

News Release

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Oregon Tree Farm System announced 2026 Oregon Outstanding Tree Farmers

Rickreall, ORE. The Oregon Tree Farm System (OTFS) honored Roje Gootee from northern Grant County as Oregon's 2026 Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year at OTFS's Annual Meeting held Saturday November 15th at the Polk County Fair Grounds in Rickreall.

Roje Gootee of Rush Creek Ranch was recognized for her 28 years of restoring and managing her property for a wide range of conservation objectives as well as her leadership in promoting the health of Northeast Oregon Blue Mountain's forest and range lands.

Gootee first purchased 1,962 acres of forest and range in 1997. "As a 17 year-old freshman in Forestry at Utah State University, I began saving so I could one day own my own forest" she said. Over an 18-year period she expanded her ranch to 3,345 acres, of which approximately 2,000 acres are forested, the rest in range.

She has restored Ponderosa pine forests that were over harvested by the previous owner, restored abandoned farm fields to forests, improved water quality through improved riparian habitat and protected upland springs, controlled invasive weeds, reduced the risk of wildfire, and removed invading Western Juniper from range and forests.

Gootee has done much to improving the long term health of her property and its watershed. She said, "for me it's just such joy to see the land respond". Beyond her own property, she has helped neighbors develop stewardship plans for their properties and has played key roles in promoting the management of all private and public lands in Oregon's Blue Mountain region.

Gootee earned a B.S. degree in Forest Resource Management with a minor in Range Management from Utah State University in 1976 and a PhD in Environmental and Natural Resource Sciences from Washington State University in 2009.

Through her natural resource academic studies, USDA Forest Service career in forest and range manage, and the management of her property, Gootee has developed invaluable insights on how best to manage our country's dry land forests.

She has and continues to share her insights through serving on numerous local, state and national private and public natural resource related boards and commissions, as well as working with local landowners and resource professionals.

“Roje is so humble for a person that has done so much for our forests”, reported Bob Parker, the local forester who recommended that she be honored for her land management and community accomplishments.

In addition to honoring Gootee at OTFS’s annual meeting , Dell & Linda Jensen of Lane County were awarded a Silver Award for the management of their 185-acre John Downing Tree Farm near Marcola. While the property has been in the family since 1908, the Jensens took charge of its management when inheriting it in 2022. They have spent a tremendous amount of time and energy in developing a sustainable timber harvest, improving its road system for active management, and converting brush areas back to Douglas-fir forests.

Others being recognized include:

Additional County Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year

- Laird-Shepherd Family of Columbia County, and
- Allan and Kathleen Crandall of Yamhill County

Oregon Inspector of the Year – Tim Gurton

Oregon Tree Farm inspectors are volunteer foresters who visit family forest landowners providing insights on how they can meet their forestland goals, and to certify that their forest meets the American Tree Farm System’s standards. Gurton visited and certified 25 landowners.

Pollinator Award – Mary Chamness

This award is given to an individual whose volunteer efforts played a key role in the management of the organization.

Hagenstein Family Forestlands Achievement Award - Steve and Wylda Cafferata

This award is presented to an individual(s) for outstanding contributions in promoting, supporting, and sustaining Oregon’s family owned forestlands.

For 59 years, OTFS has recognized family forest landowners who provide forest benefits and products using sound forestry management.

OTFS is a chapter of the American Tree Farm System which operates an internationally recognized forest certification program overseen by and for family forest landowners to promote sustainable forest management through education, recognition, and assistance.

For more information on the Oregon Tree Farm System, visit www.otfs.org