In 1998, the North American Wholesale Lumber Association (NAWLA) gave Paul McCracken the industry’s highest honor, the John J. Mulrooney Memorial Award. At the ceremony, the presenter said, “The NAWLA Mulrooney Award is intended to be given with inspiration to those persons, generally and most often in the industry, who have contributed mightily to it, with all of the industry’s decency and idealism. Mr. Paul McCracken exemplifies this definition.”

The Early Years

Paul was born on June 29, 1928 in Dallas, Oregon to Paul N. and Grace Williams McCracken. He was the eldest of three boys. His father was a businessman and his mother was a school-teacher. Paul was raised in Lebanon, Oregon. After graduation from Lebanon High School in 1946, he set off to the University of Oregon to study economics. Upon graduation in 1949, Paul elected to enter the forest products industry with the Willamette National Lumber Co. in Foster, Oregon. He left the mill in July of 1950 because a strike had been declared and an August wedding to Sally Moore was on the schedule. Paul needed to find a job. Many years later, when he became a Director on the Board of Willamette Industries, Paul commented that he was back with the same company he had started with in the lumber business—from the mill to the boardroom.

Paul and Sally did marry in August 1950 and have three children, John, Mary, and Peter. Paul found a position in Portland with Georgia-Pacific, which was new to the area. After a few months, Georgia-Pacific decided they could not afford the $275.00 a month they were paying him, which was bad news for Paul. Paul immediately went to work for Georgia-Pacific in the Portland office for Hallinan-Mackin Lumber of San Francisco. He hired Paul in 1951 as the other salesman. Paul continued to work for Georgia-Pacific until 1964. Paul found a job with United Lumber of San Francisco. He left the mill in July of 1950 because a strike had been declared and an August wedding to Sally Moore was on the schedule. Paul needed to find a job. Many years later, when he became a Director on the Board of Willamette Industries, Paul commented that he was back with the same company he had started with in the lumber business—from the mill to the boardroom.

Contributions to the Industry

Bill McPherson ran the Portland office for Hallinan-Mackin Lumber of San Francisco. He hired Paul in 1951 as the other salesman. Paul continued to work for Georgia-Pacific until 1964. Paul found a job with United Lumber of San Francisco. He left the mill in July of 1950 because a strike had been declared and an August wedding to Sally Moore was on the schedule. Paul needed to find a job. Many years later, when he became a Director on the Board of Willamette Industries, Paul commented that he was back with the same company he had started with in the lumber business—from the mill to the boardroom.

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Contributions to Salmon Restoration

Paul is an accomplished and skilled fisherman. His interest in fishing began in the early 1960s and resulted in the purchase of property on the North Fork of the Nehalem River in western Oregon. It just so happened that this area had the best steelhead drift on the entire river. One purchase led to another and today Paul personally manages a tree farm of more than 1400 acres. When he got started, Paul was determined to combine intensive silviculture practices with a serious commitment to fish and wildlife. He was trying to find a fit for small woodlands owners between flourishing fisheries and forestry-by-the-book. “I’d consider the whole effort to be a failure if it was not commercially successful,” he said.

The hope of commercial success seemed meager at first. Early century logging practices had severely soured the land, resulting in thick brush fields and poorly stocked stands of trees. In addition, many of the land’s watercourses had also been severely degraded over the years. With advice from the Oregon Departments of Fish and Wildlife, McCracken tackled the poorer sites first. To his surprise, he made profits on the first thinnings, profits that covered his site preparation and planting costs. He also experimented by planting grasses in newly planted stands and creating clusters of trees along stream banks. Bolstered by his early successes, Paul became more deeply involved in searching for unique management methods. “From the first time on, the overriding ideal on my forest land has been to determine and demonstrate the compatibility of forestry with active management for fish and wildlife,” he said.

Now coho salmon and steelhead are returning to McCracken’s streams, while Douglas fir, cedar, and spruce poke up in sites once dominated by brush. For his efforts, stewardship and contributions, Paul was acknowledged as the 1994 Landowner of the Year by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commissioners (ODFW). In 1996, Paul was appointed as a member of the Commission and in 1999 he became its chairman. He is also a member of the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation Board (OWHF).

Paul’s influence in salmon recovery efforts goes far beyond the boundaries of his own land. As an OWHF board member, Paul was instrumental in creating the North Coast Salmonid Restoration Project as a cooperative effort by OWHF, ODF&FW, Oregon Forest Industries Council, Oregon Restoration Enhancement Program, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Forestry, Cavenham Forest Industries, Hampton Tree Farms, Boise Cascade Corporation, Willamette Industries, Stimson Lumber Company, and Simpson Timber Company. The project identified 63 sites on private land between the Neskowin River and Seaside where there was a need for restoration of winter rearing habitat. Since 1995, more than 83 restoration projects have been completed and the North Coast Project is now being replicated in the mid-coast, south coast, and Willamette east areas — all because of the vision of Paul McCracken. Paul and OWHF received the American Forest & Paper Association’s 2000 Outstanding Industry Stewardship Award for their work on this project.

Paul is now retired from the Willamette Board and as Chairman of Tumac. His legacy within the forest products industry and as a conservation-minded representative of the industry is secure. However, it is easy for Paul to name as his top achievement his 52 years of marriage to Sally and his three children, nine grandchildren, and three (so far) great-grandchildren. What a legacy indeed.

September 28, 2002