

WSU North Puget Sound Extension Forestry E-Newsletter

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Forester's Notes

If it seems like it has been awhile since you received this newsletter, it is because the newsletter has been on a five-month hiatus. I'm getting things back in gear now, though. This month has me thinking about forest neighbors. The Snohomish Conservation District recently helped three woodland neighborhoods apply to be recognized Firewise communities. These are the first such communities in Snohomish County. Becoming Firewise involves developing a community Firewise plan and bringing neighbors together for community work projects that greatly reduce the risk of damage to homes and forests in the event of a wildfire. To do this successfully takes a lot of cooperation, communication, and interaction between neighbors.

Something else that has me thinking about forest neighbors is my participation in a forestry conference in Japan this past fall. We took several field tours to see how small-scale woodland owners (much like yourselves) manage their property. I was amazed at how much was done with cooperation and coordination between neighbors. Thinning, harvesting, and road building were frequently multi-property endeavors allowing much greater efficiencies. Also, landowner associations are much different in Japan than they are here. In Japan, the

associations function as true co-ops. The association will have professional foresters on staff and also will own infrastructure such as wood drying facilities and log auction yards. Services are offered to both members and non-members, though members enjoy lower rates.

I found the log auction yard to be a particularly interesting concept. It is basically a consignment shop for logs. Landowners deliver their logs to the auction yard, which sells them to the highest bidder. Each log is marked on the end to identify the landowner such that when logs are sold, the proceeds for each individual log go directly to the corresponding landowner minus a small commission (which is lower for members). The commission pays for the services of the auction yard, which does all of the marketing work. Marketing large volumes of logs pooled from multiple owners provides great efficiencies and much better marketing opportunities than a landowner selling logs individually (especially for small quantities). It doesn't matter if a landowner does not have enough of a particular species or grade to make a full log truck load that can go to a specific mill and fetch a higher price. With this system, all the landowner has to do is deliver all their logs to the auction yard where each log will get sorted and combined with others to get the best price. You can see pictures of the auction yard that I visited at <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151590239766377.1073741827.148183126376>. Click on each picture for an explanation of what it is.

Both the Firewise communities and the Japanese forestry examples illustrate the benefits of woodland neighbors working together. The efficiencies and opportunities that result are greater than what landowners could achieve individually. Working with neighbors can be very challenging, though. Just about everyone has at least one "difficult" neighbor (and if you don't, count yourself very lucky!). I think there are also big cultural differences between the United States and places like Japan. Our culture puts a high value on autonomy, independence, and individualism.

Despite these challenges, I think there are still many opportunities for landowners to work with their neighbors, and many of you already do. This could be a shared road, a joint harvesting operation, or just being each other's eyes and ears in the neighborhood for greater security and protection against trespass and vandalism. In any case, I encourage you to think about opportunities to work more with your neighbors. If you have neighbors whom you've never met, maybe this is the year to take a plate of cookies and make introductions.

Kevin W. Zobrist
Regional Extension Forestry Specialist
Serving the North Puget Sound Area

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Forest Stewardship Coached Planning

Coached Planning is our flagship program. This comprehensive, university-based forestry class will help you get the most out of the land you love. Whether you have just a few acres of woods or a large forest tract, if you have trees on your property, this class is for you.

Topics covered include:

- How do you know if your trees are healthy? What should you do if they aren't?
- Are characteristics of your property attracting or repelling the wildlife you enjoy? What can you do if wildlife cause damage?
- Are there certain trees you should always keep or remove? How do you remove trees without damaging your land?
- When selling logs, are you getting a fair deal or getting ripped off?
- How do you find or grow edible berries or mushrooms? How do you cut holiday greens without hurting the tree?
- Are invasive and noxious weeds taking over your underbrush? What are the risks and what can you do about it?
- What kind of soil do you have and how does that affect what grows?

Save money, too!

As part of this class we will "coach" you in the writing of your own simple forestry plan that may qualify you for property tax reductions or conservation cost-share grants.

What's included:

- Eight classroom sessions taught by forestry experts
- A Saturday field trip
- A large notebook full of reference materials and how-to guides
- A one-on-one consultation at your property with a professional forester.

We have three classes lined up for 2014:

1. For the first time in a number of years we will have a class up in **Whatcom County**. This will be on Thursday nights starting March 13th (if you register before February 20th you will receive a discount). <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/CPWhatcom.htm>
2. There will be an **online class** on Wednesday nights starting April 23rd (if you register before April 1st you will receive a discount). The online class includes everything that the in-person class does. The only difference is that the classroom sessions are delivered as live, interactive webinars that you tune into via your computer rather than driving to a classroom. <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/CPOnline.htm>
3. We will have our usual class this fall in **Preston** (King County). That class will be on Tuesday nights starting September 16th. <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/CPPreston.htm>

Participants frequently tell me that this is one of the best classes they have ever taken. Not convinced? I'll make you this deal: if you register for and attend this class and by the third week you decide that it isn't for you, you can turn your materials in and drop out of the class for a full refund, no questions asked. **How often does a state agency give you a satisfaction guarantee?**

Here is a nice article about the program from a participant's perspective:

<http://sflonews.wordpress.com/2013/07/30/tune-up-your-forest-management-skills-2/>

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Upcoming Workshops

Shiitake Mushroom Cultivation

In this hands-on workshop, you will not only learn how to cultivate edible mushrooms, but you'll actually do it! Each participant will receive a small alder log to work with and we'll go through the whole process of drilling, plugging, and waxing. You will have enough plugs to do your in-class log, along with extra plugs, wax, and a silicone brush to take home with you to use with your own logs. We'll use shiitake plugs in this workshop, as shiitakes are particularly easy to grow.

When: 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. OR 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday April 12, 2014

Where: The barn at Greenbank Farm, 765 Wonn Road, Greenbank, WA 98253

Cost: \$35.00 per person before 3/15; \$45 thereafter. Cost includes all materials.

Space is limited and we are already more than half full. For details and registration info, call 425-357-6023 or visit <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/mushroom.htm>.

Ties to the Land Succession Planning

Your land will outlive you. Who will care for it when you're gone? Will it be a family legacy or a family squabble? Will it be kept intact and protected, or will it be divided up and sold off in pieces? Will it become a source of conflict between surviving family members? What is the long-term future that you want for your property? This two-part succession planning workshop explores these questions and others using the award-winning Ties to the Land curriculum. Succession planning has been called the "human side of estate planning," and it could also be considered as a precursor to more traditional estate planning. The focus is on communication and big-picture planning that families should address before meeting with

an estate planning professional to draw up legal arrangements. The workshop will conclude with a panel discussion with estate planning professionals.

When: 5:00 – 9:00 p.m. March 6th (part 1) and March 13th (part 2)

Where: WSU Snohomish County Extension Auditorium, 600 128th St SE Everett WA 98208

Cost: \$50 per family/landowners and includes a workbook and two dinners each evening. Additional workbooks (\$25) and meals (\$10) are available.

Space is limited. For details and registration info, call Holly Thompson at 425-357-6022 or visit <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/ttl.htm>.

Current Use Taxation Seminar

This seminar will discuss the current use taxation programs that are available to landowners with wooded property. There are multiple programs to choose from that will likely meet your property objectives. Statewide programs including designated forestland and open space timber. Some counties also offer a Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs) program. All of these programs can provide qualified woodland owners with significant tax savings. The seminar will cover detailed descriptions, qualifications, limitations, and the application process for these programs. This seminar will be instructed by Kristi McClelland, Forester, and Megan O’Brian, Timber Land Program Specialist, from King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks. Kristi and Megan have years of experience helping landowners qualify and apply for these programs.

When: 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Tuesday April 8, 2014

Where: Fall City Meeting Room Fall City Library, 33415 SE 42nd Pl, Fall City, WA 98024

Cost: There is no charge for this seminar, but **pre-registration is required**. Space is strictly limited and is first come, first served. To register, contact Lauren Grand at 425-357-6023 or lauren.grand@wsu.edu.

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Plant Sales

The 2014 Conservation District Plant Sales are rapidly approaching. This is the best source for native trees and plants.

- King: March 1st at the KCD office in Renton. Pre-order deadline February 17th. 425-282-1912 or http://www.kingcd.org/pro_native.htm.

- Skagit: April 4th (pre-order pick-up and open sale) and 5th (open sale only) at the WACD Lynn Brown Plant Materials Center in Bow. Pre-order deadline March 21st. 360-428-4313 or http://www.skagitcd.org/native_plant_sales.
- Snohomish/Camano: March 1st at the Evergreen State Fairgrounds in Monroe. Pre-order deadline has passed. 425-335-5634 ext. 116 or <http://snohomishcd.org/plant-sale>.
- Whatcom: March 28th (pre-order pick-up) and 29th (open sale) at Whatcom Community College in Bellingham. Pre-order deadline March 17th. 360-354-2035 ext. 3, or <http://www.whatcomcd.org/plant-sale>.
- Whidbey Island: February 28th (WICD office in Coupeville) and March 1st (Island County Fairgrounds in Langley). Pre-orders only. Supplies are limited at this point, but there are still plants available and pre-orders will be accepted until about February 23rd. 360-678-4708 or <http://www.whidbeycd.org/plant-sale-order-page.html>.
- The Whatcom Farm Forestry Association will also be hosting their annual tree sale on March 22nd in Lynden.

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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.

(http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Topics/TimberSaleAuction/Pages/psl_ts_query.aspx)

Log prices dipped slightly during the fall, but have come back up to roughly where they were last summer. Douglas-fir is particularly strong right now, with #2 and #3 sawlogs both averaging around \$675/Mbf. Cedar is also very strong right now, with camp run averaging over \$1,300/Mbf. Overall there hasn't been much net change in log prices over the past year.

For an updated price graph, please visit

<http://snohomish.wsu.edu/forestry/documents/LogPrices.pdf>

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Research Update

Quantifying the spread of invasive holly – A recent Western Washington study looked at how invasive English holly spreads and how it impacts our forests. English holly is one of few species that can invade closed-canopy forests, forming a thicket-like evergreen understory layer unlike any structural element that occurs naturally. The holly significantly diminishes native plant cover and biodiversity. Invasions establish when birds (or other animals) eat the red berries and disperse the seeds. Once a new plant is established, it then spreads outward through underground runners to form dense thickets. The study found a 14-year lag after initial invasion, followed by exponential expansion (e.g. from 13 trees to 154 in one of the study plots). The study suggests that delaying action for a few years can result in a significant number of new holly trees. Large, berry-producing females are particularly important to remove.

Kevin's note: This is why I make such a big deal out of removing those holly trees in your woods—especially the pretty ones with all the berries!

Reference: Stokes, D.L., E.D. Church, D.M. Cronkright, and S. Lopez. In Press. Pictures of an Invasion: English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) in a Semi-natural Pacific Northwest Forest. Northwest Science.

The best time to prune red alder saplings – This study is from several years ago (2006) and it dovetails nicely with the “Focus on: Pruning” article below. The study looked at pruning in 3- and 6-year-old alder plantations. Vigorous alder saplings quickly heal over pruning scars and produce clear wood. The best time to prune for the most rapid healing is early-mid growing season (May 1 – June 15). Differences in timing are relatively minor, though, such that whether or not to prune at all is more important than when to prune (in other words, don't wait another year just to time it right). This study also suggests that it is OK to cut the branch collar on dead branches, and this will actually heal over quicker. Pruning should not remove more than 30% of the live crown at a time or go below 50% total live crown.

Kevin's note: Thinning in the early-mid growing season and cutting the branch collar on dead branches are practices that contradict typical recommendations (see pruning article below). Note that this study applies only to very young red alders.

Reference: DeBell, D.S., C.A. Harrington, B.L. Gartner, and R. Singleton. 2006. Time and distance to clear wood in pruned red alder saplings. Pages 103-113 in *Red alder—a state of knowledge*, eds. R.L. Deal and C.A. Harrington. General Technical Report PNW-GTR-669. Portland, OR: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station.

Seedling genetics vs. mycorrhizal activity – this study was done on interior Douglas-fir in British Columbia. The study looked at seedling growth and survival relative to two variables: seed source and connection to mycorrhizal networks in the soil. The study found that, under

drought conditions, seedling provenance (genetics and life history) is much more important to survival and growth than mycorrhizal networks. The study suggests that nursery grown stock from local seed sources is best.

Kevin's note: As you gear up for spring planting, make sure your seedlings are from the right seed zone for your property—this will ensure that your seedlings are adapted to the elevation, latitude, etc. for your area. “Off-site planting” (using seedlings from the wrong seed zone) causes many problems down the road, including greater susceptibility to drought and disease. I recently looked at a plantation that was suffering from several foliar diseases, possibly as a result of off-site planting.

Reference: Bingham, M.A. and S.W. Simard. 2013. Seedling genetics and life history outweigh mycorrhizal network potential to improve conifer regeneration under drought. *Forest Ecology and Management* 287:132-139.

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Forestry in the News

The Seattle Times reports on a legal battle over the proposed development of a forest and bog in south Snohomish County:

http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2022880395_mossbogbearcreekxml.html

The Spokesman-Review (Spokane) reports on expectations that laminated root rot in Douglas-fir will be exacerbated by climate change:

<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2014/jan/28/root-rot-to-become-bigger-problem-for-douglas/>

The *Portland Tribune* reports on the impact of Chinese wood demand on northwest log markets: <http://portlandtribune.com/sl/201307-chinese-thirst-for-wood-driving-demand-for-northwest-logs>

The Seattle Times reports on the sale of 96,000 acres of Hancock timberland to the Muckleshoot Tribe:

http://seattletimes.com/html/business/technology/2022202267_muckleshoottribepurchasexml.html

The Seattle Times makes a fascinating report on a true man of the woods, Mick Dodge:

http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2022614214_forestdwellerxml.html

The Daily Herald in Everett reports on a 13-year-old Mukilteo boy who has planted hundreds of trees: <http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20130706/NEWS01/707069950/>

The *Skagit Valley Herald* reports on Pacific Rim Tonewoods, a Skagit County mill that buys specialty logs to create musical instruments (one of their log buyers spoke at our recent specialty wood markets workshop): http://www.goskagit.com/news/news_showcase/from-the-earth-comes-music/article_618ff4aa-0f35-54eb-abb0-ea213676cfc7.html

The *Skagit Valley Herald* reports on a possible new transfer of development rights program in Skagit County: http://www.goskagit.com/all_access/county-plans-new-transfer-of-development-rights-program/article_4dc56e73-239e-56ab-84f7-d654616daba9.html

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Focus On: Pruning

This month's Focus On article is all about pruning—why, how, and when. Fall and winter are the best times of year to do pruning in your woods. By pruning I mean removing the lower branches. Douglas-fir is probably the forest tree that is most commonly pruned by small woodland owners in Western Washington, but western hemlock, western redcedar, western white pine, red alder, and others can also be pruned using the same techniques.

There are several reasons why a landowner might want to do some pruning in her or his woods:

1. Wood quality. Branches cause knots in wood, reducing the quality of the lumber. Live branches cause tight knots, while dead branches cause loose knots (the kind you can pop out of the board with your finger). If the lower branches are removed, as the tree grows in diameter it will grow over the branch scars and everything from that point outward will be clear, high-quality wood that is free of knots.
2. Wildlife. Removing the lower tree branches opens up more space and light in the forest understory, which allows for better growth of shrubs and other understory plants that are good for wildlife. Some trees should be left unpruned, though, as having a few trees with branches down to the ground will provides some habitat diversity and good hiding cover for birds.
3. Fire risk reduction. In the event of a wildfire, the lower branches of trees act as “ladder fuels” – conduits for fire to spread upward from the ground into the tree crowns. Removing the lower branches provides a vertical fire break.
4. Forest health. In the case of forest health, I am specifically referring to western white pine. Local populations of western white pine have been decimated over the past hundred years due to the accidental introduction of an exotic fungal disease called white pine blister rust. It would be wonderful if these trees could make a comeback, so I encourage people to plant them on their property. Two things that can best help white pine trees be successful is to plant seedlings that have been bred for resistance

against the blister rust and to prune. The reason pruning is important is that it allows air circulation around the base of the tree. As a fungus, blister rust prefers moist, stagnant conditions, so getting better air circulation discourages infection.

5. Aesthetics. This is perhaps the most important reason for a small woodland owner. A pruned stand of trees is very attractive. It opens up view corridors into the woods, gives the trees a “clean” look, and allows passage through the woods without getting hit in the face with tree branches. I think personal satisfaction goes along with this. So much of growing trees is simply waiting. Pruning allows you to actively do something in your woods that provides instant results (and gratification).

One of the things I like about pruning is that almost anyone can do it. It does not require special skills or the hiring a contractor. It also does not have to be done all at once—a few trees every few days can add up over the course of the year. Pruning a few trees in your woods is a great way to burn off some stress after work!

Pruning does not require expensive tools, but it does require the right tools. A high-quality saw that is designed for forest pruning is the best tool. You can get cheap saws at the local big-box store, but these generally do not last very long. A forest pruning saw can be obtained through a forestry supply company (e.g. Ben Meadows, Baileys, Pac-Forest Supply, Forestry Suppliers Inc.). A pair of bypass loppers may also be useful for smaller branches (not anvil-style cutters that can crush the stem). A telescoping pole saw is necessary for higher branches, especially if you have an aversion to ladders.

There are several tools that should not be used. One is a chainsaw, which is not a good tool for getting a precision cut without damaging the bark. It is also difficult and dangerous to be operating a chainsaw over your head for higher branches, and the chainsaws on poles are particularly unwieldy and dangerous. If a branch is large enough to warrant a chainsaw, it is probably too big to be pruned anyway. Also, as tempting as it is with those dead lower branches, things like baseball bats, golf clubs, axes, machetes, etc. should not be used to whack things off. Not only does this leave a jagged, ugly stub, but it also can also shatter the wood inside the tree.

Pruning should be done when the tree is young. This keeps the knotty portion of the tree bole to a minimum, allows ample time during fast growth years for the tree to grow out over the pruning scars, and ensures that the branches removed are small (cutting branches larger than an inch in diameter leaves large wounds). Pruning can begin when the tree is four inches in diameter at breast height, which is about the size of a tuna can.

You can prune as many dead branches from a tree as you want. With live branches, though, care must be taken to avoid reducing the tree’s resources too much, as the live branches are what produce energy for the tree. As a general rule, you should always keep live branches for at least the top 50% of the tree. A good pruning height for wood quality is 18 – 20 feet, which provides clear wood for that first log. To achieve this pruning height on a young tree while also leaving enough live branches requires pruning in stages, which are called lifts. For instance, if you begin pruning when the tree is 20 feet tall, you can go up as high as 10 feet

(the first lift). Once the tree reaches 30 feet a few years later, you can go up to 15 feet (the second lift). When the tree reaches 40 feet, a third and final lift to 20 feet can be done.

Timing is important for pruning. It should be coordinated with any thinning (pre-commercial or commercial) that is to be done. You do not want to expend effort pruning trees that will end up being thinned out. This may require planning ahead and selecting the best-formed trees that you are most likely to keep during future thinnings as your final “crop” trees. It is also good to coincide pruning with something like a pre-commercial thinning if possible, as the growth boost post-thinning will help to quickly heal over the pruning scars and start producing clear wood. For trees that are not managed for future harvest, though, this is not critical. As far as time of year goes, late summer, fall, and winter are the best times. It is best to avoid pruning in the spring and early summer when the sap is flowing, as the bark is more easily damaged and the wounds will tend to weep, which can attract and cause infection by pitch moths.

When making the actual cut, you should cut flush with the branch collar, which is an area of swollen tissue at the base of the branch. Cutting into the branch collar creates an unnecessarily large wound, and cutting beyond the branch collar leaves an unnecessary stub. You should cut a shallow notch at the bottom of the branch first to prevent the bark from tearing as the branch falls away. Then cut from the top down to your notch. Note that pruning saws are typically designed to cut on the pull stroke rather than a back and forth motion. No type of wound dressing or sealant should be applied to the wound. Pathogens will be in contact with the wound as soon as it is exposed to the air. Thus sealants end up sealing the pathogens in (and in a moist, protected environment where they can thrive) rather than keeping them out. Let the tree heal itself naturally.

Finally, remember to use appropriate safety gear when pruning. Goggles should be used, especially when cutting above your head, to keep sawdust out of your eyes. A hard hat should also be used when cutting overhead.

Additional resources:

- Conifer Pruning Basics (WSU Extension Bulletin EB1984) - <https://pubs.wsu.edu/ItemDetail.aspx?ProductID=13944>
- How to Prune Trees (US Forest Service Publication NA-FR-01-95) - http://na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/htprune-rev-2012-screen.pdf

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Tidbits:

- We have a brand new online class available: Animal Damage Control. Taught by now-retired DNR Stewardship Biologist Jim Bottorff and available on demand at <http://extension.wsu.edu/forestry/FSU/Pages/om29.aspx>.
- Did you know that you can make maple syrup from bigleaf maple here in the Northwest? It's not done commercially like it is with sugar maple in the Northeast, as bigleaf maple has a lower sugar content (i.e. takes more sap to make syrup), production is not as consistent, and we don't manage our forests for maple. It can be (and is) done, though. [Kevin's note: I think it is even better than the stuff from the northeast--it is sweeter and has a hint of vanilla to it.] Check out the YouTube video we made in December of a syrup operation in Skagit County: <http://youtu.be/ts0G77Uh3rM>.
- The latest edition of Northwest Woodlands is all about invasives (diseases, insects, and weeds). I exhort you to read this, particularly the articles starting on page 8 and page 16 (the latter was penned by Sasha Shaw, one of our Coached Planning instructors). <http://www.oswa.org/images/docs/nwwoodlands/2014-nw-mag-winter.pdf>. When you're done reading and rightfully concerned about some of the weed bogies out in the woods, click on over to our online class on how to control these on your property: <http://extension.wsu.edu/forestry/FSU/Pages/oc8.aspx>
- For those of you in the South Puget Sound and Southwest Washington areas (south of I-90 in King County and south of SR 104 in Jefferson County and all of the southwest Washington counties), DNR is pleased to announce a new stewardship forester to take over from Mike Nystrom, who retired at the end of August. Julie Sackett took over this position on November 1st. Just like Mike, Julie brings decades of knowledge and experience. [Kevin's note: I give Julie a hearty endorsement—you will love her!] You can reach Julie at 360-902-2903 or by email at julie.sackett@dnr.wa.gov.
- The Tax Tips for Forest Landowners for the 2013 Tax Year is now available at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/tax.shtml>.
- A new Woodland Fish and Wildlife publication available: Techniques and Tools for Monitoring Wildlife on Small Woodlands. It looks pretty interesting and has both Oregon and Washington information in it: <http://woodlandfishandwildlife.com/pubs/Monitoring-v7.pdf>

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