

THE CASCADE FORESTRY SERVICE NURSERY

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Cascade Forestry Service, Inc., is a private reforestation nursery and service company that has grown from a shoestring operation into an employee-owned company that both produces reforestation trees and assists landowners with forestry development and management.

The Northeastern Forest and Conservation Nursery Association has proven instrumental in Cascade Forestry's growth and development, particularly through allowing us to participate in their annual meetings. We thank the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for inviting us to cohost this year's meeting. After all, as members of the association, we share a common goal—to provide the public with quality seedlings for restocking existing forests and establishing new ones. It is this opportunity to share ideas and learn new and better ways to deal with forest nursery challenges that is the very basis for the association.

Cascade Forestry Service was founded in 1975 by Leo Frueh, 1 of 9 children who grew up on a small farm near Melcher, Iowa. After graduating from Iowa State University in 1963, Leo served as a Peace Corps forester for 2 years in Nepal. Upon returning to this country, he worked for the USDA Forest Service in West Virginia, where he met his wife, Mary, who was working as a Vista volunteer.

In 1967, Leo and Mary returned to Iowa where Leo began work as a log buyer for Bacon Veneer, a long-established veneer company in Dubuque. He later worked as a log buyer for a private logger before starting Cascade Forestry Service. Leo and a partner managed to secure a \$20,000 loan to develop a nursery on a 13-acre piece of land, buy

equipment for tree planting and timber stand improvement, and provide cash flow for the 2 partners and a part-time secretary.

Today, Cascade Forestry Service produces more than 1.5 million hardwood seedlings and conifer transplants annually, plants 1,500 acres of trees per year, and does timber stand improvement and forestry consulting in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Current staffing includes 10 full-time employees with a peak seasonal employment of almost 80 people during the busy spring season.

Cascade Forestry's growing fields started with a 13-acre creek bottom that we still use. We have since piecemealed together an additional 57 acres of production area in 6 adjacent fields. To irrigate this expanded area we now have 3 new portable pump units capable of much greater pumping capacities in addition to a 190-foot well. The pump units were desperately needed the past 2 years to accommodate an increase in our production area.

The original combined cooler and administration building was our only building until 1991 when we expanded to a location 5 miles away beside a highway. A more strategic location, this facility provided much greater cold storage and shipping capacity, as well as an enlarged office complex. However, we have outgrown this building during the past 3 years, as witnessed by the fact that last year we rented 13 refrigerated trailers for additional cooler storage space. Similarly, for the past 4 years, we have rented space in a neighbor's cattle shed for grading operations. We are currently in the process of planning for a major

new building to accommodate future processing and cold storage needs.

We are also in search of more and better land. We recently rented an additional 10 acres, and are looking for more. Our soil types vary considerably, and we'd like our ground to be more uniform, of higher organic content, and better suited for nursery production than some of our existing areas.

Like most nurseries, we have a long list of equipment needs. Some of our recent acquisitions include a bedformer, 2 trucks, 2 irrigation pumps and pipe, a tractor, and 2 seeders. But the list of needs continues, despite measurable gains this past year.

Seed collection becomes more challenging each year as the demand for seed has escalated. We collect a limited amount ourselves, but rely mainly on seed collectors within a several hundred-mile radius to supply the majority of our seeds.

Cascade Forestry also concentrates on native species within the area—zones 4 and 5. While oaks, walnut, and ash have traditionally been the mainstay of our production, we find increasing interest in species diversity. Consequently, we are growing an increasing number of hickories, Kentucky coffee tree, cherry, and endangered species like butternut and American chestnut. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has produced a heavy demand for native shrubs, and we are also trying to fill some of this demand.

In addition to growing hardwoods, we currently buy 2-year-old conifer seedlings and raise them 2 additional years at lower bed densities for resale as larger transplant stock. We now grow approximately 50 species of trees and shrubs. We also sell potted conifers for windbreaks.

Besides increasing the number of species grown, we have also increased overall production numbers from about 750,000 plants 2 years ago to almost 1.5 million this year. Within 2 additional years, we expect that target to reach or exceed 2.5 million trees. Our goal is to produce the majority of seedlings we sell. Currently we augment our shortfalls in production with purchased stock from other nurseries.

Cascade Forestry also strives to produce heavy-rooted seedlings. To accomplish this, we undercut many of the hardwood species and work to keep bed densities low. We use a Silver Mountain undercutter, which allows us the flexibility to undercut select species (for example, oaks) during the first growing season.

Our service crews planted 1,338 acres of land for 101 landowners this past spring. Jobs ranged in size from 1 acre to 200 acres and stretched from Winona, Minnesota to central Missouri, and from the Nebraska border to the suburbs of Chicago. To accomplish this task, we had 4 machine-planting crews and 1 hand-planting crew.

Projects included: farmstead windbreaks; CRP plantings; riparian plantings; a direct seeding project; a pipeline project that included 30 individual planting sites stretching from Tama, Iowa, to Joliet, Illinois; a planting for the Illinois Department of Transportation; and the establishment of a bur oak savanna for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Two years ago, we instituted a survival guarantee for plantings we do using our stock. This guarantee has become a standard practice for us. Because of it, many foresters now allow us to plant later than the established deadlines, and this has, in effect, increased the length of our planting season. This year, for example, we had 3 machine-planting crews active through the third week of June.

With the increased demand for tree plantings, Cascade Forestry Service has been doing more fall planting; we believe this is a viable option on certain sites with certain species. We also anticipate increased interest in direct seeding and have tried some innovative approaches to this practice.

As we gaze into our crystal ball, we realize the increasing importance of sharing information—whether about herbicides, genetics, bed density, species hardiness, the use of global positioning systems, or the opportunities presented by genetic alteration. We look forward to actively participating in the association in the future, and we invite all members to give us a call or to stop by our nursery at any time for a tour.