Whatcom
CONSERVATION NEWS

WINTER 2010
VOLUME 19, NUMBER 1

Plant Sale Insert

AN EDUCATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT
LYNDEN, WASHINGTON

WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT Mission Statement: To serve present and future generations of Whatcom County through a natural resource conservation program of leadership, partnership, and technical, educational & financial assistance to foster a healthy, sustainable relationship between people and the environment.

17th Annual

Native Plant Sale & Expo

3rd Annual

Saturday, March 20 • 9am-4pm • Whatcom Community College

Pre-Order deadline: Friday March 5, 2010
Pre-order pick-ups Friday, March 19, 9am-3:30pm

This photo of a pink salmon in Kendall Creek, taken by Andrew Phay, WCD GIS specialist, won first place in the Washington State Conservation Commission 2009 photo contest.

WCD Welcomes Newest Board Supervisor – Larry Davis

Larry was appointed to the Whatcom Conservation District Board in May 2009 and will serve a three year term. Larry is an Eastern Washington native; born in Sunnyside, Yakima County. His family moved to Edmonds where he graduated from high school and then went on earn a degree in Political Science from Central Washington University.

Larry moved to Whatcom County after 26 years in public service in Thurston County (Olympia). He was Staff Coordinator and Senior Analyst for the Senate Education Committee for 11 years. Then, he served for 12 years as Executive Director for the Washington State Board of Education. Larry lives in Custer with his wife, Carolyn and currently works at the duty free store at the Lynden/Aldergrove border crossing. In addition to serving on the WCD Board, Larry also serves as the chair of the Northwest Area Local Work Group for the USDA Natural

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Go Native and Buy Local at Our Annual Plant Sale

Green up your space with low cost native plants, come to learn about natives, planting techniques, composting, local agriculture, rain gardens, restoration opportunities, and more. Our plants are perfect for your native landscaping, restoration, and mitigation projects. Pre-order large quantities or come to the open sale and shop around.

Whatcom Conservation District's (WCD) 17th annual plant sale will be held on the Whatcom Community College campus.

As always, we will offer low cost, conservation grade plants with over 40 species to choose from, plus local compost, seeds, and perennials. We carefully select plants from local growers to provide the best quality conservation grade plants. Potted native perennials from Sunbreak Nursery and other Whatcom County nurseries will also be for sale on the day of the event.

ALL PROCEEDS FROM OUR SALE SUPPORT OUR EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

March 9th is Date for the Next Conservation District Election

The Whatcom Conservation District is locally led by a board of five supervisors. Formed in 1946, the WCD serves all of Whatcom County and is committed to fostering a healthy, sustainable relationship between people and the environment. Its local Board of Supervisors develops annual and long range plans of work that address priority resource concerns of Whatcom County and provide oversight to WCD programs. These plans are carried out by a team of professionals with training and expertise in Animal Science, Agronomy, Botany, Business, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Forestry, Geology, Horticulture, and Law. Our current Board includes a beef producer, dairy producer, local small animal veterinarian, a retired forester, and the former Executive Director for the Washington State Board of Education.

CURRENT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Dick Yoder – Chair
Ed Stone, DVM – Vice-Chair
Joe Heller – Secretary/Treasurer
Terry Lenssen – Supervisor
Larry Davis – Supervisor

Whatcom Conservation District Supervisor Election Notice

The WCD will hold its annual Supervisor Election from **9 am to 6 pm on March 9, 2010 at the WCD Office, 6975 Hannegan Road, Lynden, WA.**

This year, registered voters that are interested in participating in the District election may request a mail-in ballot. For efficiency, please use the ballot request form located on the District's website at www.whatcomcd.org. *NOTE:* All ballots will be due to the District office on March 9, 2010. Candidate forms and further information can be obtained at the WCD office (Monday – Friday 8am to 4pm), by email at wcd@whatcomcd.org, or call (360) 354-2035 x 3. Published election procedures can also be viewed at the WA Conservation Commission's website at www.scc.wa.gov/ or (360) 407-6200.

Eligible candidates must be registered voters in Whatcom County. Supervisor commitments include committee meetings, monthly board meetings and special events. Candidates may be required to be landowners or operators of a farm, depending on the current composition of the Conservation District Board.

Conservation District Supervisors are public officials who serve without compensation and who set policy and direction for the Whatcom Conservation District.

Whatcom Conservation District
6975 Hannegan Road, Lynden, Washington 98264
(360) 354-2035 • Fax (360) 354-4678, Email: wcd@whatcomcd.org
VISIT OUR WEBSITE: http://www.whatcomcd.org

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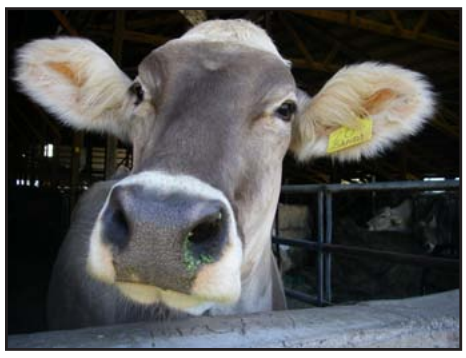
Small Farm & Dairy Program Updates

Dairy Update: A Time for Opportunity



The economic downturn that we are all experiencing has hit our community with a thunderous force, particularly in the dairy industry. Milk prices are lower than they have been in years and farmers are tapping all their resources to stay afloat and not dissolve one of the defining industries of our county.

Yes, times are tough, but they are also opportunistic. In an effort to help farmers be more resourceful and efficient with their nutrients, we have developed a new manure Application Risk Management (ARM) system designed to work in conjunction with our new Dairy Nutrient Management Plan (DNMP) format to help farmers reduce the risks associated with manure application to farm fields, while also increasing the available timing and flexibility of application dates. The system should allow more precise and flexible manure application, while also significantly reducing the risk of runoff from fields that can reach community waterways. A win-win situation. It is our goal to have all dairies in the County participating in this program in the next five years. Enrollment in this new system requires an update of your DNMP and evaluation of your current farm fields. For more information on the ARM system, please contact us or visit our website.

If you are thinking about upgrading or installing new equipment, or increasing your environmental stewardship, please contact us about Cost Share and NRCS stewardship programs. Some examples of cost share items are manure solid separators, hose lines, and vegetative practices like CREP and wind breaks. The installation of a wind break using native vegetation can act as both a visual barrier and can have air and water quality benefits.

Support your community by taking further steps to protect our County's natural resources with good stewardship.

Agricultural Water Quality

It Takes a Multiple Barrier Approach to Stop Pollution

The key to preventing pollution from farming activities is containment with good conservation practices. Conservation practices act as a pollution barrier, containing or otherwise controlling the movement of nutrients, soil, and bacteria that are a potential threat to the environment. When contained, the nutrients in manure can provide a valuable fertilizer; it's only when manure escapes the confines of the containment area and enters the air and/or water that it becomes a pollutant. It usually takes several conservation practices operating as a system to ensure that a farm is adequately protecting the environment. Practices can be utilized in groups such as heavy use area protection in the confinement area, nutrient management for fields, and filter strips for areas in close proximity to water. When used in conjunction, you can target not just one, but multiple types and sources of pollution at once. If you operate a farm, consider how many barriers you have to pollution, and how the following practices can benefit you and the environment. The following examples and photos are excellent practices to consider. For more information on how you can set up barriers to pollution on your farm, contact Chuck or Beth at (360) 354-2035.

CONFINEMENT AREA
Best Management Practices

Water quality protection starts with the confinement area. Confinement areas are known by a variety of names including pens, corrals, lots, yards, over wintering areas, free ranges and heavy use areas. These areas are generally the most significant source of pathogens, nutrients, and sediment discharged to surface water from livestock operations. As a good practice, confinement areas should be located on high ground as far away from water as possible. Quality definitely trumps quantity here: livestock are best served when maintained in a well drained, mud free environment. Additionally, a smaller footprint will reduce the volume of surface runoff requiring treatment.

Heavy Use Area Protection

A heavy use area (confinement area, pen, or alleyway) is any area where animals are at risk of causing surface damage. Footing for the confinement area should be composed of suitable materials such as wood chips, pea gravel, crushed rock, sand, or geotextile fabrics which reduce mud, improves livestock footing and comfort, absorbs pollutants, and/or facilitates collection of manure.

Example: Covering outside runs for horses with a 6 inch layer of crushed gravel and then capping it with an additional 4 to 6 inches of pea gravel eliminates mud and improves conditions for good hoof health (see photo).

Waste Storage

Proper storage of manure improves livestock health and comfort, conserves nutrients for later use by crops, and helps protect ground and surface water.

Example: Farms that don't have an improved structure for storing manure can get started by selecting a storage site 100 feet or more from surface water and wells and covering it with a tarp during the seasonal runoff period (Oct.–March).

For more information or help with agricultural water quality best practices, see Small Farm Expo and Cost Share Info on the back page.

Roofwater Runoff Management

Installing and maintaining gutters, downspouts and outlets so roofwater is collected, controlled and transported away from livestock confinement areas. The conveyance of water away from facilities will help to reduce mud, ponding, and surface runoff in heavy use areas.

Example: The collection and transfer of clean water collected on a 30 ft x 75 ft roof (assuming an annual rainfall of 45 inches) through an underground outlet to a ditch, keeps 63,000 gallons of water from collecting in animal use areas.

BUFFER AREA
Best Management Practices

Buffers provide the final barrier to pollution, but by themselves, they don't supply enough protection unless good field and confinement area practices are also in place. Many types of buffers can be farmed so long as it is with caution and they are in excellent condition for removing pollutants during the runoff period (Oct – March).

Filter Strip

Using a strip or defined area of grass and/or legumes to remove sediment, nutrients, pathogens, and other contaminants from runoff and wastewater before it enters environmentally sensitive areas. Filter strips may be grazed and hayed. Filter strips generally provide the final opportunity to stop contaminants in surface runoff from entering water.

Example: In pastures maintaining healthy, vigorous forage plants that are at least 3 inches tall, the area within 50 feet of water during the runoff period (Oct 1 - March 30) may qualify as your filter strip.

Access Control

Using a fence to exclude livestock from a stream reduces streambank erosion, the entry of contaminants into surface water, and the destruction of native trees and shrubs.

Example: A fence installed on the field side of a recently planted salmon habitat restoration buffer prevents damage to seedling trees and shrubs by livestock.

FIELD AREA
Best Management Practices

Healthy, vigorous forage plants in field areas provide one of the most effective barriers to pollution. One of the keys to sustaining productive fields is to give them a rest during the winter. Keeping livestock in confinement areas and out of fields during the winter runoff period protects soil from compaction and spares forages from being destroyed by over grazing.

Prescribed Grazing Management

A decision making process in which livestock access to pastures is controlled so that forages have time to recover and regrow after each grazing period. Good pasture management improves the health and productivity of forages and increases the capacity of pastures to filter nutrients, sediment, and bacteria in surface runoff.

Example: Using temporary electric fencing to divide a larger, continuously grazed pasture into smaller paddocks (see lower photo), and completely grazing one paddock before moving to another one that has had enough time to regrow.

Nutrient Management

A process for making decisions about the amount, placement, and timing of manure and fertilizer applications which improves the use of nutrients by plants and reduces the potential for surface and groundwater pollution.

Example: Applying manure in the spring after the runoff period, but before pasture forages enter their rapid growth period in April and May will decrease the risk of runoff and encourage forage growth.

Watering Facility

Providing livestock with a tank, trough, or other device for water, which protects streams by providing alternative access to water.

Example: Installing a nose pump (a self priming diaphragm pump) for livestock watering in a remote pasture so they don't have to use a stream.

Restoration Projects

BelleWood Acres Is Growing

John and Dorie Belisle acquired additional acreage in 2009 to expand their farm and move their farm store to a more easily accessible site across Tenmile Creek from their home farm. BelleWood Acres is well known regionally for their apples, pears, baked goods and for the other treasures found in their farm store located on Ten Mile Road. They have also received recognition as a **"Salmon Safe"** producer and the "**Food Alliance Seal of Approval"** for their sustainable agriculture practices.

Seeing opportunities for conservation coinciding with the farm expansion, the Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) worked with the Belisle's in the fall of 2009 to install a stream crossing, enhance a riparian forest buffer, and place large woody debris in the stream to improve fish habitat. This work was funded by BelleWood Acres and a "Pioneers in Conservation" grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation with partial funding from the Washington State Conservation Commission. Eighty community members joined with district staff on November 7th to plant nearly 600 native trees and shrubs during a work party sponsored by the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association. WCD will continue to work with John and Dorie to develop signs and handouts designed to educate farm visitors and local students about how salmon habitat enhancement can integrate with long term sustainable agriculture in Whatcom County.

Native Plant Profile

Paper Birch

Paper birch is an easily recognized deciduous tree in Whatcom County. White, peeling bark is characteristic of mature paper birch. The bark of immature paper birch has a shiny copper coloration, making it very attractive for landscaping as a young tree. The toothed, heart shaped leaves fill the branches like delicate jewels as they turn golden in the fall. Paper birch lives 50 - 80 years and prefers a sunny location over shade. At maturity the height ranges from 40 to 70 feet.

For many species of wildlife, paper birch is a source of year round food. Deer feed on young stems and leaves, preferring it over red alder. Rabbits, voles and shrews eat the seeds, and beaver cut them down and use the inner bark as food and the wood as dam material.

Paper birch catkins and seeds are used as food by many bird species, and the decayed tree trunks are home to nesting birds. Human uses of the birch tree include snowshoes and birch bark canoes! Paper birches grow well in sunny locations and in a wide variety of soil types, including heavy silt loams that are saturated in the winter.

Plant your paper birch today!

Good Stewardship Has Its Rewards

CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

The Conservation Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary program that pays landowners rent, a signing bonus, and all the costs for planting buffers along creeks and ditches. CREP will also pay the cost for livestock exclusion fencing.

Van Zandt Area Family Builds a Wildlife Oasis

Saw Whet Owl roosts near the Lane's back door.

alligator lizard
bald eagle
barred owl
bats
beaver
bewicks wren
black bear
black throated gray warbler
blackheaded grosbeak
bobcat
brown creeper
cedar waxwing
chestnut backed & black capped chickadees
common yellowthroat
coyote
dark eyed junco
douglas squirrel
downy woodpecker
elk
evening grosbeak
flicker
fox sparrow
garter snake
gold finch
hairy woodpecker
harrier
hooded merganser
house wren
kestrel
kinglet
long toed salamander
mallard duck
mice
nesting willow flycatcher
nesting woodduck
nuthatch
pacific tree frog
pacific giant salamander
pheasant
pileated woodpecker
pine siskin
possum
pygmy owl
rabbit
raccoon
red legged frog
redtail hawk
robin
rough skinned newt
roughed grouse
rufous hummingbird
sapsucker
saw whet owl
sharpshinned hawk
skunk
song sparrow
spotted towee
stellar Jay family
swainsons thrush
tree swallows
varied thrush
voles
weasel
western salamander
western tanager
western toad
wilsons snipe
wilsons warbler
winter wren
yellow warbler

Guiding a tour of their 20 acre property, the Lane family lists the birds, mammals and amphibians they have identified here, their names quickly filling three pages in my notebook. The entire family is knowledgeable about the correct identification of species, but 11 year old Fanter leads the tour and is a top notch ornithologist and experienced naturalist; a living field guide! Friendly and full of awe for their natural surroundings, the family shares their ideas of how to cultivate great wildlife habitat.

When asked "why do so many species of wildlife use your property?" The Lanes gave a number of intriguing answers.

Seeds produced by native plants are available throughout the year at different times depending upon the species of plant. Rodents and small birds thrive on these seeds. Tall grass and shrubs such as Indian plum, Spirea, and Rose provide thickets that small birds and rodents use to hide from predators. Raptors are attracted by the abundance of rodents and small birds. The supply of rotting wood attracts woodpeckers, owls and nesting birds. Neglected apple trees provide food for the occasional bear. Ponds and creeks supply drinking water and amphibian breeding sites. Water is available even in the summer time, when amphibians, birds, and mammals need it the most. And humans provide additional bird seed and a safe haven.

The Lanes moved to the property 15 years ago. The land was clear-cut and Red alder trees were returning on the disturbed ground, which had ditches dug for drainage and pits excavated to provide fill for machinery access. Coho salmon still use the creeks running through the property, but their habitat is degraded.

The Lanes are now cooperating with the Whatcom Conservation District through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to install native plants along streams in open areas of the property that are dominated by Reed canarygrass and interplanting conifers to the Red alder overstory. To encourage spawning Coho, Steelhead, and Cutthroat trout in the Lane's creek, the Whatcom Conservation District sought funding from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation's Community Salmon Fund grant program.

The Community Salmon Fund provides funding to improve salmon habitat with the cooperation of the local community. Four neighboring landowners got involved in the project, which replaced three undersized culverts and installed large woody debris and spawning gravel in the creek. The Whatcom Land Trust, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, and the local school children are all getting involved in the neighborhood's habitat restoration efforts.

The long-term goal now is to restore another reach of the stream out of a roadside ditch and back into its natural channel. For now, the Lane family's goals are to improve and enhance wildlife habitat on their property. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and Community Salmon Fund are helping them achieve their goals.

Lane family and friends.

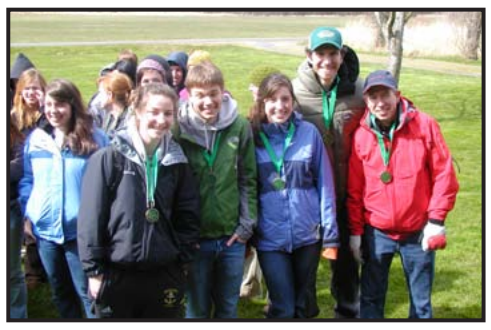
Announcements & Events

WCD Board of Supervisors ELECTION

Come vote on March 9, 2010 from 9am – 6pm at the WCD Office, 6975 Hannegan Road, Lynden WA. Mail-in Ballots may also be requested. For efficiency please use the ballot request form located on the District's website at www.whatcomcd.org. See front page for more election info.

Attention Highschool Students and Teachers – Save this Date!

Thursday, April 15, 2010
Annual Northwest Regional Envirothon



Every year students, teachers and field specialists participate in this exciting regional event. High Schools from Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish and King County compete for the Regional Envirothon title and a chance to compete at the state and national level. Snohomish Conservation District will host the Northwest regional event in 2010. The all day competition will take place at Warm Beach Camp & Conference Center, Stanwood, WA. This all day team event focuses on 5 areas of knowledge: Soils, Wildlife, Aquatics, Forestry, and an Oral presentation. This year's environmental issue is: "PROTECTION OF GROUNDWATER THROUGH URBAN, AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING"

For more information or to register a Whatcom team contact the WCD office. We can also assist with sample questions and support.

Other important dates:

Washington State Envirothon:
Tentatively set for May 19 & 20, 2010, Lake Wenatchee, WA.

North American Envirothon:
August 1–7, 2010, California State University, Fresno, California.

Mt. Baker FFA Forestry Team Places at Nationals

Congratulations to the Mt. Baker FFA Forestry team on placing 6th out of 40 state ranked teams at Nationals. The winning student team is led by Todd Rightmire. Team members include Booker Schmidt, Matt Cronk, Kurtis Zender, Joe Scarpete, and alternate Aaron Leavitt.

Small Farm Cost-Share Program to Help Landowners Install Fencing and Livestock Watering Systems

The WCD invites small acreage livestock owners to participate in a cost-share assistance program that assists in the installation of best management practices identified in their farm plans.

This pilot program seeks to assist landowners with their stewardship and water quality goals by sharing the cost of on-farm Best Management Practices (BMPs). Funds are available starting in January 2010 and are to be used for off-channel watering facilities and fencing livestock out of creeks and wetlands. The cost-share program will provide landowners 75% cost share, not to exceed $3750.

To learn more, and to apply for cost-share assistance, contact Chuck or Beth at the WCD office at (360) 354-2035 x 3.

WCD Welcomes Newest Board Supervisor – Larry Davis

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Resources Conservation Service.

Larry says: "I believe in the mission of the Whatcom Conservation District: assisting land managers with their conservation choices. Whatcom County is now my home. I am grateful for the opportunity to be on the Board and help advance the conservation of natural resources in this community."

To learn more, or become involved with the Conservation District Board and local projects, contact our office.

Thank You 2009 Plant Sale Vendors and Volunteers

Our 2009 Plant Sale was a success because of our great local partners and dedicated volunteers!

Local Nurseries and growers

Namaste Gardens, Plantas Nativa, Sunbreak Nursery, Tree Frog Farm, Tuxedo Gardens, and Uprising Seeds.

Agencies and Volunteers

Amanda Kauppilla, Deborah Borden, Emily Derenne, Erica Hanson, Jenna Finch, Kate Burke, Kate Lamson, Kathi Marlowe, Melissa Roberts, Megan McGinty, Michelle Mitchell, Sarah Steeley, Bellingham Food Coop–Cordata Store, City of Bellingham, Common Threads Farm, Forest Garden, Mt. Baker Beekeepers, North Cascades Audubon Society, NSEA's Washington Conservation Corps Crew, Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA), Sustainable Connections, Squalicum Mountain, WSU Beachwatchers Program, Whatcom Land Trust, Whatcom County Noxious Weed Board, Washington Native Plant Society, Whatcom Community College, WSU Master Gardener Program Volunteers.

Also, a BIG thank you to all our customers, new and old, who came out and purchased native plants. This annual event provides low cost native plants and education. All proceeds from our sale support our education programs, including the annual Highschool Envirothon, farm and stream tours, workshops, and classroom education.

Whatcom Conservation District to Host FREE Small Farm EXPO For Whatcom County Livestock Owners

January 7, 2010 · 5-8pm
Ferndale WECU Educational Center
5659 Barrett Rd, Ferndale
Refreshments and resources will be provided.

Join us for our second annual Small Farm EXPO. This open house event is designed for small acreage livestock owners who are looking for tools to improve their land and animal health. Local feed, seed, fencing, mud and manure management, and environmental specialists will be on hand to answer questions about products, services and support. This is also a chance for farmers to network and discuss techniques for coping with the wet winter months, dealing with high feed costs, and regulations that matter to them. Featured speaker – Kulshan Veterinarian Clinic.

This years EXPO will feature WSU Extension, Farm Friends, Sustainable Connections Food and Farming Program, Northwest Agricultural Business Center, Gallagher Fencing Company and more. Contact the WCD for more information.

WCD Receives 2009 District of the Year

Of the 47 Districts in Washington State, the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) awarded Whatcom Conservation District with the 2009 District of the Year award for showing tremendous efforts to get conservation on the ground and improving or building their overall program through coordinated planning with other entities. George Boggs, WCD Manager, and Joe Heller, WCD Board Supervisor, accepted the award, which was presented at the WACD Annual Meeting in Spokane. The WCD is very proud to have received this award because the quality of work that is being done throughout the State by all Conservation Districts is exceptional. To receive statewide recognition is a big accomplishment for not only the employees and Supervisors of the WCD, but also for the landowners and operators throughout the County who implement conservation. The award is a beautiful wood and glass sculpture created by Bob Clark at Okanogan Conservation District and is on display at the WCD office.

WCD Wins Area Awards

The WCD won the 2009 Northwest Area District of the Year, competing with nine other west side counties for the award. In addition, George Boggs received the 2009 Manager of the Year award from the State Conservation Commission, being recognized for his talent for supporting the WCD Board of Supervisors and staff to find innovative ways to address difficult natural resource issues.

Frank Corey Recognized

Frank Corey, Riparian Restoration Specialist at the WCD, received the WACD 2009 Special Service Award. The award recognizes Frank's outstanding professional contribution to the improvement of Washington's natural resources and improving conservation values in Whatcom County. Anyone who drives through the County and sees hedgerows planted on ditches may be looking at the results of Frank's work. Frank Corey has been with WCD since 2004 and is known as a leader in stream restoration techniques and wildlife habitat needs.