



A Tribute to Cliff Taylor

by Jeff Stringer

Photos courtesy: Taylor Family

Cliff Taylor developed one of the most sophisticated woodland ownerships in Kentucky and garnered significant recognition in the Eastern United States. He has left a significant legacy for both his family and the multitude of woodland owners who will benefit from the example he provided.

As with many woodland owners, Cliff was open and interested in sharing his woodlands and knowledge with others. His career in forestry and agriculture Extension in both Kentucky and Florida, no doubt, contributed to his interest in educating others. He was progressive in his use of Farm Bill programs to improve his woodlands and built a strong relationship with Chris Will and Central Kentucky Forest Management, implementing advanced silvicultural practices, including the promotion of white oak regeneration.

The interest in educating others and opening his woodlands up to numerous field days and workshops has had a significant impact on forestry in the Eastern U.S. in ways that he could not have foreseen but are nonetheless attributable to him. The biggest and best example of this impact is the collaboration between the University of Kentucky (UK) and the DendriFund, affiliated with Brown-Forman, that led to the partnership with the American Forest Foundation and the formation of the White Oak Initiative. His use of advanced practices in white oak management spawned a field day at his woodlands for the Society of American Foresters. One of the family members of Brown-Forman attended, became enlightened about white oak management, and this resulted in subsequent partnering with UK that ultimately led to the formation of the White Oak Initiative in 2017.

Cliff's legacy lives on through this multimillion dollar, 17-state initiative to improve upland oak manage-

ment. Cliff, along with his sons Scott and Steve, and with the aid of Chris Will, also established the first dual certified American Tree Farm and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) family-owned woodland in Kentucky. This interest in certification, and the American Tree Farm certification through the Center for Forest and Wood Certification at UK led to the production of the first certified whiskey barrels produced in America. His certified white oak stave logs were used by Kelvin Cooperage in Louisville for barrels exported to Irish Distillers. Ultimately this led to the first release of Redbreast Whiskey's Kentucky Oak Edition, estate brand "Taylor Family Elk Cave Farm" in 2022. All bottles were snatched up quickly by buyers after its release in the U.S., and it was voted #2 most exciting whisky of 2022 by Whisky Advocate, no doubt due to the taste imparted by wood from Taylor's Elk Cave Farm.

As one might suspect, the Taylor farm and Cliff also garnered a number of accolades from more traditional sources, the most notable of these was being recognized as the 2017 Kentucky Tree Farmer of the Year and one of four nationally recognized Regional Tree Farmers of the Year in 2022. In typical fashion, the Taylors continue their interest in education and the advancement of forestry students at the University of Kentucky through the Taylor Family Forest Scholarship. All of this is a significant legacy resulting, from what I am sure Cliff would describe, as "business as usual," conducted with grace, charm, and humility. Thank you, Cliff!

