

# Conservation Showcase

## Sowing the seeds of forest health

EQIP takes root in private forest

**H**is friends and neighbors cannot believe the change.

“When they stop by they say ‘this can’t be the same place you bought a few years ago,’” Ed Daellenbach says of his privately owned forest just south of Spokane, Washington.

But Mr. Daellenbach can believe it. For the past three years, he has poured much of his time, energy, money, and muscle into turning his private forest into a healthy, functioning ecosystem. And the calluses on his hands provide the evidence that the terrestrial transformation did not happen by itself.

After he and his wife, Annie, purchased about 54 acres of her father’s farm four years ago, the Daellenbachs set a goal to significantly improve the health of the 16 acres of forested land.

“My first concern was fire,” he says. “It was clear that the forest was overstocked and that something needed to be done.”

But, Mr. Daellenbach did not have a background in forest management and wasn’t sure what work needed be done to



*Ed Daellenbach, using NRCS’ Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) has poured much of his time, energy, money, and muscle into turning his private forest into a healthy, functioning ecosystem.*

promote the forest’s health. Fortunately, his father-in-law had previously received conservation technical assistance from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for his farming operation. He heard that NRCS

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- Ed Daellenbach, landowner



could also provide technical and financial assistance for forestry.

“I stopped by the office to find out about a program that could provide assistance to help me do the right things for the land,” he says.

That program, he learned, is called the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

worked with me to explain what to do – and she’s walked the ground with me to show me the best management methods. And,” he says, “the program provided me with payments for forest thinning and re-planting.”

Since signing up for the program in 2005, Mr. Daellenbach has been implementing slash treatment, pre-commercial thinning and forest planting on a schedule worked out by himself and NRCS’ Seaboldt.

“It’s been good for me to have a contract with a schedule to complete the management practices,” he says. “I’ve had to get right on it, but the results have been worth the effort. The thinning practices have not only reduced the fire and disease threat,” Mr. Daellenbach says, “but there’s been an improvement in the overall health of the trees themselves.”

“When I began thinning, I’m sure some of my neighbors wondered if I even liked trees,” he said. “But I love trees. I wouldn’t take a single one out if I didn’t need to. But sometimes you need to.”

Mr. Daellenbach continues to battle other threats to his forest – namely in the form of a parasitic fungus known as mistletoe. “I spend a good deal of time and effort working to remove branches that are affected,” he says. “Sometimes that means climbing atop tall ladders



*NRCS forester Misty Seaboldt, left, and Ed Daellenbach, discuss forest health issues on the Daellenbach farm just south of Spokane.*

“For traditional agricultural operations, EQIP is widely known – and well used,” says NRCS Forester Misty Seaboldt.

“Over the years it has become the workhorse for implementing conservation practices on cropland – but the program is also available for private forest owners, as well,” she said.

“For me EQIP seemed like a win-win,” Mr. Daellenbach says. “Misty has

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and using chainsaws that are attached to 20-foot extension rods,” he says. “But all of that work has toned my muscles better than working out at a gym,” he says with a smile.

NRCS’ Seiboldt agrees that forest management is not a passive exercise. “It’s a hands-on function that requires knowledge, awareness, dedication and tenacity. But when you see these kinds of results,” she says while walking under a canopy of towering Ponderosa Pines, “you can see that it pays off.”

In addition to his friends and neighbors, Mr. Daellenbach has a host of other admirers of his forest reclamation activities – though they cannot readily express their admiration. Hundreds of deer, turkeys, and elk regularly visit the forest and adjacent wetlands and croplands that make up the Daellenbach farm. And thanks to 30 bluebird houses he’s constructed, Mr. Daellenbach has dozens of bluebirds that return yearly to nest and raise their young.

“I had a vision of what I wanted this land be – a place where we could get away and enjoy nature,” he says.

Now, through their hard work, and a little help from the NRCS, the Daellenbach’s are growing closer to the realization of that vision.

*Written and photographed by Ron Nichols  
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*Ed Daellenbach has built and placed more than 30 blue bird houses in his private forest just south of Spokane.*