

# SKAGIT CONSERVATION DISTRICT

*Winter Newsletter, 2025*







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# WILDFIRE TIPS:

## *BEWARE OF THE GREEN MENACE*

Every year, firefighters encounter what they commonly refer to as green “gas cans” (arborvitae) as the source fuel or accelerant to multi-structure fires due to their location against homes or in the tight gaps between neighbors. Due to high foliar oils and annual needle cast in arborvitae, which build up inside their multi-stem habit, these common evergreen landscaping plants are a short spark away from causing incredible damage, especially when our landscaping is contiguous to wooden fences, homes, and decking.

In a recent demonstration of the combustibility of arborvitae, the Skagit Conservation District set up several of these shrubs in a row spaced 3 feet apart, then ignited them in a controlled setting. In this demonstration, we found that most of the plants took between 15-30 seconds to catch fire, and less than 5 minutes before becoming fully engulfed, even with a starting moisture reading exceeding 50.0%. When there was a light breeze, the fire spread easily from one shrub to the next.

It's important to think about reasonable ways to mitigate risk to one of your most valuable assets: your home. As with the mantra in real-estate, planting arborvitae comes down to three factors: location, location, location.

We recognize that no one wants to live on a moonscape, however, reconsidering highly flammable plants like arborvitae, particularly within 5 feet of our home and neighbor's wooden fence line, is not only a relief to our firefighters, it's also going to make a difference during wildfire season. July to September tend to be our warmest, driest times of the year. If an arborvitae can become engulfed and throw embers within seconds during high moisture periods, (as seen in the video on page 4), it's very unlikely that any firefighting force can respond in time to save an adjacent home. Unfortunately, wildfire season is typically followed directly by months of rainy, stormy weather. Few insurance companies and contractors can restore even minor fire damage before Fall weather sets in, which can mean a long delay on home repairs.

Do yourself, your neighbors, and our firefighters a simple but effective fire risk reduction action: remove the green menace within your property, especially near your home. There are some great alternatives to arborvitae (contact Carla, our in-house plant expert, for tips!). We don't need to live on the moon, but we do need to accept that arborvitae is not a good choice for the immediate ignition zone surrounding our home.



To learn more about mitigating your home's wildfire risk, visit [skagitcd.org/wild-fire](https://skagitcd.org/wild-fire) and schedule a free, non-regulatory wildfire home risk assessment.



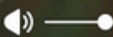
# WILDFIRE TIPS:

*BEWARE OF THE GREEN MENACE*



**SKAGIT**  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
SOIL • WATER • WOODLAND

## BEWARE OF ARBORVITAE: THE GREEN MENACE



0:00 / 4:30



Click to see the YouTube video of our arborvitae burn demonstration!





# SKAGIT FARM CIRCLE

## Agriculture Education Event



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Skagit Farm Circle hosted about 500 local third graders in November to teach about farming and agricultural through 6 engaging learning stations, including the Skagit Conservation District's Watershed Model presentation, which is always a hit!

The Skagit Farm Circle is hosted by the Western Washington Agriculture Association, and offers children a chance to learn about our food systems and environment, with topics including dairy farming, entomology, potato farming, watersheds, wildlife preservation and the types of crops grown in the state. There was also a presentation about local 4-H programs, and farming equipment on display!

This year's event included had significant growth from last year, with about 150 more attendees as well as additional volunteers and funding

Students came from Clear Lake Elementary, Skagit Adventist Academy, Mary Purcell Elementary, Mount Vernon Christian, Edison Elementary, Big Lake Elementary, Madison Elementary, Conway School and Jefferson Elementary.

We are grateful to Western Washington Ag Association and the partners who joined us in presenting at this event, and excited about "planting the seed" of education for our local youth!

Those interested in volunteering or supporting next year's Skagit Farm Circle can contact the Western Washington Agriculture Association at 360-424-7327 or email [info@westag.org](mailto:info@westag.org).



# HEAVY USE AREA



Before



After

Five K's Farm recently installed a concrete heavy use area for their cattle. Prior to installation, the farm was struggling with mud around their feeding space. Manure had become hard to remove, as it would quickly incorporate with the mud. Cattle were having a hard time moving around the space and feed was being wasted as it was dropped into the mud. It was a sticky wicket!

To improve the area, Skagit CD partnered with the farm on a cost share project to install a 1,500 square foot concrete slab, which would provide an overwintering space for the cattle. Since the project was completed, the farm has seen a drastic improvement in the area's soil health, and grasses are starting to recover in the field. A calf and cow pair have particularly been enjoying the comforts of the dry space!

Would you like to talk with our Planners about a similar project on your farm?

Click [here](#) to send them an email!

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT





# FLOOD RECOVERY RESOURCES

USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA) has several emergency relief programs that can help with post-flood recovery. To qualify for this coverage:

1. Contact your local FSA office at the first sign of damage. Damage reports are needed to request funding for the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), so please report early, even if you only have general information to share at this point. If your farm is not already registered with USDA, they can help start that process.
  - a. [Find Your Local USDA Service Center | Farmers.gov](#)
2. Document damage or losses with photos that are date stamped (phone cameras do this automatically).

Damage or losses that may be covered by various programs include the following (this list is not exhaustive – please contact FSA for more information):

- Emergency Conservation Program (ECP- covers up to 75% of costs. Limited resource producers may qualify for 90%)
  - Removing debris from farmland
  - Grading, shaping, or leveling land
  - Restoring permanent fences
  - Restoring conservation structures
  - **To be reimbursed, do not begin restoration efforts for the above covered practices until an ECP contract is signed and approved.**
- Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP- payment rates vary)
  - Feed/forage losses due to flood including purchased or harvested feed stored on the farm, additional feed purchased, and additional cost of feed delivery
  - Grazing losses due to flood
  - Honeybee hive, colony, and feed losses due to flood
- Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP- Payment rates based on fair market value of livestock. 2025 rates available [here](#).)
  - Livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality
- Emergency Farm Loans
  - Emergency Farm Loans offer crucial financial support to farmers and ranchers impacted by natural disasters such as flooding. These loans can be used to restore or replace essential property, cover production costs, pay essential family living expenses, and refinance certain debts. The aim is to help producers recover swiftly and maintain the viability of their operations during and after disaster recovery.
  - Eligible applicants include farmers and ranchers who operate in a disaster-designated county and have experienced substantial damage or loss. Applicants must demonstrate an inability to obtain sufficient credit from other sources to cover their disaster-related needs.
  - These will be announced within several months of disaster designations. Please contact FSA to learn more. We will include the announcement when they are available in the [Regional Markets newsletter](#).





# GARDEN GUIDE FROM ECO-RESTORE

## **Inviting Wildlife to the Harvest**

Along the winter shore of Padilla Bay, the air hums with quiet life. Dunlins wheel over the water, their pale bellies flashing in silver light, while a lone song sparrow rustles through dried grasses. It's easy to think of December as a time when the garden sleeps—but beneath the stillness, the work of the living continues. Now is the moment to tend to the small shelters and food sources that sustain our wild neighbors.

As you gather your final harvest of collards or kale from the cloche, notice what else has taken refuge in your garden—the chickadee in the salal hedge, the dew-spangled spider web strung between fennel stalks, the dark glisten of soil turned rich from autumn's leaf fall. Each small gesture of care—a brush pile left for wrens, a water dish for bees—extends the life of the garden beyond its borders.

## **Water: A Simple Offering**

In a corner of your garden, a shallow bowl filled with stones and rainwater becomes an oasis. Bug bowls—rocks arranged in low dishes—offer safe footing for bees and butterflies to drink. You don't need a pond or fountain; what matters is consistency. The freeze-thaw rhythm of winter means checking water sources often, especially after frost.

At Pomona Grange Park in Alger, you can see how simple water features draw in life even in the cold months—towhees scratching beneath

redtwig dogwoods, robins dipping into puddles left by last night's rain. These small sanctuaries remind us: care doesn't have to be complicated to be meaningful.

## **Shelter: A Place to Hide and Rest**

Every living thing needs a place to rest unseen. A fallen branch, a log left to soften, or a brush pile tucked beneath the trees—all create vital habitat. Bunching grasses and untrimmed perennials provide winter cover and nesting material for birds. Even the humble beetle house—a stack of stones or sticks in a quiet corner—gives home to ground beetles, pill bugs, and spiders that will later serve as food for birds.

If you walk the forest edge near Deception Pass this time of year, you'll see nature's own design at work: sword ferns arching under cedar boughs, moss gathering in green layers, and countless small worlds hidden within. This is what we try to echo in our gardens—a living mosaic of texture and form.

## **Diverse Habitat: A Living Tapestry**

A garden rich in life grows from diversity, not perfection. Let the lines blur a little between your cultivated spaces and the wilder ones. Plant native shrubs like red-flowering currant, ocean spray, and evergreen huckleberry alongside your herbs and greens. These plants feed birds and insects while anchoring your soil and softening the transition between zones.



# GARDEN GUIDE CONTINUED

At the Skagit Wildlife Area, flocks of trumpeter swans feed among the winter fields—a reminder that abundance exists even now, if we make space for it. Could your garden hold that same invitation? What corners might you leave untrimmed, what plants might you let seed, what layers of growth might you allow to unfold?

## This Month's Tasks

Even as you reflect, there's work to do that aligns with the season's slower rhythm:

- Harvest hardy greens from cold frames or cloches.
- Order seed catalogs and dream up next year's biodiversity.
- Prune kiwi and grape vines to shape strong growth.
- Secure cloches and structures against winter winds and snow.

Each task can become a meditation—small, deliberate acts that echo the wild care you're inviting into your garden.

**For more seasonal garden tips (including specific seasonal sowing guides), sign up for Eco-Restore's monthly newsletter [here!](#)**

Phone:  
(360) 350-6625  
Website:  
[eco-restore.com](http://eco-restore.com)



## A Closing Reflection

When we design gardens that welcome birds, insects, and other small creatures, we also create spaces that invite us to pause—to notice. The garden becomes a conversation between what we plant and what arrives.

Eco-Restore can help you plan or adjust your garden design to increase habitat value, selecting native plants that thrive in our region and structuring your beds for both beauty and biodiversity. Together, we can create spaces that are as alive in December as they are in June—places where the rhythm of the natural world hums quietly through every season.

This winter, may your garden be a refuge—for you, and for the wild.

*Article by Sara Jo Kinslow*



# PASTURE MANAGEMENT PLANNER

## DECEMBER

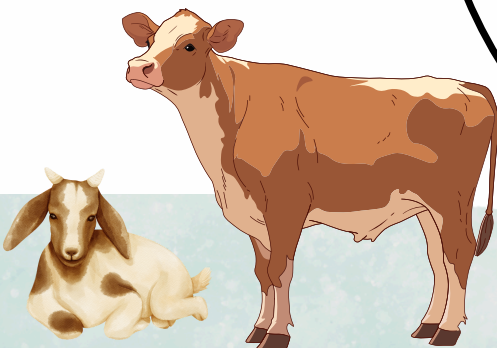
- Continue to restrict livestock from pastures, especially when soil is saturated. Grazed grass below 3 inches will delay spring regrowth by 6 weeks.
- Protect wetlands, swales, and depressional areas from livestock access to prevent damage to function and habitat.
- Store manure in a covered area or cover with a tarp.
- Make sure birds and other wildlife have access to water during freezing temperatures

## JANUARY

- Restrict livestock from wet pastures and surface waters with fencing or a confinement area.
- Collect manure daily and store it covered.
- Hang nest boxes now for orchard mason bees and birds and be sure birds have water available during freezing temperatures.
- Pre-order native plants at the District's plant sale!

## FEBRUARY

- Make sure you have portable electric fencing to divide your pasture into smaller paddocks when the fields are ready to be grazed.
- Inspect your fencing and facilities to be ready for the coming season.
- Did you order plants at the District sale? Time to prep your planting area for pick up on March 9th.
- If your manure storage is full, contact the District to join the manure share program.





# PLANT SALE

## Online Store Opening January 5th

Every year, the Conservation District hosts a plant sale for the public to promote natural resource conservation by providing quality, conservation-grade native plants at wholesale prices. These plants are beautiful, hardy, and serve a purpose in conservation projects such as erosion control, riparian restoration, reforestation, backyard habitat enhancement, wetland restoration and wildfire mitigation. Proceeds from the plant sale also help fund youth education efforts!

This sale is self-supporting, and not for profit. Our staff and volunteers work very hard to make the sale run as smoothly and seamlessly as possible for our customers. It's one of our favorite events of the year!

## FAQs

### *How do I order plants?*

Go to our [website](#) to pre-order your plants online. All plants are sold on a first come, first serve basis. Quantities are limited, and many species will sell out, so order early! Plants come in bundles, and the minimum plant order is \$50 (before taxes).

### *How big are the plants?*

Your plants will be bare root. This means they will not be coming in a pot, but rather a compact bundle that will be packed in a convenient bag for travel. You won't need a truck! The bundles are smaller than most people expect since the plants are bare root.

### *Where do I pick up my plants?*

All orders must be picked up on the designated pickup date at the Plant Materials Center in Bow, WA. \*Any plant orders not picked up will be donated to local restoration projects.\*

Online store open January 5th - March 13th

In-Person Pick-Up March 15th in Bow, WA

(Sales by online pre-order only)

To order and for more information, click [here](#)



# PLANT SALE



Evergreen Huckleberry



Red Flowering Currant



Ocean Spray



Sitka Spruce

## 2026 Plant List:

Cascara	Alaska yellow cedar
Red osier dogwood	Grand fir
Red flowering currant	Noble fir
Pacific dogwood	Western red cedar
Osoberry	Sitka spruce
Mock Orange	Douglas fir
Big leaf maple	Hooker willow
Blue elderberry	Kinnikinnick
Peafruit rose	Salal
Paper birch	Oceanspray
Evergreen huckleberry	



Salal



Paper Birch



WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF  
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

2025

AWARDS:

JED HOLMES

RYAN GELWICKS

We are so proud of Skagit CD's Board Member Jed Holmes and Farm Planner Ryan Gelwicks for receiving well-deserved awards from WACD, recognizing their exemplary dedication to local conservation. We are so fortunate to have them on our team, and in our community! Thank you, Jed and Ryan!



# SKAGIT COUNTRY LIVING EXPO 1/31/26

## What is the Expo?

The Country Living & Modern Homesteading Expo is a full-day event offering 100+ hands-on workshops, expert-led classes, demonstrations, and community panels covering every aspect of rural life. Whether you're raising goats, fermenting food, or building your first root cellar — this is where it all comes together.

## Why Attend in 2026?

- Learn New Skills: Gain practical, take-home knowledge in small group settings
- Connect with Experts: Ask questions, get feedback, and network with regional pros. Skagit CD staff will participate in teaching workshops, and will have a booth for info about our services!
- Hands-On Experience: Many classes are demonstration-based with live animals, tools, or food.
- Build Your Community: Join panels, local clubs, and connect with people who share your values
- Youth & Family Program Training: Special 4-H & FFA Educator sessions, beginner teaching tracks, and youth program preparation.

## Sample Topics You Can Expect in 2026

### Homesteading & DIY

- Off-Grid Solar Basics
- Arc Welding & Farm Construction

### Livestock & Farming

- Managing the 7 Wastes on Your Farm
- Sheep 101 & Advanced Goat Ailments

### Gardening & Food

- Edible Landscaping with Vines & Figs
- Seed Saving & Garden Tool Maintenance

### Home & Kitchen Arts

- Sourdough & Traditional Baking
- Cheese Making: Mozzarella

### Sustainability & Nature

- Beekeeping and Hive Health
- Herbiology for Beginners
- Know Your Native Trees

**For a complete list of workshops  
and to register, click [here](#)**



# EXPO CLASSES BY SCD STAFF 1/31/26

## Session 1- 9:00 am- 10:00 am

### Introduction to Pasture Management: Ryan Gelwicks

Come learn the ins and outs of the basics of pasture management. Learn about rotational grazing, forage demands, practices to benefit your soil and animal health. Designed for pasture manager beginners.

## Session 2- 10:15 am – 11:15 am

### Advanced Pasture Management: Ryan Gelwicks

Second class in the pasture management series. Come learn the science behind management decisions. If you are interested in the "why" this class is for you. Learn concepts on soil microbial health, how to conduct your own in field soil health assessment, advantages of a holistic approach to pasture management and how we can control photosynthesis through grazing.

**For a complete list of  
workshops and to  
register, click [here](#)**

## Session 2- 10:15 am – 11:15 am

### What to Look for when you buy or Rent a Piece of Property: Emmett Wild

You should always go on a second date! Match your farming goals and objectives with potential farm sites. All farms are not created equal. Learn what resources are available for evaluating soil types, land usage, setbacks, regulations and wetlands before you purchase a farm. Careful preplanning begins a strong foundation for meeting your personal and financial goals.

## Session 5- 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

### Raising Ducks on the Homestead: Emmett Wild

Ducks are the ultimate homesteading super species! You can manage crops biodynamically with their superpower pest control of slugs, snails and other insects. Get delicious eggs that are great for baking and eating. Keep them as comedic and fun pets or have meat for your holiday table. Regardless of your reasons for wanting ducks, this class will walk you through current best practices for care and infrastructure needs, physiology and behavior, breeds and uses, and will help you develop a sustainable flock of your own. So come quack about ducks with us!

# WORKSHOP MAKEOVER

Changes are in progress to make our workshops more flexible and accessible!

You may have heard about “Backyard Conservation” and “Watershed Masters”. All of the great workshops included in these programs will continue to be included in our new workshop series in a **more flexible schedule**, and with **Spanish interpretation** offered! Keep an eye out on our “Events” page for updates.





Thank you for reading this issue of the Skagit Conservation  
Newsletter! If you have questions about current programs or  
ideas for other stewardship activities in our community,  
please feel free to contact us at  
**[skagitcd@skagitcd.org](mailto:skagitcd@skagitcd.org) or (360)428-4313.**  
We'd be happy to hear from you!

