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Snohomish/Skagit Extension Forestry E-Newsletter

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The Snohomish/Skagit Extension Forestry E-Newsletter is sent out periodically as news and announcements become available. Please feel free to forward and share this information with others who may be interested.

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Forester's Notes

As we draw to the end of 2008, there is much to consider looking both forward and backward. Looking back on the year, there are many program accomplishments to celebrate. Among the highlights:

1. Two Forest Stewardship Coached Planning shortcourses were offered; one each in Snohomish and Skagit Counties. A total of 54 ownerships participated, with 20 new stewardship plans created (and counting!)
2. The first ever Advanced Forest Stewardship series was offered as a pilot program this fall. This pilot effort will be continued in Spring 2009 with a second offering that incorporates many changes and improvements based on what was learned from the first offering.

3. Workshops were offered on key topics of interest (as identified with the forest landowner survey), including fire risk reduction, security, and Ties to the Land (succession planning).
4. 27 site visits were conducted in Snohomish and Skagit Counties, as well as almost 200 phone and/or email consultations.
5. Various other workshops, field tours, and school programs were offered throughout the year.

Looking forward, many challenges await in 2009. So many things have changed with the economy, even in just the past few weeks since the last newsletter was published. This has meant huge budget shortfalls and broad program cuts at the state and county level. The Forest Stewardship program was affected by these things, but there is much to be thankful for and optimistic about. Read the Program/Funding Update for a county-by-county breakdown of changes and impacts.

The very best to you all of you for 2009 and beyond.

Kevin Zobrist
WSU Extension forester

Program/Funding Update

We are facing unprecedented budget shortfalls at the state and county level. All programs have been affected by this, including the Extension Forestry program. Here is a brief summary by county:

Island County

A request was made to the Island County Commissioners to provide a small amount of funding to expand the Forest Stewardship Program to Island County so that site visits and events could be offered to Whidbey and Camano landowners. Given the extreme budget situation, Island County was not able to meet this request and Extension as a whole is facing significant budget and program cuts.

San Juan County

Similar to Island County, we were looking into possible expansion to San Juan County, but San Juan is also facing an extreme budget situation and Extension has been significantly impacted.

Skagit County

The news is mixed for Skagit County. Extension had requested increased funding to put Skagit funding on par with Snohomish. The Commissioners were not able to grant this requested increase in funds, but the \$4,250 that was funded for 2008 was renewed for

2009. This is great news, as it means we can continue to operate in Skagit County, and Skagit County's continued recognition of Extension Forestry as an important program is much appreciated.

One of the challenges in Skagit County will be getting as much "mileage" as possible out of a very limited budget. While our level of county funding will remain the same as in 2008, there are some new challenges. The reason for this is that in 2008, all of the forestry funding went to staff time and WSU subsidized all of the related travel and other expenses. Because of the state-level cuts, WSU is not able to do this in 2009. We are looking into other funding sources so that the \$4,250 will not have to be split between staff time and expenses, which would result in a decrease in available funding for both categories.

Snohomish County

Snohomish County continues to be our most robust source of funding. Snohomish County provided the greatest county-level funding (for both time and expenses) in 2008, and will continue to do so in 2008. Extension did take a significant budget cut in Snohomish County, but no positions are being cut, which is very good news. Also, Snohomish County is able to provide funding for the Forest Stewardship program through a special 4-year grant, rather than having to compete for scarce general fund dollars.

Even though the forestry program is in (relatively) good shape in Snohomish County, we will still be tightening our belts. Travel expenses will be constrained, which will put some limitations on site visits and certain other services. I will know more about these impacts when we get into the new year.

State Funding

Extension is a partnership between WSU and the counties we serve. As such, the rest of the program funding comes from the state. Sometimes when things are lean at the county level, the state can pick up some of the slack. Unfortunately, right now the state has budget problems of its own. Many of you have probably seen in the newspaper that WSU has been asked to cut \$10 million from its budget. Since academic instruction and libraries are exempt, Extension may be faced with a disproportionate share of this cut.

It is times like these when state policy makers begin to question whether or not Extension matters. Without Extension, we would not have Forest Stewardship, 4-H, Beach Watchers, Master Gardeners, agriculture programs, or many other programs that provide public benefits, keep youth out of trouble, and ultimately save taxpayers more money in benefits received and problems prevented than the cost of the program. In addition, WSU Extension is able to use taxpayer investments to leverage private grants and federal funding that would likely be otherwise distributed to other locations. Thus for each dollar of lost state and county funding for Extension, there is a far greater dollar loss of services that are not likely to be returned to state and local taxpayers.

In the past, Extension programs have been saved by the public communicating their support for Extension to their elected officials. If you feel that WSU Extension is important, this is a really good time to share your thoughts with your state senators and representatives in Olympia. If they do not hear from you, they will not know whether or not Extension is a priority for their constituents and this will limit their ability to make informed funding decisions.

What does it all mean?

Because we were not able to secure funding to expand to either Island or San Juan County, I do not expect any Extension Forestry programs will be offered in those counties in 2008. I am still available as a resource by phone and email, but I will not be able to do site visits in or bring classes to those counties. This is the same way it has been for 2007 and 2008.

With the greatest county funding coming from Snohomish County, the majority of programs will likely be offered here. Programs will also continue to be offered in Skagit County (look for program announcements in early 2009), but there may not be as many as in Snohomish County. Participants from all counties are always welcome at any event regardless of location. I will work to locate events as centrally as possible relative to Snohomish County, Skagit County, North King County, South Whidbey, Camano, the Anacortes ferry dock (for San Juan), etc.

Program-wide, I expect to shift some of the emphasis away from workshops (which were the main focus of 2008 activities) in favor of expanding some of our technical publications as well as our web presence. These outreach mediums allow us to reach large numbers of people at a relatively low cost, and they will support the in-person efforts that we do (e.g. classes and workshops). We will continue to offer Coached Planning and other workshops in both Snohomish and Skagit Counties, as there is no replacement for these things, and currently scheduled classes will go forward as scheduled. I just do not expect the workshops to be as much of an emphasis as they were in 2008. I will also be putting a lot more emphasis on pursuing grant funds to support the program in these difficult times. This may have impacts on the nature and content of future programs

Keep in mind that all of these things reflect my best guess as to how things will play out in 2009 given the information I have now. Things are still being decided at the state and county level, so all of this is subject to change as circumstances change. Regardless, I will work to offer the highest level of outreach service possible.

Christmas Trees

It's the time of year when many folks are thinking about Christmas trees. If you are looking for a real Christmas tree, this is a great way to support local tree farmers and utilize "special forest products." For information on local Christmas tree farms, visit the Puget Sound Christmas Tree Association at <http://www.pscta.org/>.

Thinking about growing Christmas trees on your land? There is a lot of good information available to help you get started:

- Puget Sound Christmas Tree Association: <http://www.pscta.org/>
- Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association: <http://www.nwtrees.com/>
- National Christmas Tree Association:
<http://www.christmastree.org/home.cfm>
- WSU Intro to Christmas Trees:
<http://smallfarms.wsu.edu/crops/christmasTreesIntro.html>

If you do not have internet access, you can contact me at 425-357-6017 and I can send you information about growing or buying Christmas trees.

Next Regular Forest Stewardship Class

Registration is now open for the next regular Forest Stewardship Coached Planning class in the Northwest Washington area. The class will be Tuesday evenings February 24 – April 21st, 2009 at the Snohomish County Extension building in South Everett. This 10-session practical, hands-on course will enable forest landowners to prepare their own forest stewardship plan with guidance and "coaching" from natural resource professionals. Open to all, this program is designed to help forest landowners develop customized management solutions to meet their own unique ownership objectives. Whether you own 5, 50, or 500 acres of forest, if you want to expand your knowledge, tools, and confidence for managing your forestland, this course is for you. The cost per household/ownership is \$150 before February 1st, and \$175 after February 1st. **Enrollment is limited to the first 30 ownerships—register early as this class is already half full.** For details and registration information, visit <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/CP09Everett.htm> or call 425-357-6017.

Other Upcoming Events

- **Forest Practices Board Hearing on changing leave tree requirements in riparian buffers – January 8, 2009 in Mount Vernon.** 6 PM at the Mt. Vernon Fire Department, Station 3, 4701 E. Division St. For more information on the hearing or the proposed rule changes, contact the Forest Practices Board at 360-902-1400 or visit http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/fp_rulemkg_dfc_hearings.pdf
- **Country Living Expo – Saturday January 31, 2009.** The Expo will be held at Stanwood High School from 7:30 AM – 5:00 PM. Over 100 classes will be offered on raising beef, milking sheep, fruit tree maintenance, fibers, organic farming, parasites, forest maintenance, home food preservation & cheese making, honey bees, cider making, weaving, spinning, and lots more, including an in-the-woods forest management class taught by yours truly. For more information or to

register, visit <http://skagit.wsu.edu/countrylivingexpo/> or call WSU Skagit County Extension at 360-428-4270, ext 0.

- **Snohomish Conservation District 2009 Plant Sale – March 6-7, 2009.** Visit <http://www.snohomishcd.org/> or call 425-335-5634 for more information.
- **Skagit Conservation District 2009 Plant Sale – March 20-21, 2009.** Visit <http://www.skagitcd.org/> or call 360-428-4313 for more information.

Forestry in the News

- The Seattle Times reports on the impact of the declining housing market on lumber markets:
http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2008303041_aplumberstruggles.html
- More grim news for lumber manufacturers from The (Lower Columbia) Daily News:
http://www.tdn.com/articles/2008/10/24/top_story/doc49011e05bbeed408570634.txt
- Even more grim news from the Puget Sound Business Journal:
<http://seattle.bizjournals.com/seattle/stories/2008/11/10/story13.html>
- Here is an interesting article from the Seattle Times on how the economic downturn is directly affecting some forest landowners:
http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2008371435_forestland10m.html
- Here is an article from the Everett Herald on a recent UW/WSU study on the economic challenges facing log truck drivers in Washington:
<http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20081110/BIZ/711109972&SearchID=73337973306098>
- Here is some good news from Forbes Magazine about the value of forestland as part of a diversified investment portfolio:
http://www.forbes.com/finance/2008/11/03/timber-plum-creek-pf-education-in_rs_1103investopedia_inl.html
- Here is an article from the Oregonian on declining numbers of visitors to national forests:
http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/11/national_forests_see_fewer_vis.html

- The Skagit Valley Herald reports on the Puget Sound Cleanup recommendations from the Puget Sound Partnership. The recommendations include keeping forestlands from being converted to development:
http://www.goskagit.com/home/article/agency_releases_puget_sound_cleanup_proposal/
- The Skagit Valley Herald also reports on some hands-on forestry education that Mount Vernon students are participating in:
http://www.goskagit.com/home/article/stepping_outside_the_classroom/

2008 Farm Bill

There are several opportunities for family forest owners in the 2008 Farm Bill, including cost share programs. To find out more, visit

<http://www.forestrycenter.org/headlines.cfm?RefID=104555>

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Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.