



## Snohomish County Teams Take Two Top Spots at Envirothon

Two Snohomish County teams competed in and won top spots at the Northwest Regional Envirothon held at Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center in Bellevue on March 26, 2009.

### Congratulations Stanwood High and Sky Valley Schools!

Stanwood High School brought a record seven teams, one of which came in first out of the sixteen teams competing. Monroe's Sky Valley Tree Huggers, from Skykomish Environmental School, came in third. Teams competed from Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish and King Counties. The top team from each county will compete in the state event at Lake Samish on May 19 and 20.



Top - competing from Stanwood High School are left to right: Thor Pearson, Andrew Salmon, advisor Ryan Ovenell, Scott Weisse, Alexa Flem, and Jack Medicott. They will go on to compete at the state Envirothon in May.



Left - Monroe's Sky Valley team includes, left to right, Victor Rodriguez, James Helms, Christian Millan, Brittany Hale, Taylor Moe (alternate), advisor Deb Schuldt, and Autumn Baker (kneeling).

Below - These two team members compare notes at the aquatics station. Teams compete on their knowledge of soils, aquatics, forestry, wildlife, and on an environmental issue. The environmental issue this year was biodiversity.



### Spring 2009 Serving Snohomish County and Camano Island

#### Election Results

The results from the recent District election were a victory for Karl Hereth, a farmer from Snohomish. He will serve a three year term after being confirmed in May by the Washington State Conservation Commission.

Karl takes over for Wiard Groeneveld, who has served on the District board as a supervisor for twenty years. Welcome Karl!

#### Assessment Outlook

Snohomish Conservation District is again going forth with an application for an assessment to provide stable funding for our programs.

Two public meetings will be held at the District office, 528 - 91st Ave NE, Suite A in Lake Stevens.

The public meetings will be:  
**Monday, April 13, 6 PM - 7 PM**  
**Thursday, April 16, 7 PM to 8 PM**

If you would like to learn more, or offer comments on the proposed assessment, plan to attend or call Bobbi at 425-335-5634, ext. 109.

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- ❖ Workshops & Tours

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*Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.*  
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Zen Proverb



The Washington State Envirothon is an annual natural resources competition in which high school youth study and compete on their knowledge of five areas: soils/landuse, forestry, aquatic ecology, wildlife and a current environmental issue. The 2009 environmental issue, which requires each team to give an oral presentation, was 'Biodiversity in a Changing World'.

Local teams go on to compete at a North American competition with teams from around the US and Canada.

**North American Event**

**Canon Envirothon 2009  
 August 2 - August 8  
 University of North Carolina  
 Asheville, North Carolina**

# Butterfly Bush - Beautiful and Dangerous

Adapted from the Metro King County Weed News website

Butterfly bush is arguably the most controversial plant on Washington's noxious weed list. Even some people who fully understand how invasive this plant is still can't bring themselves to uproot their prize garden specimens. Without a doubt, this Chinese shrub offers gardeners many benefits. Besides feeding adult butterflies with its abundant nectar throughout the summer and early fall, butterfly bush requires almost no water, insecticides, or fertilizer to keep it healthy and productive. These qualities combined with its tough, indestructible nature have made butterfly bush a huge favorite among north-west gardeners.

## So Why is It on the Noxious Weed List?

Many qualities that make butterfly bush such a durable garden plant also make it a serious threat in nature. In its native range, butterfly bush is adapted to colonizing new areas, such as river banks disturbed by floods. It rapidly forms mature stands that can resist invasion by other fast-growing plants.

Its ability to grow in low-nutrient, low-moisture soil makes it perfectly suited for taking over sandy river banks. Its resistance to garden insects makes it poor habitat for caterpillars and other critters needed in nature to sustain the food chain. This is especially true for our rivers where insects feeding on native shrubs and trees fall into the water to feed salmon and other fish. In fact, one of the impacts of butterfly bush along rivers is that it crowds out the willows that are such good habitat for many of our native butterflies. Unlike butterfly bush, willows provide food for both larvae and mature butterflies.

## To Have or Not Have

If butterfly bush grows in your garden, you may not have noticed any seedlings. Does that mean your plant is safe and not spreading? Unfortunately, it does not.

Butterfly bush seeds are small and easily dispersed by wind for many miles from the parent plant. These are colonizers after all, looking for new territory to take over! Also, butterfly bush seems to germinate best in well-drained, open areas, not in nice, rich garden soil with lots of other plants to compete with. You only have to look along roadsides in King County to see how successful butterfly bush is in spreading to new areas.



Photo by Forest & Kim Starr, U.S. Geological Survey.

Because it mostly spreads by seed, you can stop your butterfly bush from infecting other areas by cutting off flower stalks each fall. Seeds usually disperse throughout Winter and Spring, so cut those flowers every fall. Don't wait until spring garden clean-up time.

In Oregon, it is now against the law to sell butterfly bush, including the species *Buddleia davidii* and all of its many cultivars. Although some cultivars produce less seed, they all produce enough seed to spread. Oregon feels that the threat to natural resources overwhelms any benefits gained by using this plant in gardens.

## What About Washington State?

In Washington State, butterfly bush is a Class B noxious weed and control is required only in a few counties (see the Washington State Noxious Weed Board weed list for details). The Washington State Department of Agriculture has not put butterfly bush on the prohibited plants list that regulates what nurseries can sell. In King County, control of butterfly bush is not required (largely because it has already become too established to remove it all), but removal is definitely encouraged. This means it is up to everyone to voluntarily do the right thing.

The impact of this plant along our rivers is serious. It is a growing threat. Removing butterfly bush from natural areas once it is established is very costly and may not be possible in some remote areas. Gardeners are being asked to use other plants and to remove those already in their garden. If this is just too hard, simply remove fading blooms at the end of summer to stop butterfly bush from spreading.

# Time to Appreciate Native Plants

From our friends at the Washington Native Plant Society

Governor Gregoire has proclaimed May 3-May 9, 2009 Native Plant Appreciation Week in Washington. This week is a celebration of the amazing diversity of Washington's more than 3,000 native plant species that inhabit our deserts, rain forests, high alpine environments, river valleys, and even backyard landscapes. Native plant ecosystems are critical to sustaining our native wildlife and the quality of Washington's environment.



Native Plant Appreciation Week inspires citizens through diverse activities and events to learn more about native plants and their habitats, and how to protect them. You can participate in everything from talks, hikes, garden tours, visits to natural areas and habitat restoration projects.

It's also a great time for government agencies, non-profit groups and environmental organizations to highlight their work in protecting native plant species and restoring native habitats. You can learn about many projects that enhance natural areas in your county. You can also learn how native plant ecosystems provide the most suitable habitat for our native birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects. Native plants serve another important purpose, they filter rainwater so that clean water is entering our streams, wetlands and ultimately, Puget Sound.

Native Plant Appreciation Week also conveys the tremendous threat posed by invasive exotic pests – insects, plant diseases and invasive plant species. You can see and learn how invasive species harm native plants and ecosystems and learn about work being done in both the public and private sector to combat that threat.



To find out more about our native floral abundance, our amazing bio-diversity, and all the good work being done to protect and preserve it, visit the Washington Native Plant Society website at [www.wnps.org](http://www.wnps.org).

## Native Plant ID Course

May, with its explosion of flower color, leaf shape and delightful scents, is the perfect time to explore the incredible variety of native plants all around us! Join experienced plant ecologist and Native Plant Steward Holly Zox on a tour of native plant habitats in Western Snohomish County.

In this 10-hour course (broken into three sessions), you'll learn about the diverse habitats in this area, the specific requirements plants need to survive, and excellent field characteristics to help you identify plants in the wild. You will spend the majority of the class outdoors, mostly on trails, so plan to dress accordingly.



### Class Dates

**Tues. May 12 and Thurs. May 14**  
**5:30 PM-8:30 PM and**  
**Saturday, May 16, 9 AM-1 PM**

**Where:** WSU Snohomish County Extension's Office  
600-128<sup>th</sup> St SE, (McCullum Park), Everett.  
**Cost:** \$10, advance registration and payment  
**Bring:** Bring a magnifying glass and a plant field guide.  
Recommended: Pojar and MacKinnon's  
[Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast](#).  
**Questions:** Contact Donna Gleisner at 425-252-4185 or  
[dgleisnw@verizon.net](mailto:dgleisnw@verizon.net).

**Sponsored by:** Washington Native Plant Society and Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management Division.

# Weeds: If You Can't Beat Them — Eat them!

By Alan Shank, Certified Farm Planner

That is to say, let goats eat them. Goats, those little ruminants with the funny expression on their faces, are browsers. They actually prefer the taste of shrubs, trees and broadleaf plants like weeds instead of your luscious grass. And as it turns out, there's more protein in shrubs in the early part of the grazing season than in grass.



Thorns, you ask? No problem, blackberries are delicious. Weeds hard to reach or located in a wet or sensitive area? Not a problem. Goats are nimble and light on the soil. Unlike herbicides that might leach into streams and wetlands, goat droppings quickly decompose into and improve the soil. However, too many goats can erode a sensitive bank and should not be allowed in or near fish-bearing streams.

So, whether your challenge is knapweed, oxeye daisy, common tansy, Canadian or scotch thistles, (to name a few), goats are thinking "dinner!". Some weeds and many landscape plants actually are harmful to goats, but as long as they're given a variety of plants to eat and are not starving, goats generally do not select toxic plants. Or they eat only small portions of those toxic plants at growth stages when the plants are less of a danger.

Browsing goats can be ideal weed controllers in situations where they are rotated through the same pasture as cattle, horses and other grazing animals. By putting grazing pressure on the weed population, goats give grasses the advantage. But don't expect instant results.

It may take several years to see substantial improvement in a weed-infested pasture. Plus, on-going weed management is necessary for a number of years due to residual weed seeds. Other considerations for improved pasture are soil fertility, pH, grass species, stocking rates, and grazing by other livestock.

People own goats for a variety of reasons including: pets, meat, milk, milk by-products and breeding. That means raising goats to control your weeds may also produce a marketable product, while providing you a valuable service. Goats do need a mud-free clean and dry shelter, hay in winter, regular worming and shots, some company, regular hoof trimming, plenty of clean water, and goat-proof durable fencing.

If you don't want to raise goats, but still like the idea of using them to control weeds, you can hire a goat herding service two to four times a year. Considering that goats eliminate the use of fuel, heavy equipment, herbicides, and pesticides while conditioning and fertilizing your soil, hiring a herder may be a cost competitive option worth trying.

If you would like to learn more about raising goats and selecting the right breed, contact the WSU Extension livestock advisor hotline at 1-877-563-6789 or Joan DeVries at 360-428-4270 ext. 240, [joanrd@co.skagit.wa.us](mailto:joanrd@co.skagit.wa.us).

You may also want to check out the local Northwest All Breed Goat Club website <http://northwestgoatclub.com/>. They will have a goat show at the Stanwood Fairgrounds on Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup>. (Sources for this article include Healing Hooves <http://healinghooves.com/> and WSU Extension Livestock Advisor Nikki Fee).

## What Do Grazers Prefer?

Cattle and horses prefer grasses, which promotes the growth of broadleaf plants and shrubs. Sheep prefer broadleaf plants and grasses, which promotes shrub growth. Goats on the other hand, as browsers, prefer broadleaf and woody plants, which promotes grass growth by eliminating the competition.

## Carrying Capacity

Plan on 250 head of goats on a half-acre to an acre at a time. If a weed seed-bank is present, it may take persistent grazing to resolve your weed situation.

Source Healing Hooves LLC

## Grazing by Type of Goat

Pygmy goats are not a good choice for clearing land. They are better suited for pets and 4H projects. Fiber, fainting, dairy and meat goats are good for browsing but need supplemental feed during winter.



All goats need good fencing. Five-foot chain link or New Zealand-type is excellent. Field fencing tends to bend when they climb on it, which they will.

Source Nikki Fee, WSU Livestock Advisor

# What's New With Water Rights

If you own water rights in the Snohomish River basin, then you know that recent trends in land use, agricultural markets, and fish recovery programs are influencing your options for the future, especially as people balance the many needs for water. For some, this means finding a way to benefit from the economic opportunities water provides for stream flows, real estate development, and agriculture. For others, the value of water rights goes well beyond a financial balance sheet. It offers priceless returns for river stewardship, protecting the valley's agricultural character, or ensuring a prosperous economy for the region.

The Washington Water Trust (WWT) has been working with landowners since 1998 to create water projects beneficial to both conserva-



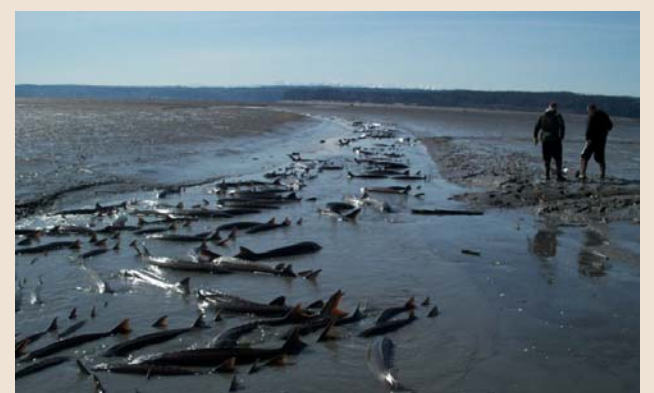
tion and local agriculture economies. WWT is an independent nonprofit organization working to enhance stream flows for the benefit of fisheries, water quality, agriculture and recreation. They do this on a temporary or permanent basis - by changing portions of valid, ecologically significant water rights to use as flow in salmon bearing streams.



Three Fish & Wildlife staff, Brendan Brokes, Bob Warinner and Steve Boessow, along with Amanda Cronin from WWT, sample bugs to assess the quality of water in this stream.

For example, projects can include changing a point of diversion to a mainstem source; switching from surface water diversions to deeper groundwater; selling the unwatered corners of a circle pivot; purchasing water formerly used on lands now in riparian buffers; and many more. They provide water holders with advice, assistance, coordination or voluntary cash incentives. The hope is to ease the strain on both streams and water users trying to get the most out of their water rights.

Call the Water Trust to learn more about water rights management at 206-675-1585 or check out the website at: [www.washingtonwatertrust.org](http://www.washingtonwatertrust.org).



## Strange Sturgeon Stranding

It was the most fascinating Puget Sound sturgeon event of the decade, according to one biologist. This amazing stranding of sturgeon in Port Susan's Juniper Beach area near Stanwood happened on March 19. About 1,500 sturgeon became stranded while feeding, but most seemed to have survived. Only a handful of big ones perished. Most were 6 - 10 feet long.

Sturgeon resemble sharks and have bony plates for protection. They can live to be 100 years old, grow more than 10 feet long and weigh over 400 pounds. Skagit Bay and other bays may have them as well, but they haven't been documented there as much.

## Fun Facts on Sturgeon

- ❖ Sturgeon are the largest freshwater fish in North America.
- ❖ They are born in West Coast rivers but migrate out to estuaries and coastal waters to eat.
- ❖ As bottom dwellers, they suck up food with a toothless mouth. They eat small fish, shellfish, insects, worms and other bottom organisms.

# Upcoming Tours & Classes

## Relay Crops

Tuesday, April 14th, 10:00 AM (approx. two hours)

Located on a dairy between Stanwood and Arlington

(Map and directions sent to registrants)

This workshop highlights a farmer who is using relay crops with corn on his farm. Giving the presentation will be Chris Clark from Whatcom Conservation District and Alan Shank, SCD Dairy Planner.

Funded by Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management

## Twilight Pasture/Weed Walk

Wednesday, June 3, 2009, 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Adam Farnham Farm, Monroe

(Map and directions sent to registrants)

Join our farm planners and merit farm winner Adam Farnham on a twilight tour of his newly purchased farm in Monroe's Meadowlake area. We will identify weeds, evaluate grass stand health, and look at issues like rotational grazing, fertilizing, and tillage needs. Please join us for a fun walk-about!

Funded by a grant from the WA Dept of Ecology Centennial Clean Water fund



## Green Your Yard with a Rain Garden, Rain Barrel and Native Plants

Find out how you can store and reuse rain water for your garden at one of these two evening classes. Learn step-by-step how to build your own rain barrel and how to design and install a rain garden that will capture and filter rain in an attractive garden feature. Taught by SCD staff engineers and restorationists, includes a free full-color rain garden handbook and resources on finding rain barrels.

## Two Events:

Frances Anderson Center

700 Main Street, Rm 206, Edmonds

Wednesday, June 10, 2009

7:30 PM – 9:00 PM

Snohomish City Library Community Room

311 Maple Ave, Snohomish

Wednesday, June 24, 2009, 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Both classes funded by a grant from the WA Dept of Ecology Centennial Clean Water fund

## Selecting Good Horse Property and How to Improve an Existing Farm

Bryant Farm, Arlington

(Map and directions sent to registrants)

Saturday, September 26

Two Tours - 10:00 AM & 1:00 PM

(both topics covered on each tour)

You will love the barn at this former dairy!

It has hosted chickens, sheep, cows and horses in its past life (see photo). Alayne

Blickle, Horses for Clean Water, will

highlight what to look for if you're buying

a new farm, especially if you want to bring

home horses. It always pays to do your

homework first, it may save you time and money down the road.

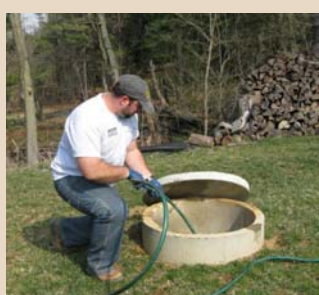


The tour includes:

- ❖ A rotational grazing system set up for both cattle and horses
- ❖ Concrete compost bins
- ❖ Rotational grazing/watering facilities
- ❖ Well-defined sacrifice areas
- ❖ How to use 'Heavy-Use Areas' to keep those pastures green!

Tour one funded by a grant from the WA Dept of Ecology Centennial Clean Water fund

Tour two funded by Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management



## Fall Septic Care

Stanwood PUD

October 17, 2009

Save money by knowing how to care for your septic system. Teri King from the University of Washington SeaGrant program gives a lively presentation on the do's and don'ts of home septic system care. Learn about system types, how they operate and how to protect them from

damage as well as extend their life. Knowing what can go down your drain is a huge part of keeping your system functioning well. From toilet paper to cleaning products, learn the best thing to keep your septic system working. Tips for landscaping and covering unsightly components are also included.

Funded by a grant from the WA Dept of Ecology Centennial Clean Water fund

# Agricultural-based Loans Now Available

## Emergency Loans

Emergency loans are now available to agriculture producers who cannot obtain credit from conventional lending sources at normal rates and terms. The current emergency loan rate is 3.75 percent with a limit of \$500,000. The loan can be used to restore or replace essential property, pay family living expenses, reorganize your farming operation, or refinance certain existing operating debt. These emergency loans are considered temporary, and borrowers are reviewed periodically to determine eligibility for a return to conventional loans.

## Loans for Youth

Youth loans of up to \$5,000 are also available to rural youngsters between the ages of ten and 20 who are participating in 4-H, FFA, or a similar organization.

To qualify, the applicant must comply with Farm Service Agency's general eligibility requirements, and

- 1) reside in a rural area, city or town with a population of 50,000 or fewer people, and
- 2) conduct a modest income-producing project in a supervised program.

Funds can be used to buy livestock, seed, equipment, and supplies; buy, rent, or repair equipment; and/or pay operating expenses for the project.

## Other Loans Available

The Farm Service Agency also offers many other loans, such as direct operating loans, farm ownership loans, guaranteed loans, loans for beginning farmers and ranchers, and loans for socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Contact Mark Turner at 360-354-5658, ext. 2 for additional loan information.



## Become a Beach Naturalist!

Learn about the beach life that exists on the edge of Puget Sound and then share that information with others at our local Snohomish County beaches! All you need to participate is a desire to learn about marine life and the willingness and time to share that information with class groups and beach visitors. This is an activity for all ages and abilities!



The three-part training is:

**Wednesday, April 15 and  
Thursday, April 23, 6:30 - 9:00 PM**  
at the North County Fire Hall, Stanwood  
and a field trip to Kayak County Park on  
**Saturday, April 25, 10 AM - 12 PM**

The class will have hands-on activities and lecture sessions covering:

- ❖ Shoreline Processes
- ❖ Marine Organism Identification and Life History Strategies
- ❖ Naturalist Techniques

All participants will be asked to sign up for at least 2 two-hour time volunteer slots at Snohomish County beaches from Lynnwood to Stanwood between late April and August. Each person chooses their beach and their schedule, with options on weekdays and weekends.

For more information or to sign up, please contact Chrys Bertolotto, WSU Snohomish County Extension Beach Watchers, 425-357-6020 or [chrys@wsu.edu](mailto:chrys@wsu.edu).

## Snohomish Conservation District

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