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WSU Extension Puget Sound Forest Stewardship E-Newsletter

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In this issue:

- [Forester's Notes](#)
- [We're Growing](#)
- [Thinning and Pruning Workshop](#)
- [Conservation Cost Sharing Workshop](#)
- [Spring Coached Planning](#)
- [Winter Social](#)
- [Other Upcoming WSU Extension Events](#)
- [2011 Native Plant Sales](#)
- [Program Audio Improvements](#)
- [Forestry in the News](#)
- [Focus On: Tree Topping](#)
- [Focus On: Tree Health](#)
- [Tidbits](#)
- [Contact](#)

Forester's Notes

Autumn tidings to all. This newsletter has been long overdue. I will try to make it up to you, though, with a double issue that is packed with announcements, information, and even two "Focus On" features.

It is not that there has been no news to report, but rather that things have been happening so fast that there has not been time to report it. In the past two months the program has grown in both service area and staffing, and many of the grants that I have

been pursuing all year long to offset the budget cuts have been awarded, meaning new programs, projects, and initiatives.

Our fall Coached Planning series is in full swing, and we just had an excellent fall social last week. We have several more fall workshops coming up, and events are already planned for winter and spring.

Our workshop topics and locations this fall and through 2011 and 2012 are being guided by the results of the program survey from last spring. My thanks to all of you who took the time to complete that survey and share your desires and ideas. Two of the top requested workshop topics were thinning/pruning and cost share programs. Thus, these are our fall offerings, and their locations in Sedro Woolley and Snoqualmie, respectively, are also based on the survey data.

In addition to helping us determine the best program topics and locations, the survey data also revealed important information about how we should deliver program content, what days and times work best for live programs, the demand for online programs, and even beverage preferences at workshops (this last one may seem trivial, but the data allowed us to reduce our refreshment costs by 20%, keeping overall workshop costs and fees down).

In short, we asked, you responded, we listened, and now we're responding with improved, targeted programming that I hope will be both more efficient and more effective.

Kevin W. Zobrist
WSU Area Extension Educator
Serving Snohomish, Skagit, King, and Island Counties

We're Growing

I am very pleased to announce that the WSU Extension Puget Sound Forest Stewardship Program is expanding. Starting in January 2011, we will be serving Island County (both Whidbey and Camano), and our service in King County will grow to include both the Snoqualmie and the Lake Washington/Cedar/Sammamish watersheds (the northeastern 2/3 of the county). And of course, we will continue to serve all of Snohomish and Skagit Counties. This means more workshops, services, and activities in more places around the north-central sound area.

This expansion will be made possible by grants from the King and Whidbey Island Conservation Districts, and other grant funds that we have pursued over the past year. We have also received a grant from the USDA Forest Service to do a summer youth program in Snohomish County, training high school students for natural resource careers.

With all of these new initiatives, I was in great need of staff support. In the last newsletter, I introduced Jacqui Styrna as my new part-time program assistant. It turned out that I needed someone with even more hours available, so we did some staff-swapping and now Tamara Neuffer will be serving as a half-time forest stewardship program assistant. A huge thank you to Jacqui for all of her great work (I miss her already, but at least she's just down the hall), and a warm welcome to Tamara. Tamara brings with her a wealth of skills and experience, and a passion for forestry. Tamara and her family are themselves forest owners and Coached Planning alumni, with acreage outside of Arlington.

Tamara will be taking the lead on planning and coordinating workshops. She will also be the lead for our Snohomish County Summer Youth Program. You can reach Tamara at the same number as me (425-357-6017), or by email at tneuffer@wsu.edu.

Thinning and Pruning Workshop

Join us on Saturday November 6th in Sedro Woolley for a workshop on two of the most basic forest management activities: thinning and pruning. These are two of the best tools available to enhance the health, beauty, and habitat that your forest provides. Whether you are new to managing forestland or just want to "sharpen the saw" to refine your techniques, join us for this hands-on workshop where you will learn how to thin and prune properly and safely

Topics will include:

- Why thin and prune
- Types of thinning
- When, how much, and how often to thin
- When and how to prune
- Tools of the trade

We will begin in the classroom to discuss the science and techniques of thinning and pruning. After a break for lunch (on your own), we will then meet up at a local property for hands-on practice. You will have the opportunity to try out different pruning tools and practice your technique. You will also have the opportunity to practice marking out a stand for thinning, followed by discussion. The class will be taught by DNR Stewardship Forester Mike Nystrom and WSU Extension Forester Kevin Zobrist.

Cost is \$15per individual or family. Pre-Registration is required. For details and registration information, please visit <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/thinprune2010.htm> or call 425-357-6017. Persons with a disability requiring special accommodations while participating in this workshop may call WSU Extension at 425-357-6017. If accommodation is not requested in advance, we cannot guarantee the availability of accommodation on site.

Conservation Cost-Sharing Workshop

Fighting invasive weeds? Forest in need of thinning or restoration? Want to plant trees? Washington State University Extension and the Snoqualmie Watershed Forum invite you to attend our free cost-sharing workshop at 6:30 PM on Wednesday November 10th at the Snoqualmie Library. Learn about federal, state, and local programs that help forest and farm owners pay for conservation work and improved management practices on their property. We'll be covering a number of federal, state, and local programs available for area landowners, how to qualify, steps to apply, and where to get help with applications.

Examples of projects may include:

- * Tree Planting
- * Fish barrier removal
- * Fish and wildlife habitat enhancement
- * Invasive species removal
- * Pre-Commercial Thinning
- * Riparian restoration

Pre-Registration Requested. Register free by visiting <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/costshare2010.htm> or calling 425-357-6017. Persons with a disability requiring special accommodations while participating in this workshop may call WSU Extension at 425-357-6017. If accommodation is not requested in advance, we cannot guarantee the availability of accommodation on site.

Spring Coached Planning

Our flagship "Forest Stewardship Coached Planning" class is already lined up for spring 2011. The spring class will be Tuesday evenings starting April 12th at the Snohomish County Extension building in South Everett. This is the best (and most popular) class we teach, so if you have not taken Coached Planning yet, I really hope you will check this out. I have never heard from anyone who did not find this to be well worth the time and investment to attend. You will leave this class a different forest owner than when you start. The last three classes sold out, so register early to ensure your spot.

This 10-session practical, hands-on course will guide you through the development of your own stewardship plan with "coaching" from the top natural resource professionals in the state. In the process of creating a forest plan unique to your property and objectives, you'll go in depth with us both in the classroom and in the field covering a wide range of forestry topics. Things we'll cover in detail include ecology, Silvics, soils, wildlife, forest health, fire, applied silviculture, water resources, aesthetics, regulations, special forest products, working with contractors, and more. The class includes nine evening classroom sessions, a Saturday field trip, a personal site visit to your property

from a professional forester and/or wildlife biologist, and a forest stewardship notebook packed with information.

Your completed forest stewardship plan may qualify you for significant property tax reductions, as well as qualify you for a whole range of cost share and other assistance programs. It will also provide you with a road map for maximizing your enjoyment of your land. Perhaps even more beneficial than the plan itself, though, is the educational process of preparing one. Even those who do not complete a written plan find the education they receive in this class to be invaluable in the stewardship of their property. Whether you own 5 acres (or even less!), 50 acres, or 500 acres, if you want to expand your knowledge, tools, and confidence for stewarding your forestland, this course is for you.

Registration is now open, and we are now accepting online registrations. For details and registration information, visit <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/CP11Everett.htm> or call 425-357-6017. Persons with a disability requiring special accommodations while participating in this workshop may call WSU Extension at 425-357-6017. If accommodation is not requested in advance, we cannot guarantee the availability of accommodation on site.

Winter Social

What started out as just a fun thing to kick off the year last January has started to become a tradition throughout the year, and it has evolved to include an education program as well as dinner and visiting. So we'll bring this back once again and start out 2011 the same way we did 2010. Mark your calendars for Friday January 14, from 6:30 – 9:30 PM at our usual location at the Snohomish County Extension building in south Everett. Come and enjoy great food, see old friends, meet new friends, and enjoy an after-dinner education program. Program speakers are yet to be determined, but we'll limit it to one or two speakers this time so that we don't run so late (and to leave a little more time for visiting). You can RSVP online at <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/social2011Jan.htm> or by calling 425-357-6017. Persons with a disability requiring special accommodations while participating in this program may call WSU Extension at 425-357-6017. If accommodation is not requested in advance, we cannot guarantee the availability of accommodation on site.

Other Upcoming WSU Extension Events

- **Septic Care Workshops.** Are you on a septic system? WSU Extension is offering free Septic Care workshops this fall to help you avoid costly repairs and family health hazards. Learn how septic systems work, everyday maintenance tips, how to know when to pump the system, and questions you should ask your septic service provider. The next workshops will be 6:30-9:30 PM on Wednesday November 10th at the Granite Falls Library and 9:00 AM to noon on Saturday

November 13th at the Stillaguamish Grange Hall. For additional information or to register, visit [http:// http://www.snohomish.wsu.edu/septic](http://www.snohomish.wsu.edu/septic) or call Jacquelyn Styrna at 425-357-6023.

- **2011 Country Living Expo** – Save the date: the 2011 Country Living Expo will be Saturday January 29th at Stanwood High School. This huge event features an all-star lineup of classes on everything WSU Extension has to offer, including gardening, beekeeping, food preservation, livestock, forestry, and much more. Registration opens in November. For more information visit <http://skagit.wsu.edu/countrylivingexpo/> or Contact the WSU Skagit County Extension Office at 360-428-4270, ext 0

2011 Native Plant Sales

It's not too early to start thinking about the 2011 native plant sales that will be hosted this winter by your local Conservation District. This is one of my top recommended ways to get high quality stock of native trees and shrubs for your forest. Unlike the major tree nurseries, you don't have to order huge bulk quantities.

- The dates are set for the Snohomish Conservation District plant sale, which will be Friday and Saturday March 4 – 5, 2011. Mark your calendars, and watch for more information later this fall. <http://snohomishcd.org/plant-sale>
- The Whidbey Island Conservation District is taking pre-orders through January 31st, for pickup on March 5, 2011 at the Greenbank Farm. For sale and ordering info, visit <http://whidbeycd.org/plantsale.aspx> or call 360-678-4708.
- Information on the Skagit and King Conservation District Plant Sales will be posted in this newsletter as it becomes available.

Important: Don't order trees and plants willy-nilly. Make sure to match the right trees and plants with the right site. Know what grows well in wet vs. dry, sun vs. shade, etc. Planting the right tree on the right site is a first step in ensuring a healthy, vibrant forest. Your local Conservation District or WSU County Extension Office (e.g. me) can help you select appropriate species.

Program Audio Improvements

We do programs all over, and let's face it – the acoustics of the various venues are not always the best, and not all of our presenters are as loud-spoken as I am. Sometimes, it's just plain hard to hear. We don't want you to miss a word, though, so we'll be featuring some new gadgetry at our workshops, namely an assisted listening system (ALS). We'll have several small headsets available at each workshop. The presenters will be wearing clip-on microphones that broadcast directly to these headsets. If you think you might

have trouble hearing, please grab one of these headsets before (or anytime during) the workshop. You'll get your own personal volume control on the headset. We encourage you to make use of these headsets if they help you hear. The program will be much more enjoyable if you're not straining to listen. Right now we have an indoor system, but we are hoping to expand with a portable system that can be taken outside on field trips.

Forestry in the News

Some WSU Extension newsletters provide links to external sites for the convenience of users. These external sites are not managed by the WSU Extension. Furthermore, WSU Extension does not review, control or take responsibility for the content of these sites, nor do these sites implicitly or explicitly represent official positions and policies of WSU Extension.

- The Covington/Maple Valley Reporter featured a slide show from the summer field day:
http://www.pnwlocalnews.com/south_king/cmv/lifestyle/100812134.html
- *The New York Times* featured an article about a Seattle company that turns condemned urban trees into custom furniture:
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/08/business/energy-environment/08sustain.html?_r=3&ref=todayspaper
- *The Olympian* ran an article on carbon sequestration in Northwest forests:
<http://www.theolympian.com/2010/08/30/1351756/nw-forests-offer-carbon-dilemma.html>
- *The Seattle Times* reported on the use of horse logging in an environmentally sensitive area. The article featured horse logger Wes Gustafson, who gave a demonstration at the Skagit field day in 2009:
http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2012971347_horselogging23m.html
- *The Seattle Times* reports on successful efforts by the Whidbey Camano Land Trust to purchase the Trillium Forest:
http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2013042760_trillium01m.html
- *The Daily Herald* in Everett reports on volunteer efforts to plant trees along the South Fork of the Stillaguamish:
<http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20101028/NEWS01/710289861>
- *The Seattle Times* reports on a court decision that may significantly change how forest roads are regulated:
http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2012648909_loggingroads18m.html

Focus On: Tree Topping

Our first Focus On feature this month is a short one on tree topping. By tree topping I do not mean the appropriate pruning practices that trained arborists may employ (such as with fruit trees or broadleaved street trees). Rather, I mean the cutting off of the top of a tree to improve views, avoid power lines, etc.

Tree topping is actually one of the most common things I get asked about. Is it ok? Will it hurt the tree? My advice on tree topping is simply this: Don't. Do. It. In fact, I can only think of one legitimate reason to top a tree, and that is to create a snag or wildlife tree.

Topping is one technique to artificially create a snag. Why? Because it's so effective for killing the tree. Not only has the tree lost its leader and a key portion of its photosynthesis factory, but now you have a nice fresh cut across the top of the stem that is exposed to the elements, collects rainwater, and otherwise fosters the perfect conditions to introduce disease and decay right into the stem of the tree. This is great if you want heart rot for cavity dwellers or to have a dead or malformed tree to provide habitat features. Not so good if you want a tree that looks good or is healthy.

Think about a tree or trees in your forest that have been naturally topped (e.g. top blown out by wind, snow, or ice). What does the tree look like now? What were the impacts of the storm damage to the tree's appearance, growth, health, and vitality?

There are bound to be conflicts between trees and either views or power lines. In these cases, I do not believe that topping is the answer. In the case of power lines, you may be able to work with your power company to identify the most likely hazard areas and do some careful branch pruning without simply hacking the top off of the tree.

If the conflict with the top of the tree is unavoidable, then the problem is ultimately that it is the wrong tree for that location. In this case, I recommend removing the tree altogether rather than keeping it in a ruined form by topping. You can replace the tree with a smaller variety that won't cause problems, or leave that particular area tree-free.

Focus On: Tree Health

The issue of tree health comes up more in the fall than any other time of year. I think a big part of that is that this is the time of year for what we call seasonal dieback. Despite the Pacific Northwest's reputation for rain, it is perhaps our dryness that is actually the most distinguishing feature of our climate from a tree's perspective. Our climate is characterized by a long droughty period in the summer. This is very different from other parts of the world where summer means afternoon thunderstorms and heavy rains.

It is our summer drought period that gives conifers a big advantage in this region, with their evergreen foliage that is available year round. Hardwoods have it rough; going dormant during the wet season and then lacking water when their leaves are out. Thus our conifers dominate and we earn the nickname of the Evergreen State.

However, “evergreen” does not mean that the leaves last throughout the life of the tree. It simply means that leaves last for more than one growing season. Every year, an evergreen tree will tend to shed its oldest foliage (the innermost foliage on the branch). The same drought feature that gives conifers their advantage is not without consequences – the conifers are also stressed at the end of a long, dry summer. By the time September rolls around, there are not enough resources to maintain all the green foliage, so the tree prioritizes and the oldest foliage gets the boot.

This seasonal dieback is particularly pronounced in western redcedar (we call it “flagging”), but certainly not limited to that species. Interestingly, the seasonal dieback has been particularly pronounced this year. This is somewhat counterintuitive, as the summer and early fall have been so wet, such that one would think moisture stress would be lower this year. My thinking is that the growing season has simply been so rough all around this year, with unseasonal weather from spring through fall, that the trees are still stressed overall. In any case, don’t fret too much if you observe excessive seasonal dieback in your trees – this is not likely to be an indicator of disease or “something else going on.” Seasonal dieback has a very distinctive pattern (shedding the innermost foliage). I would expect the symptoms of insect or disease problems to look completely different.

When thinking about tree health, remember that tree health and forest health are two totally different concepts. Tree health refers to the health of an individual tree, whereas forest health refers to the health of the system. A certain level of insect activity, disease activity, mortality, and decay is both normal and healthy in the forest. Damaged, dead, and dying trees are critical habitat features for wildlife (cue the “Circle of Life” music...).

I remember talking to a gentleman whose goal was to eradicate root rot in our forests. While I appreciate his passion for healthy trees, I think this goal is misguided. Root rots are a natural part of our forest ecosystems. Our trees evolved together with these fungi, and the fungi have an important, natural role to play in breaking up and diversifying structure and species mixes. This may conflict with certain management objectives such that practical treatment is warranted, but I don’t think eradication is the answer and the potential for unintended consequences would be huge.

Perhaps the biggest problem when it comes to tree health is when it is a tree in your yard or around your home that is ailing. One dying tree in a forest of otherwise healthy specimens is no big deal. But if you only have three trees in your yard and one of them is sick, the impacts are greatly magnified and it gets your attention.

So what should you do in this case? One of the first things to determine is whether or not it is a potential hazard (i.e. if it falls is it likely to hit your house, barn, children playing in the yard, etc.). A hazard tree may be a higher priority issue.

The next step is to determine the cause of the tree's decline, especially if there is the potential for a hazard. For instance, if the tree has the potential to threaten your home, you will want to know if it has, say, a root rot problem. Your local WSU County Extension Office has resources that can help you troubleshoot tree problems, including Master Gardeners and forestry agents. Keep in mind that the forestry agent is going to be trained to deal with native trees in a forested setting; not ornamental trees in a landscape setting or fruit trees in an orchard setting. We also have a number of great publications, diagnostic tools, and other "self-help" resources on our website (<http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/resources.htm>).

here are some tips of things to make note of when working to diagnose a problem:

1. What trees are affected? Just one tree, or multiple trees? Which species are affected, and which are not?
2. When did you first notice the problem? Spring? Late summer?
3. What color is the affected foliage? Red? Yellow?
4. What pattern of foliage decline do you observe at the tree level? From the top down, bottom up, random patches, or a uniform crown fade?
5. What pattern of foliage decline do you observe at the branch level? Are the current year's needles (branch tips) affected, previous year's needles, or both?
6. What evidence do you observe on the foliage? Tiny black spots on the undersides? Large black spots? White pustules? Honeydew or egg masses from insects?
7. What evidence do you observe on the stem? Sawdust (frass) from wood-boring insects? Animal chewing or girdling around the stem or individual branches? Resin streaming or flowing? Evidence of mechanical injury?
8. What evidence do you observe in the upper canopy? Distress cones present? Has the tree leader shortened, creating a rounded-looking top rather than a pointy top?

Ultimately, my recommendation if you have a tree of concern, especially a potential hazard tree, is to hire a professional. There are a lot of "tree services" out there, and as with any type of service provider, some are better than others. I always recommend hiring a certified arborist, as these folks must maintain a certain level of training and continuing education. The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) maintains a directory of certified arborists that you can search by location: <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findArborist/findarborist.aspx>. I also recommend getting a second opinion if you are not satisfied with the arborist's diagnosis or recommendations.

Keep in mind that even with a solid diagnosis, in many cases there may not be immediate practical things you can do to address a forest health issue. These are not like garden pests where you can go to your local garden center and get a spray to quickly clear up the problem. In many cases it is a matter of letting the problem run its course (oftentimes the trees will recover, though with some growth loss). In other cases, the tree may be already doomed to mortality by the time you observe any symptoms. I am often perplexed when “tree services” offer to spray the trunk of a sick tree with some chemical or another – I wonder if this is more to make the customer feel better than any actual practical value.

If you do have a tree with a serious problem that is likely going to lead to mortality or structural failure, remember that you do not necessarily have to remove it. If the tree is not likely to be a hazard, you may wish to simply let nature take its course and look forward to a future snag and the habitat it will provide for all sorts of interesting creatures. If you do decide to take it down, you do not have to take it down completely. You can leave a short snag (e.g. the bottom 10 – 20 feet) that will have a much narrower hazard area and a much lower potential to cause damage, but with huge benefits for wildlife. Even a tall stump (4 – 5 feet) can be used by wildlife or become a “special feature” of your forest or landscape.

One final caveat is that if the problem with your tree is infectious in nature (e.g. root rot or dwarf mistletoe), there may be management implications if there are other susceptible hosts nearby. A professional certified arborist or your local WSU County Extension Office can help you determine if additional management actions are needed.

Tidbits

Here are some other items of interest:

- Whitebark pine to be studied for listing as an endangered species – Whitebark pine is one of my favorite species, as it is a beautiful tree that grows in beautiful places. Unfortunately, just like its low elevation cousin western white pine, the whitebark pine has been hit hard by the white pine blister rust (an invasive disease). Climate change has also allowed mountain pine beetles to expand their range to higher elevations where the whitebark pine grows. This would be the first northwest tree to be listed as endangered. If you want to see some beautiful whitebark pines, visit Sunrise at Mount Rainier National Park – they are all around the parking area.
- A new Forest Service Report is available: Private Forests, Public Benefits – Increased Housing Density and Other Pressures on Private Forest Contributions. [This report projects North Puget Sound Watersheds to experience some of the highest levels in the nation of private forest conversion to development.](http://www.fs.fed.us/openspace/fote/benefits.html)
<http://www.fs.fed.us/openspace/fote/benefits.html>

- King County has put together a great new brochure on Firewise principles. This is a good overview of Firewise principles regardless of what county you are in: <http://your.kingcounty.gov/ddes/fire/pdfs/FirewiseBrochure.pdf>
- The Washington Department of Revenue has an updated series of fact sheets about taxes on timber and forestland in Washington: <http://dor.wa.gov/content/FindTaxesAndRates/OtherTaxes/Timber/default.aspx>
- Speaking of taxes, the 2010 Tax Tips for Forest Landowners is now available: <http://www.timbertax.org/developments/TimberTaxTips2010.pdf>
- Check out this article on the NASA website about the relationship between bark beetles and wildfire – bark beetle mortality does not necessarily mean higher wildfire risk: <http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/beetles-fire.html>
- So far, 96 people “Like” the Forest Stewardship Facebook page. If you’re on Facebook, check us out and help us reach triple digits: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Everett-WA/WSU-Extension-Puget-Sound-Forest-Stewardship/148183126376>

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