



Extension Forestry

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Forester's Notes

Messy but functional

You would never know by looking at my office that I like things neat and orderly. I like everything to have and be in its place as part of a logical system. Stacks and shelves should be trim and orderly, papers should be neatly alphabetized and filed in the filing cabinets, no loose papers should be on the desk or the table, and nothing should be on the floor except the furniture, lest something get in the way of the vacuum. Clutter and mess cause me angst and a feeling that things are out of control.

And yet, my office is currently characterized by mounds of papers on my desk, piles on the floor, equipment waiting for a home, books off the shelf, and so forth. I haven't seen the wooden top of my desk in weeks. It does irritate me a little, as I have my perception of cleanliness, beauty, and what a good office should look like. However, it is currently quite functional, and productivity has been high. The mess reflects lots of things going on, and many people being served.

Messy but functional is a good description of forest ecosystems. The "mess" in the forest sometimes clashes with our notions of what a healthy, well-cared for property should look like. I often hear "my forest looks like a mess" from property owners who are concerned that they are doing something wrong. We tend to have perceptions of beauty and order that we project upon nature such that the natural disarray can cause some consternation. If your objectives include having a healthy, biodiverse, wildlife-friendly, and highly functional forest system, then messy is usually a good thing. When folks go through our forest stewardship short courses and have their site visit, I think many people are surprised by how good of a condition their forest is in relative to their objectives compared to what their prior perceptions had been.

Complex relationships

"Messy" reflects a natural condition with many different processes occurring and many niche habitats. It is a product of complex relationships and interconnectedness, many of which we don't fully understand. If ecosystem health and wildlife habitat are part of your objectives, there is no need to "clean" or "park out" the forest of fallen branches, logs, debris, dead trees, or underbrush. This can conflict with a desired aesthetic, though, in which case it may need to be considered and balanced against other objectives. It also might take some recalibration of what we consider beautiful such that we can see beauty and function in the mess.

Much like forest ecosystems, our own interconnectedness and personal relationships are complex and often not neat and tidy. As families gather this holiday season, many will experience complex family dynamics and relationships that are multidimensional and can include anger and grieving. Even though our relationships with family and friends can be a bit messy, especially in the polarized age we are in, there is usually still a lot of value, beauty, function, and potential in those relationships, which shouldn't be discarded out of hand.

As a foster/adoptive parent, I've seen my share of messy, complicated, and poorly defined family relationships. The parent-child relationship is more complicated when you are not the birth parent, but it is still a beautiful relationship, even with its complexity. Most of the children in the foster system have experienced severe trauma. They have messy life stories and messy behavior issues that are hard to wade into. Granted, the horrors these children experienced are not a beautiful or functional type of mess. With this in mind, I want to make a clear distinction between relationships that are a little complicated and messy versus being unsafe, unhealthy, and/or dysfunctional. There is tremendous beauty, value, and potential in these children, though, that we try to draw out in the hope that they emerge in their fullness with resilience.

Processes and function

Unsafe, unhealthy, and dysfunctional situations also apply to forest ecosystems. In these cases, an intervention may be necessary in order for us to achieve our objectives. Fire safety is a great example of where we might want to have a more clean and tidy type of landscape rather than the messy natural jumble. This is not for the whole forest, though—just for the zones immediately around homes. Beyond these zones, it's OK to be messy. Trying to fire-proof the forest would strip it of its natural beauty, habitat, and function. That's why we focus on saving homes from burning as opposed to the whole forest. There are, of course, things you can do in the forest zone to reduce the potential fire intensity. An example would be consolidating fine fuels like branches and twigs into habitat piles, which reduces the continuity of fine fuels but maintains or even enhances habitat function.

When it comes to addressing forest systems that are unhealthy or dysfunctional, this is what restoration is all about. I don't see restoration as trying to recreate the forest conditions of the past. Aside from remnants, those forests are largely gone, and the world has changed considerably in the meantime. Rather, I see restoration as an effort to restore key ecosystem processes and functions. Whether it's thinning an overstocked stand, creating a snag, removing invasive vegetation, introducing

diversity, or placing logs in streams, these are all efforts to restore key natural processes and cycles and rebuild connections and relationships. When the right processes are in place and functioning well, the forest is on a better trajectory toward whatever our desired future condition is. We may not be able to recreate old growth, at least in the short-term, but we can certainly restore some old forest functions with the application of the right management practices, if that's one of the objectives. You can't expect to get anywhere if the engine isn't working.

I hope that you will give yourself a lot of grace if there are things in your forest or your life that are a little messy and complicated. I also hope you will be able to think about forest and ecosystem health in terms of systems and processes, focus efforts on supporting those processes as needed, and find beauty in the chaos.

Kevin W. Zobrist
Professor, Extension Forestry
Washington State University
Serving the Puget Sound Area

Final 2019 Forest Health and Fire Seminars

Learn why trees are dying and what to do

Dead and dying trees have proliferated throughout western Washington. Some trees that have been particularly hard-hit include hemlocks and cedars, causing concern for many property owners. Washington State University (WSU) Extension Forestry will be giving free public seminars to explain why so many trees are dying right now and how property owners can approach the issue.

Learn what makes forests healthy or unhealthy and how to recognize when there's a problem on your property. Topics include insects, diseases, and drought, including their environmental roles and the important interactions between them. Learn about what property owners should do (and not do) to increase tree resilience and mitigate impacts.

Mitigate your wildfire risk

Is fire risk really a concern on the westside? How would a major westside fire play out? Learn about what and where the risks are and practical things you can do to protect your home and increase your property's resilience.

Upcoming offerings

The seminars are free, and there is no registration required. Space is limited, though, so arrive early to ensure your seat.

North Bend

The [North Bend seminar](#) will be held Tuesday, December 10th, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the [North Bend Library](#), 115 E 4th St, North Bend, WA 98045.

Carnation

The [Carnation seminar](#) will be Thursday, December 12th, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the [Carnation Library](#), 4804 Tolt Ave, Carnation, WA 98014.

Issaquah

The [Issaquah seminar](#) will be Tuesday, December 17th, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the [Issaquah Library](#), 10 W Sunset Way, Issaquah, WA 98027.

2020 Forest Owners Winter School

Save the date

The 2020 Western Washington Forest Owners Winter School will be on Leap Day: Saturday, February 29th. Since February 29th is a whole extra day of the year, there's no excuse for not having time to attend! The Winter School will be held at Green River College in Auburn. Over 20 different classes will be offered, including chainsaw safety and maintenance, forest safety and security, forest owner legal issues, variable density thinning, agroforestry, living with beavers, and more. Registration will open soon, at which point an announcement will be sent out.

Other winter schools

For those of you in southwest Washington, there will be a [Southwest Washington Forest Owners Field Day](#) on February 8th at the Washington State University campus in Vancouver.

For those of you on the Eastside, there will be an Eastern Washington Forest Owners Field Day on February 1st in Colville.

2020 Conservation District Native Tree and Plant Sales

It's that time of year—time to mark your calendars for the early spring sales of native trees and plants for your planting projects, and to note the preorder dates.

King Conservation District

- March 14th sale/pickup date
- Pre-orders open now
- King Conservation District Plant Sale website: <http://store.kingcd.org/>

Pierce Conservation District

- February 28th and 29th sale/pickup date
- Preorders open now until January 15th
- Pierce Conservation District Plant Sale website: <http://www.piercenativeplantsale.com/>

San Juan County Master Gardeners

- March 28th sale/pickup date
- Preorders will begin in January
- San Juan County Master Gardeners Plant Sale website: <https://www.mgfsjc.org/2020-native-plant-sale.html>

Skagit Conservation District Sale

- Information will become available in February
- Skagit Conservation District Plant Sale website: http://skagitcd.org/native_plant_sales

Snohomish Conservation District Sale

- March 21st sale/pickup date
- Pre-orders begin January 20th
- Snohomish Conservation District Plant Sale Website: <https://snohomishcd.org/annual-plant-sale>

Whatcom Conservation District

- March 28th sale date
- March 27th-28th pickup dates
- Preorders January until March 16th
- Whatcom Conservation District Plant Sale website:
<https://www.whatcomcd.org/plant-sale>

Whatcom Farm Forestry Association

- March 14th sale date
- 10 AM to noon or until sold out
- Lynden Fairgrounds

Whidbey Island Conservation District

- February 29th sale/pickup date
- Preorders open now until January 31st
- Whidbey Island Conservation District Plant Sale website:
<https://www.whidbeycd.org/plant-sale-storefront.html>

National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year

Congratulations to the New Family, owners of Nourse Tree Farm in Snohomish County, on being named this year's National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year award! This award is a major accomplishment, and this is only the fourth time in the 45 years of this program that the winner has been from Washington. Watch a [short video of their story](#) to learn about their salmon habitat restoration project and why they are so deserving of this award.

Need help with a forest plan?

Students at local forestry schools like Green River College are regularly looking for case study forest properties and landowners to work with. This is a great way to contribute to education while at the same time getting some free work done. If you are in King or north Pierce county and would be interested in having someone put a plan together for you, please let me know.

Online Forest Stewardship Coached Planning Course

This class is sold out

As usual, this class sold out early. We are tentatively planning on having a spring course in Skagit County.

Other 2020 classes

Classes are tentatively planned for spring in Skagit County and fall in Preston. Watch for formal announcements in early 2020.

Forest Health Updates

Below are some brief updates on current forest health issues.

Western hemlock

We still don't understand what is causing hemlocks to be defoliated from the bottom up. In previous newsletters it was attributed to a web blight fungus called *Rhizoctonia*, but that is now questionable. We will provide updates as they become available.

Sitka spruce

Spruce aphids are damaging Sitka spruces in coastal forests. There is a good [article from DNR](#) on the subject.

Sword fern die-off

Some updates are posted on the [Seward Park Sword Fern Die-Off Blog](#).

Pacific madrone health issues

You can learn about the various diseases and pests impacting Pacific madrone by visiting the [Washington State University Pacific Madrone Research website](#). You can also sign up for their excellent madrone newsletter at that site.

Bigleaf maple decline

The University of Washington [completed a study on this phenomenon](#) earlier this year and found a correlation between declining maples and higher temperature and proximity to development.

Hokkaido gypsy moth

This dangerous invasive insect was [found for the first time in the US this summer in Snohomish County](#). This pest should be taken quite seriously, as it has the potential to spread rapidly and cause significant destruction of forests. Gypsy moths are usually controlled by spraying harmless natural bacteria that only the moths are susceptible to.

What to do if you think your tree/forest is unhealthy

For any ornamental or fruit trees, contact the WSU Extension Master Gardeners in your county through your county Extension office to see if they can diagnose the issue and provide solutions. You can send samples to our [diagnostic lab in Puyallup](#) for a formal analysis (fees apply). You may need to hire a certified consulting arborist to come out and look at the tree on site.

For native trees in a landscape setting or around your home, you can contact us with questions (include high-quality photos) and we might have an idea of what the problem could be. Here again you may need to hire a certified consulting arborist come out to look at the tree on-site.

For native trees in a forest setting, you can contact us with questions, and we might have ideas. If it's only a few trees, you may need to hire an arborist. For a more broadly affected area, or if you may need to end up harvesting a stand, a consulting forester may be needed.

You can find a certified consulting arborist through [an online certified arborist directory](#) offered by the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture. For consulting foresters, visit our [Washington State Consulting Forester and Silvicultural Contractor Directory](#).

Update from the Department of Natural Resources

The Washington Department of Natural Resources reorganized its assistance programs for small forest landowners. Stewardship foresters are now in the forest health division instead of forest practices. The stewardship forester for western Washington is Matt Provencher, who can be reached at matthew.provencher@dnr.wa.gov. Ken Bevis is the stewardship wildlife biologist, and he can be reached at ken.bevis@dnr.wa.gov.

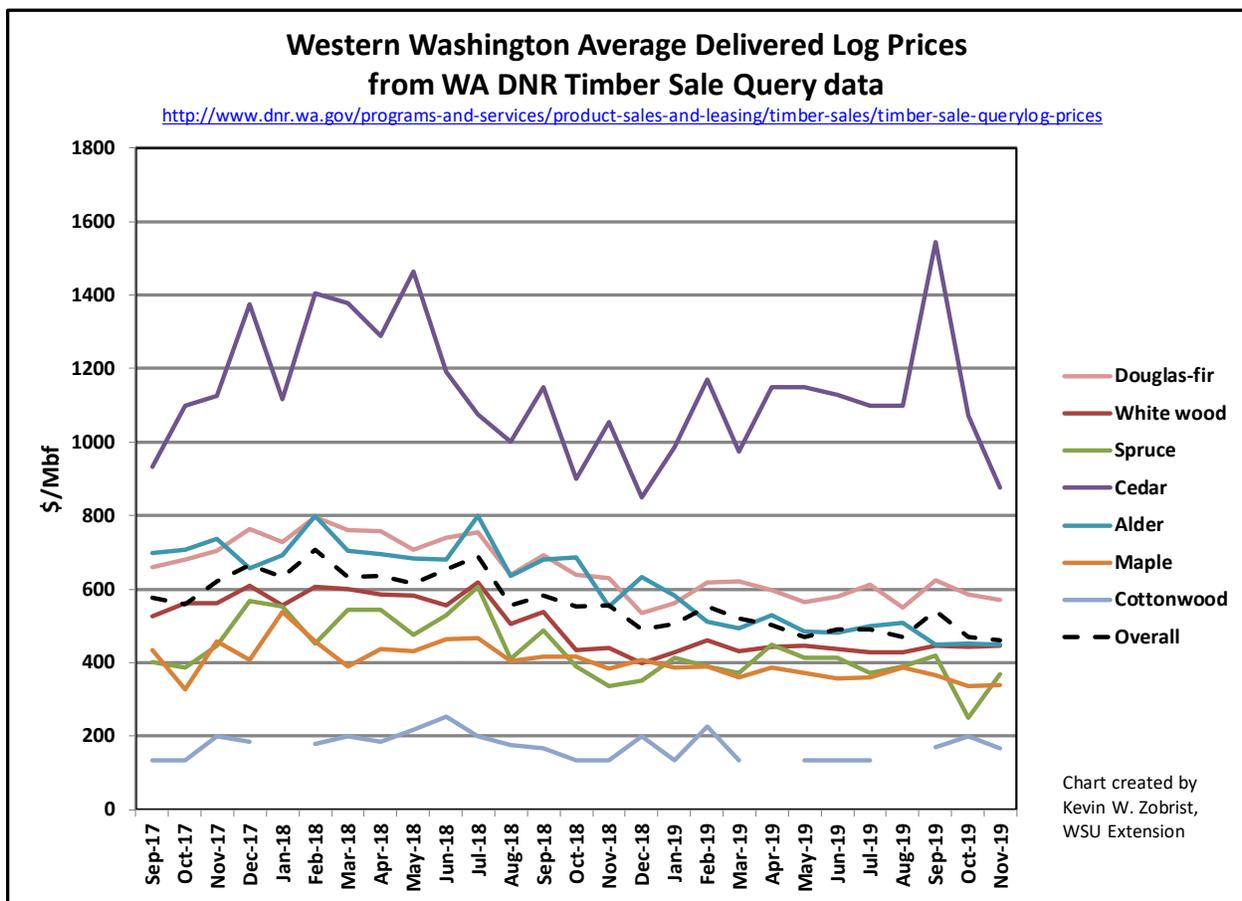
The Small Forest Landowner Office remains in the forest practices division and is focused on helping landowners doing timber sales. Todd Olson has been hired as the

new Small Forest Landowner Regulation Assistance Forester. Todd can be reached at 360-902-1029 or todd.olson@dnr.wa.gov.

Market Update

Here is the latest news on log prices in Western Washington based on data provided by our friends at DNR in their [monthly Timber Sale Query reports](#).

Log markets have been in a relatively steady decline over the past year and a half due to the tariff war. Alder has been particularly hard hit, with current prices at about half of what they were 16 months ago. China is (was) a major market for alder. The ongoing trade war forced the Northwest Hardwood mill in Mount Vernon to shut down, so there are fewer places to send alder and they are farther away, so additional hauling costs will eat into the net return for the landowner.



Other Educational Events

Disclaimer: Any non-WSU events are listed for informational purposes with no implied endorsement by WSU.

2020 Country Living Expo and Cattlemen's Winterschool

This annual WSU Extension event will be held Saturday, January 25th at Stanwood High School. This is one of the biggest Extension programs in western Washington. Well over 100 classes will be offered on every topic imaginable. I'll be teaching two classes, one on forest health and one on mushroom growing. Visit the [Country Living Expo website](#) for class descriptions and registration information.

Sound Waters University

The Island County Sound Water Stewards are hosting their annual [Sound Waters University](#) at South Whidbey High School in Langley on February 20th. This event will feature a variety of classes on different conservation topics.

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[North Puget Sound Extension Forestry Website](#)

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Initiative, San Juan County, San Juan Islands Conservation District, Skagit County, Snohomish Conservation District, and Snohomish County Surface Water Management.

Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office. Reasonable accommodations for the events described above will be made for persons with disabilities and special needs who contact us at the address above at least two weeks prior to the event.