

## Woodlot Management Award 2018

The Woodlot Management Award of the SWWA has been presented this year to the combined families of Bill and Earl Elgie.

Bill and Earl Elgie own and manage approximately 50 acres of woodlot on six different farms in Lambton County. Some areas border the Sydenham River. The largest lot, at 23 acres, is on the home farm, near Dawn Mills.

As OWA members, the Elgies participate in woodlot tours, finding them informative and beneficial for comparing notes and stories with fellow woodlot owners. Bill Elgie recently took part in the 5 year OWA Strategic Planning Workshop. They attend woodlot related sessions at the South West Agricultural Conferences. "We've always realized how valuable and important woodlots are to landowners."

Bill and Earl have used the services of professional Foresters, Wallace Montgomery and Donald Craig, to manage their woodlots, selectively logging their home farm woodlot 20 years ago. Their goal is to enhance diversity of species, both hardwoods and softwoods, trimming or cutting "junk" trees and invasives.

Back in the 70's, Ken Elgie, (the brothers' father), tapped maples, producing syrup in a small way. In 2000, Bill and Earl started making syrup again, and currently draw from approximately 600-650 taps, producing 400-450 litres of syrup per season, supplying the community with liquid gold - farm gate sales only. The Elgies have focussed on keeping and encouraging hard maples; but have not ignored the importance of diversity. "If something wiped out the hard maple, we wouldn't be left with a barren woodlot."

Firewood is cut and sold, lately salvaging dead ash. Both Earl and Bill burn wood as their sole heat source in their homes. Some years ago, the brothers built their own bandsaw, using it for cutting their lumber; it has proven a useful tool on their farm.

The Elgies have worked with OMAFRA and Kent Soil and Crop Improvement Association to verify the yield benefit of windbreaks as it pertains to cash crop production. They are convinced of the advantages, and have miles of windbreaks on their properties. Planting their first windbreak in 1988, they have added coniferous trees almost every year since, in both the former Camden and Dawn Townships. Five and a half miles of cedar windbreaks have been planted to date, as well as hundreds of seedlings of deciduous species in their woodlots and riverbanks.

A passion for trees seems to be an Elgie Family trait: Doctor Bill Elgie, the brothers' great uncle, started planting scotch pine on his sand farms in the former Zone and Euphemia Townships in the late 1940's. Eventually approximately 400 acres of Christmas trees were in production. Bill and Earl's grandfather and father continued in the business after Doc's death. The next generation of Elgies know how to run a chainsaw, and participate with their parents, thinning and pruning trees on the family woodlots, and enjoying the benefits they provide.

"Trees are essential on our family farm. We've always had woodlots and plan to keep it this way. The woodlots are needed for recreation, family outings, wiener roasts, a wedding, wildlife habitat, a source of income, and the exercise we get as we maintain them."

Congratulations to the Bill and Earl Elgie families on this well deserved award. We all benefit from and are grateful for their role in improving our environment through their dedication to woodlot preservation and maintenance.