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NEWS

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Bent County Couple Recognized as Plains Tree Farmers

LA JUNTA, Colo. – Last night, Bent County couple Lance and Norma Verhoeff were recognized as Plains Tree Farmers – a designation that requires them to have a forest management plan and continually manage trees and shrubs for plains forest health – at the Bent County Conservation District Annual Meeting in Las Animas.

In the case of the Verhoeffs' tree farm, the forest itself was created through conservation plantings. The Verhoeffs manage more than six acres of tree projects, with the first established in the early '60s and the last area added in 2002. Their plantings include numerous species of trees, including evergreens like Austrian, Scotch and piñon pines and deciduous trees like cottonwood, bur oak and hackberry. Their land also offers many shrubs, including lilac, Nanking cherry and wild plum.

“On the plains, management usually consists of maintaining the trees for the health and life of the project,” said Donna Davis, district forester for the Colorado State Forest Service La Junta District. “Outcomes here may be soil erosion and wind control, improved wildlife habitat, energy conservation, economic values for crop or livestock protection, aesthetics and even supplemental income opportunities.”

The American Tree Farm System is a nationwide community of nearly 60,000 landowners linked by a desire to manage their woodlands and tree plantings effectively. Tree Farmers must manage at least three forested acres, and to qualify, Tree Farmers must have their forest re-inspected every five years by a Tree Farm-qualified forester. Beneficial outcomes of qualifying lands may include sustainable timber products, wildlife and recreation values, aesthetics and watershed protection.

The American Tree Farm System is run on the state level by a state Tree Farm Committee. It is a program of the American Forest Foundation, administered by the American Forest Council in Washington, D.C. Funding for the program comes from private donations and contributions from the forest products industry.

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