



Williams: Passionate Advocate For Forestry

Jennifer McCary, Senior Associate Editor: Phone/Fax: 334-636-2921, e-mail: jmccary@hattonbrown.com

You've heard of Johnny Appleseed, the 19th century conservationist credited with planting apple trees across the Northeast and Midwest. Well, Bob Williams of Glassboro, NJ could be considered a modern day Appleseed. Whereas Appleseed planted apple orchards, Williams is planting *A Working Forest, Its Future with Fire, People & Wildlife*, a PR tool he hopes will help the forest products industry regain its rightful place as the 'true environmentalist.'

He likens the DVDs to little seeds that will germinate in the minds of viewers and hopefully grow into a better understanding and renewed respect for the role that forests play in the overall health and wealth of this nation, its natural resources and the positive impact it has on its citizens.

A registered forester in two states, certified SAF member and wetlands scientist, Williams has spent the last 30 years managing and restoring forests in a state known more for its concrete jungles than its timberlands. Perhaps it is that ever-present challenge that has made Williams the passionate advocate that he is.

For too long, opponents have painted the forest products industry as enemies of nature, bent on destroying it and murdering wildlife. Unfortunately, such rhetoric is usually met with...silence.

"I have come to believe that the forest industry and foresters in general are the kind of folks that are busy out in the woods," says Williams. "They don't want to deal with all this nonsense that you

have to in terms of forest policy, and that is our weakness."

The industry is made up of busy, hard-working individuals who just want to do their thing. They don't like the limelight and don't have time for politics. They'd rather somebody else do the speeches to school groups and community organizations.

There is too much talking to the choir and not enough engaging of the public. "I don't think the forest industry has made the investment where it needs to because we need to get our citizens clamoring for us to be the 'keepers of the forest' like the Audubon Society is the 'keeper of the birds'."

Williams was recognized for his industry outreach efforts last May when the Northeastern Loggers' Assn., at its annual banquet, presented him with its Outstanding Contribution to Forest Industry Education Award.

How It Developed

Several years ago Williams attended a meeting where he watched a short video on forest fires that was professionally done with actors. It occurred to him that forestry needed something like that to tell its story, but to tell it from the point of view of those who do it—the landowner, the forester, the logger, the mill and so on. There are so many interesting people involved that he felt such a film would be both entertaining and informative. It would showcase the successes and benefits of forest management and counteract the fuzzy math—an avalanche of misinformation that has been passed off as scientific fact for 30 years or more.

When a forestry issue comes up in the news, Williams thought, he would have a ready tool to send to that reporter or commentator so he would have an objective background of the industry as he covers the story.

Around that time, the principals



Bob Williams with his spouse, Sarae

of Jarvis Video Productions, Tuckerton, NJ, which specializes in producing documentaries, contacted Williams as a recommended forestry source for a film they were working on. It didn't take the producers long to see that Williams was a man with a lot of good ideas and he had a story that needed to be told.

Over the coming months they collaborated with him to plan, film and produce a highly effective video that was completely unrehearsed and unscripted. The people spotlighted in the film talk about their purposes and goals with such passion and honesty about the forest, the land and their responsibility to nature that no scriptwriter could have captured as succinctly.

Williams defined the scope of topics he wanted to cover and selected the 'who and where.' Everything else was left to the expertise and skill of the Jarvis crew. The result is a 60 minute balanced documentary depicting the complete life cycle of a working forest, including the not-so-pretty side that so many industry organizations gloss over or ignore entirely, i.e. prescribed burns and harvesting. It takes the viewer to New Jersey, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Wisconsin and Washington. They visit with landowners, tree farmers, wildlife biologists, ecologists, fire managers, loggers and forestry professors.

Powerful Tool

"I don't think my film is any magic bullet, but it is the kind of thing that we all need to be doing. It is a powerful tool," states Williams. One reason it is so powerful is that it does not use the all too familiar 'us against them' mantra. The message is straightforward, clear and positive.

It is his hope that people throughout the industry will get a copy or several copies and use the film to educate and change the public's perception of forestry. It doesn't take much. Share it with your child's classroom; present it as the program for your club meeting; or send it to a local reporter.

He believes the way to turn things back around is for the public to tell Congress to stop letting huge swaths of

unmanaged forests become tinderboxes like we've seen in Colorado this summer. We need the public to demand that Congress put foresters and loggers back in charge of our national forests.

"This is my drive and I am disappointed that there's not enough of us doing this. I just think we have to make the investment in public relations or we

are going to be out of business. We do a lot of good things but we have to be perceived by the public as doing good."

For more information or to purchase the DVD online, visit www.aworkingforest.com, or mail check or money order to JVP Enterprises, P.O. Box 628, Little Egg Harbor, NJ 08087. The cost of \$17.95 includes shipping fee. **TH**

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