Littlefork for pick up. The cost for the 500 trees was \$208.00 plus shipping expense. With the tree planting details out of the way, I thought it would be a good idea to contact Tom Crumpton to establish a time to meet to discuss the newly approved ten-year plan. I gave him the dates when we were going to be there and he said to call him when I arrived.

Around July, I received an unexpected survey from Michael Malachi, Assistant Engineer with the Koochiching County Highway Department. It asked if I had an interest in selling the county an easement along County Road 77. An improvement project was being considered. I completed and returned the survey stating it was possible, and I would be visiting the area in September and would drop by their office to learn more. It was a long list of things to do on this trip and having Briana along was perfect timing. We stayed the night at the Holiday Inn, and we got up bright and early.

Our first stop was for the nesting box, followed by a DNR visit in Littlefork to pick up the tree planting stock. Mike Eilers was in his office. Knowing I would need tools and seedling aprons to carry and hold the trees, he had everything ready. I reintroduced Briana to Mike and then off we went to plant trees on the property. Mike would join us later. Coming up to the property, I asked Briana if she had an idea where the property lines were located. No doubt she recognized the land and only with a little assistance, Briana figured out the property lines. I also noticed surveying ribbon along County Road 77 and it reminded me to stop by the Koochiching County Highway Department.

We arrived at the homestead site and I showed her the sealed water well, the slope leading to the unidentified creek where family trash dotted the area and, of course, the white spruce trees planted in 1998. Looking at the trees, now up to eight to ten feet tall, I reminded Briana those were hers. Uncertain of the length of time needed to plant the trees, Briana and I began digging a hole, placing the roots into the ground and then padding around the base of the tree with our feet. It is a slow one-by-one process. By the time two dozen or so were planted, Mike Eilers pulled-up. He brought and introduced Nate Eiting, a new employee at the DNR Office. Both provided us some helpful hints on how and when to plant. They told us spring was the best time rather than the fall. The percentage of trees surviving the winter is likely to be less than when planted in the spring. Our conversations then broadened and we talked about Mike Timmer's timber removal project. We would meet with Mike Eilers the next day to review it. Briana and I kept planting and four hours later had 250 of the trees planted in the ground. We were both tired and sore and called it day's work.



**During this visit, Mike and Briana plant 500 trees together.**

Before returning to International Falls, I drove State Highway 71 to glance at the area where timber was removed from the right-of-way. You had to get out of the car to determine where Mike Timmer had taken out trees. He knew what he

was doing and it showed. A call would be made to thank him for a job well done. That evening to celebrate a successful day, I took Briana to Sha Sha Resort on Rainy Lake for dinner. Before turning in for the night, I called Tom Crumpton to see if I could buy him breakfast while I was in the area. Unfortunately, because of conflicts Tom was not going to be available. I really had no questions to ask him because I reviewed the plan and it was simple to understand. However, before ending the conversation and unsolicited, he said, *“Whoever maintains your wildlife corridor clearings does some of the finest work I have ever seen.”* I will pass the compliment to Dean Piekarski and his father who performs the work each year in exchange for hunting on the land.



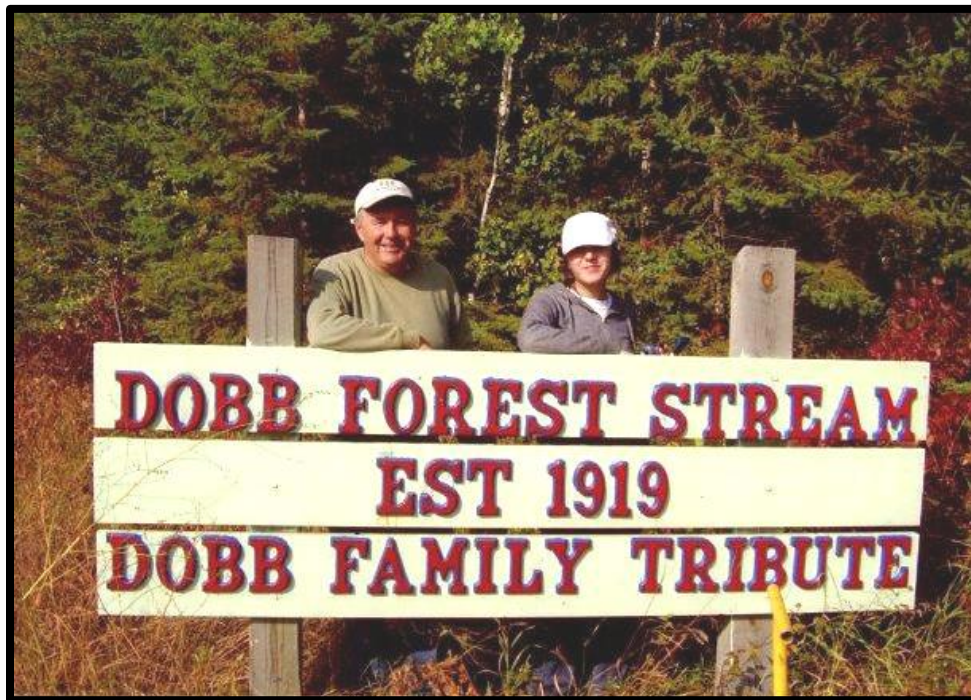
### **Logging road and wildlife corridor maintained by the Piekarski family**

Morning came quickly, but we were determined to complete the planting job. First was a stopover at Raymond Johnson to say “Hi” and encourage him to come out to the property. Briana already knew Raymond from past visits. Now onto the DNR Office in Littlefork to set a time with Mike Eilers to inspect and get his opinion on Mike Timmers work. Prior to leaving, Nathan caught me and stated my Tree Farm Inspection Record needed to be renewed. I vaguely remembered what he was talking about when he showed me a copy Mike Eilers had prepared years back. It was his job now and was certified to do the task of filling it out and



returning it to the American Forest Foundation. The Tree Farm Inspection Record needs to be completed with renewal of the Ten Year Woodland Stewardship Plan. Then with my signature, it was done and I kept a copy for my records.

Mike Eilers decided to follow us out to the property and looked over all the areas of the timber cut. Mike's professional opinion was reassuring to me that he was pleased with Mike Timmers timber removal. Having Briana there gave her a chance to see a satisfying end result. Briana and I spent four more hours planting the remaining trees and finished by early afternoon. Briana stated, *"It was one of the toughest jobs she has ever had."* It was astounding to think several years back the professional tree planters took four days to plant 38,000 white spruce. It was unbelievable what they had accomplished. With several daylight hours left, I wanted Briana to help repaint the "Dobb Forest Stream" signs and make sure the letters were secure. Upon finishing the job, Dawn Piekarski was driving by and I waved her down to ask if she would take a photo of Briana and me next to the sign. The picture would secure our memory of this trip.



### **Mike and Briana stand next to a Dobb Forest Tree sign in 2008**

Briana would fly out the next morning at 5:45 a.m. and as soon as the Koochiching County Courthouse opened, I would gather information about the

survey ribbons along County Road 77 and the possible improvement project. Arriving first to work was Matt Gouin, a contracted employee serving as the County's surveying engineer. He had installed the wood stakes and survey ribbon and informed me that to get information on the status of the County Road project, I would need to speak with Michael Malachi. Since Matt was familiar with my property and connected with the County, I initiated conversation about my west property line. Though he could not do the survey of my property due to his position with the County, Matt informed me that the company he worked for would be able to complete a survey. The name of the company was Murray Surveying of Bemidji and Matt provided me the owner's name, Bob Murray. I want to eventually have a conversation with him and obtain a quote on the cost of surveying my west property line. Michael Malachi was now in his office along with his boss Doug Grindall, Koochiching County Engineer. Wanting information on the County Road Improvement project, they explained it was high priority to pave the remaining amount of the road. The portion of County Road 77 in front of my land is a dirt and gravel surface. The new standards included widening the surface and redoing the draining ditches. With final approval anticipated by the Board of Commissioners, an offer would be presented to all adjoining landowners for an easement acquiring an additional 11 feet in width representing about 2.5 acres. I was to be notified in early spring of 2009.

My day wrapped up with a trip to the property and the installation of the nesting box. It was placed on a tree about 50 yards north of the first nesting box installed the year previously. Returning home, I have a lot to think about and anticipate what the next year will bring. The year ends in grand fashion as I received my second SFIA check in a total of \$2755.20. Making it even more eventful was also receiving in the mail a Certificate of Appreciation from the Arbor Day Foundation for the tree planting: *"For recognizing the beauty trees bring to our world and the importance they hold for the future on the planet."* Someone had submitted our names and I would share this award with Briana. Being a landowner is just getting better and better.

## 2009

It was February when I was contacted by Michael Malachi, Assistant Engineer for Koochiching County. An offer arrived to purchase a 2.5-acre easement for the County Road 77 improvement project. The initial amount was \$700.00 per acre. My knowledge of government purchases from private property owners propelled me to make a phone call to Michael and determine if that was indeed their best and final offer. In our conversation, I asked him if he had authorization to negotiate within a range and, if so, what was the high end. Michael told me the amount was \$900.00 per acre. In addition, I brought up the fact that several years ago trees were planted in the proposed easement area being acquired and if any consideration could be given for the loss of those trees. Another \$100.00 would be added. The County offer was now at \$2350.00 plus approval of my final request to install a new entrance to the property and include a culvert. Michael agreed; however, he needed to know where I wanted the new entrance built. The directions I gave were 800 feet east of the State highway intersection along the county road. With the final arrangements made, I said, *“Send me all the necessary paperwork for my signature.”* On March 6<sup>th</sup>, I received a Koochiching County Purchase Offer, along with engineering maps for the project area including my land. Documents were immediately signed and returned. I am feeling good about the details of the purchase. It was in 1995 when I paid the near “going rate” for the purchase of the property. The price was based on approximately \$125.00 an acre. A new benchmark for the “selling price” of land was now established at \$900.00 per acre. It was noted the County Road Improvement Project is scheduled to start this coming summer. I looked forward to my upcoming visit to see the progress. Payment from Koochiching County of \$2300.00 was received in June.

Before the departure of my fall trip, I needed to make contact with Bob Murray of Murray Surveying located in Bemidji, Minnesota. With revenues from timber contracts, SFIA payments and the County’s purchase of the easement, I felt it would be a wise investment to pursue the surveying of my west property line. Through a phone conversation, an appointment with Bob was made. The arrangements included meeting on the property site during my visit and obtaining a cost estimate. In the meantime, Bob would gather information from the County

and speak with Matt Gouin, County Engineer about my land to further prepare him.

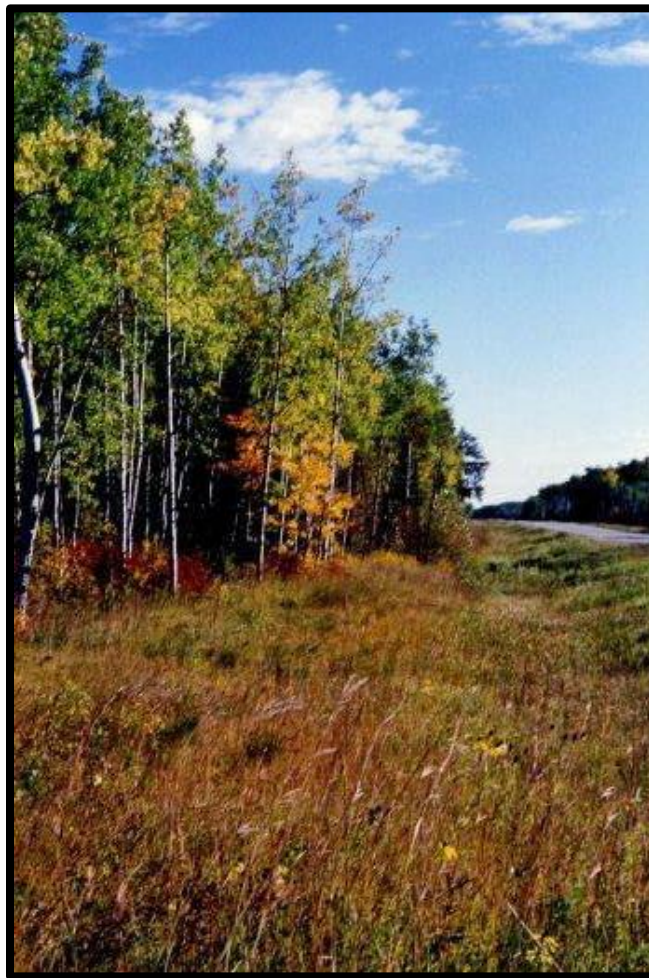
For years now, I have been trying to persuade a friend, Jo Miles to join me on a trip to Northern Minnesota. Jo and I have a history that goes back to the mid-70s, both professionally and personally. Our years have been filled with laughs and so to have him agree to come along was special. We would fly into Duluth and take the scenic drive to International Falls. Good weather was not guaranteed during our visit. It seemed the best day would be our first day. First up, supplies were purchased to redo the “Dobb Forest Stream” signs: glue to refasten the letters, paint and paintbrushes. While traveling to the property, I wanted to make sure Jo was introduced to Raymond Johnson. Our visit turned into an hour with Raymond telling stories of the past pertaining to the family and property. I asked Raymond to join us on site if he had the time. Wanting to make sure I met Mike Eilers, the next stop was the DNR office. My recent ten-year plan suggested the removal of 22 acres of black spruce. The trees were 75 years old and as my forester, I was looking for his professional opinion. Mike would eventually go out on site and concur with the plan. No action would be taken until 2010.

Jo and I headed out to the property driving from one end to the other on both the County road and State highway. He was amazed on the amount of land. What impressed me was the first phase of the county road project. The drainage ditch was significantly widened, free and clear of all trash, and with the road surface being a mixture of dirt and gravel tightly compacted. Next summer, phase two would include asphaltting and the installation of the culvert and new property entrance. I showed Jo beaver ponds, the white spruce planting, homestead site and creek areas. We walked a mile or two, with camera in hand, shot a number of photos featuring the fall colors. Next would be the sign work and this time more than just touch up. It took us nearly a day and a half to repaint and refasten all the letters for both signs, looking like new at completion.

For many of our meals we would go into Littlefork to either JC’s, formerly known as the Big Spoon or the Home Town Café. I remember Jo ordering a piece of banana cream pie from the Home Town Café. He said, *“It was the best in the world and I’ll return to Littlefork in the future for another slice.”* During the



evenings, we did spend time drinking a few beers, conversing with the locals and watching footballs games on big screens.



### **Fall foliage featured brilliant colors along Highway 71**

Now on the final day, I needed to meet Bob Murray on site to understand what the survey project would consist of and how much it was going to cost. All of us walked what was thought to be the west line. Bob had a proposal in hand including a description of the survey projected of over a half mile, setting capped iron monuments at the two corner locations, steel fence posts set along the line, and finally the recording of the Certificate of Survey with the County's Survey Office. I also confirmed that Bob would contact Jim Staples, the neighbor, to the west to inform him of the survey. The cost would be \$5,000.00. A brush line cut the full distance of the survey would be an optional cost of \$1,500.00. This was going to be a bit more than expected and I told Bob I had to think about it. After

he left, a discussion with Jo took place. With some experience in this arena, I wanted Jo's opinion. For the volume of work, would it be worthwhile? The west side of my property borders the only private property whose owner's actions have prompted me to this point. The remaining land is surrounded by State owned property and I don't worry.

It was time to head back to Duluth with a stop in Buyck, then a drive along the Vermillion River via a back dirt road of 25 miles to Cook. We finally arrived in Duluth and spent the night in the Canal District along the shores of Lake Superior before boarding the flight home in the morning. When I returned home, I called Bob Murray and asked him if he could complete the survey before the end of the year. With the money generated from the County of \$2350.00 and the SFIA payment of \$2796.00, I was comfortable to move ahead with the survey project. In the long run, it would be a smart investment providing legal protection. The survey project was completed by Bob. He agreed to meet on site next year to walk the west line and answer any questions I might have. I was anxious to find out the exact location.

## 2010

Before leaving for Minnesota, I emailed Bob Murray of Murray Surveying taking him up on the offer to walk the west line survey. Plans were made to meet on site the first day of my visit. It was the latter part of September when I arrived in International Falls. Now on the way to meet Bob, I drove County Road 77. Improvements to the road were completed. A newly paved asphalt surface replaced the dirt and gravel road that benefited the area and my property. Driving a bit further, I did notice the new entrance agreed upon by the County was not where it should have been nor a culvert installed. I would have to look into this.

Bob was right on time for our meeting. First, he showed me the northwest corner property line. It was actually further west than I thought it was going to be, up to 50 feet more than expected. Step by step, we walked the entire distance bringing us to the southwest property corner and in view of State highway 71. Bob did the initial brush cutting and installed enough metal stakes to clearly see down the survey line from one stake to the next with survey ribbon on all the stakes. Bob even went onto the east side of the property and placed a monument at the

point of the southeast corner of the property. I was very pleased with the survey and the outcome.

Later that day, I did meet with Mike Eilers from the local DNR Office, went to areas of the previous cuttings, examined the new growth, and then discussed the removal of the black spruce. Along with the forestry management talk, Mike mentioned, with the success of the white spruce plantings, a thinning project was likely necessary in the future. I realize the whole dynamics of the land has changed in the last decade. The 320 acres now consists of a far greater amount of timberland rather than grassland or farmland, a carefully planned transformation has occurred. Evening was approaching and I returned to International Falls thinking about what needed to be accomplished before this trip ended. Ranking high was discovering what the County's reason for the location of the newly installed entrance and why no new culvert was included. The next morning I went to the Koochiching County Highway Engineer Office seeking information. Doug Grindall, Koochiching County Engineer joined staff member Eric Norstad at the counter and went on to say, "*An on-site decision was reached to relocate the entrance thought to be best.*" The contractor completed the job and there is no intention of changing its location. I reminded him I had agreed with the County on where the entrance was to be installed as part of the County Road 77 improvement project. It was 300 feet off the mark and without a culvert. I requested it be relocated but Doug would not budge. The County Board of Commissioners had a meeting scheduled the day before I was to leave, and I decided to attend the meeting and share with County Commissioners my experience. During the public comment period, I introduced myself and recapped my agreement with the County. In brief, Wade Pavieck, Chairman and other Board of Commissioners members agreed with me. Doug Grindall was directed to relocate the entrance and install the culvert.

It was now October and back at home, I would receive the SFIA payment. I was blown away as the check I received was for \$5,014.00, a very sharp increase. The SFIA payments were increasing slightly each year since the enactment of the law but this was unprecedented. A letter signed by John Hagen, Director of Minnesota State Property Tax Division accompanied the payment and went on to say, "*We expect that this year's increase payment amount will be a one-time*

*occurrence. The increase was due to a change in the law in 2009 regarding how the SFIA payments were calculated.”*

For the record, I am now wondering what my expenditure versus revenues would be since purchasing the property. With calculator in hand, on the expense side the breakdown included: Survey work, \$6500.00; Tree planting, \$3117.00; Well work, \$550.00 and Taxes paid, \$7,400.00. The revenue side brought in: Timber removal, \$6,050.00; Sustainable Forest Investment Act, \$13,450.00 and Misc., \$250.00. Totaled up, it is virtually a break even. I did not include trip costs nor considered overall tax incentives. Knowing the survey work and the large tree planting are one-time expenses, the purchase of the property has been a wise financial investment. Importantly, I always want my practices to be a common sense approach ensuring preservation for our natural resources; connect the next generation of outdoor lovers; and be proud to know decisions made are right for the land, the family, the environment and the public.

It was late October when a phone call was received from Raymond Johnson confirming the County had relocated the entrance and installed a culvert. Raymond continues to have a watchful eye on the property, which is greatly appreciated. Year ending, I have made the decision to have the 22 acres of black spruce removed. I wanted to contact Mike Timmer. Mike had successfully completed my first two timber cutting projects. I placed several calls and after exchanging phone messages, I was able to reach Mike and learned he was extremely busy. It would be several winters before he could do the job. It is now necessary to figure out if I should move forward or wait.

## 2011

Mid-summer arrived and progress needed to be made on locating an available logger to begin removing the black spruce. With Mike Timmer too busy, I utilized the current Minnesota Forest Resource Directory and was able to identify several other logging businesses. I placed calls and emails to at least three different service providers in the Littlefork area that included Delack, Dobbs and Imhof. All were busy or did not respond to the inquiry. Over the years, having spread out the tree cutting projects combined with the tree plantings, a rotation system had been created lending itself better forestry management. Looking to the



years ahead, it was conceivable both a short and long-term timber removal schedule could be established for the future. Rather than large tree cuttings, downscaled versions could be planned that would ensure a revenue source while protecting the property's natural beauty, habitat and wildlife. For all practical purposes, I further wanted the black spruce removal to begin.

This trip finding a logger that was available and had a good reputation was first and foremost. Having never dealt with Boise Cascade to remove timber, I decided to stop at their administrative office in International Falls. I met with a John Berglund, Wood Procurement Forester and learned they oversee a number of logging contracts of various sizes. Unfortunately, Boise's yard was filled with logs with a waiting list for new contracts. I did get a chance to obtain a copy of their boilerplate agreement. Thinking it was loose knit, I felt better about the language in the timber removal contracts I devised. Locating a logging business remained a priority.

Since a year had gone by, I wanted to look at the new growth taking place along the brush line of the recent survey. Having a clear site line from one metal stake to another was my interest. So I drove to the northwest corner of the property and quickly my attention shifted to below the embankment along Meadow Brook. A heavy piece of equipment driven by somebody had caused extensive damage to my property. Vegetation debris was knocked down and pushed into the channel of the creek and large tire ruts were evident throughout the area. The deep impressions of the tires lead right to Jim Staples property. This was unexpected to say the least and it bothered me. Not knowing the course of action to take, I drove to the DNR Office in Littlefork. I wanted to seek advice from Mike Eilers. Mike being unavailable, I spoke with Patty Growette, Office Manager. Patty placed a call to Darrin Kittleson, Minnesota State Conservation Officer for the region. That evening I received a return call. We would meet onsite the next morning. Both of us walked the area and I showed him the tire tracks and the survey line so he could see the damage done to my property. Darrin asked me to stay put while he went to Jim's. About a half hour later, he returned with Jim who admitted using a large skidder to go after a beaver dam. Sorry was not going to be enough with me. Jim had no permission to go on my land, nor the proper permit to destroy a beaver dam. Working with Darrin, a Minnesota Wetland Conservation Restoration Order was issued to Jim that would be overseen by Justin Berg of the Koochiching

County Soil & Water Conservation District. A Certificate of Satisfaction Restoration was sent to Jim following his successful efforts to restore the land. As a matter of public record, I have further evidence that Jim disregards my property rights. Unfortunately, this being the third incident with Jim, stronger legal measures will have to be considered against him if he is involved in future property damage to my land.

Finding no logger for the black spruce timber-cutting project yet, on my final day I wanted to speak with Dean Piekarski who lived across the county road from my property. Dean and his wife Dawn know a great number people in the area. I mentioned the difficulty in finding a logger to remove the black spruce. They told me that Bernard Nordland, a small time logging operator lived just down the road. He had just completed a job for them and came highly recommended. Bernard was at his lake cabin and unable to be reached, so Dean provided me his phone number to contact at a later date. Discussion then took place with Dean about my west property line. Knowing of his work on the wildlife corridor that is used as a hunting area on the east side of my property, I asked Dean if he would be interested in a small tree and underbrush removal project on the west property line. We both walked the area and agreed a five-foot swath would enhance the property line. For his efforts, I agreed to pay \$500.00 on completion. I issued the check in December. At home in Washington, I followed with a call to Bernard. He was an owner of Green Forest Incorporated, a cedar-fencing specialist who also removed timber from my cousin's property, the Romens. My timber in turn would be sold to Sappi of Duluth, known for its fine coated paper and sustainability practices. Bernard said he could get started that winter so I proceeded to prepare a contract to remove up to 400 cords of black spruce as identified in the Woodland Stewardship Plan. It was sent to him and was returned signed!

To no surprise, the SFIA payment had been significantly reduced. Payment is now based on \$7.00 per acre and projected to be that amount in the years ahead. Total received was \$2,240.00.



## **Property damage caused by neighbor in 2011**

2012

In early September, I began to write my memories about the property and completed the first draft version through 1999. Being unsure everything was totally accurate, I provided copies to my mom, daughter Briana, wife Marcy, Raymond Johnson and Mike Eilers for their review. I also called my Uncle Don residing at an assisted living facility in the Minneapolis area to gather additional information. Each gave me feedback with needed corrections, which prompted a visit to the Koochiching County Recorder's Office. My trip in late September to Northern Minnesota was filled with meetings. I flew into International Falls late Thursday evening.

The first appointment was Friday at 8:30 am with Mike Eilers at his office in Littlefork. I wanted him to inspect the area where Bernie Nordlund removed black

spruce timber and provide me feedback. We agreed then to meet on the site. Bernie had done an excellent job. He had removed 100 cords of wood and sent me a check for \$2,387.00. The original contract specified 400 cords removed in two years; however, only 25% of that was cut. I also learned from Mike: 1) the area soil contained moist sphagnum moss, food seed for fostering new growth; 2) the black spruce cut had a great number of cones providing seeds for future growth; and 3) it takes only two ounces of seed for planting an acre. Mike asked me if I would like him to walk around the land and do a quick timber assessment, and we made an appointment to meet Monday.

Now, my next stop was at Bernie Nordlund's to develop a timber agreement to remove the remaining 300 plus cords of black spruce. We signed an agreement for up to three years to finish the job, both of us are in no rush to have it completed, and it provides me a small payment every year. Bernie and I jumped into my rental car and headed to the east property line to discuss boundaries for cutting the black spruce. The 320 acres on the east side of the highway is surrounded by State property. On the safe side, as not to infringe onto State land, Bernie will double check with Mike Eilers prior to the cut. Bernie then wanted to show me mature timber along the State Highway 71 right-of-way thinking it should be removed sooner than later. No doubt, the trees were mature and, if a strong windstorm came through, the trees he identified could come down on the power lines. I told him I was going to meet with Mike on Monday and I would get his expert opinion.

While still on the property and out of the blue, we hear someone shout, "*Are you the property owner?*" I then was introduced to Wayne Blake of Littlefork who proceeded to tell me there was a huge beaver problem on both sides of Highway 71 and adjoining the property. Sure, water pressed both sides of the highway and covered acres of land. Wayne is a licensed beaver trapper and asked permission to go on the land and remove the beavers in the upcoming season set to start the first of October. It was granted. I returned Bernie home.

Finally, around 2:30 pm, I had my third and final meeting of the day. It was with Matt Gouin, Koochiching County Surveyor. I wanted to understand "bearing trees", tagged and established by the County when improving County Road 77 in 2010-2011. Matt explained the bearing trees identified and determined the exact



location of the monument placed 3/10 of an inch under the road pavement. This is my northeast property line, which was important to know!

Saturday and Sunday I spent visiting the neighbors, repainting the Dobb Forest Stream signs and then deciding to do surface hunting for treasures. I borrowed a shovel from the Piekarski's and used it to remove silt and leaves along the edge of the stream located next to the homestead site which was the area used to dump trash back in the days. Sure enough, I found old glass jars, a cooking spoon, and a tractor seat all from between the 1920's and 1930's. Returning the shovel, I saw both Dean and Dawn and thanked them for recommending Bernard and the work he completed on the west property line.

Monday morning, I again met with Mike Eilers. We spent an hour and half walking the land identifying a number of pockets of mature trees that included the timber in the right-of-way. I will be contacting Liz Wallin, with the MNDOT to coordinate a future cut for Bernie and arrange to prepare the necessary paperwork with MNDOT. I decided to hold off on removing other mature tree pockets for several years. Monday afternoon was approaching and I had two additional issues to check up on at the Koochiching County Courthouse. First, I wanted to verify exactly how my grandfather acquired the 320 acres. I had the initial draft in hand of my memoirs and I stated my grandfather secured the first portion of land through the Homestead Act. I was wrong. Pam Rooney, the County Recorder provided me copies that showed how the land was acquired. My memoirs have been updated.

Justin Berg of Soil & Water Conservation District was my next visit. I wanted to know if the Restoration Plan had been successfully completed by Jim Staples on my property and it had. Within the damaged area that Jim restored, I learned the County was dredging the creek to allow the water to flow properly. The County's work will be very helpful. The damage of the property by Jim is no longer an issue. Hurrah!

Now back home, I emailed Liz Wallin with MNDOT to request and complete their permitting process, and I obtained a list of requirements to remove mature timber from the Highway 71 right-of-way, followed by a phone conversation. She seemed to remember working with me from a timber removal

project along the right-of-way in 2006. I submitted the paperwork and in less than two weeks, approval was granted. A timber contract was then prepared for Bernie Nordlund and he will have until March 2014 to complete the project. For what it is worth, I appreciate the effort and system the MNDOT has in place to coordinate the removal of timber. It helps to ensure the protection of a continuous greenway corridor along stretches of our highways, a beautification effort that is a must. Scenic drives make for memorable road trips. I only hope all property owners truly understand its value.

## FUTURE PREDICTIONS: SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM

Looking out into the future and becoming aware of circumstances as they develop prompts speculation both reasonable and long reaching in respect to property management. Many decisions lie ahead with opportunities of great magnitude. The list of predictions created can seem farfetched or even practical. Forecasting the future is a fun and meaningful exercise provoking much for thought. Enjoy the possibilities I envision for 2013 and beyond:

Minnesota Power proposes to build the Great Northern Transmission Line to bring cleaner, emission-free energy to meet energy demands and increase system reliability. The improvement is from the Canada border to the Iron Range near Duluth. One of the routes depicted would be on or near the existing power easement on the property. Understanding the consequences is a must.

After completing the process, White House staff has traveled to the “Dobb Forest Stream” property to select a 20’ white spruce tree for the White House in October. This would be with the support of local and regional officials, and the National Christmas Tree Association. Family members are set to present the tree to the White House in late November. The white spruce is the first tree provided from the State of Minnesota and would be featured in the entrance hall of the White House.

Further scientific studies of extract from white spruce, poplar and other trees demonstrates strong basis for medical advances that includes fighting skin aging to curbing the development of cancer cells. A closer look is needed for a potential “property” revenue stream.

In the southwest, water interests are extremely high. Water management strategies include investigating ground water mining particularly from northern Minnesota using both public and private land. Seen is a pipeline transporting water to the Colorado River; then, for distribution to the heavily populated areas. Property impact unknown; however, it could be substantial.

State Highway 71 is listed for expansion from a two to four-lane highway. Capital Improvements include meeting new highway standards for replacement of

road, culverts and drainage ditches. Sites are set to increase width of easement and with payment of the going rate to adjoining property owners.

Come 2025 timber prices double.

Family continues to want to keep the land undeveloped and recognizes the value of a conservation easement for the property owned on the east side of the highway. A voluntary agreement between family members and land trust giving up development rights in exchange for compensation, lower taxes, tax breaks, and security the land will never be developed will be considered. The family would maintain ownership with the land still utilized for hunting, farming, and conduct timber cuttings with the Best Practice Management requirements.

To mitigate a large-scale, private-public development project, the Dobb Family has been approached to sell an easement for its development rights on the property located on the east side of Highway 71.

Stewardship Plans or equivalents continue to be updated as necessary.

Land prices increase sharply to over \$2,000.00 an acre.

Several significant discoveries are made on the property. A mastodon bone thought to be 15,000 years old and relics from the Ojibwe Native American Tribe including art works and spears with wooden shafts and stone heads stirring lots of public interest.

An estimated one million acres of Koochiching County is underlain with peat. Studies continue to be conducted using deposits as an energy source. A county driven project remains in discussion with a Canada Company, one of the world's largest miners of peat. The Dobb Forest Stream property on the east side of the Highway 71 is known to have peat and combined with the Minnesota State property bordering the family land has been identified for its potential.

An unpredictable migration pattern now occurs on an annual basis. Each October thousands of common mergansers flock on the "Dobb Forest Stream" property for several days as part of their migration. It becomes a phenomenon drawing a greater number of visitors that include experienced observers and professional photographers.



A non-carbon trail linking up to 24 different communities stretching over 300 miles is proposed by State and regional governmental agencies. The project is to serve both recreation and transportation interests aimed for such bicycling, walking, jogging, snowshoeing, geo-caching and using single seat and/or two wheeled carbon-free vehicles. Major sporting events are created on the hard surface trails and provide an economic boost for each community. The existing power and highway easements on the property are being considered for the route.

Environmental and related non-profit groups lobby statewide for a nature center. It would emphasis conservation, green practices, saving endangered species, retaining wild places, and providing native animal, environmental and habitant research. One of the sites considered is the Dobb Forest Stream property.

The Olympic Committee is looking to relocate its Winter Olympic Athletic Training Facility. Northern Minnesota has been identified as an excellent location. The Dobb Forest Stream property is listed as a potential site.

Global warming, acid rain and holes in the ozone become even more important issues. Combined with an environmentally based definition of mental health accepted worldwide, a movement is building to manage lands even better. Studies show a healthy environment promotes healthy childhood development. Knowledge will have an enormous influence to preserve and increase the amount of nature available to children and the rest of us. Private and public landowners are called upon to help, and new governmental incentives are introduced going beyond ones given to the tobacco, wheat, and cattle farmers.

Lease companies seek contract to rent the property for hunting. After much research, the Minnesota Recreation Immunity Act or equivalent is weakened by having a fee charged to use land. There becomes a greater liability for landowners by having such an agreement. Unless the law is changed, that idea becomes discarded.

## 2013

Right now I need to recognize both Allison Abrahamse, Lead Naturalist at Northwest Trek in Eatonville, Washington and Jan Stamey, retired school teacher and a high school friend from Bellingham, Washington. It was a surprise when distributing copies among those featured in the Dobb Forest Stream book to discover the Koochiching Soil & Water Conservation District through Pam Tomevi published it on their web-site. I then prepared instructions how to get to the book on the web-site. As a result, I know it has been viewed among many. Allison and Jan provided a great deal of technical assistance by polishing-up grammar and formatting the book's content. Their interest and support with this project has been greatly appreciated and taken it far beyond my expectations.

It is now spring of 2013 and in the mail, I received a payment from Bernie Nordlund who I have contracts with to remove timber from both the highway right of way and depicted Black Spruce areas. In the envelope was a check for \$833.00 for removal of Aspen from the right of way along with a note stating I did not get to the Black Spruce and need to talk with you. Within the same day, I called Bernie and asked him to update me on his timber removal progress. He stated he could no longer fulfill the terms of our agreement. Bernie was a logger all of his life and I interpreted what he said as being fed-up with maintaining his logging equipment and battling the snowy and cold winter environment when removing timber. I understood. Bernie did not want to leave me hanging. During a recent conversation with a well-known logger in the Littlefork area by the name of Gordon Dobbs, Bernie was told he would be interested in completing both timber removal projects. For acknowledgement, Gordon is the son of Elmer Dobbs who removed timber for my father in the early 1990's. I learned Gordon is a member of the Minnesota Forestry Association, contacted and made arrangements to meet with him on my next visit in September to develop the necessary contract terms.

Being a member of the Minnesota Forestry Association and the American Tree Farm System, I receive numerous publications throughout the year. What caught my eye was the announcement stating the 2013 National Tree Farmer Convention was to be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The event is to feature many opportunities to expand knowledge on woodland management as well as meet other Tree Farmers and professionals from around the country. My particular

interests are legislative measures, estate planning and tax policies. The convention featured distinguished speakers addressing such topics. So along with hundreds of Tree Farm Landowners, I would attend my first National Tree Farm Convention held between July 24 and July 27. I met a great number of people and even had dinner with John O'Reilly, the President of the Minnesota Forestry. Tremendous contacts were made. After my conversations one stands out, and I ponder the question as other landowners do: "What should happen to the land when I am gone and while alive, how if at all do I prepare"? I know options are out there in likes of wills, trusts, conservation easements and forest legacy programs. Need to think about this a lot more and have conversations with my family. While in Minneapolis area, I was able to spend time with my cousins Tom Romens, Katherine Bentley, and her parents my Uncle Don and Aunt Mary. I provided a copy of the Dobb Forest Stream book to the family. Somehow visiting the property became a discussion and plans were made with Katherine and her husband Keith to drive Don and Mary to the Littlefork area in September for all to meet.

Remembering the list of short and long term predictions created an update is appropriate. Throughout the first part of the year, I received a number of public meeting notices about the Great Northern Transmission Line, a large power project between Canada and the United States to meet energy demands and increase system reliability for the region. A portion of my property was identified as a proposed alternative route for this project, but no longer. According to Minnesota Power Officials and the map requested and sent to me, the preferred route upon final approval will be located about a country mile away.

Friends and family members have been reading the Dobb Forest Stream book. I know because out of the blue two long standing friends stepped forward and asked to join me on the next Minnesota adventure. I never had anyone want to go without twisting an arm or two. Bill Stamey will be with me for the entire trip while Pat Duffy for several days. Special recognition goes to Bill because this is second trip. During the school winter vacation of 1966, Bill and I travelled to Northern Minnesota to visit my grandparents. We experienced -15 degree weather and spent a lot of time indoors. This trip will be different because much of the time will be outdoors on the property. I feel fortunate to have their company. Other indicators demonstrating the books interests are e-mails received and my

daughter, Briana placing it on her Facebook site showing a number of inquiries. Perhaps the most interesting comment from a reader was in form of a question: “When do you expect to be selected to have a Christmas Tree in the White House? That was one of my predictions, however maybe farfetched!

Scrambling over things for the September visit, I narrowed list of “have to dos”. The letters to the Dobb Forest Stream signs need replacement for the first time in ten years. Secondly, though time consuming and laboring begin the process to hand carry two generations of dumped trashed at the edge of the unnamed creek to the road side for future pick-up and proper disposal. This clean-up will be at least a three year effort. Because of the limited time spent each year on the property I wanted get organized. Therefore, at home I purchased the replacement letters for the signs, drilled holes and painted the letters several times over. Not wanting to check in luggage/packages on the plane, I called Mike Eilers and asked if I could have them shipped to his DNR address in Littlefork. He agreed. In the mix of the conversation, Mike mentioned there was a serious beaver problem on both sides of Highway 71. Beaver lodges and dams were constructed in several areas including the inside of the highway culvert. As a result of their undesirable activity, property I own is underwater. This has allowed the beaver easy access to harvesting hundreds of tree. Mike provided me the name of Jake Jewelin from Littlefork’s MNDOT. I called Jake and was told he was attempting to identify and notify the property owner so steps could be taken to reduce or eliminate further devastation. I gave him authorization to go on my land and take necessary MNDOT’s action to solve the problem.

September has rolled around and I assured Bill Stamey and Pat Duffy, I would have plenty of bug repellent for the trip. Confirmed with Pat his time of arrival and length of stay so a schedule of events could be planned. In addition, I contacted my cousin Katherine to determine whether or not the family would be making the trip from Minneapolis. It was a go and arrangements were made for all to stay at the AmericInn in International Falls. Bill and I arrived the evening of Wednesday, September 25<sup>th</sup>. Thursday morning we got up early and drove to the Littlefork’s DNR office to pick-up the letters I had shipped prior to our departure. In that shipment, I also included a surveyors tape, paint and wire brushes. With a stop at Polkinghorn’s Hardware to purchase additional supplies for the signs we arrived on the property by 8:45am.





**Katherine Bentley, Aunt Mary and Uncle Don, Keith Bentley.  
Picture taken by the rebuilt Dobb Forest Stream sign.**

Plenty of time to rebuild one sign before the expected arrival time of Katherine, husband Keith and my Aunt Mary and Uncle Don. What I thought would take an hour and a half took much longer. Both Bill and I were anal about the position of the letters before permanently attaching them. Even if seemed a fraction of an inch off, the letters would have to be readjusted. By the time 10:00am rolled around Gordon Dobbs and his father Elmer pulled-up as planned. With the first sign about 75% done, Bill knew I had to spend time with Gordon to review the timber removal plans and develop terms for an agreement. Gordon and I walked the right of way area where trees are to be removed, then drove to the nearby Black Spruce section to complete discussion of the timber removal. According to Gordon, the timber will likely be sold to Potlach in Bemidji and processed into fine magazine

paper. During the time spent together we agreed to dates, times and dollars. I would prepare the contract and drop it off at his home before returning back to Washington State. Upon returning to the sign project, my cousin Katherine and the family arrived. Elmer Dobbs, I learned knew my Uncle Don and had not seen him for nearly 40 years so they were chatting it up. I greeted everyone and rejoined Bill in the completion of the sign. My intention was to have the sign rebuilt so it would be new looking for a photo with Katherine and her family. Mission accomplished. Snapshots were taken and I made arrangements to meet with them back at the AmericaInn. Bill and I still had to rebuild the second sign, however, we mastered the process and finished it in an hour in a half rather than the four hours to complete the first sign. Now according to Pat, he was to fly into Minneapolis Thursday evening, drive to International Falls arriving by 6:00pm and he wanted to take me and Bill to dinner. At 5:00pm, I met with Katherine and all the family members in the lounge and talked about many memories. Bill joined us and soon thereafter the cell phone rang. It was Pat, he had already checked in. We met in the lounge, introduced him to the family members spending a bit more time together. With the sun setting, I suggested to have dinner at the Thunderbird Lodge about seven miles away. Unfortunately, missed the sun set, however had excellent dinners and plenty of drinks. Before heading to our rooms plans were made for the next day.

I am an early riser and told Katherine and Keith if they were up to meet around 6:30am on Friday morning at the breakfast area in the motel. They were waiting for me! It allowed us to spend additional time together and later Don and Mary would join us providing the best opportunity to say good-bye. Bill, Pat and I are now heading out to the property. The idea is to walk around and show them features of the land and also look for birds. Bill had brought his binoculars and was hoping to see birds never seen before. He is a true birder. Our first stop was at the Dobb Forest Stream sign for snapshots. I then drove from the east to the west property line so they could get a feel for the vastness. We stopped at the homestead site and pointed to where the home, barn and tool shed was once located and nearby viewed the thousands and thousands of white spruce planted in 1998. Just 150 feet away was the unnamed creek which runs through the property and were able to see some of the trash dumped over the years. I showed them an old ceramic broken piece having a red wing with a number 10. Pat would do some

research and discover it was “once” a Red Wing 10 gallon container used in the prohibition days and highly desirable for collectors. We then talked about Diamond Back Willow growing throughout the property and its value for making walking sticks. Driving now from the west to the east side of the property I parked the car. We hiked into the wildlife corridor for about half a mile hoping to see birds or wildlife. There were birds darting in and out of the forest. We did take an opportunity to find a backdrop of fall foliage with brilliant colors to take pictures. Upon leaving the forest, we noticed a number of mushrooms not familiar with. I eventually found out one is known as the Yellow Wart. The others remain unidentified.



### **Mushrooms picked from the Dobb Forest Stream property**

What is interesting if you Google mushrooms of Northern Minnesota you discover this part of the country is a hot bed for pickers. I did learn among supposedly edible mushrooms on the property are Waxy and Frost Caps, Orange Mycena and the Lobster. Our last stop would be near the north end culvert running under

Highway 71. On the east side of the highway you have land covered in water stretching as far as the eye could see. On the west side a trickle of water coming out of the culvert and a muddy scene with wood pieces shattered everywhere. What I've been told is MNDOT decimated with dynamite the beaver lodges and dams on the west side of the highway. The culvert remains plugged by a beaver dam inside. According to Jake Jewelin from MNDOT a special type of boring machine has been requested. It is a piece of equipment designed to remove the beaver dam built underneath the highway. This will restore the water level on the west side of the highway and its natural flow. It is now about 1:00pm and we are returning to International Falls. About 2:30pm we regrouped and headed for Rainy Lake National Park Visitor Center. We watched a short video about the history, land and water features and animals of Voyageurs National Park. With the temperature around 70 degrees, it was happy hour time. Our next destination would be the Island Resort and Lodge. It had a huge wooden deck providing excellent views for bird watching and large pitchers of beer with and top notch service. Between talking about the past, watching eagles soar and looking at fishermen returning with their catches it could not have been a better day. Dinner was ordered and returned back to the AmericaInn around 9:30pm.

Saturday morning, I wanted to buy breakfast before Pat Duffy traveled to Iowa for a visit with relatives. It's a tradition for me to always have wild rice pancakes and bacon at Sandy's Cafe in International Falls. My pitch is you have to try wild rice pancakes. Pat went along with it and Bill ordered eggs, sausage, toast and hash browns. We got fueled up and Pat headed south. Because it was a rainy day, Bill Stamey and I went back to the motel deciding it would be best to watch sports on TV. Bill would also take the time reintroducing me to the game cribbage. So with time to spare that afternoon we drove to the Koochiching County Museum. Edgar Oerichbauer, Executive Director gave us a personal tour of the Koochiching County Museum. It was very informative to learn about the people and its history. The displays of particular interest featured local tools, weapons, artwork and cookware. It inspired me and Bill to treasure hunt on my property the next day.

Sunday, the sun would return. Woke-up around 6am and as quiet as possible left the room to get a Sunday paper and cup of coffee. When I returned, Bill was up and ready to go for a treasurer hunting and bird watching experiences. We began the day along the bank of the creek side where the garbage had remained for years



to dig for “old stuff”. With a shovel and a claw-type rake, we started to remove the buildup of compost to see what could be uncovered. It was shortly after Bill suggested we remove trash and take it up close to the roadside for eventual pick-up. He knew it bothered me and I carried the same “clean-up” thought for years. With two five gallon buckets, small pieces of metal and glass were lugged and piled close to the county road. Large and heavy chunks had to be pulled out to the road. They consisted of tractor parts, tires, gas cans, cookware, fencing material and the like. Multiple trips were made. Not an easy haul because of the uneven ground and a distance of 800 feet to where the pile was created. The pile got so big, Bill named it Mount Metal. It could be the highest elevation in Northern Minnesota.



**Mount Metal built by Bill Stamey and Mike Dobb**

In order to rest, every so often, Bill would escape to look for birds while I looked for treasures. We both had luck. Bill flushed from under foot a Ruffed Grouse. The sound startled him but it can be checked off his list as a bird never seen before. While he was away, I struck gold, in a sense. I found a 1953 Lysol brown bottle, a green Wildroot bottle with their caps on and a small red wing type jug. Altogether, I would find eight different piece of glassware. Perhaps the best treasurer, later learned was a vintage pair of Willson sunglasses uncovered. Amazed all these items have been buried for 50 to 70 years and seemingly not tarnished with time.



### **Treasures found near the unnamed creek in 2013**

Before leaving, Bill did spot several frogs, thought to be a Bullfrog and Spring Pepper. I have been told having frogs are a good sign, an indicator of a healthy



habitat. I only wished my camera was close by. Much was accomplished on this day but what standouts most was Bill's willingness to help clean up the homestead site. About five hours into it were both sweaty and tired and returned to the motel to watch the NFL games.

Monday, the final day before departing, I had made arrangements to meet with Mike Eilers to walk the west property line and do an on-site timber analysis. On this outing, Mike would explain to both Bill and I forest ecology even included information on birds. Mike will be retiring from DNR in November and has been instrumental helping me to understand best practices for managing forestland. Identifying scattered patches of mature timber throughout the property, I am hoping to have Mike coordinate what I expect to be the most challenging removal project. Before leaving the woods, Mike pointed to a pile of logs neatly placed. It was a part of a bear trap built to hold stinky bait, luring bears to the area. I continue to learn from Mike. I know he will be greatly missed when he retires. His professionalism and knowledge have been appreciated not only by me but also a large number of landowners and staff members. I congratulated him on his career, took his picture and promised to keep in touch. Bill and I then returned to remove more trash further heightening Mount Metal. That would end my 18<sup>th</sup> consecutive trip to Minnesota...one of the better ones!



**Mike Eilers, long-time friend and Department of Natural Resources Forester a month before retirement. Photo taken next to the Dobb Forest Stream property.**

2014

A great number of land decisions were made during this past year. I feel confident; other times cautious, when making my mind up on what to do. At times it is a struggle because the worry of not having all the information before doing the right thing. Thinking the most important decision was reached this year benefiting both the family and land. The 320 acres no longer consists of four tax parcels, rather five parcels. Working with Koochiching County, namely Bob Peterson and Shelly Johnson of the Auditor/Treasurer Department, I submitted a Land Division application splitting the one tax parcel of 160 acres previously identified as parcel number 33-027-21000 into two tax parcels; one of approximately 45 and the other 115 acres. The reason, the parcel was divided by Highway 71. Now, there are tax

identification numbers for both the west and east sides of the highway. The legal documents were prepared by Kim Wimmer, Attorney who resides in Littlefork. The land division was approved and recorded by Koochiching County. Here is a breakdown of the 320 acres by tax parcel: On the east side of the highway, parcel number 33-027-11000/40 acres, 33-027-12000/40 acres, and 33-027-21000/115 acres. On the west side of the highway, parcel number 33-027-21100/45 acres and 33-028-11000/80 acres. In reviewing the property map, a portion (approximately 4 to 6 acres) of tax parcel 33-028-11000 is located on the east side of the highway. It was recommended by the County not to divide such a small parcel. Future decisions can now be determined by west side, east side tax parcel numbers and not having to deal with a 160 acre parcel splitting Highway 71.

I was excited to visit the property in September. My largest timber removal project has been completed. Two contracts were executed by Gordy Dobbs; one for cutting mature trees along the highway right of way, the other a 22 acre patch of black spruce and ash. Nearly a 1,000 cords were removed. Though a Woodland Stewardship Plan is followed, I want to see what the outcome looks like including the condition of the land with use of heavy logging equipment. Until then my anxiety level looms. His wife Lori went on site and recorded a video of the operation and sent me a copy. Through the video, I was able to see for myself, the Delimber, Feller Buncher and other equipment used to remove trees from the property.



**Feller Buncher removes Black Spruce gathering up to ten trees at a time.**



Simply amazed at the advancement of logging; how quickly trees can come down and with limited man power required. Weather is always a factored and with the cutting of black spruce from peat, the land had to be frozen like a rock to support the heavy equipment. Gordy and his crew worked in temperatures of 25 degrees below zero during a two week period. When I met with Gordy on-site and walked the areas cut, the end result exceeded expectations. No damage to the property and tree patches kept along the highway right of way for beautification purposes. I can now relax! We also visited the property on the west side and projected a small tree removal project close to the power right of way within the next two years. Gordy and I then spent time looking at the white spruce planted in 1998 wanting to know whether or not they should be thinned. His advice along with the opinion of Mike Eilers is to wait until the trees are 25 to 30 years old and then consider a select-cut. The trees would then be thinned and have a market value. I look forward to this project as it will be Briana's first harvest.

I was notified by my cousin Katherine and husband Keith Bentley would be joining me several days on this trip. They informed me of their great time last year and hearing stories about treasures found on the homestead portion of the property. Help dig for treasures building up a sweat is not usually thought excitable; however, both looked forward to it. At least that's what I was told. So, before driving from Minneapolis to International Falls, I reminded them work clothes and gloves would be required! We spent three days together and here is a few of the items found thought to be from between 1930 through 1940's: pocket watch; marbles, one made of clay; a "Ford" wrench; Chas H. Fletchers Castoria and Coca Cola bottles. Rummaging around in the dirt is what I really enjoy, looking for history. It is like being 7 years old taking part in an Easter egg hunt wanting to always find the next egg. Our last day on the property we dismantled Mount Metal, the pile of trash hauling it to the local transfer station. In addition, Keith and Katherine helped with assembling a Rubber Maid storage unit which is located inside Bill Nordlund's garage. My personal belongings are now secured and I no longer have to borrow tools. The garage is located in Littlefork at his residence. In order to entice Katherine and her husband to join me in 2015, Katherine was promoted to operations supervisor! There is a lot more treasure hunting to do, as I found out the location of the saw mill on the property. And still

the homestead area currently being explored have years of effort remaining. Just need to find more time.

The thought of providing a Christmas Tree for the White House is in my mind. I figure worth mentioning, if not for the entertainment value. This year, I researched the tree farm competition on how to be considered. Several inquiries have been made and include an e-mail to Honorable Denny Heck, Washington State Congress Representative; researching online, the requirements; contacting Joe Brown and Matt Wappler from DNR office in Littlefork, Minnesota; and even correspondence with John Wallin, the Outstanding Minnesota Tree Farmer of 2013. Learned, it is an extensive application and competitive process. I meet the requirement of being a certified Tree Farmer, however, you must be nominated for the Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year award by the forester the property owner works with. The State Tree Farmer of the Year then competes with other winners within a region. I know the white spruce on the property would be a perfect Christmas Tree for the White House. Encouragement comes from my family and John Wallin who stated he read “Dobb Forest Stream” and was impressed with the documentation, siting the management of the property over the years. Competing to provide a Christmas Tree for the White House would be an honor for the family. Being an absentee property owner, I don’t know if our family can be competitive; however still have the appetite to pursue by further understanding the process.

And finally in July, became acquainted with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP provides technical assistance and incentive payments to assist crop and other agricultural producers with environmental and conservation improvements to property owners operations. This is a United States Department of Agriculture program. In order to be eligible I had to meet their requirements and complete an application. It has been approved. My first funding request is to help with aerial seeding for the 20 acres where the black spruce was removed just a few months ago. I want to take the precautionary step to ensure a tree crop for the next generation of the family. If approved, reimbursement would be 75% of the expense to aerial seed. Actual out of pocket costs will be approximately \$400.00. There are four funding sessions between now and the end of the year. Jane Hafvenstein, Soil Technician with the USDA from Baudette, MN office is my contact and will notify me of the decision. I also believe in the future, EQIP

projects and funding opportunities will be pursued and further assist with the proper management and care of the property.

## 2015

Starting out with a little trivia. A friend shared information about the Boeing Family in a way is tied to the property. So here's a question; How did William Boeing become wealthy enough to begin the Boeing Air Craft Company? He inherited enormous amount of money from his father Wilhelm Boeing who amassed wealth by property owned in Northern Minnesota. Wilhelm discovered large veins of taconite, a mineral used to make steel, thus through mining created much of the initial family's fortune. Here's a second question? How did I accumulate enough money to purchase the property in Northern Minnesota? Got lucky by investing in Boeing stock that increased sharply in the mid-1990's...to keep the land in the family!

This year, made what I figure to be another monumental decision. It came on the heel of updating our Will by David Hammermaster, Attorney in February of this year. When notifying him of property owned in Minnesota, he recommended if intentions are to have Briana vested have a separate legal document prepared in Minnesota. Kimberly Literovich, Attorney at Law for Shermoen & Jaka from International Falls was hired. After conversations, a Transfer on Death Deed would meet our current requirements with my wife and daughter being the benefactors deciding how to manage the property after I pass. Marcy has stated she prefers not to be a decision maker so I expect that responsibility will actually become Briana's. The document was prepared and recorded with Koochiching County in May. Until time comes, the decision making remains in my hands. I hope within the next ten years I can devise a legacy plan addressing the sale of the property, split-up or re-purposing of the land. In addition, I want our family to attend the Annual National American Family Forest Conference held April in Washington DC. This is an opportunity to learn and mingle with forestry professionals, politicians and property owners how best to make future decisions about the land. As a family, we have talked about attending.

Through the course of a year, I read forestry articles and engage in discussions with property owners about opportunities and learned of Chaga and Truffles. Chaga is a tinder fungus that grows on trees, particularly birch. When harvested, Chaga is an ingredient in teas, lotions, vitamins and other products to support human health. Truffles are an edible mushroom that grows underground near tree roots. Truffles are included into ingredients of exclusive recipes. Both can fetch high end dollars. Now understanding Chaga, I know some exits on the property. Truffles have been identified in Northern Minnesota but may not be on the property. Chaga and Truffles deserves more research as a potential revenue source generated from the land.

I am now generating a list of projects needed to be accomplished on the fall adventure to Northern Minnesota. Always cast a net attempting to lure friends or relatives to join me. This year's team members include my cousin Katherine and husband Keith making it three years in a row and Bill Stamey, longtime friend, whose record is two out of three years. Their presence greatly appreciated helping with property clean-up, treasurer hunting, repair and installation of signs and remarking property lines. However, Bill is a birder and knowing the property has birds his binoculars are close in hand. For me though, he is the environmental manager of the property. Each day he would build up sweat removing barb and fence wire, glass and an assortment of other trash items buried deep underground. In all he filled-up a pick-up truck load, eventually hauled to the transfer station located in International Falls. Actually over the past visits, the family dump site is on the verge of being no more. Daily, Katherine, Keith and myself were digging in the earth for treasures. During our time, found a Hame ball, horse shoe, glass bottles, marble, cow bell, files, silver fork, license plate, belt buckles, buttons, a calve jaw, skull of a fisher and tools not identifiable. This year, the Hame ball discovered by Katherine is the best treasure. It is solid brass and part of a work horse's collar. My grandfather was known to have a team of horses used for plowing and forestry work. Keith noticed a bubbling of the creek and suggested it might be a natural spring. With the water being a higher than normal level, I will pay close attention in the years ahead...could be valuable resource. While working the dump site we were treated by the sounds of water flowing in the creek to the birds chirping going after Red Sprite winter berries, thistles and insects. Bill and I installed two new "Certified Tree Farm" signs on the property along the state

highway. From what I understand these were provided by the American Forest Foundation and stored for pick-up at the Littlefork DNR office.

Meetings were confirmed well before my visit. Spent time with Gordy Dobbs, a friend and logger to discuss the possibility of a timber removal project next year on the west side of the property. Though the timber is ready, prices are likely to increase, so decision is on hold until next year. Gordy did provide a chainsaw to help harvest my daughter and wife's request for birch hot plates, candle holders and table coasters. We found a down tree and birch cuttings were mailed home. A meeting arranged with Jane Hafvenstein, Soil Conservation Technician with USDA was cancelled. Actually, good news as she informed me via phone conversation, my EQIP grant for aerial seeding on nearly 20 acres was extended and scheduled for spring of 2016 provided black spruce seeds are ordered before the end of the year. Finally, I spent time with Joe Brown, Forest Supervisor and Matt Wappler, Forester of the Littlefork DNR office. First, I wanted to confirm when the black spruce seeds are ordered for the aerial project proper storage could be provided at the DNR office. Next, needed to know what helicopter service I'd be working with. Matt mentioned the State of Minnesota goes to bid every year for aerial seeding services and would provide me that information when it becomes available. I have the initial responsibility to request and pay for the helicopter services all reimbursed through the EQIP. My conversation with Matt and Joe shifted to updating of my ten year Resource Management Plan as required by Sustainable Forestry Investment Act for 2017. Both gave me a list of names of Forest Certification Coordinators. The highest recommendation was Mary K. Perala of Boise Paper from International Falls. I contacted her and available and willing to prepare the next ten year Resource Management Plan. She is aiming to complete it by September so we are able to walk the property during my visit explaining the elements of the plan. Concurrently, if necessary the American Forest Foundation Tree Farm Inspection Record will be reviewed and revised.

The Bill Stamey, Bird Watch Report is an excellent way to wrap-up this visit to Minnesota. Identified on the property were common birds; Robins, Northern Flicker and Gold Finches and less common; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Cedar Waxwing. During several side trips saw northern harrier and for the first time a Merlin. Need to mention we traveled to Buyck, Minnesota spending time with my cousin Brian Eggert and wife Barbara. Their home has much family history as it is



where my mother was born and grew up, a farm back in the days lying on the Vermillion River. A beautiful spot tucked in a wilderness area.

## 2016

For me the property has become a part of the family's history. I am hoping to always make highest and best use decisions for the land. Having land can bring you a lot of opportunities more than one can image. Over the years the "property" notebooks are getting thicker with reference material and paperwork verifying decisions/actions taken. Those binders will become beneficial when my days of managing the land are limited or come to an end.

You can get moved and influenced so easily especially when it comes to land. No joke, programs and ideas fill the air. Marcy and I attended in January a documentary about song birds. It was called "The Messenger," an incredible film production regarding songs birds and their challenges with migration and loss of habitat. It jarred me to think that over five decades nearly half of the song bird population has declined. Years ago, I do remember seeing and hearing a greater number of song birds. This subject has caught my attention and caused me to contact Kelly Voight, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRCS. Previously worked with her on an aerial seeding program, so have built-up a resource I can trust. So I inquired about helping song birds and she informed me of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program specifically for the Golden Wing Warbler Habitat. The American Bird Conservancy is working with NRCS to improve habitat in critical areas for the Golden Wing Warbler to prevent it from being added to the endangered species list. I learned my property was in the critical zone and because of interest I needed to set-up a meeting with Kevin Sheppard of the American Bird Conservancy. Contacted Kevin and that will be meeting number one when I travel to Minnesota in September.

On Sunday, May 7, 2016, I achieved what is seldom accomplished by a private property owner. Though two plus years in the making, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program's aerial seeding project was completed via Kelly Voight. My responsibility was purchasing the black spruce seed, coordinating with local DNR Foresters and determining/paying for the aerial seeding provided by Scott's

Helicopter Services. On the ground overseeing the entire region-wide project was Dustin Nelson, DNR Forestry from Hibbing who made sure the black spruce seed was delivered to vendor and my designated 20 acres was seeded. My total cost for the project was \$798.20 and for the conservation practice was compensated \$5,501.92. The EQIP contract number 74632215ORE has nearly come to an end!

In June, my cousin Katherine informed me her dad, Donald Dobb passed away. As a special remembrance she asked on behalf of family if she could plant a White Pine tree on the homestead site. The White Pine tree was my uncle's favorite. So arrangements were made for both Keith and Katherine to join me again in September to among things determine a location and plant the tree. The tree was planted on site where the home he grew-up in stood. A protective wire barrier was installed surrounding the tree preventing the deer from nibbling on it. A sign was hung stating...(White Pine planted, September, 2016. In loving memory of our dad, Donald C. Dobb. March 19, 1924 – June 11, 2016). Now all four Dobb boys have passed; my father George, uncles Jim, Francis, and Don. The land has become an important tribute to their livelihood.

In July, I started making appointments with my contacts for the September visit. As mentioned, first set time for Kevin Sheppard with the American Bird Society; establish a meeting with Mary Perala, a Forest Certification Coordinator with Boise for land inspection and complete the new ten year Resource Management plan; get with Bill Nordlund to extend the storage rental space inside his garage and finally complete a timber removal contract with Gordy Dobbs, the local logger.

I arrived in International Falls the evening of September 12. That next morning I met with Kevin Sheppard to walk the land and discuss the Regional Conservation Partnership Program specifically for the Golden Wing Warbler. It was determined a minimum of 10 acres would be required and scattered throughout a section of land we identified ideal areas. If I move forward on the project Kevin would submit an application for funding through the EQIP program that if approved allows me to hire a forester to create niches consisting of shelterwood cuts favoring the Golden-Winged Warbler. Overall a good idea but not the Song Bird Sanctuary vision I had. Told Kevin, wanted to give it some thought.

Before the day was up, I had conversation with Matt Wappler, Forester in the Littlefork DNR Office. I shared with him my strong interest to become involved in the creation a song bird sanctuary and study area. At that moment, Matt said Margi Coyle, Assistant Area Wildlife Manager with DNR in I-Falls was part of a movement to create a “Heart of the Bog Birding Trail” along State Highway 71, the area of my property. This led me to have a phone conversation with Margi. I learned efforts are underway for planning birding trail destination(s), a collaborative effort to include wildlife biologists, foresters, tourism officials, photographers, nature enthusiasts, birders along with local, county and state officials. This process is being overseen by Carrol Henderson, Nongame Wildlife Program Supervisor with the State of Minnesota. Initially, I am drawn to this because it is a vision creating a bog/wildlife/bird attraction with regional if not state-wide significance. The committee seems to be big thinkers and I like it. If a part of my land could help leverage funding toward this movement and become a sanctuary and study area of sorts, I would consider being a willing participant either selling, leasing or donating property. It would carry the caveat, which the land is in perpetuity, meaning sole purpose for the likes of “Heart of the Bog Birding Trail.” I am now included in the loop and will receive minutes and updates on the committee’s progress. In Washington State, it would be the beginning of a major attraction such as Northwest Trek or Nisqually Delta. This has my attention!

On Wednesday, September 14, I met with Mary Perala on the property to walk the land and discuss elements of the next Ten Year Resource/Stewardship Plan. The plan she has prepared will be instrumental providing information for land management decisions from May 2017 through May 2027. Just as important the plan allows me to maintain the Sustainable Forestry Investment Act program providing annual payments as an incentive to practice long-term sustainable forest management. These payments more than cover the amount paid in taxes each year. Furthermore, a current plan creates eligibility for state and federal funding land enhancement programs. In my case, the white spruce tree planting project in 1998, a Cost Sharing Program saved me 50% of total expense and the 2016 EQIP Aerial Seeding program provided a great stewardship decision and financial benefit. I feel government will always lookout providing incentive programs and laws that benefit landowners. Being alert for opportunities is a must. Overall,



## **Patches of Wild Ginger and Bushes of Red Elderberry**

Mary and I spent over an hour walking various parts of the land. She pointed out several key issues that I listened very carefully to. For instance, she remarked about the amazing growth of the aspen/birch trees returning from the early 1990's when my dad had the timber removed. But her comment of having a lot of value here as those trees will be available for harvest between 20 to 25 years for my daughter, Briana...told me she read the Dobb Forest Stream book. I was impressed. She also recommended some pockets of timber could be harvested. Her input was timely because later that day, Gordy Dobbs, the local logger and I would establish a timber removal contract for the coming winter. Upon completion of the land inspection, Mary showed me wild ginger growing on my property, pulling up the root she removed the dirt and taking a sniff could smell the scent. Never knew, I had wild ginger growing! To complete the ten year plan, Mary and I would meet one more time and in her office filling out my portion of the American Tree Farm System Inspection Record renewing my status as Certified American Tree Farmer. When the land first became a Certified Tree Farm in 1997 it was assigned #6107. New rules were established and because my land is divided by a state highway two identification numbers are required. For the record, tax parcel numbers 33-28-11000 and 33-027-21100 are # 6107 and tax

parcel numbers 33-027-21000, 33-027-12000 and 33-027-11000 designated as #6107a. Kudos to Mary Perala for getting this all important job done earning a well desired thank you!

Featured on this trip were other highlights that I need to mention:

The meeting with Gordy Dobbs led to the signing of a timber removal contract during the upcoming winter. Approximately 400 cords of timber will be removed in selected areas on the west side of highway. Types of timber to be cut: aspen, birch, bam, spruce and balsam. The wood will be hauled to Boise in International Falls and used for paper products and particle board.

Stopped by the Koochiching County Soil & Water Conservation District office checking in with Pam Tomevi, the Director and she introduced me to James Aasen the newly hired Forest Resource Specialist. I mentioned to them about my song bird sanctuary desire. They will keep me posted on opportunities they come across. Jolen Simon, Program Coordinator stated the office will continue to update the Dobb Forest Stream book placing it on their web site. Mentioned, I hoped to continue writing through 2019 and at that time a portion of the land will have been in family ownership for 100 years. A good time to perhaps stop!



### **License plates discovered with metal detector**

With Katherine and Keith we attempted to treasure hunt again in the area of the homestead trash site. Items are getting harder to find but using the metal detector



and digging down 6 to 8 inches of soil found two Minnesota license plates; 1935 X22-369 and 1927 A77-705. Both had to be my grandfathers and in remarkable condition knowing they were buried for half a century plus!

During my last two days my cousins Mark (from Phoenix) and Tom Romens (from Minneapolis) joined me. They asked for help in trying to locate the trash site on the Romens homestead, two miles down County Road 77. This is where my grandmother was raised. Being a hundred and twenty acre parcel we narrowed the search near the former home site. With the metal detector found a few items but nothing of meaning. Tom then decided to walk a distance to the neighbor's home to inquiry about the whereabouts of the trash site. Sure enough, Tom was shown the area located on the southwest portion of the property and brought back an old Minnesota license plate. There, in no time we unearthed an old ash tray, lantern, utensils and colored bottles dating to the 1920-30's. Together, we would like to return to the site next fall.



### **New installed Dobb Forest Stream sign**

Staying in Littlefork at the Hometown Motel had a few advantages because just across the street is Bill Nordlund's garage, the place I store my equipment. Eventually, I caught-up with him and made storage arrangements for next year. In a conversation about the Dobb Forest Stream signs, I told Bill of the hours spent on maintaining them, namely because of the attached letters damaged by the weather year after year...and this visit was no exception. So I asked if he knew of anyone

who could engrave letters and replicate the existing signs. Bill recommended Jesse Lutgen of Littlefork who was working on his property. I was able to introduce myself to Jesse and explained to him what I needed. We agreed to the price of \$400.00 plus materials for one sign and it would include installation. Jesse completed the project and installed the new sign by mid-October. Looks good!

Finally, returned home to Washington and have to mention the article (dated Oct. 2, 201) I read in the Tacoma News Tribune entitled “Family Forest Can Help Fight Climate Change.” It’s regarding a 157 acre property owned by the Lonquist family and located outside of Portland, Oregon. The family hopes to capitalize on the forest’s ability to clean air, turning the carbon stored in the forest into credits that can be sold to polluters who want or need to offset their carbon footprints. Most small landowners don’t know this opportunity exists. The article states it can be complex because it deals when landowners can log their inventory of trees, assessing the carbon content and being subject to levels of auditing. In other words bringing the forest to the carbon market can be daunting. But if you can get beyond the barriers this carbon market can be profitable. Kyle Holland of Ecological Carbon Offset Partners, a California firm has estimated the Lonquist forest could bring an estimated \$235,000 over the first six years followed by \$6,000 a year after that. Eyes need to be kept on this opportunity.

I’ll wrap this up by saying...if what I hear is true that keeping busy can extend your longevity then maybe it’s a good idea to continue as long as I can managing the land.

## 2017

Plenty of good news and one sad note. Certainly much was the unexpected that happened.

Start off by feeling fortunate to have visited Raymond Johnson one last time in September, my 2016 visit. On November 3, 2016 Raymond passed away. He was a life-long resident of Littlefork and a woodsman of Koochiching County and retired as a forester with the County Lands and Forestry Department in 1990. Raymond was a friend to three generations of the Dobb family including my

grandfather, my father and myself. He provided much history about the Dobb property and expertise on land management and even more so contributed vast knowledge to all landowners of Koochiching County. Surely, he will be missed.

Mid-year I received a call from a Levi Luukkonen from Minneapolis. In brief, he thought his grandfather was a step brother to my grandfather. It turned out not to be the case. However, Levi did a lot of research and came across an article in the October 28, 1918 Bemidji Pioneer newspaper. Probably knowing I would be interested in a copy an e-mailed was sent. It was about a fire fund raised by citizens of Littlefork totaling over \$3,000.00. Featured in the article was the M.J. Dobb Camp collecting \$25.00. This was my grandfather's logging operation and learned for the first time his giving spirit. All the money raised went to aid the victims of the October 12, 1918, Cloquet fires. It was one of the worst fires in Minnesota History-over 450 dead. By the way, my grandfather had a brother named Mark.

I did not mention last year, Mary Perala of Packaging Corporation of American (formally Boise Cascade) who prepared the 10 year Resource Management Plan had nominated me for the 2017 Minnesota Regional Tree Farmer of the Year. It was with the understanding that I attend the Minnesota Forestry Conference to accept the award if selected. I said yes while thinking my chance would be slim at best. It was the later part of August, Mary sends me an e-mail stating not only had I been awarded Regional Tree Farmer of the Year but also the 2017 Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year! I teared-up reading it to my wife. Here I need to say; ***not to be forgotten, it was each generation, their decision making and just holding onto ownership of the land led to this incredible honor.*** The decision was made by the Minnesota State Tree Farm Committee with the award presented by the American Tree Farm System. A formal letter was received from Tom Witkowski, Minnesota Tree Farm Coordinator stating a plaque would be presented and family honored at the Minnesota Forestry Conference held in McGregor, Minnesota on October 13. In addition, a Stihl Chainsaw is provided and a large sign to be installed on the property stating "2017 Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year", the Mike Dobb Family. All costs would be reimbursed from the point of entry into Minnesota for the conference. In the meantime the Summer publication, Tree Farming for Better Forests had been received by hundreds of landowners. Inside was a two page article with colorful photos entitled Minnesota Tree Farmer

of the Year: Michael Dobb. It highlighted segments from the Dobb Forest Stream book. But very heart felt was the editorial written by Kathleen Preece, the Communications Director. The piece was dedicated to me...it was simply overwhelming reading the words she wrote, filled with inspiration and emotion. Before finishing this segment, I need to fast forward. Only then it will make sense!

It is now September 13 and I am boarding the plane heading to Northern Minnesota to visit the property. During the six day stay I have plenty to do. Before leaving on the trip Tom Witkowski contacted me stating a 3X6 feet metal sign would be available to pick-up from Mary Perala in International Falls. The language on the sign: "2017 Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year. Mike Dobb & Family". It was to be installed on the property. The sign required reinforcement, at the lease plywood backing and posts attached. With the sign in my hands I took it to Menards Hardware and Lumber store. I had no tools and not exactly sure how best to proceed. So I introduced myself to Ryan, the Manager on duty. Told him what needed to done and he assigned Walt, a part-time employee to take care of me. After two hours of meticulously measuring, drilling holes, and setting screws the job was complete. No charge for the labor! Now headed to the property to install the sign but it would take two man effort...a stop at the Littlefork DNR Office to get help. Luckily, Matt Wappler, the Director was available.



**Sign is located at the intersection of State Highway 71 & County Road 77 in Koochiching County, MN**

Shared with him I needed one strong young man and he eventually assigned Ben West, a newly hired Cooperative Forester with a catch. Matt explained he would be hosting the Northern Landscape Committee meeting in February. It is part of Minnesota Resource Council made up of foresters, DNR /county employees, private business and land owners. Included would be a tour for the elected State and Local officials highlighting work done on private lands to show impact and discuss additional services and opportunities for landowners. And before he could ask, I said “yep” you can use my property! Ben and I were on our way to install the sign at the intersection of State Highway 71 and County Road 77. Installed at a location sure to get a number of looks over a great number of years!

The next day I stopped by to see Gordy Dobbs, my logger who completed a timber removal project on the west side of the property in December. In January I received full payment of \$11,354.52. I wanted to thank him for doing an excellent job and congratulate him for being selected the 2017 Minnesota Logger of the Year. Incredible to think a Dobb and Dobbs both linked to Koochiching County received the highest awards possible. Also later that day, inspected the logged area and found new growth has already appeared. Slash has been left over and because of its proximity to water and stands of tall trees; these newly created openings should be ideal habitat for warblers on the threatened or federal endangered species list as well as other song birds. I want to see an increase in birding activity in the coming years.

The remaining days on the trip included metal detecting on the property. Biggest find was a horseshoe. I still come across a bit of garbage and remove it from the homestead trash site. Bill Nordlund who I rent storage space from allowed me to use his John Deere Gator. It helped as I drove miles along the right of way to local property line stakes and re-tape them. Dean Piekarski and family, a property neighbor had me over for my first Walleye fish & chips feast. It was really good! And finally took a lot of pictures of the property because on my final day I would meet with Mary Perala to create a power point featuring the 320 acres its history and land management to be presented at the Minnesota Forestry Conference. The last stop was Koochiching County Soil & Water Conservation District to learn of new land programs and investment opportunities. I will have to see what is available in future.



It was the announcement of being selected Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year that prompted action for one of my bucket list items. I have wanted Briana to attend the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) “Fly-In”. It is held in Washington D.C. each year and provides the opportunity to join Tree Farmers across the country. This is extremely important as together briefed on federal issues that impact family forests and meet face to face with Members of Congress. On October 2, we flew to Washington D.C. to be a part of the experience that Briana will remember the rest of her life. First day consisted of a workshop highlighting important legislative issues where Beth Riley with ATFS was assigned to visit Minnesota Members of Congress with us. ATFS had set-up five appointments enabling our voice to be heard on policy issues. Beth had great depth and led much of the discussion on Tax Policies, Farm Bill and the Timber Innovation Act.



### **Meeting with Congressional Representative Rick Nolan, 8<sup>th</sup> District of Minnesota**

Bri and I learned a lot from both Congress Members, their staff as well as from Beth. Topping the list included 1) breakfast with Senator Al Franken followed by a meeting with his Legislative Assistant, 2) Conversations with Representative Rick Nolan, 8<sup>th</sup> District of Minnesota and where the Tree Farm is located, and 3) discussion with Legislative Assistant Brian Werner representing Senator Amy Klobuchar. Bri and I gained much knowledge but hopefully contributed in some ways beneficial to all Tree Farmer Land Owners. My message is simple: Tree

Farmers should be on the same footing as Wheat, Dairy and Tobacco Farmers when it comes to tax and program incentives. Eventually with time the gap will be bridged. Finally what I am so proud of is Briana saying to me; I want to do this again next year!

It is a short stay at home before Marcy and I board a plane October 12 to Minnesota. I promised Mary Perala we would attend the 2017 Minnesota Forestry Conference's dinner and Tree Farm Award banquet. For the Dobb Family to be selected Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year is such a high honor. The nearly 100 years of property ownership reflects dedication by each generation. This demonstrated best stewardship practices paying tribute to the Tree Farmer profession; being a good neighbor by providing a healthy forest, habitat for wildlife and contributing to clean air and water quality.



### **Part of the 2017 Minnesota Forestry Conference crowd held in McGregor, Minnesota on October 13th**

All together about 100 Tree Farm Land Owners attended the October 13 event. It was special for the family having Patrick Duffy who traveled all the way from Sumner, Washington and Beth Riley with ATFS of Nebraska to share the incredible evening. Following the power point presentation, both Ross Korpela, Chair of the Minnesota Tree Farm Committee and Mary Perala presented two beautiful plaques; one recognizing the *Sign of Sustainable Forestry* and other *Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year*.



## **Awards presented by Mary Perala and Ross Korpela both of the Minnesota Tree Farm Committee to the Dobb Family**

Thanks, also needs to be given to Dennis Thompson, President of the Minnesota Forestry Association for scheduling and coordinating the Annual Meeting & State Tree Farm Awards and John Wallin for his photography and video production work. At home the plaques now hang on a wall, what is called the Minnesota room!



## **Dennis Thompson, President of the Minnesota Forestry Association announces the winner of the Dobb Forest Stream book**

I'll close, what I can tell climate change is real. Just watching the growth of trees I know spring is earlier and winter comes later. The growing season has supersized Briana's White Spruce forest. Years to come, I hope the land continues to harden from the cold weather enabling timber removal from peat land. If not Tree Farmers will lose the opportunity to grow and harvest mature trees on hundreds of thousands of acres. For now peat land is productive land growing trees, a resource valuable for all. Tree Farm Land Owners have a lot to gain or lose all hinging on those we elect.

## 2018

In January, a letter was received with very good and timely news from the Minnesota Department of Revenue. During 2017, lawmakers made key changes to the Sustainable Forest Incentive Act (SFIA), a program all the Dobb Forest Stream acreage has been enrolled in for twelve years. SFIA will now be jointly administered by both Minnesota Department of Revenue (Julie Rosalez) and Department of Natural Resources (Lisa Roots). The most important change allows property owners to now choose from three covenant lengths – 8, 20, 50 years. Payment rate increases with the covenant length; 8 years at \$8.91, 20 years at \$12.33 and 50 years at \$15.26. It was important to share this information with Marcy and Briana. I wanted their advice before making a decision because the ramifications easily go beyond my days. So 280 acres, tax parcels numbers 33-028-11000, 33-027-21100, 33-027-21000 and 33-027-12000 are now enrolled under the 20- year SFIA covenant. The remaining parcel 33-027-11000 continues to be in the 8-year covenant as I work toward donating that land for a Song Bird Sanctuary and Study Area to become part of the family legacy. The SFIA changes are extremely meaningful particularly in terms of annual revenue. Typically a check from Department of Revenue would have been \$2240.00 for the 320 acres. Each year now, the amount will be \$4324.74 and over the twenty year period represents \$86,510.00 with enough money to cover tax payments. This decision should lend itself for keeping the land in the family for many more years to come.

Preparing for the annual trip to Northern Minnesota, I wanted to catch-up on the DNR's Minnesota State Heart of the Bog initiative because of my strong interest wanting to donate land for a Song Bird Sanctuary. This land was seemingly identified in the preliminary mapping for this project. Several phone conversations took place with Carrol Henderson, Nongame Wildlife Program supervisor and the projects lead. I learned the state legislators failed to pass funding to begin the first phase elements of the Heart of the Bog project. Plan B now has kicked in with hopes to secure dollars through the Legacy Fund, a program administered Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission. Understanding government, a project of this nature will be a slow process...that is why I call my Song Bird Sanctuary project a ten year project! Finally, I learned Carrol Henderson is retiring after a 45 year career with DNR but given suggested land donation avenues

and contact names to further pursue. In doing so, I established several meetings during my visit to Minnesota; Larry Petersen, Regional DNR Supervisor and a joint meeting with Wade Pavleck, County Commissioner and Nathan Heibel, Land Commissioner of Koochiching County.

Getting ready for the trip Bill Stamey, a lifetime friend confirmed he would be making his fourth visit to Northern Minnesota with me. As previously mentioned in the book, he is a birder and shown much interest with the effort to donate land for a Song Bird Sanctuary. Both him and his wife, Jan have been an inspiration for this family legacy effort.

Wanting all to know the seriousness to donate a 40 acre parcel for a Song Bird Sanctuary and Study Area, I created an idea for a sign to be built and installed on the land and along County Road 77. With help of Ron Haines, a fellow Rotarian who specializes in metal works, custom metal letters were created spelling out: Song Bird Sanctuary Study Area, Dobb Forest Stream. I would pack these letters in my suit case and the construction of a sign would become a project for both Bill and me. Our first morning, Thursday, in International Falls a stop at Menards was necessary to purchase boards, posts, paint and hardware. We hauled the supplies to Littlefork spending time in Bill Nordlund's garage building the sign. It took more time than thought to paint the boards, line-up and secure the letters with both glue and nails. Approximately two-thirds of the job was completed by 1:30pm. For a change in pace we decided traveling to the east side property and determine the location for the sign. Before calling it a day, we stopped by and visited Jim Staples sharing with him about the Song Bird Sanctuary project. In a short time, he grabbed a bucket, filled it with apples and bread then spreading near a grove of trees 50 feet from where Bill and I were standing. All of a sudden, song birds of all kinds (Juncos, Gray Catbirds and Blue Jays) swarmed and entertained us. Looked at the watch and it neared 4:00pm, time to head back to International Falls and have a chocolate milkshake at Hardees!





## **Growing Birch trees on the property, reaching for the sun.**

My first meeting appointment scheduled for Friday at 8:30am with Larry Petersen, the DNR Regional Supervisor to discuss a 40 acre land donation for the purposes of a Song Bird Sanctuary and Study Area. Bill agreed to attend as an extra set of ears and add to questioning needing clarification purposes. Several options were talked about including the donation to the Non Wildlife Fund as well as a potential conservation easement. Repeatedly, Larry noted the State DNR operations were undergoing annual budget reductions and lacked resources thus could not consider an agreement benefiting land for song birds. A pledge was made to keep in touch by contacting me if better circumstances arise. What's most important was the opportunity to inform the agency the land donation is available.

A second meeting was scheduled for Friday at 1:30pm on the property. Arrangements were made to meet with Ben West, a Forester from the Littlefork DNR Office. I wanted a professional timber assessment along the west property line. The question seeking an answer... are any timber removal projects forthcoming in the near future? Bill, Ben and I set out on the mile walk through the forest coming across a survey post about every 200 yards. With engineering tape in hand I was able to remark each post. Several timber stands were talked about all being immature for cutting. While focused looking at the trees, I stepped onto a hornets nest. I did not know I could still run fast enough to avoid bee stings! As we approached a stream the option was to walk around but Ben noticed a beaver dam. It stretched 10 feet across the water. He told us to follow him. It

was the first time ever to walk on a beaver dam's ridgeline. A very sturdy structure! Ended the walk and conversation knowing I will no longer have to think about harvesting trees, rather focus on land management and stewardship most beneficial for Briana in the years ahead.

Still time remaining in the day, Bill Stamey and I headed to Bill Nordlund's garage. Bill worked to finish the attachment of the Song Bird Sanctuary letters while I headed for Polkinghorn's Hardware store to rent a portable drill and posthole digger used to assemble and install the sign. We loaded the sign onto the truck and went back to property. Taking turns the holes were dug and sign installed within half hour. The sign is located on the 40 acres destined to be donated. For the time being, the sign will hopefully encourage bird watchers to use the property. That evening in celebration of a busy day we drove to Almost Lilly's a popular restaurant in Rainer to enjoy beers and have wonderful dinner.



## **Installed sign on the forty acres to be donated for a Song Bird Sanctuary.**

Saturday morning greeted us with clouds and the forecast of continued rain. Temperatures have dipped being cooler than normal for this time of the year. I do not remember experiencing weather like this in my 25 annual visits. Still heading out to the property to metal detect and bird watch. While I was searching for treasures, Bill went on his own to bird watch. It has become tougher to unearth discoveries. Still, able to dig to a coffee pot and hardware used in the logging



days. Each finding continues to excite me. With Bill gone for nearly an hour I called out his name. He replied from a distance. Showing up he went to the truck for water and when returned said he lost his credit card, driver's license and a hundred dollars plus held together by a paper clip. He thought somewhere on the property it slipped out of his pocket while pulling out his work gloves. We both agreed with all the undergrowth it was going to be difficult to find. Together we retraced his steps by following a not so well defined bent grass trail. After winding our way along the creek it was found. What a relief! Then walking a bit further Bill pointed out the biggest beaver dam I have ever saw. It was 50 or more feet across with water backed up forming a beautiful pond. Looking around I could count 14 trees down; some mature others slender sticks. Eventually, we would return to take pictures and cut a piece of a tree where a beaver had gnawed. This was beaver art work at its best and a treasure I would take home. In this same area, had a couple of surface finds; another coffee pot and a lantern both old and battered. I am beginning to wonder if this was the site of my grandfather's sawmill that I have wanted to locate. Further looked around for ax blades, old saws, and hardware but nothing could not found. That search will continue!



**Beavers build the best aquafers & know how to take down trees.**

Sunday and Monday were dripping wet days. A lot of cribbage played and watched football, drank beer, and had soups, pizza and burgers at several local bars. Also provided time to get souvenirs and buy wild rice!

Tuesday morning at 9:00am was a scheduled appointment with Wade Pavleck, County Commissioner and Nathan Heibel, Land Commissioner for Koochiching County. The County's knowledge and position of the State DNR's project, the "Heart of the Bog Birding Trail" was the item for discussion. Not knowing whether they ever heard of the project or its details, a week before the trip, I had the opportunity to inform Carrol Henderson of the meeting. He suggested I contact Gretchen Mehmel, the Wildlife Manager at Norris Camp, a known nature preserve in Northern Minnesota who is very familiar with the "Heart of the Bog" project. Learned she knew Nathan and would call him in advance of the meeting to provide a fresh update for him. That was of tremendous benefit and helped with discussions at the meeting. Bill, would be by my side and encouraged to take part. I asked Nathan to take the lead and describe the project to date. Following, I provided a written description of the project and stated my interest in providing 40 acres for this project. With map in hand, pointed out the location of the property also having been identified in the preliminary mapping for the "Heart of the Bog" project. I also stated the 40 acres directly behind the parcel wishing to donate was owned by Koochiching County. It was a piece formally owned by my grandfather who chose not to pay taxes with the land reverting back to the County. Envisioned, a minimum of an 80 acre song bird sanctuary and birding trail with yet thousands and thousands of acres of state land bordering all sides of the land...this project could be as big as you wanted it! Lots was shared and discussed including the surge in the popularity of bird watching. Commissioner Pavleck reminded us, Koochiching County did not have the resources and the State would have to play a vital role forming a partnership with various agencies, non-profit groups and businesses. Still, interest does loom as an opportunity to create wildlife-nature tourism would bring much needed economic uplift to the area. I closed by saying at any strategic time my land could be donated serving as a match for government or foundation funding. Nathan is an excellent contact and he will remember our meeting and the strong interest for a comprehensive birding area and program.

Much of the rest of the week was bird watching. Bill and I would be looking for and identifying birds in the following locations: the banks of the Rainy River just below AmericInn, our place of residency; Voyageur National Park on established walking trails; the Tree Farm property, along the utility power right of way; and an abandon railroad right of way. Actually, the height of the birding season in Northern Minnesota is May through August, however, for the end of September there seemingly was a fair amount of activity. Being a novice, I continue to marvel how Bill can quickly identify birds through flight, site and sound. He has taught me to be patient, stand still and quietly listen for the greatest opportunity to view birds. I continue to build a stronger interest in birding because it brings a nature experience filled with beauty, song, grace and charm of birds. It appears bird watching is a rapidly growing field in outdoor recreation. I am hooked, and feel pursuing a land donation for this cause is extremely worthwhile. I asked Bill to maintain a log of all the birds identified on our trip. Here is the list: Woodpeckers included Pileated, Downy, and Hairy; Northern Flicker; Bald Eagle, Yellow Warbler, Gray Catbird, Black-Capped Chickadee, Junco, White-Throated sparrow, Belted Kingfisher, Magpie, Ruffed Grouse and a Common Grackle.



### **Can you spot the Downy Woodpecker?**

A quick remembrance of my birding experience with Bill was pulling up to the area where the Song Bird Sanctuary sign would be installed and for a Pileated Woodpecker come flying out of the woods...a signal of sorts for the land to be a Bird Sanctuary!



I will close by saying, since home, conversations have taken place with the Minnesota Land Trust regarding a conservation easement. Issues separate us at this time. Also, heard from Beth Riley, the Midwest Strategic Partnership Manager for American Forest Foundation. I met her last year in Washington DC. There current project is a soon-to-be published Upper Midwest Assessment for the purpose that includes the launching of additional conservation projects having impacts on water, wildlife and recreation. My mind wonders if a Song Bird Sanctuary could be considered?

## 2019

Much thought has been given to donating land for a song bird sanctuary. Following the trip last year I've had further discussion with individuals, non-profits and government agencies. Still a good idea though the number of Nature Wildlife Areas tend to provide significant habitat for the purpose of supplying birds adequate livable, breeding and feeding spaces. So after making trips to Pismo Beach, California; two in the last five years to learn about Monarch Butterflies their habitant, migration and struggles it would make sense to perhaps help. So, having numerous conversations with contacts in Northern Minnesota and elsewhere, I've gauged support for a project to accommodate Eastern Monarch Butterflies by donating the 40 acres to customize native habitat and study areas for use to include: inventory, tagging, viewing with a host of additional educational type offerings. Right now I do not know of such a place in Minnesota and possibly an important tourism draw for Koochiching County *with incredible opportunity lining environmental incentives with financial incentives.*

For the 2019 visit, it was a must to coordinate the trip with Marcy and Briana. It has been at least 10 years since walking the land. More so, its special and important, knowing the largest portion of the **property has been in family ownership for 100 years.** Thus, I wanted a special picture depicting ownership and sharing a moment long not be forgotten. Based on availability, the Minnesota adventure was scheduled for late spring. Marcy and I would spend the days May 29<sup>th</sup> through June 6<sup>th</sup> while Briana's schedule was June 1<sup>st</sup> through June 4<sup>th</sup>.

Tentative plans had been determined prior to our departure in an effort to coordinate a “100 year ownership photo”. For all she has contributed in land management expertise and connections, I want to include Mary Perala. Aside, from a breakfast stop, Marcy and I would head to Mary’s office to coordinate a special photo gathering. It was determined Monday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> would work best and scheduled to meet at 1:30pm by the Dobb Forest Stream sign. The time set was perfect because arrangements would fit right into Beth Riley of the American Forest Foundation schedule, who I also want to be part of this ceremony. Beth from Nebraska has the furthest distance to travel but was in the area on additional business purposes. Garrett Riley, Beth’s son would be travelling with her and became a great opportunity for our family to meet him.

Before heading out to the property we stop by Littlefork at Bill Nordlund’s place where I show Marcy my storage area and grab some supplies as well as introduce the two of them. Bill informed me, my cousins Mark and Tom Romens were scheduled to be in Littlefork the evening on June 10. Mark, would be dealing with listing a piece of property and selling a boat before returning to his home in Arizona. Now at the property, I would re-acquaint Marcy with the property lines. The land had a different look than typically fall visits.



**Spring time view of flowing stream.**

Noticeable, the grassland matted, leaves just beginning to appear on the trees and the scrub cover; streams flowing, ditches filled with water from snow melt and recent rains. You could see a distance looking into the forest from the roadside with the limited new growth. Driving to the southwest corner of the land, an ATFS sign used for property boundary purposes was down and needed repair. I would make a note of it knowing to fix it before the end of the trip.

**Water flowing over  
beaver dam with new  
grass sprouts which by  
fall will be 4 feet tall.**



The urge came to metal detect going right back to the homestead site where I do it year after year. At the family's trash site, the digging for treasures was as easy as it has ever been. The spring time of the year the ground is soft and makes for less effort. Despite bug repellent, I lasted about an hour as the mosquitoes and ticks became a huge factor. Mosquitoes literally drilled me through my heavy long sleeve t-shirt and several wood ticks were discovered on my clothing. I knew that would not be an enjoyable part of this trip! Marcy and I headed back to International Falls where late in the afternoon we would go to Voyageurs National Park for a mile walk then to the Island View Resort for a beer and catch a glimpse of the sun going down on Rainy Lake.

The next day, Marcy suggested we repair the ATFS sign, the boundary marker for southwest corner of the property. The challenge was getting to the sign because of a wide ditch filled with four foot depth of water. Over the years, I hid an eight foot long plank between the edge of the shoulder of the highway and the ditch. It was buried but found under a blanket of matted grass. The plank was used as bridge, however a bit short of the width of the ditch needed to cross. We made it over taking with us a replacement sign, nails, glue and wood to further support the sign on the post which remained solid. We repaired and beefed up the sign to last a number of years. Now using the plank to return, not so lucky, almost making it but not quite as I slipped off and water reached over my knees. Marcy, luckier as her shoes only got soaked. It was time to head back to the hotel and get ready to pick-up Briana at the airport flying in at 5:00pm.

Briana's flight actually arrived early so we was decided to go to Sha Sha resort located on the western edge of Voyageurs National Park for dinner. I had taken Briana there years back during her last visit to Minnesota. It was a beautiful evening and sat outside on the deck. Always learning something new, found out sixteen hundred islands dot the waters of Rainy Lake that lies in both Canada and the United States. Saturday, Marcy and I would meet Briana in the lobby at 8:30am to head-out to the property.

Before reaching the property, we made a stop in Littlefork where Briana was introduced to Jim Staples, property neighbor; Bill Nordlund, resident where storage shed location; Mike and Laura Polkinghorn, owners of Polkinghorn Hardware store. We noticed, Littlefork had a city-wide garage sale and decided to partake. Briana found a 70's wine decanter and I found a drinking glass with the name Codger on it...my high school nickname. One more stop at the Piekarski residence where Briana and Marcy met Dean. His wife Dawn, daughters Danielle and Destiny were not at home. The next several hours were spent walking on the property. I reviewed with Marcy and Briana the boundaries, talk and show the locations of the various property projects; helicopter aerial seeding, sealing of water well, hand plantings, clean up of homestead trash site and logging projects. During the walk, while looking down Marcy picked up a bear claw. That would put an edge on things! Finishing up, mosquito bites galore with at least 10 wood ticks removed from our clothing and hair! Ending the day, we had dinner in Rainer, a small community east of International Falls. With plenty sunshine remaining, we took a nature walk on the Tilson Bog Boardwalk...a newly built one-half mile wooden structure on top of a bog. Great experience, where there is enormous opportunity for people like us to learn about this special habitat.

We returned to the property on Sunday. I chose to mental detect while Marcy and Briana wanted to avoid the mosquitoes and ticks staying clear of the forest. They walked a distance up and back along County Rd 77. In the hour and half metal detecting, I found several items but two worthy of attention. First a pin with the engraving on it: United States Navy Construction Battalions; second a Colgate tube with the words Ribbon Dental Cream. Both were probably buried for 80 plus years and well preserved for length spent in the ground.



**Seabees navy pin belonging to Donald Dobb, unearthed after being buried for 80 plus years.**

By sending a picture of the pin to my cousin Katherine, she was able to identify it as her dad's, Donald Dobb who had served in the Navy. Anxious to have it, I would send it to her in the mail. Our final stop would be the Dobbs Residence. Marcy and Briana met Gordy and Lori Dobbs, part of a long time logger family who for decades provided timber removal services for our family. I invited them for "100<sup>th</sup> Year of Ownership" celebration and photo gathering scheduled the next day. We wrapped up the day early and enjoyed a dinner at the Thunderbird Resort located across the road from the Voyageurs National Park Headquarters entrance.

It's Monday and our family photo with friends to celebrate a 100 Years of Ownership is scheduled for 1:30pm. The morning offered the time have Marcy and Briana introduced to a number of my contacts. At the Koochiching County Building hands were shaken with Tom West, Auditor/Treasurer; Lindsay Frank, Records Office; Len Peterson, Assessor and Matt Gouin, Environmental Services. The one person not available and a must to know is Nate Heibel, Land Commissioner. For any land project such as change in use other than forestry chances are he would be involved. At the Littlefork DNR Office, Marcy and Briana were introduced to Patty Growette, Office Manager and Matt Wappler, Supervisor. Not available was Ben West, Forester with a lot of knowledge of all phases of forestry land management.

We would make one more stop before heading to the property, the cemetery in Littlefork to visit the grave site of Michael James Dobb and Catherine Marie Dobb, (formerly Romens) my grandparents. It was the first visit for all of us. Respect was made to them as well as the Romens Family with grave sites side by side.



With time closing in on 1:30pm, we headed to the property for a photo session celebrating the “100 Year of Family Ownership” of the land. Destiny Piekarski would be home and asked her to take the pictures. All showed up: Mary Perala, Beth and son Garrett Riley, the Dobbs Family; Gordy, Lori and their father Elmer. Briana had made a special poster stretching both sides of the Dobb Forest Stream sign. It highlighted the century long ownership and became a very special moment. So proud of an achievement very few families will ever experience in the world! Following the picture, Mary provided a nature walk that featured information about wildlife; identification and scent of trees, scrubs and plants. Along the stream, a wildflower caught our eyes it was called the Indian Paint Brush. Before the final gestures, being hugs and thanks, I dug a small white spruce tree that Barrett would take home and plant as a remembrance. It was time for dinner with Beth and Garrett joining us in Littlefork.



**Mary Perala leading a nature walk, learning the various scents of the forest.**



**Celebration – 100 years of Dobb family ownership of property. Pictured right from left: Marcy Dobb, Gordy, Lori and Elmer Dobbs (Dobbs Logging), Mary Perala (of PCA and AFTS), Beth Riley (of American Tree Foundation), and Briana Dobb. Article was published in 7-31-19 International Falls Journal.**



**Left: Indian Paintbrush Wildflower. Dotted throughout the property.**

**Right: Garrett Riley with a tree given off the property. Now planted at his home in Omaha, Nebraska.**



Having heard from my cousins Mark and Tom, plans were made to meet in the lounge at the AmericInn at 7:00pm that night. It would be the first time for Briana to meet Mark and nearly 20 years since meeting Tom’s family on their visit to Washington State. We exchanged updates on each family; then talked specifically about the early history of both the Romens and Dobb families. Before leaving we agreed to meet in Littlefork one last time for a photo of Mark, Tom and myself.

Briana was scheduled to fly out the next morning but before doing so, we stopped by the Soil and Water Conservation District. There she was introduced to Pam Tomevi, District Administrator and Jolen Simon both resource specialists providing services for the management of the property.

Briana and Marcy now have met a great number of my contacts all contributing to making the land ownership so meaningful, so successful. All my thanks may never be realized for the support given. You think there is so much time to be grateful but there isn't. You only hope you've showed enough! This trip comes to an end.

Last but not least, for this trip finishing now with a list I call "Mike's Tips for Managing the property known forever as Dobb Forest Stream."

\*Work with Natural Resource Specialists. \*Global warming is real: protect yourself and others; protect the property. \*Carbon tax credits or equivalent will come, research, jump in when appropriate. \*Let nature lead the way with growth of tree and scrub cover. \*Be a member of local and national forestry associations. \*Know your local, state and national elected officials and what they're too. \*In making decisions, always ask: what will this lead to? \*Water flowing on should be as pure as water flowing off property. \*With native plants, scrubs and trees create habitat for birds, bees and butterflies. \*Support laws best suited for nature. \*Keep Resource Management Plan updated.



**Special moment with Mike, Marcy and Briana Dobb. Owners of the property since 1994.**



Following the 1969 Sumner High School 50<sup>th</sup> Class Reunion which Doug Holbrook and I attended in June a conversation has led to a second trip to Northern Minnesota. Doug was both a friend in high school and college roommate. His schedule allowed him to be available September 12<sup>th</sup> through the evening of September 15<sup>th</sup>. I would need additional days because of meetings booked.

Coming up with special projects for each trip is strived for and when completed needs to provide a sense of accomplishment. Where many landowners have such signs that state: No Hunting, No Trespassing, Private Property, and Keep Out; I would rather offer more of a positive message. The building and installation of the Sign Bird Sanctuary-Study Area sign did just that. Comments made suggest the sign heighten awareness of how birds struggle to survive. Over the decades, the bird population has sharply declined and this project was a subtle way to get the message out. In July while attending a street fair I spotted a vendor selling metal letters and symbols that included a butterfly. It inspired me to build and install a “Butterfly Sanctuary Sign” for the property. The letters were purchased setting-up a project for the upcoming trip with Doug Holbrook.

The day before the trip Doug and I touched base. We talked about what to bring and established a meeting point at SeaTac Airport. Weather was expected to be daytime 70's and 40's at night with fall leaves turning color. Perfect. Our departure flight on September 12<sup>th</sup>, landed in International Falls at 5:30pm; checked in at AmericInn and went for dinner. Doug experienced his first bowl of Wild Rice soup washing it down with a Long Island Ice Tea. Can't remember what I had other than a Long Island Ice Tea. After dinner we walked down to the Rainy River to watch fishermen cast for walleyes; then caught the last bit of the Thursday Night Football game before falling asleep.

For Friday morning, I had made prior arrangements to pick-up a newly published map plat book of Koochiching County at the Soil and Water Conservation Office. Always like checking in with the staff to learn about programs offered to private property owners. Later on this trip, I would return to spend time with Jolen Simon, Program Coordinator for the Soil and Water Conservation District to obtain information on Water Sheds. Jolen determined my property was located in the Big Fork River Water Shed. It is one of the largest in the region at 1,326,947 acres and primarily monitored through studies by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

High water quality and regular testing is important. With two streams entering and exiting the property it is essential to know, clean water flows onto the property and clean water leaves the property.

Before heading to the property, two stops were necessary. Doug wanted a coffee mocha. No Starbucks in International Falls rather a small business called the Coffee Landing and located across the street from the Soil and Water Conservation Office. It very much satisfied the urge. Next was Menards to purchase wood and hardware for the Butterfly Sanctuary sign. It was a rainy day, perfect to begin work on the sign project inside Nordlund's garage in Littlefork. Doug painted the boards and together spaced out the metal letters. Needing the paint to dry and with the rain letting up it was decided to visit the property. Showed Doug the property boundaries and shared with him tree removal and planting projects having taken place. We walked on the logging roads and homestead site both noticing a lot deer beds and bear scat! Returning to Littlefork, we stopped at Gordy Dobbs, my logger, making arrangements for Doug to get fresh cut birch coasters, a souvenir of the trip. Completed the day with a stop at the Littlefork DNR Office; there Ben West, the local forester contact mentioned a Native Wildflower Planting Pollinating program was available and would I be interested...rather than taking up the remainder of the day gathering details an appointment was set up for Monday morning. Doug and I would then returned to International Falls and decided to go to Sha Sha Resort for dinner.

Saturday morning a good breakfast was called for. Doug heard mentioned several times "Wild Rice" pancakes and when experiencing Northern Minnesota it's a must. Sandy's Place located in International Falls is known for their "Wild Rice" pancakes and was the first stop of the day. Still immediately afterwards, another coffee mocha at the Coffee Landing before heading to Littlefork to finish the Butterfly Sanctuary sign. First chore was to attach the metal letters to the wood signboard requiring a drill. A battery operated drill was rented from Polkinghorne's Hardware. Three screws anchored each letter into place and holes drilled to fasten the signboards onto the post. We now loaded up the SUV and headed to property to install the sign but before doing so had to select an appropriate site on the property. An ideal location was chosen...the west side of Highway 71 and along County Road 77 in a partially opened field with wild flowers. As Doug and I unloaded the sign, the Piekarski's, neighbors stopped by



and inquired about the project. It was perfect timing because a posthole digger was needed and asked if they had one to borrow. Sure enough. The signboards were attached to the posts, postholes dug and the sign positioned in the ground. Job done! But what will be long remembered is the swarm of beautiful butterflies fluttering around while installing the sign. Among the types of butterflies seen were thought to be Black Swallowtail, Common Checked Skipper, and the Viceroy. Overall, butterflies are on a rapid decline. For instance 90% of the Monarchs have vanished in the past few decades...I feel good joining a movement of people making a difference to restore the butterfly population.



**Installed sign on property located on the west side of State Hwy 71 on County Rd. 77. Next year the top board will include the word “Bees and”...Funding is being sought for a Native Wildflower Pollinating project for this area.**



**Numerous butterflies were seen on the property that included a Blue Swallowtail.**

Sunday is Doug's last day before flight out that evening. We decided to return to the property but leave early enough to watch the Sea Hawks Football game. I brought my metal detector along and wanted to do some final treasure hunting. In a spot not searched, luck would happen; two hits and two digs uncovered an attachment for a piece of machinery and a hame ball. The hame ball was solid brass and used as a grip for a horse saddle. Several other items were also found that included knives, spoons & forks. Doug seemed amazed items were being unearthed from a foot down and 80 years in the past. Before wrapping up Doug and I would do a nature walk to see a dried-up beaver pond unveiling a 60 foot beaver dam. He was able to see firsthand the marvelous engineering work performed by the beavers. And then one more thing, Doug contacted his wife Marsha and held the first ever livestream, providing her with a glimpse of the property! We returned to International Falls changed into Sea Hawks wear and headed to the Border Bar to watch the game...unfortunately game was not televised but had an outstanding pizza and a final Long Island Ice Tea. Doug flew out that evening with a taste of the Northern Minnesota flavor!

Received word the night before Nathan Heibel, Land Commissioner would not be available for a scheduled Monday morning meeting. Instead of cancelling it altogether I was encouraged to meet with Danae Schafer his assistant. Surprisingly, it was recognized she was an acquaintance of Mike Eilers, the first DNR forester I closely worked with. She knew me and was knowledgeable of the property. That helped, so when I shared with her about donating property Danae was aware. So the conversation centered on desires to provide land available for a wildlife sanctuary and the public benefit. Mentioned my efforts contacting groups associated song birds and butterflies and to date interest, but not enough interest because of the lack of resources. Our discussion then shifted to the Heart of the Bog Birding Trail a project both of us knew about. It is driven by the State's Department of Natural Resources and targeted for Northern Minnesota with my land up for consideration. Carol Henderson, the retired Nongame Wildlife Supervisor led the initial planning effort and his replacement Cynthia Osmundson has picked up those reigns. Through phone calls and correspondence each know of the willingness to donate. The big issue is funding, however, Minnesota hopes to increase their annual federal allocation through the Recovery American Wildlife

Act boosting this initiative. Danae said she would keep me informed of Heart of the Bog progress and look for other land donation opportunities. I appreciate both her and Nathan's efforts to help.

Next, I arrived in Littlefork at the DNR office, 10:45am to meet with Ben West for the purpose of learning about the Native Wildflower Pollinating program. Ben explained funding is available for a two year period. Understood requirements would include: 1) establishing a timetable, 2) selection of acreage and site on property, 3) preparation of soil as necessary, 4) purchase of native wildflower seeds, and 5) seed application. Ben brought up an aerial map on the computer and initial discussions had us both pinpointing the west side of Highway 71, along County Road 77 as the best location for this project. Within the next two weeks Ben pledged to complete an onsite assessment and contact to further the Native Wildflower Pollinating project. It is a new direction increasing the beauty of the land. Probably more importantly, a successful planting will help lessen the rapid declining numbers of birds, butterflies, bees and dragonflies. Additional benefits will be protection and conservation of pollinator species resulting in a public education for the importance of pollination. This project will be a high priority and look forward to its completion...hopefully with many positive comments and lots of photo opportunities in the years ahead.

I finished the day with a few hours of metal detecting and before leaving the property loaded two truck tires dropped off along the roadside of the property. They were taken to the International Falls Landfill for proper disposal. The next day departed for home and thinking both visits this year were very special!

## 2020

Covid 19, a serious and deadly disease has hit worldwide. Life has become very different and created unprecedented circumstances. Now social distancing and mask wearing is everyday occurrence. With no vaccine and the misdirected efforts by the Federal Government, the United States is placed in a most vulnerable position. In eight months nearly 200,000 lives taken and another 6 million people infected. Because of the situation, it took me six months to make the decision as to

whether or not I should make the trip to Minnesota. Accepting the proper protocols, a late date decision was made to go.

For this trip , what mattered was to complete the Native Wildflower Planting and Pollinating project. I call it my first roadside attraction effort. Months before boarding the airplane, several steps had to be taken to meet DNR's requirements. It was my responsibility to determine and order the type of native wildflower(s). With a great number to choose from, I learned it would not be an easy decision. After two phone calls to Minnesota Native Landscape and research in between, mounting to hours, I purchased 4lbs of *Amorpha canescens* known as the Lead Plant. The seeds were shipped the Littlefork DNR Office and placed in cold storage to be planted in September. Ben West, was notified of my selection and shipping arrangements. At that time, I was informed a needed state ID project number was required and Cost Share agreement signed. This entitled me to a reimbursement of \$312.50 upon completion of the project. I was introduced to DocuSign, Ben emailed me the agreement and on my little cell phone with my clumsy fingers scribbled my signature on the authorization line!

In early August my dates were set for the Minnesota visit. It would be September 7 thru the 13<sup>th</sup>. Before departing a decision of just how the soil preparation was going to be achieved. I finally settled on Ben's recommendation, the hiring of Rodney Sawyer. After Rodney looked at the 2.5 acres and several phone conversations, we agreed upon \$300.00 with the work finished and ready for planting before my arrival. It did not go quite that way. Four days before the flight, Rodney calls and said his first effort did not go well and different equipment was needed...what that meant was an increase in cost. I was OK with the new figure of \$600.00 knowing the job would be finished on time.

Arriving in Minnesota, my first stop was to meet with Rodney. I found he was a hard working family man and determined a great job had been fulfilled in preparing the soil for the planting project. Impressed, I decided to forego my thought of seeding the site and rather hired Rodney for an additional \$200.00. I would pay him \$800.00. Altogether the soil prep, seed expense, planting the seeds came to \$1,0021.23. Immediately following the completion of the seeding project Ben West authorized the program's reimbursement of \$312.50. I am so excited about the project and need to explain why.

Over the years being a tree farmer I have increased my knowledge about wildlife and their habitat resulting in a strong desire to build a paradise; wanting to invite bees, birds and butterflies to a home that is comfortable enough to help provide an upswing in their population. It's an effort and a statement that the ecosystem is so important and as landowner have the ability to contribute to the pollinating challenges of today. This is my expression for a greener/healthier life. Next year, I am hoping to see a 2.5 acres of Lead Plants in bloom filled with the activity of bees, birds and butterflies placated by the burst of colors that include purple, blue-violet, red and yellow. The Lead Plant was chosen because it is virtually drought and shade resistant which requires very little maintenance. The drawback is the plant has a very deep root system and whenever removed will be challenging. This project has given a dose of wildlife and flower beauty from the roadside of Koochiching County Road 77. I want the bee, bird and butterfly watchers, photographers along with other nature goers to enjoy the site. It's with hope this investment has a ripple effect giving attention to environment. A follow up project will be an effort to install a Web Cam system with an app available to the public for year round viewing!

Finally, the trip also included a bit of metal detecting, again on the homestead site always finding something and this year no different. Among treasures dug up were a vintage brown whisky bottle, a marble, found out is a fancy Bennington made before 1910 and a "first coin" discovered being a 1935 D wheat penny.

Can't wait to return next year !

It was six years ago on pages 55 through 57, wrote short and long term future predictions of the property. *Some were farfetched others practical.* Forecasting with *imagination* is a fun and meaningful exercise. So here is my latest attempt for **What Might Be Envisioned for 2021 and Beyond:**

The Minnesota Department of Transportation purchases from the Dobb Family a 500 foot stretch of property along Highway 71 to construct a public pullout for the purpose of photographing and viewing wetlands as well as known beaver lodges. An educational kiosk provides detailed description of their values.

The Littlefork-Big Falls School District receives a grant for a three year program from the Monarch Butterfly Association. Students are educated about the



plight of Monarchs and taught how to tag, release, monitor migration and living habits. The selected site is the Dobb Forest Stream Butterfly Sanctuary.

During a winter logging project the movement of soft ground uncovered the skeleton of a duck billed dinosaur on the property. It draws huge interest from the paleontologists and the general public. Thought to be the furthest found north in the continental United States.

A water restoration project includes a replacement of a culvert under Highway 71 as well as increases side channels helping to store water flow and capacity. It lessens flooding concerns and improves riparian habitat for endangered frogs and other wildlife life.

Through the Soil and Water Conservation District and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency the Big Falls River Water Shed receives funding that includes the installing of two chemistry sites on the water flowing onto the Dobb property and two chemistry sites for water flowing off the property. The purpose is for surface water assessment and the tracking of water quality.

CBS Sunday Morning Show features their “Nature Moment” segment from the property. It is a beautiful piece highlighting the water flow of the stream, leaves falling with spectacular shots of frogs and their croaking sounds. And not to be out done, a beaver pops its head out of the water then swims towards a massive hut.

Through the Minnesota’s Outdoor Heritage program and Wildlife Recovery Act the Heart of the Bog Birding Trail moves forward. A portion of the Dobb property is donated and used as a match to help secure additional monies for the project.

The William Gates Foundation provides a significant portion of funding to study carbon emissions and their effect on the environment. Scientific data shows the detrimental and the enormous impact it has on climate change. Swift action by lawmakers lead to an historic carbon floor price. First time subsidies become greater than that for tobacco farmers. All family tree farmers benefit for their contribution to a healthier planet!

The largest mushroom truffle in the US is found on the Dobb property. It is valued at over \$8000.00.

The Minnesota legislators pass a measure designating “Walk-On” only for public use of property. This is optional for each property owner. It is intended to protect degrading forest and field lands.

The Dobb Tree Farm has been selected to provide an annual official White House Christmas Tree. It is an 18 foot White Spruce cut from the homestead area. Briana Dobb and friends represent the Dobb Family and accompanies the tree and is greeted by the President and First Lady.

The Dobb Tree Farm was nominated and selected by the American Tree Farm System to be the National Tree Farm of the Year. Ceremonies are held during the National Tree Farm Conference in Washington DC with dignitaries from both Washington and Minnesota in attendance.

Support government agencies to improve Highway 71 and County Road 77.

Work with Soil and Water Conservation District and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to create a community/visitor well site, much like the former “Camp B” public water site. Continue to learn about water rights and laws.

Participate in a public-private partnership to install a Web Cam for wildlife viewing on the property.

*In closing not sure if I will continue my memoirs.* Notes about land decisions and thoughts will continue to be produced for the benefit of Briana. Now is a good time to summarize a **List of Accomplishments Since the 1996 Ownership of the Property**; no order of preference/importance and are referenced in greater detail throughout the book.

- \* Built a network of forestry professionals to help guide in decision making.
- \* Acquired partial reimbursement from Soil & Water Conservation District to seal water well...no water well on property.
- \* Metal detected the homestead site finding an assortment treasures.
- \* Worked toward donating a minimum of 40 acres on the east side of Hwy71.

- \* Coordinated with DNR three separate 10 Year Resource Management Plans; 1997, 2007, 2017 that allows for government funding programs.
- \* Enrolled into the Sustainable Forestry Investment Program completing each year annual Request Form for financial reimbursement of taxes and beyond.
- \* Sold Koochiching County easement of 11 foot width along County Road 77 stretching the length of the property on the east side of Highway 71 converting dirt road to paved asphalt.
- \* Worked with Conservation officer to determine who damaged the northwest corner of the property...turned out to be neighbor...matters resolved.
- \* Contracted with Murray's Survey Company of Bemidji to survey the west property line and was filed with Koochiching County. A length of nearly a mile from County Road 77 to Highway 71.
- \* Made or had made wood products that included walking sticks, coasters, and ink pens. Used birch and diamond back willow from the property. Designed and had produced "Dobb Forest Stream" Hats and Sweatshirts.
- \* Oversaw three tree plantings: 1) 1998, 34,000 white spruce on former pasture land. 2) 2008, 500 trees planted by hand with Briana. 3) 2016, Aerial helicopter black spruce seeding on 20 acres of peat land. First and only family tree farm known by the Minnesota Forestry Association to have ever completed this type of planting.
- \* Became a member of the Minnesota Forestry Association and the American Tree Farm System and continue to be.
- \* Oversaw five timber removal projects with local loggers. Largest was 20 acres of Black Spruce. Most interesting was removal of trees along Hwy. 71 right-away. The family maintained such rights.
- \* Named property and signed it "Dobb Forest Stream" in remembrance of family.
- \* 2017 became Minnesota Tree Farmer of the Year.
- \* Nearly completed clean-up of the homestead trash site located along stream.

- \* Worked with MNDOT to remove beaver lodges and dams within Hwy 71 right- away to eliminate Highway flooding/washout and improve stream flow.
- \* Built and installed two signs “self- declaring” a Song Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary.
- \* Celebrated 100 Years of Family ownership of the property.
- \* Approved and completed on 2.5 acres a DNR Native Wildflower and Pollinating project on the west side of county Road 77. Funded in part by DNR.

It is appropriate to say I am an extremely lucky person all around. Owning land is very special and for our family became a connector linking generation to generation. Over the years, keeping the land at its best can be a challenge but with program incentives and good decision making, always realized. I will continue to do my part and you do yours. It is with passing time the feeling of greatness is achieved in the building of an ecosystem beneficial to all. Together we can pay a special tribute for a better life by inspiring others to seek positive action. Yep, let us do this!

The “Dobb Forest Stream” memoir project has come to an end with the exception of future years. Yearly, updates will be available on a requested basis anticipated to be in the month of October. For your copy, contact Mike Dobb at [mjdobb@aol.com](mailto:mjdobb@aol.com) or call 253-987-5225.

