



Still giving 'em hell at 93



JUNE 18, 2013 9:00 AM • BY BENNETT HALL,
[CORVALLIS GAZETTE-TIMES](#)

Feisty lumberman Wayne Giesy has carved his own niche in Oregon's timber industry

Wayne Giesy got his first taste of logging in 1933, when he helped his grandfather cut down a massive cedar tree on a foreclosed Western Oregon farm he'd acquired from the bank. They stood on a springboard several feet off the ground, where the trunk wasn't quite so thick, and chopped their

way through with axes.

After they got the tree down, Grandpa showed him how to split the wood into shakes. The farm buildings needed new roofs.

"They were terribly run-down," Giesy recalled. "We turned about a third of that tree into shakes and roofed every one of those buildings."

He was 13 at the time. As a young man, he did a stint in the Army, serving in the Pacific during World War II, and tried his hand at a variety of trades before turning to logging full time in the 1970s.

Giesy had a long and varied career in the Oregon woods, from working as a gyppo logger with his own independent outfit to taking on a partnership role with Hull-Oakes Lumber in Dawson. And he waded into the state's timber policy fights with both fists.

In the 1950s he served two terms in the Oregon House as representative from Benton County, working primarily on wildland fire protection and management of state forestland.

In the 1970s he cofounded the Alsea Valley Alliance to block federal Wild and Scenic River designation for the Alsea and Nestucca, advancing the claim that private landowners were doing a good job of protecting both rivers already.

In the 1990s he was instrumental in getting the Hull-Oakes mill — America's last working steam-powered sawmill — listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the 2000s he helped mount a successful legal challenge to the endangered species listing for coastal coho salmon runs, arguing that hatchery fish should be included in the counts.

Now 93, Giesy doesn't log for a living anymore, but he still cuts and stacks all the firewood for his home on a 66-acre tree farm near Philomath.

"Anything that falls down, he's after it," laughed wife Betty Jo, 84.

He wears Red Wing boots and wide suspenders, peppers his conversation with "hells" and "damns," and looks you in the eye when he disagrees — firmly but politely — with your point of view.

Giesy still gives his occupation as timber consultant and frequently gives his opinions on forest policy issues. He serves on the board of the Oregon Forest Industries Council, is active with the American Forest Resources Council, stays in contact with faculty at Oregon State University's College of Forestry, testifies regularly at Oregon Board of Forestry meetings and does not hesitate to offer advice on forest management to Oregon politicians, from the governor to the state's congressional delegation.

"I give 'em hell whenever I can," Giesy said.

In April, Giesy's contributions to the industry were recognized with an honorary membership in the Oregon Society of American Forestry, and he's been nominated for membership in the national body.

Longtime Oregon Department of Forestry employee Tim Keith, who co-chaired the nomination committee, said it was an unusual move considering Giesy lacks a college degree in forestry, normally one of the professional society's baseline requirements.

"I think it's really the entire body of work, the fact that he's been so supportive of forestry over his entire career, going back to his time in the Legislature," Keith said. "And he never quit."

Giesy's not done yet. Since the earliest days of Oregon's timber wars, he's been promoting the idea that public forest land should be managed for harvest as well as conservation.

In the early 1980s, Giesy went to Hull-Oakes owner Ralph Hull with a plan.

"I said, 'Ralph, if we're going to have any peace in this timber industry with the enviros, we ought to go to our government and tell them we should set aside 40 percent of our forests for environmental purposes,'" Giesy told him.

Another 10 percent should be reserved to protect streams and fish, and the remaining

50 percent should be responsibly managed for timber production.

When Giesy raised the idea at a timber industry trade association meeting, one of the members jumped and called him a nut, but Giesy's been pitching the plan ever since to anyone who would listen. He believed then, and believes now, that his approach would satisfy environmental concerns while providing jobs for Oregon's loggers and wood for Oregon's mills.

Today, more than 30 years later, the idea appears to be catching on. In recent months, remarkably similar suggestions for resolving the state's timber crisis have emerged from the governor's office and the halls of Congress, although there's still plenty of resistance at both the state and national levels.

Wayne Giesy's not big on saying "told you so." But he is big on persistence. And now that he sees a glimmer of hope for his modest proposal, he's going to keep pushing for it.

"I don't make any apologies to anybody for what I've been doing. I haven't changed my spots; they may have. And I'm not gonna quit. I'm gonna get it done," he said.

"If we had any reasonability at all, there are solutions to this," he added. "There's a way to do these things if you just sit down and do 'em."

Have an idea for a "Story Next Door" profile? E-mail your suggestions to news@gtconnect.com, with "Story Next Door" in the subject line.

The Story Next Door

NAME: Wayne Giesy

AGE: 93

FAMILY: Wife Betty Jo, children Cindy Keller and Reid Giesy, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren

RESIDENCE: Philomath

OCCUPATION: Timber consultant

MILITARY SERVICE: U.S. Army 1943-46, serving in the Western Pacific; remained in Army Reserve until 1955, reaching the rank of 2nd lieutenant

ETC.: As a member of the 1938 Amity High School boys basketball team, Giesy was named to both the A and B league all-tournament teams at the state championships. Amity played in the second division but made it all the way to the

overall state title game, losing to Baker City.