Washington State University Puget Sound Extension Forestry E-Newsletter

Fall 2026

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Forester's notes

Times are tough

The excellent adventure of the Extension Forestry Program has become a bit of a bogus journey of late. We have been hit with significant budget cuts. A few months ago, we lost 40% of our state funding. On the county side of things, San Juan County has now joined Skagit County in withdrawing all support for Extension Forestry education programs, so education resources are dwindling in the North Sound area. These are tough losses, as we have had a consistent presence in these counties for many years. All the funding cuts have meant the loss of a staff position and elimination of numerous programs that would otherwise be offered.

Budgets are tough everywhere, and cuts have to be made. I do not know why the forestry program was targeted as one of the first programs to eliminate. There continues to be high demand for this program in these areas, and our events regularly sell out. We also consistently document a particularly high return on public investment. The objective, practical, research-based information and resources we provide equip and empower landowners to meet their own needs, be self-sufficient, and prevail against the many challenges of forest stewardship. In any case, it is disappointing.

Dealing with disappointment

Disappointment goes far beyond the budget woes of agencies and programs. As individuals we face sticker shock daily at the gas station, grocery store, fast food drive-through, and more. It's tough out there, and not just financially. Wars, social unrest, fire and flood disasters, and ever-deepening strife at all levels are not abstractions – they impact us in everyday life. People represent a wide variety of beliefs, values, and ways in which life is experienced, but disappointment in the state of the world seems to be a broadly shared element of the human condition.

As we try to navigate these unsettling times characterized by loss, upheaval, anxiety, and disappointment, it is unlikely that we have yet reached the nadir of this bogus journey. We do not know what, where, or when that point will be. What we do know, though, is that it will not be the end of our story. We have a remarkable capacity to adapt, grow, persevere, and prosper. We often teach about resilience in the context of natural systems. Let us also be characterized by resilience.

I am acutely aware of the disparity between the ease of writing these words and the reality of living them out, especially when there is so much that we cannot control. A trite vision of a fairytale ending will seem pretty tone-deaf depending on what you're facing right now. My expression of confidence in our resilience and our future is not to minimize our individual or shared challenges. Nor is it to deny the need to grieve loss. Rather, it is an exhortation to not lose hope in the process. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." In these deeply disappointing times, hope is what pushes us forward and inspires us to be our best despite the circumstances. It is an acknowledgement that the adage of long-ago poets still applies: "This too shall pass."

Hope in action

This does not mean that we should be passive, though. "This too shall pass" should not be confused with "c'est la vie." To do so would conflate hope with apathy. Hope is active. We may need to be patient in our hope, but we should not be passive. There is much that we cannot control, but that does not relieve us of a duty to leverage that which we can control.

Desmond Tutu said, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” We do not have to look far to see a lot of darkness. We also do not have to look far to see light. There is still good news out there. We will still have a great lineup of education programs for you. Even though we have lost significant funding in some areas, it remains strong in others. County leaders in King, Snohomish, Island, and Pierce counties continue to prioritize the forests and forest owners in their counties, and they provide tremendous support for the Extension Forestry Program because they see the value and return on investment. This allows us to continue to have a heavy presence there.

This presence is important, because forest landowners face manifold challenges including fire danger, forest health issues (including the extremely destructive emerald ash borer, whose presence in Washington was just confirmed a couple weeks ago), overstocked stands, invasive weeds, market and regulatory complexities, and ongoing tree mortality from drought, among others. On-the-ground stewardship that landowners engage in as a response to education provides both private and public benefits. Everyone benefits from good forest stewardship, which brings us to the bodacious heroes of the story: all of you. You are the ones who do the real work when you take the things you learn and apply them on the ground.

Whenever you plant a tree, create habitat, remove invasives, thin to improve health and resilience, or do any of the other activities you do to care for your forest, you bring a little light and make the world a little better for everyone. What you do matters, and it is the embodiment of active hope as forest stewardship is by nature a hope-based endeavor. We plant a tree in the hope that it will grow. We cut a blackberry in the hope that it *won’t* grow. Nothing is done out of cynicism. It is not always about doing, either. Even just quietly listening to the rhythms of the woods and reexperiencing that sense of wonder plays a role in reigniting passion and keeping that light burning.

Resilience in community

Keep doing what you’re doing, and don’t forget to support one another. Resilience does not happen by accident, and we do not thrive on our own. We just observed the 25th anniversary of 9/11. Last year I visited New York City for the first time, and while I was there, I visited the 9/11 Memorial. I remember vividly the day the towers fell, and gazing into the reflecting pools was a deeply moving experience. What struck me the most, though, was the Survivor Tree. This broken and burned Callery pear tree was found in the rubble. It was restored to health by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation at their local nursery. In 2010, it had recovered enough to be returned to the World Trade Center site and planted at the memorial. When I saw the tree, it was the only one in bloom, standing out from all the others with its showy white blossoms. It was an icon of resilience made possible by years of care and nurturing. Build resilience in your community by connecting with, supporting, and encouraging others during these tough times. In other words, be excellent to each other (and party on…).

Kevin W. Zobrist
Professor, Extension Forestry
Washington State University

WA DNR Wildlife Biologist Ken Bevis is retiring!

Ken Bevis, longtime Stewardship Biologist with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, is retiring on October 1st after many years of helping forest landowners meet their wildlife objectives. He has also entertained us with his wildlife stories and songs along the way. Many of you have attended Ken's wildlife sessions in our Coached Planning courses or at our field days, winter schools, and various wildlife workshops. Many of you have also had Ken come out to your property for a site visit.

For those of you who know Ken, **if you would like to share a short message with him, you can do so by sending it to me by 5:00 p.m. this Thursday, October 1st** (short notice!). You can send a written message or record a short video message on your phone. You can send it to me by email at kevin.zobrist@wsu.edu or by text at 425-231-4524. Be sure to include your name!

Ken's successor, Vanessa Tisdale, is already in place. She brings the same level of knowledge, enthusiasm, and humor as those who preceded her in the position. Be sure to come and meet her at our 2027 events!

Winter 2027 Online Forest Stewardship Coached Planning course

Learn holistic stewardship in our flagship forestry course for property owners

You value your wooded property for its natural beauty, wildlife, privacy, and peace and quiet. You want to make sure that climate stress, fire, and unwanted pests and diseases don't derail the future of your forest, but incomplete, inconsistent, and unverified information makes it hard to know what to do, when to do it, or whom to trust. That's why WSU Extension offers the Forest Stewardship Coached Planning course. Whether you want future old growth, periodic timber income, or just to more fully enjoy your woodland retreat, we turn guesswork into actionable, research-based steps to meet your goals.

Become the expert your trees need

We have trained thousands of Washington landowners just like you to confidently assess the health of their forest and develop a reliable plan for success. We'll give you the tools you need to reduce risks, enhance value, avoid costly mistakes, and promote a vibrant, resilient forest so that you have the peace of mind of knowing your property is on the right track for decades to come.

What you will learn

- How to identify the species of trees on your property and monitor their growth
- Proven strategies to improve forest health and increase wildlife diversity
- When, why, and how to thin your trees
- What species of trees and shrubs to plant where
- How to successfully control invasive weeds
- Practical steps to reduce wildfire risk to your home
- Your soil properties and why it matters
- How to find the right services when you need professional assistance
- What the qualifications are for property tax reduction and cost share grant programs for forested properties
- How to write your own forest stewardship plan and receive recognition as a stewardship forest

What's included

- Nine class sessions taught by state and local experts
- An **in-person** field trip
- A digital library of reference materials and how-to guides
- A native tree book and tree measuring tool
- A binder of printed course handouts, selected presentation slides, examples, and other resources
- A consultation site visit to your property from a state or county service forester (properties within western Washington only) to get all your questions answered

Dates and registration

The winter online course for western Washington properties will be held Tuesday evenings, January 26 – March 23, 2027. The registration fee is $145 per family. Space is limited and is first come, first served. The online courses almost always sell out early. Registration is now open. For full details and to register, visit the Winter 2027 Online Forest Stewardship Coached Planning Course Website.

Fall 2026 Bigleaf maple syrup workshops

A sweet endeavor

Tapping bigleaf maples is an exciting way to engage with your forest, spend time with family and friends, and create a delicious treat for personal use or to sell commercially. Join us ahead of the upcoming sap season for a workshop at an active sugaring operation! You'll learn about the essential tools needed for tapping, how and when to tap trees, and how to process sap.

This is an introductory workshop good for beginner hobbyists and aspiring commercial producers. No experience required.

Olympia – October 9, 2026

The Olympia workshop will be from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. Friday, October 9, 2026 at the WSU Meyer's Point Environmental Field Station. Cost is $25 per vehicle and pre-registration is required. The registration deadline is 5:00 p.m. on October 7th. For additional details and to register, visit the Olympia Maple Syrup Workshop website.

Sedro-Woolley – October 10, 2026

A companion workshop is available in Sedro-Woolley on October 10th at 10:00 a.m. For more information and to register, contact Rich Miller at rich.miller66@yahoo.com.

Bigleaf Maple Syrup Toolkit

Be sure to check out the new WSU Extension Bigleaf Maple Syrup Toolkit!

Tidbits

- New publication available: Agroforestry Handbook for the Pacific Northwest

- State officials confirm first detection of emerald ash borer in Washington State

Subscription and contact info

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Contact info

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Extension programs are available to all without discrimination. This email includes promotional material.