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Forester's notes

Rome wasn't built in a day

I was looking over my yard the other day. Just two short years ago our house had just been built and the yard was nothing but dust, mud, weeds, rocks, and construction debris. Now there are trees that are already more than ten feet tall, a variety of native shrubs and groundcovers, hundreds of flower bulbs that bloom throughout the year, a water feature, lights, walking paths, and a patio. Given how busy the past two years have been, I wondered

how I could possibly have done it all. The answer is that I did it incrementally – a little bit at a time. Small steps add up to big results. Rome, as they say, wasn't built in a day.

Trees, of course, are the same way. They don't become huge overnight (although the now 15-foot Douglas maple I planted seems to have); they grow in small increments each year. The massive giants we find in old growth forests represent the sum of many small increments.

Incremental growth is an important concept in forestry, and there are several forestry terms associated with it. For instance, we use an increment borer to extract increment cores so that we can count the growth rings (increments) to determine the age of trees. Current annual increment refers to the volume growth of a tree or stand over the past year. Periodic annual increment is the volume growth over a specified period of time. Mean annual increment is the average annual volume growth over the total life of the tree. Culmination of mean annual increment, the point in the life of a stand in which the average growth per year is highest, is considered by some to represent the optimal time to harvest (though a forest economist will tell you this is only true at a zero interest rate!).

The anti-disturbance

We talk about disturbance a lot in forestry and ecology. We tend to have a negative association with disturbances, as things like wildfires, major windstorms, and volcanic eruptions are destructive by nature. That destruction is often not limited to natural areas, and homes and lives are destroyed by major disturbances as well. From a purely natural perspective, though, disturbance is not inherently negative or positive. It is a natural part of forest ecosystems, and there are plant and animal species that are specifically adapted to post-disturbance conditions or edges between disturbed and undisturbed areas. Without disturbance we would lose entire suites of plant and animal species. Disturbance is both an end and a beginning. It is death and new life. In natural systems, disturbance simply is. Or, as I like to say, “disturbance happens.”

Incremental growth or change is sort of the opposite of disturbance. A disturbance is a single large event that results in a sudden new reality. Incremental change, on the other hand, happens slowly as a series of small events that are often imperceptible individually but in aggregate can produce something just as dramatic if not more. I encourage people to establish photo points in their woods and take photos from those points at least twice a year

(winter and summer). The result is a time lapse that can reveal the incremental changes that are happening.

The power of the increment

Disturbance commands a lot of attention, not just in nature but in life and in our world. Natural disasters, global pandemics, and terrorist attacks can completely upend society, continually dominate the news cycle, and make lasting changes to how we live. Most people who are old enough to remember 9/11 will remember exactly where they were when the towers fell, and the impacts of that day still permeate our society decades later. Events like these leave a mark on entire generations. At a more personal level, events like the death of a loved one, an accident, a cancer diagnosis, or a stroke can completely change someone's life in an instant.

We don't know exactly when or where a disturbance is going to hit. As such, they catch us by surprise. At the same time, we tend to be acutely aware of the potential for them. When it comes to earthquakes, we know "the big one" will happen at some point and could happen at any time. We know that a major wildfire event could happen in any given summer, even in western Washington. Disaster preparedness, building codes, vehicle safety features, and the safety spiel you get every time you board an airplane are testaments to our understanding that...disturbance happens. The entire insurance industry is built on our respect for the power of disturbance.

While disturbance gets a lot of attention, we should not ignore the power of incremental change. Whether it's landscaping a yard, growing a forest, getting rid of pesky blackberries and Scotch broom, writing a novel, breaking a bad habit, getting in shape, or recovering from a major illness or injury, there's enormous power in step-by-step, day-by-day, word-by-word. As the Chinese proverb goes, the longest journey begins with a single step.

Incremental change is not always for the better, though, and in this we should also respect its power. Societies don't become polarized overnight – it's an incremental divergence. Relationships fall apart incrementally. Things decay incrementally. I recently watched the movie *Cabaret*, which was a stark reminder that the Nazis did not come to power in Germany overnight – it happened slowly and incrementally when many were not paying attention.

The next time you're faced with a monumental task, remember that there's power in the increment. Similarly, the next time your inclination is to ignore something troubling because it has a small impact in and of itself, also remember that there is power in the increment. The power of the increment should both inspire us and serve as a cautionary tale. As another proverb goes, from little acorns grow mighty oaks.

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

Upcoming webinars

Take an hour to learn something new at one of our upcoming webinars. The webinars are free, but pre-registration is required. Can't make it at that time? Register anyway, as registrants will receive a link to the recording afterward.

Introduction to Bigleaf Maple Sugaring – July 27th

Did you know you can make maple syrup from our native bigleaf maple? Bigleaf maple syrup is delicious with a unique flavor that is arguably better than the syrup produced from sugar maples in the northeast. In this introductory webinar for beginners, we will explain the basics of bigleaf maple syrup production at the hobbyist scale, including equipment needed, weather and site conditions, tapping and sap collection, and boiling off the water and finishing the syrup. This webinar will be on Wednesday, July 27, 2022 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and again from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.

[Bigleaf maple sugaring webinar details and registration](#)

Current Use Property Tax Options for King County Forest Owners – August 16th

Current use taxation allows land to be taxed based on its current use for growing trees instead of its full market value, which may be based on using the property for development. At this webinar you'll learn about Designated Forest Land (DFL) and the Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs), which are the two options available to people with forested property in King County. Topics covered include program requirements, tax benefits, application procedures, and more. This webinar will be on Tuesday, August 16, 2022, from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.

[King County current use webinar details and registration](#)

Upcoming Forest Owner Field Days

This year we're offering both in-person and virtual field days!

Vashon Forest Owners Field Day – August 27th

An out-in-the-woods education event

Forests in the Puget Sound area are facing unprecedented challenges and increasing tree mortality. Join us for the 2022 Vashon Forest Owners' Field Day to help you meet those challenges, restore healthy forest conditions, and achieve your goals for your property. The Field Day will feature different outdoor workshops specifically for people with forested property on Vashon. Learn about current forest health issues, drought and climate impacts, fire risk reduction, wildlife, and much more in an out-in-the-woods setting with local experts. The Field Day will be followed by a bring-your-own picnic dinner, and then a Twilight Forest Tour hosted by King County Conservation District.

When and where

The Vashon Field Day will be held 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Saturday, August 27, 2022, at Island Center Forest at the 188th Street Trailhead.

Cost

Save \$10 by pre-registering! Pre-registration for the Field Day is \$20 per individual or \$30 per couple (same household or ownership). Pre-registration must be received by 5:00 p.m. on August 24th. Youth under 18 may attend free. Student and Master Gardener discounts are available – call 425-738-0109 for details.

Field Day tickets at the gate will be \$30 per individual or \$40 per couple (same household or ownership). If paying at the gate, **a check or exact change is required** (we cannot give change).

The Twilight Tour after the field day is free!

Details and registration

For complete details, a list of workshops offered, and discounted pre-registration, visit the [Vashon Forest Owners' Field Day website](#). You can register for the Field Day, the Twilight Tour, or both.

The Field Day and Twilight Tour are made possible in part by funding from King Conservation District.

Southwest WA Family Forest Field Day – August 13th

This event features a rotation of forestry classes taught by experts from around the Pacific Northwest, including forest health, thinning, non-timber forest products, wildlife

habitat, and more. It's also a great opportunity to network with other landowners and connect with foresters and other professionals that can assist you on your property.

Where and when

This event will be held at L & H Tree Farm in Winlock, WA on Saturday, August 13, 2022. Sessions will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with a break for lunch. Pre-registration is required.

Cost

Cost is \$30 for an individual or \$40 for a family of two or more. Register before August 5th and save \$10!

Details and registration

For complete details, a list of workshops offered, and pre-registration, visit the [Southwest WA Family Forest Field Day website](#).

Washington Forest Owners' Online Field Day

Save the date! For those of you who can't join us in the woods this summer, we are reprising our popular online "field day" on Saturday, October 22, 2022. More information will be available soon.

Fall Forest Stewardship Coached Planning Courses

A forestry course for property owners

Our flagship course will teach you how to assess your trees, avoid insect and disease problems, attract wildlife, and take practical steps to keep your forest on track to provide enjoyment and even income for years to come. In this course you will develop your own Forest Stewardship Plan, which brings state recognition as a Stewardship Forest and eligibility for cost-share assistance, and may also qualify you for significant property tax reductions.

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 cut trees without damaging your land?
- What types of trees do you have? Does your forest look like a “mess”?
- How do you know if your trees need to be thinned, and how do you go about it?
- How do you identify and mitigate fire risks?
- 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?
- What is the risk of wildfire on your property?

When and where

In person learning is back! We are offering two in-person courses this fall:

1. Preston (King County) – Tuesday evenings starting September 6th
2. Conway (Skagit County) – Thursday evenings starting September 8th

Cost and registration

Cost

The registration fee is \$160 and covers up to two adults from the same household/ownership. Youth under 18 are welcome and may attend at no additional cost. Space is limited and is first-come, first-served. This course almost always sells out.

Your registration includes:

- Nine evening class sessions taught by state and local experts
- A Saturday field trip
- A digital library of reference materials and how-to guides
- A copy of the book Native Trees of Western Washington
- A consultation site visit to your property from a state or county service forester
- A tree measuring tool

Registration is now open

[Details and registration for the Preston course](#)

[Details and registration for the Conway Course](#)

Summer Twilight Tours

Get connected with other forest owners

Twilight tours are informal evening gatherings to meet fellow forest owners and see what other forest owners are doing on their property.

Whidbey Island Twilight Tour – August 23rd

Join WSU Extension Forestry on August 23, 2022 from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. for a twilight tour through the forests and restored prairies of the Pacific Rim Institute in Coupeville. Hear from PRI land managers about the work they're doing as well as future plans for the forest. This is an opportunity to ask questions, see another landscape that may be similar to your own, and meet fellow forest owners in a relaxed and casual manner.

We'll walk along a primitive road through the prairie, stop for a peek into the native plant greenhouse, travel an established path through the forest, and stop to observe the Garry oak restoration area before returning to the parking lot.

This event is free, but **space is limited**, and pre-registration is required. [Whidbey Island Twilight Tour details and registration](#).

Maple Valley Twilight Tour – August 20th

Join King Conservation District for a twilight tour of Wild Rose Farm in Maple Valley. Learn how to create forest trails that improve your enjoyment of your forest. Learn how you can improve the health of your forest and how to get free help. See examples of non-timber forest products small forests can produce. Get answers to your questions about using and managing small forests from a King County landowner and King Conservation District Forester. [Maple Valley Twilight Tour details and RSVP](#).

Vashon Twilight Tour – August 27th

Join King Conservation District for a twilight tour of a Vashon resident's forested property. This will consist of a walking tour of the forest, with discussion of past treatments, forest health considerations, and other management tools and considerations. This tour will take place following the Vashon Forest Owners' Field Day on August 27, 2022. Pre-registration is required. Register for this twilight tour through the [Vashon Forest Owners' Field Day website](#).

Forest health updates

Bigleaf maple powdery mildew

You may have noticed that many of the bigleaf maples in the area are almost completely white with powdery mildew. This is the result of our extremely wet spring. This is a cosmetic issue that is not expected to cause any long-term issues. It will resolve with new leaves next spring.



Emerald ash borer

Our fear that the emerald ash borer would spread to the Pacific Northwest has come to pass. On June 30th, the emerald ash borer was found in dying ash trees in Forest Grove, Oregon, which is just 30 miles from Washington. Infestations aren't visible for the first two to four years, so unknown to us, the emerald ash borer has actually been here getting a foothold for several years now. Unlike the powdery mildew above, the emerald ash borer is anything but harmless. This invasive insect has the potential to wipe out our native Oregon ash trees as well as the various ash species commonly used as street trees in our cities. The eastern U.S. has seen nearly 100% mortality of their ash trees, and Oregon ash is highly susceptible. More information about the emerald ash borer and what to do will be coming soon from WSU Extension.

Forest Health Watch

From Joey Hulbert, WSU Puyallup

Tracking tree health issues with iNaturalist

We hear many reports of tree health issues in the Pacific Northwest every year, but we haven't had the capacity to track them across the region. However, recently with the launch of the Forest Health Watch program and the development of community science tools like iNaturalist, we can now work together to track tree health issues like redcedar dieback.

The [Forest Health Watch](#) is a program led by WSU that invites anyone to learn and contribute to research as community scientists. Collectively, community scientists are accelerating research about the dieback of species like western redcedar. While redcedar has been the primary focus so far, the program recently created more projects to track the dieback of species like Douglas-fir, grand fir, red alder, bigleaf maple, and western hemlock.

Anyone can get involved by sharing observations of trees on iNaturalist.org. The online platform also has a mobile application. [There is a list of the iNaturalist projects that you can join](#). Together we can create a shared understanding about factors driving the dieback of redcedar or other forest health issues.

Steps for contributing to Forest Health Watch projects

1. Create a user account on [iNaturalist.org](#)
2. Join the project you're interested in contributing to (e.g., Western Redcedar Dieback Map or Bigleaf Maple Health Watch)
3. Add an observation through your browser or the mobile application
4. Tag the project
5. Answer the project questions
6. Share the observation!

The dieback of western redcedar was selected as the focus of the pilot project of the Forest Health Watch program because it was identified as a primary concern by many partners and stakeholders. Then, the [Western Redcedar Dieback Map project](#) on iNaturalist was co-designed with partners from the USFS Forest Health and Protection, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Oregon Department of Forestry, and WSU Extension foresters. It was designed to collect similar information to the ODF Survey123 project so that the information will be useful and valuable to these partners as well. Therefore, adding observations to iNaturalist will also inform the program partners in other agencies.

Join the movement to accelerate research with many other community scientists. To date, observations of more than 600 healthy and unhealthy redcedar trees have been shared by more than 100 individuals. These contributions are revealing important information about the extent of the dieback. For example, observations of trees with top dieback have been shared from Vancouver Island in British Columbia to central Oregon and east into northern Idaho. The goal is to collect 2021 observations this year. Collectively, these observations are helpful for identifying patterns in site and soil conditions where trees are vulnerable and identifying the environmental parameters (temperature, precipitation, etc.) that best explain the dieback events.

Want to find out more or learn about the latest patterns and findings from the iNaturalist observations? The Forest Health Watch hosts monthly Community Office Hours to answer questions about the program and help users learn to use iNaturalist. The program also hosts monthly Research Updates to share updates and host discussions about the observations that are shared on iNaturalist. Learn more about the events and other opportunities to get involved at <https://foresthealth.org/>.

Subscription and contact info

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Contact info

Kevin W. Zobrist
Professor, Extension Forestry
Washington State University
kevin.zobrist@wsu.edu
[Puget Sound Extension Forestry Website](#)
[Puget Sound Extension Forestry Facebook Page](#)

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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. Reasonable accommodations for the WSU Extension events described above will be made for persons with disabilities and special needs who contact us at least two weeks prior to the event.