

FORESTRY

notes

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Making it work in Washington



Districts, other conservation leaders work together to fill gaps, avoid overlaps

Doug Rushton remembers well how things were four years. Back then, conservation districts in the state of Washington didn't tackle many forestry issues, and collaboration among partners was limited. Now Washington is becoming an example for other states for how conservation districts can take charge and build effective relationships with state agencies and local organizations.

At the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) annual meeting in early December, Rushton and other district leaders helped to organize three concurrent breakout sessions dealing with forestry issues. The group invited forestry leaders from the State Department of Natural Resources, as well as Aaron Everett, who had just conducted Washington's statewide assessment.

"It was a two-prong thing: getting our folks educated about forestry issues, and getting them in touch with the resources that are available," says Rushton, the Thurston County Conservation District supervisor and a long-serving member on NACD's Forest Resources Policy Group.

Everett's talk focused on some of the pressing issues facing Washington forestland today: the threat of wildfire; fragmentation; and an ever-shrinking pool of dollars to work from. The night before he delivered his presentation, Everett was named Washington's State Forester, so now he'll be an even greater asset to the group's efforts to help meet the challenges of those forest-related issues.

"I don't think anybody was surprised by what

they heard," admits Rushton, "but having it all together in one place was a big help." After the sessions wrapped, Rushton made a point of encouraging all those in attendance to share contact information. State agencies have experienced a great deal of turnover in recent years due to the economic downturn, leaving district staff unsure about who to work with. A year and a half ago, Rushton attended a legislative meeting where DNR officials predicted as many as 200 of the Department's 1,500-member staff would be let go. "Now it's even worse," says Rushton. "For example, they've got four or five people on the east side of the state doing stewardship work, and just one guy on the west side of the state, which is maybe one-third of the land area but 80 percent of the people. The poor guy (Mike Nystrom) is just run ragged."

This is where districts and other partners can help, he figures. By leveraging the resources of the Washington

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Washington is home to some of the most beautiful forestland in the nation. Districts in the state are working to help forest preservation efforts.

Next Month

**Special Insert:
Opportunities in
Agroforestry**





Website aims to assist female landowners

During the March 2010 Women and Working Lands symposium in Washington D.C., Pennsylvania landowner Nancy Baker addressed the challenges facing the nation's growing number of female forest landowners today. More importantly, Baker offered ideas for how the U.S. Forest Service could more effectively connect with those landowners. USDA leaders took note.

After much discussion, it was decided that the most effective method to assist in the effort would be to build a website to act as a "clearinghouse" for all the relevant information available to female woodland owners across the nation.

According to Paula Randler, Forest Stewardship Program Specialist for the Forest Service, USDA has made efforts to recognize agricultural issues for women, "but we haven't yet had an effort toward working with women in forestlands."

The Forest Service is using its cooperative agreement with the National Woodland Owners Association to co-create a site that will launch late in 2011. For the past several months, the two groups have collected and categorized publications and other educational tools they've been made aware of. The clearinghouse aims to accomplish a few basic objectives:

- Provide a local and national practitioner network where information and ideas can be shared
- Support a basic forest language so the laywoman can easily communicate with her forester
- Support women in finding assistance for their forest management objectives
- Provide estate planning resources
- Provide contact information for women to find peer learning environments and training

According to the National Woodland Owner Survey (Butler 2008), female decision-makers manage 13% of the acres of family forests in the U.S.. By contrast, male decision-makers manage 73%. Another 8% of family forest acres are managed by respondents who indicated multiple decision-makers, including at least one female and one male (6% of respondents provided no answer). At the same time, women outlive men on average by about five years, leaving many women woodland owners without a

partner in management, and often unexpectedly. "We want to make contact with women before they feel they are in an emergency situation," says Randler.

Providing a place for women woodland owners to find information can increase a family's enjoyment of the land regardless of who the primary decision-maker is, and can increase its economic gain from harvesting or other forest uses. All landowners face tough decisions about inheritance, conservation values and economic assets.

Efforts to assist female forest landowners are already underway in several states. Oregon has the WOW program (Women Owning Woodlands) and Wisconsin women forest landowners can join the Paulette Bunyan program. Additional programs exist in New Hampshire, Arkansas, Pennsylvania and several other states. Until now, though, no effort has been made to centralize those resources.

Says Darrel Pendris, executive director for the National Woodland Owners Association, "The key is aggregation of high quality information and people."

Randler and Pendris are now hoping

conservation leaders from around the country – specifically conservation district and RC&D staff – will identify and share existing materials that can be added to the clearinghouse's list of resources. Conservation leaders are encouraged to contact Randler or Pendris with suggestions.

The site will be interactive and easy to navigate. When users visit the homepage they will find a map which will allow them to click on their state. There, users will find a list of resources to assist with a number of potential issues. Those resources will also allow users to connect with a local face. "I think having it be geographically-based is important," says Randler. "People appreciate having someone they can meet and talk to face-to-face."

The Forest Service and National Woodland Owners Association plan to market the site with the help of their partners. For the site to be effective, says Pendris, it must locate those women not looking for help. "The challenge for us is to get to those women not tapped into their woodland owners association or other networks."

For more information on the website, or to recommend materials for the clearinghouse, contact Paula Randler of the U.S. Forest Service at pbrandler@fs.fed.us, or Darrel Pendris of the National Woodland Owners Association at pendris@nwoa.net.

"We want to make contact with women before they feel they are in an emergency situation."

Paula Randler
Forest Stewardship Program Specialist, U.S. Forest Service



Forest Service research supports the value of urban trees

According to U.S. Forest Service research, trees increase home prices, improve air quality, reduce household energy use and the effects of climate change.

Forestry Briefs

According to Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell in a released statement, "Trees in urban areas

beautify neighborhoods and provide great economic benefits. Aside from enhancing neighborhood aesthetics they filter the air, reduce storm runoff and absorb carbon dioxide."

The report offered the following examples: Chicago's 3.6 million trees annually reduce air pollution by about 890 tons, a \$6.4 million benefit per year; in Sacramento, trees planted on the south and west sides of houses reduced summertime electricity bills by an average of \$25.16; in Portland the study found that street trees growing in

front of or near a house added an average \$8,870 to its sale price and reduced time on the market by nearly two days.

For more information on this report, visit the Urban Forest Data website at <http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/data/urban>.



Forest Legacy reaches two million acres

The U.S. Forest Service recently reached a major milestone: protecting more than two million acres of private forests threatened by development. This achievement was made possible by leveraging roughly \$1.1 billion in federal and private funds through the Forest Legacy Program. Forest Legacy works with private landowners, states and conservation groups to promote sustainable, working forests. In fiscal year 2010, the program was funded at more than \$79 million, helping landowners across the country conserve and manage their land while protecting environmentally important landscapes.



Joint Forestry Team sets 2011 priorities

In December, members of the Joint Forestry Team gathered in Washington D.C. for their annual meeting. To begin the day-long discussion, NACD representative and Joint Forestry Team chairman Charles Holmes offered a review of the group's 2010 activities:

- Further obstacles were identified for how the four partner organizations – NACD, the U.S. Forest Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Association of State Foresters – overlap one another
- A survey was completed and its findings have been shared at a number of recent meetings
- Memorandums of understanding were signed this year in states including California, Colorado, Connecticut,

Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin
• Webinars were held to showcase state-level success stories

The staff contact for each member organization then briefed those in attendance on the survey's findings before representatives from NRCS offered an update on statewide assessments.

In the afternoon, Joint Forestry Team leaders turned their attention to 2011 priorities. A few of the top priorities identified were:

- Host an executive meeting
- Work with NRCS Chief Dave White on emphasizing the importance of forestry to state offices
- Find ways to include Joint Forestry Team efforts into the 2012 Farm Bill

- Assist in the development of a national forest management template for assistance with all eligible programs

Leaders had further discussion on how forestry activities may fit into the next Farm Bill and at the conclusion of the meeting, Forest Service representative Ted Beauvais was introduced as the new chairman for 2011.

The Joint Forestry Team's purpose is to make recommendations that result in coordinated interagency delivery of forestry and conservation assistance for working forests, farms, and ranches. Team participants seek to improve the sustainability of the nation's forests in order to provide optimum levels of public benefits and ecosystem services.

For more information, visit <http://www.jointforestryteam.org>.

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State Extension office and local forestry organizations, such as the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA), the group believes it can assist the DNR in its efforts.

"There's enough work for everybody," says Rushton, "so it's not a competitive thing. We're able to identify gaps and areas of overlap so we can fill those gaps and avoid tripping over one another."

The key to building lasting forestry partnerships? "One of the things we do is to go to each other's meetings," says Rushton, who sits on the WFFA advisory board and represents conservation districts on the Small Forest Landowners Statewide Committee. And to show an appreciation for all the help Andy Perleberg and the Washington State University Extension office has provided, the districts in Washington helped to co-sponsor one of WSU's recent forest field days – a first for districts.

The presentation at the WACD annual meeting was just one of several stops for Rushton. A few months ago, he assisted fellow Washington State conservation district forestry leader Garth Davis in a series of forest-health related sessions at the Washington Association of District Employees conference. More recently, Rushton informed leaders at a WFFA meeting why conservation districts would make strong partners. "We're a funnel for cost-share money – that's one thing I knew they'd be interested in – and, two, we have an infrastructure already set up throughout the state that would be easy for them to tap into."

Last fall, Rushton completed a statewide survey of district forestry activity aimed to identify where forestry expertise and

resources were located. "That way, if you're in one district and you don't have a forester, you can look at the chart and say, 'this district has a forester on staff, I'll borrow her.' It's what we'll do in Thurston Conservation District with the adjacent district in Grays Harbor."

The survey will need to be updated every so many years, Rushton acknowledges, but he believes it's an invaluable resource, and something every state conservation district association should consider.

All of the efforts in Washington are apparently working; when a rash of foresters were let go by the DNR and private contractors, a few were hired by district offices throughout

the state (Rushton says three districts have hired a staff forester in the past year alone). And thanks to events like December's WACD meeting, the dialogue in the state is stronger than ever.

Says Rushton, "It's been a continuing, high-energy movement toward more partnership, more communication and more joint prioritization on what we need to do."

For more information on the forestry partnerships conservation district leaders are helping to build in Washington, email Doug Rushton at drushton21854@gmail.com. The WACD forestry web site is at <http://www.wadistricts.org/our-programs/committees.html>.



Conservation leaders had an opportunity to tour a thinned forest site in Eastern Washington last summer. A staff shortage has limited the number of such projects in the western side of the state.



State Foresters talk Farm Bill

When the National Association of State Foresters' executive committee gathers in Washington D.C. each December, it usually finds its way to Capitol Hill. This year, due to the impending turnover in Congress, they instead chose to focus much of the meeting's discussion on the 2012 Farm Bill.

Reduced funding levels for conservation programs is of concern in the next Farm Bill as the new Congress is facing pressures to reduce federal spending; yet, there is a strong case to invest limited funds in response to priorities identified in the Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies – an important outcome of the 2008 Farm Bill. Says NASF Director of Forest Policy Jake Donnay, "The point was made that maintaining the current funding levels might be considered a victory."

The technical service provider (TSP) certification process is one area where leaders believe changes are necessary. An NRCS review team is looking into ways to streamline the TSP certification process, including options that take advantage of state agencies as well as existing certification and crediting systems that have identified proficiency standards for providing quality, professional forestry assistance to forest landowners.

Another obstacle requiring attention is the bottleneck caused by the lack of technical assistance funding available through programs such as EQIP and WHIP. Once a conservation plan is in place, EQIP and WHIP funds can be used to design, layout and implement

practices called for in the plan. Currently, the amount of EQIP and WHIP funding made available for technical assistance is not keeping pace with what is needed to deliver more cost-share assistance through these programs – in some cases leaving appropriated dollars unspent. Any unused cost-share dollars from conservation programs could conceivably be used as an offset to pay for other priority programs, including those outside the conservation title of the next Farm Bill.

At present, USDA has not taken any public positions on the Farm Bill, as is true of many other organizations in attendance at the NASF meeting; leaders are still in the process of forming their priorities, says Donnay. "Other than some broad areas of discussion that organizations might want to focus on, there were not any detailed priorities discussed in the room. This meeting served more or less as a chance to share information regarding where progress has been made in delivering conservation programs on private forests and where improvements are needed as well as to discuss potential areas for future collaboration."

According to Donnay, NASF plans to continue its Farm Bill discussions with NACD as well as other partners through its involvement in the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition – an alliance that represents the interests of a diverse group of partners who first came together to ensure forestry has a strong place in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Conservation Calendar

- **Jan. 30-Feb. 2, 2011** – NACD 2011 Annual Meeting, Gaylord Opryland Hotel and Convention Center, Nashville, Tenn. Contact Nicole Aiken at 202-547-6223
- **March 21-23** – 23rd Annual Family Forest Landowners Conference, University Inn-Best Western, Moscow, Idaho. Contact Tera King at 208-883-4488.
- **March 23-25, 2011** – Small Log Conference, Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Visit <http://www.timberbuysell.com/slc>
- **May 2-5, 2011** – International Biomass Conference & Expo, America's Center, St. Louis, Mo. Visit <http://www.biomassconference.com>
- **June 4-9, 2011** – 12th North American Agroforestry Conference, hosted by the University of Georgia. Visit <http://hosting.caes.uga.edu/2011NAAC>

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