**PSCTA Minutes of the Summer Farm Tour, July 27, 2019**

The meeting was called to order by the Association president, Bob Moore, at 10:00 a.m. preceded by delicious donuts and coffee provided by our hostess Ruth Heft of Big Lake Trees. The meeting was well attended and we welcomed some new people to our meeting and also some old friends of the association. It was wonderful to be at Big Lake Trees once again and bring our summer meeting up to the northern members of our association.

After our instructions, Ruth Heft gave an overview of the farm, how they have grown over the years, sales information and future plans. Like so many farms, Big Lake Trees came into being as a family idea and family endeavor. Ruth’s husband, Ralph was a forester and it was his mother who encouraged starting the farm. The 62 acre farm was purchased in 1974 and in 1982 they sold their first tree. Approximately 12 acres are planted in Christmas trees with the balance of the farm in timber. It wasn’t until 1999 that Ruth and her husband built their home on the property. In addition to her private home there is a second home up the hill on tier one of the farm and then up the road to the top is another field of trees with a covered picnic area. The setting of this farm is perfect for a family Christmas tree adventure. Ruth passed around an aerial photo of the farm taken a few years ago that gave the members an opportunity to see the expanse of the farm that has been called the largest tree farm in Skagit County.

Between 1400 and 2700 seedlings are planted each year, however, because they do not have irrigation on the farm they did lose approximately 50% of the seedlings due to the heat these past three years along with some issues of root rot and also the deer visiting the property. Sales of trees each year have varied between 1,000 and 1,500 trees with net revenue of about $50,000. Trees are priced by the foot (Douglas Fir $4 a foot, Grand Firs $7 a foot, Nobles and Nordmanns $10 a foot). Although there are some taller trees the cost of a tree does not exceed $80 (i.e. a 9 foot Noble would cap out at $80). For the 2018 season the farm sold out of trees in 9 days.

Ruth and her family have the second home and 21 acres of the farm on the market for sale. The price is $795,000 with the opportunity to lease the upper fields of trees. If you know of anyone interested in the business this is a beautiful farm.

As part of Ruth’s presentation questions came up about using social media, Facebook, to promote sales. PSCTA does have a Facebook page that we can send photos and updates to and Sheila explained that process of “liking” a photo or article and having it be picked up by our association’s page. Because farms are all so busy during our short season and we are all selling out of trees so early, it is difficult to respond to social media requests from potential customers. Population growth in the area and fewer tree farms are both factors in the shortage of trees for U-cut. For many farms having pre-cut trees has lengthened the selling season and increased revenue for the farms.

**General Membership Meeting**

Secretary’s Report: The minutes of the January meeting we accepted. Jan Moore indicated that for the future we will be mailing out minutes of the meetings and also the membership renewal forms. E-mail is efficient at times, but we do want to make sure that everyone gets these important documents.

Treasurer’s Report: Sheila McKinnon provided members a copy of the Financial Report. To date we have 42 paid members. For those who have not paid, please send dues to Sheila as soon as possible. Several farms are members but have not requested to have their farm listed on the website. All payments to the lobbyist and research have been made and the association is still in good shape financially. The treasurer’s report was accepted.

Puyallup Fair: Mike Roosendaal gave a presentation with updates about the Puyallup Fair for Fall 2019. For the 2019 Fair our booth will be in the Exhibit Hall. The Northwest Outdoors building will not be used for booths this year. So, what does this new location mean for us? Well, we will have a lot of traffic through this building so it is doubtful that we will have much down time. Entrance to the fair to reach our booth will be through the Gold Gate. The theme for these exhibits is Education and we will provide some information to share with fairgoers. The expectation is that our booth will be manned for the duration of the fair, August 30-September 22 (the fair is closed on all Tuesdays and will be closed on Wednesday, Sept. 4th). Mike brought up an important question to the group about what our mission for participation should be. In years past this was the major avenue for publicity for farms, but today families go on the internet to find tree farms and most all farms sell out of their trees early. We do need to continue our conversation about participating in the fair for future years. We plan on having our monitor going with photos of our farms. Please send Mike and Denise digital photos to update our presentation. We will not be awarding any gift certificates for trees this year. Jan will be sending out a note about signing up to be in the booth. Back to expectations, we know that it will be difficult to be in the booth from open to close each day, but we do need a farmer there for a significant time period. We will provide farms with gate passes and parking passes (2 per farm per shift). You will have the opportunity to take breaks and enjoy the fair too!

Legislative report: Brad Tower was not able to attend the meeting, but he did send his greeting via e-mail. Bob Moore read his e-mail which basically told us that “nothing too jarring on the Legislative front to report. I have general business concerns like minimum wage going to $13.50 on January 1st and L&I writing new safety rules for remote sites (they’re picturing remote timber stands, but definitions matter). These are not things that require growers to march on Olympia. Finally, our licensing program will continue through 2030, and we have money to invest in research, so suggestions to Gary and Thomas (Thomas is the research scientist working with Gary at WSU) as to what pests or other challenges they could help with are the only thing I’d ask of the group.” I’m sure that Brad will be at our January 2020 meeting with lots of new information. Related to this, Sheila and Ruth attended a meeting about the legislation Brad mentioned regarding L&I. We really don’t have to worry too much about this because of our seasonal business, but it does relate to good safety protocols for equipment handling.

The Kirk Company: Mike Hepler from the Kirk Company was at the meeting and talked about some new products available through the company. He passed out the new catalog (this is on line for your review too) and pointed out some new products of interest: Car Top Carrier, scented pine cones, funnels to mention a few. The colorant is still a big seller for the company with White as being the best seller. We are so fortunate to have the Kirk Company as a member of our association. Not only is their representative at our meetings, but Mike is generously offering our membership the Coop prices which are much lower than regular pricing. You are encouraged to contact Mike for your orders. He will not be at our October meeting, however, we have a couple of ways for you to get the products without having shipping charges. If you are a member of the PNWCTA, he will be at the September meeting in Portland where you can pick up products or he will deliver orders to Bob Moore at the Double Four Tree Farm for pickup. Bob will also bring orders to our October meeting. The key is order now! ([mhepler@kirkcompany.com](mailto:mhepler@kirkcompany.com))

New business: Update your website—remember it is up to members to do their own updates. If you forgot your log in information contact Sheila.

Fall Meeting: Crystal Creek Tree Farm, Harvey Hawken hosting will be on Saturday, October 12th

Following our delicious potluck lunch the members headed for the fields for a culturing demonstration from Bob Moore.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 with many thank yous to Ruth for a great meeting!

Respectfully,

Jan Moore, Secretary