

Carl and Teresa Smith Recognized for Forest Stewardship Efforts

In April of 2004, Carl and Teresa Smith purchased a quarter section of land one mile south and one half mile east of Salt Fork, Oklahoma, or 4 miles south of the intersection of hwy 60 and 74 south of Lamont, Oklahoma. The property consists of approximately 105 acres cropland 40 acres of native grass and 10 acres of forested acres. The Smith's purchased the property because it was half way between Carl and Teresa's work. Carl works in Enid and Teresa in Ponca City.

Once the Smith's took possession of the property they implemented many conservation practices on the property. The first was allowing the Oklahoma Forestry Division and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to implement a prescribed burn on the forested and native grass acres. The purpose of the burn was to control the spread of eastern red cedar and Osage orange on both sites, as well as utilizing the sites as training for cooperating agency employees and volunteers with the local fire department.



State Forester John Burwell recognizes Carl and Teresa Smith as Forest Stewards

After the burn Carl and OFS Forester Dan Stidham walked over the area where he wanted to establish a 3 row windbreak. This windbreak was to provide three primary benefits;

1: Provide a visual screening from the road for privacy to the home that would eventually be on site and to reduce the availability of road hunting onto the property.



Secretary of Agriculture, Terry Peach congratulates Carl and Teresa Smith on their recognition as Forest Stewards

2: Provide much needed woody cover and food habitat for both nesting birds and deer.

3: Provide a windbreak from the north winter wind for the house.

After going over the objectives for the tree planting Dan advised Carl that he was eligible to sign up for the Forest Stewardship Program and utilize cost-share monies in the Forest Resource Development

Program. This program provided on-the-ground technical assistance developed into a written plan to establish the 3 row windbreak. This plan also allowed Carl to site prepare the land for planting, plant 650 trees and shrubs, apply weed barrier and drip irrigation to the planting at 75% cost share rate.

The species planted were 200 Rocky Mountain juniper in the north row next to the county road. Carl wanted an evergreen specie that was hardy, provided a dense visual barrier, but one that would not spread into pastures like the eastern red cedar. The Rocky Mountain juniper is more drought resistant, grows at the same rate, and does not reproduce and spread in nature like the eastern red cedar.

The middle row Carl planted 200 lacebark elms. This tree was selected for its fast growth and ability to reach its mature height relatively quick. This tree provides nesting habitat for certain birds, additional visual screening from the road because of its low branching ability, and is quite tolerant to a variety of soils.

The inside row Carl planted 350 Amur honeysuckle. This is a fast growing shrub that is able to establish a solid vegetation barrier of 7'x7' in about 5-7 years. This area of the State receives many late winter snow storms that limit the available of food for birds to utilize. Honeysuckle provides an emergency food source in late winter with its red berries that the plant holds on its stem, 5-7 feet above ground, until spring.

Weed barrier was used throughout the planting to help conserve moisture and reduce weed competition. Drip irrigation was also used to supply additional water throughout the summer to the planting. Without these two items, the success of the planting would be minimal at best. However, even with weed barrier, mowing between the rows is still necessary. Carl, for the past 5 years has mowed the windbreak every other week through the summer.

As with most tree plantings, rabbits and deer can cause significant damage to newly planted trees. In Carl's case, rabbits seem to favor his trees to any other plant on the property. Carl has harvested many cottontail rabbits, which he says makes for excellent table fare. He also used "Ro-pel" spray to help deter the pesky creatures. His efforts have now paid off. For some of the lacebark are 12 feet tall, the Rocky Mountain juniper 5-6 feet tall and the honeysuckle 6-7 feet tall. All have been maintained to reach a large enough size that rabbits and deer will not bother them to the point of killing them, and provide some wind protection to the Smith's home.

Carl has planted 4000-5000 trees through-out the 40 acres of native grass. He has planted pecan, black locust, sawtooth and bur oak, Rocky Mountain juniper, honey locust, sand plum, green ash, lacebark elm, and walnut throughout these acres to increase and improve the amount and type of woody cover. Carl has mentioned numerous times that in native grass rabbits do not bother the seedlings if you do not disturb the soil, mow or control the native grass around the trees. He thinks the rabbits have a harder time finding the seedlings. This year is the first year that he can see many of these trees he has out-planted in these acres. Even though they are slower to get any height to them as compared to the ones in the windbreak, they survive and require no additional maintenance.

Carl has also partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and enrolled acres in the “Partners for Wildlife” program to enhance waterfowl and fish habitat on his property. Utilizing the USFWS assistance, Carl has installed a 2.5 acre pond and a 1.75 acre pond in the native grass acres. Many different waterfowl and fish now utilize the ponds and provide additional hunting and fishing opportunities that did not exist on the property previously.

Other conservation efforts Carl has implemented on his property was removing 43 acres of the original 105 acres of cropland and putting it into the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program. These 43 acres were considered saline seeps and were eligible to be planted to grass. The remaining 62 acres Carl switched from conventional tillage to no-till. Carl has used rotational and double cropping techniques to control unwanted weedy annuals in the cropland and to build up organic matter in the soil. Utilizing summer crops also increases the wildlife food sources in the area.

All of these conservation efforts have allowed Carl to enroll his acres in the USDA’s Conservation Securities Program. This program rewards the best stewards of the land with an annual payment to keep and maintain established conservation practices on these acres. All of these conservation efforts and programs require good record keeping to maintain eligibility. Carl maintained all the necessary paperwork for the Forest Stewardship Program to run.

Carl and Teresa Smith were nominated and recognized as Forest Steward for applying, implementing and maintaining their Forest Stewardship Plan. Their success shows an excellent example of how to utilize the Forest Stewardship Program to help achieve other conservation projects and programs through other conservation agencies like the Grant County Conservation District, the USDA and USFWS.