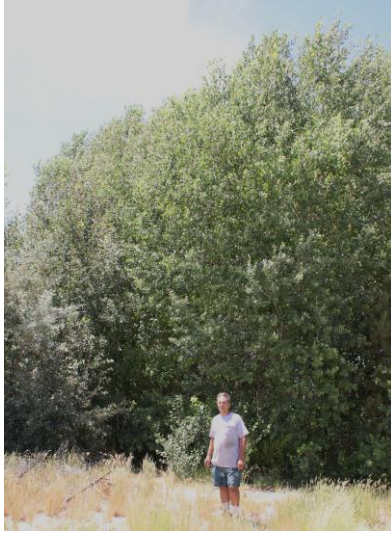


## Jack's forest

By Larry Hyslop



Jack Prier in front of his forest

Most of us would say we enjoy trees, especially here in Elko where trees do not grow naturally. But no one can claim to love trees like Jack Prier. His property near South Fork contains a forest of approximately 2,000 trees. This is not a park setting but an unruly, choked, natural forest covering two acres of ground. The largest trees are over 50 feet high, with lots of trees above 40 feet. Jack's forest has created a different ecosystem, where the air is cooler, holding more moisture and little wind.

Each year, Jack adds to his forest, obtaining 200 young trees from state programs or the Internet. He figures he has tried over 200 different tree varieties. A fair number of new trees are slender sticks he simply jams into the ground. Perhaps 40 survive each year to add to the forest.

I asked Jack which trees grow the best in his forest. He responded "If I only had one type it would be the narrow-leaf cottonwood." Other favorites include Simon's poplar, quaking aspen, and chokecherry. He has tried numerous conifers and calls Austrian black pine "bomb proof", easy to grow. Blue spruce also does well in his forest.

I then asked him what was the key to growing such a forest and he replied "crowd them." He said trees like neighbors and need to smell each other. Jack suggested for a new stand of trees, plant 20 trees five feet apart, not in rows but in a clump so they could protect each other from sun and wind throughout the day.

"Grass is the enemy of trees", he said. You can have a lawn or trees but not both in the same place since they need different watering techniques. He has 19,000 feet of drip line laid out in a rough grid pattern throughout the forest. He advises not to circle a tree trunk with drip line but lay it farther out so the tree roots move outward to find the water. Trees want a deep soaking so he waters constant for a week, then uses a pattern of turning off the water for three days, then on for four, off for three days, etc.

Birds appreciate his forest and it usually contains dozens of mourning doves and an owl or two. These avian visitors have changed the forest. The ground contains numerous bushes like wild rose, currant and chokecherry. These have not been planted by Jack but deposited in bird droppings. Also in the forest are young trees rising from the roots of mature trees. One straight line of shoots reaches out from a mature tree with a root following a drip line. The shoots farther from the mother tree are shorter and younger.

The most basic change is the soil. Jack roto-tills some areas to add mulch to the soil. He treats the ground with fertilizer, chemicals, fungus spores and pours vinegar around his conifers. His property area has only six inches of gray soil on top of hard pan, which he has not tried to break up but he feels is weakening from water and tree roots. It took five years of work before there were enough trees to trap falling leaves and keep them within the forest, further helping the soil.

At night, Jack leaves his door open so he can hear the wind moving through his forest, which makes all the work worthwhile.

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