

## **Social Forestry & Biomass Resources**

**Tom Ward, Ashland, Oregon**

As translated by: Alexis Reifensuthl

Summary of Eco-farm Workshop

“Social Forestry” is a term possibly conceived by Tom Ward when he created a social forest outside of Ashland, Oregon. He realized that our culture needs to reconnect with the forest so he devised a plan and he followed it through to completion. Social forestry can be defined (by T. Ward) as a connection between people’s living space/needs and the forest. My definition (A. Reifensuthl) would be forest-perma-culture. Realistically, a social forest is one that promotes economic and ecological stability, forest farming and production (permaculture), energy and nutrient recycling and education.

To begin, Tom stressed the importance of celebration and education as related to seasons, cycles and festivals within the forest. Seasonal festivals such as Yule, May Day, Beltane, and Samhain should be incorporated into this vision of (re)creating an ancient culture filled with ritual, food, harvest celebrations and pilgrimage. This would inspire the landscape while filling our lives with celebration of the forest and of natural cycles. Tom mentioned the Celts and the Druidic alphabet as an example.

Next, the practical side of social forestry was discussed, i.e. how to manage a social forest. First, go into your forest with (Japanese) hand tools and thin all the lower limbs off the trees so that the forest fire fuel hazard is reduced. In forestry terms, this is called logging restoration and fuel hazard reduction work. Second, let the artisans in the community go into the forest and harvest all the materials they need for crafts, building and art. Also harvest local products that have been grown, such as (acorn or walnut) oils, nuts, berries, herbs, mushrooms, food, etc. Third, inoculate logs with mushroom spores (he is not completely sold on Paul Stamets’ chain saw oil-inoculation method). And finally, build houses for people with wood from your land: thin small Doug fir’s for poles, use cribbing, tie brush into bundles for insulation and then cover the inside and outside with adobe. Tom stresses the importance of working with your hands and only using tools if necessary. He does promote Japanese hand tools and something called a “drum shredder” for turning woody materials into mushroom compost.

Then Tom talked of stewardship contracts and “ecological opportunity zones,” which he would later refer to as “hippie reservations.” He said, yes, they are like Indian reservations and focus on intentional subsistence lifestyles, local currency, tax-free operations, permaculture and forest-town (urban forestry) relationships. He briefly brought up the difference between land commons and intellectual commons. On this note, he also discussed the difference between indigenous science and epistemological science, both questioning the same systems and histories, but using different methods to reach conclusion and understanding. (WE NEED TO TEACH/EMPHASIZE BOTH).

Tom’s motto about the economic paradigm is: “No more gold rushes.” Basically, he stresses that no single product should fuel the economy. From firs to timber to gold, a single product was acquired for the economic profit. He understands that a prolific economy should be based on complex business plans, or multiple products from one parcel of land. And these products should be obtained in a sustainable and eco-friendly forest/gardening system. Tom teaches permaculture workshops at the high school in Ashland and is known to celebrate pagan festivities on his land from time to time.