



South Douglas News

South Douglas Conservation District

Fall 2020

Assisting cooperators to adopt, implement and promote conservation practices which encourage good land stewardship and the protection of natural resources.

FALL CHIPPING COMING IN NOVEMBER

We will be offering another FREE chipping event November 12 and 13. You will need to sign up ahead of time so we can schedule the route. This is for South Douglas CD residents, which is roughly the lower half of Douglas County. In the past we have chipped from Waterville to Rock Island. The specifics of the requirements are on our website. Note that the chips will be left with you.

We would like to devote one day to **Badger Mountain residents. November 12.** As one of the few forest stands in Douglas County, it is an area that could use some fuels reduction. This (did I mention free?) service could help protect buildings and forest settings. Talk to your neighbors to spread the word.

Contact us at 509-745-9160 for more information.

We also have a cost share program for fuels reduction on your property. Need some help?



Free Firewise Assessments

We can come to your property and evaluate your fire risks and strengths. The 15-30 minute review can alert you to simple things you can do to reduce fire hazards. Call us and we can schedule an appointment.

Overwintering Habitat—page 2

LOCAL
POSTAL CUSTOMER

South Douglas Looking for Supervisor

Are you interested in becoming more involved with your Conservation District? South Douglas Conservation District will have elected and appointed supervisor positions open early in 2021. We accept associate supervisors at any time. Check out our website to see more information.

OVERWINTERING HABITAT

Need a good reason not to clean up your garden this fall? Those flowers and other pollinator friendly plants you grew this summer can also benefit bees, wasps, moths and beetles seeking shelter from predators and the elements. The availability of nesting and overwintering habitat is one of the most important factors supporting native bees and other beneficial insects. Stems and branches of trees, leaf litter, shrubs, wildflowers, undisturbed and bare ground, dead wood, brush piles and rock piles will attract and support pollinators throughout the winter. What can you do?

Leave your wildflowers whole until spring. Many birds and other wildlife feed on the seeds of the flowers, including sunflowers, asters and coneflowers. Prune the dead flower heads in early spring, to create nest sites before the bees start flying. See how-to on the right.

Save a Snag—Dead standing trees are usually taken down in managed landscapes. But if there is no safety issue, consider leaving them standing for woodpeckers, owls and, of course, insects. If safety is a concern, fell the tree and leave it on the ground. You can also bring in a log to help with habitat. But be sure the log you are planting is free of any pests or diseases.

Start a Brush Pile—Pick a spot out back and start by putting down larger branches, then smaller ones as you build the pile. Aim for 2-8' tall and 3-10' in diameter, with plenty of air spaces. Birds and small animals can use the pile for cover, as well as insects. As the pile breaks down, you can plant other shrubs nearby. Consider planting a hedge of wildflowers to hide the pile, if needed.

Leave the Leaves—we touched on this in a previous newsletter but this fall think about leaving the leaves where they fall. You can leave a thin layer on your lawn. It actually helps provide organic matter and nutrients for your lawn. Not only pollinators but other insects use the leaves for winter protection which in turn provide food for chipmunks, birds and other small animals. If you can't leave them on your lawn, consider raking the leaves into the garden or around trees to provide shelter for the pollinators and mulch for the more cold sensitive plants.

Do you really need that perfect lawn?- Or can you leave part of it unmown for shelter and nesting needs? How about converting your green lawn into a bee lawn. Short stemmed grasses and wildflowers tolerate some foot traffic and need less watering, mowing and fertilizer than the standard turf grass. Crocus come up in the spring, and the pollinators love them. They die back late spring and you won't see them for another year.

Visit the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation for more information.
Xerces.org

How to Create Habitat for Stem-nesting Bees



WINTER

Leave dead flower stalks in-tact over the winter.

SPRING

Cut back dead flower stalks leaving stem stubble of varying height, 8 to 24 inches, to provide nest cavities.



Female bees find cut or naturally-occurring open stems, start a nest, then lay an egg on the pollen balls. Larvae eat the pollen.



SUMMER

New growth of the perennial hides the stem stubble.



Bee larvae develop in cut dead stems during the growing season.



FALL



WINTER



Bees hibernate in stems during the winter.

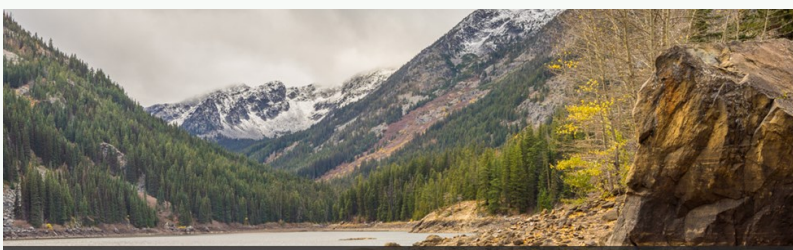


SPRING

Cut back dead flower stalks. Old stem stubble will naturally decompose.



Adult bees emerge and start nests in newly cut dead stems or in naturally-occurring open stems.



We are revamping our website. This is a photo of not Douglas County, Washington on our home page. Do you have some good photos we could use on our website that shows the “real” Douglas County? Call Carol at the office or send your photos via email.

REDUCING STRESS DURING WILDFIRES

BY AL MURPHY

The Summer of 2020 was a different and stressful time. It started with the droughty season and ended with a record fire season across the west and forcing evacuations of thousands of people (even in large metropolitan areas). How often is Mansfield threatened twice in one summer by rapidly moving wildfires? Add all that on top of the Covid-19 with social distancing, masking up and the constant reminder to sanitize our hands. This was a difficult summer for most of us. Hopefully, better times are coming. None of us want to get Covid-19 and none of us want to lose our home to a wildfire. There are some parallels between Covid-19 and wildfire.

Before we compare the two, let's look at a concept that is about 90% effective at reducing the loss of structures from wildfire. The concept is the Home Ignition Zone, referred to as the HIZ. This research-based approach found that homes with about 100 feet of managed (fire resistant) vegetation around the home will not ignite from radiant heat from even the hottest wildfire. There is more to the story. The HIZ can be broken down into three landscape zones around a structure. These landscape zones are 5, 30, and 100 feet from the structure. Each landscape zone has a specific fire behavior objective. The objective of the first 5-foot zone is to have non-combustible materials in this zone such as beautiful flowers, green grass, or an inorganic mulch. The second zone, from 5-30 feet, is intended to have vegetation that is spaced out in such a manner that fire does not spread in this zone. The objective for this zone is no fire spread—the area is lean, clean, and green. The objective for the 30-100 foot zone is to reduce the intensity (the heat produced) of an approaching wildfire. To achieve this objective, even with the native vegetation, remove the dead fuels, thin out some of the trees and shrubs, and remove any ladder fuels. Creating these zones does not mean creating a “moonscape” around your home, the opposite is true. This is an opportunity to create a beautiful landscape that is Firewise and one that reduces stress every time we have a new wildfire start in our area.

With the above concept in mind let's look at the parallels between Covid-19 and Home Ignition Zone (HIZ). We could compare the 100 feet of managed vegetation to social distancing we do with Covid-19, and the masking to the different zones with different objectives. And the one that most of us have the hardest time with (hand sanitizing) could easily be compared to doing the maintenance of keeping the landscape in good condition. Many of us can get the first part of the landscaping done, but most of us have a challenging time of doing the maintenance.

A closing thought, when we go out and do something as the “fire is a coming”, we will likely not follow up with any maintenance on the work we accomplished. Actions based on fear (an approaching wildfire) are generally not pursued once the fear is gone. However, if we develop a desired condition of our property and write it down, we will likely follow it up and stay with it because it is something we strive for and not something “we had to do.”

Al Murphy is a retired Forester and former fire manager with the BLM and US Forest Service and a current WSU Master Gardener.



WHAT IS VSP? BY CAROLYN KELLY

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) is an optional, incentive based approach to protecting critical areas while sustaining agriculture. The VSP is allowed under the Growth Management Act (GMA) as an alternative to mandates regarding development impacting critical areas, such as no-touch zones or large buffers. The five critical areas include fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, wetlands, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas, and critical aquifer recharge areas used for potable (drinkable) water.

Agriculture comprises the majority of land use in Douglas County. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, Douglas County had a total of 814,109 acres of farmland. That is nearly 70% of all the land in the county! Total market value of production from those lands was nearly \$200,000,000 in 2012.

Regulatory mandates would have had a huge impact on the farms, farmers, and farming economy in the county.

Douglas County was one of 27 counties state-wide to decide to participate in VSP. Local representatives from our community, including agricultural landowners and producers, came together to form a Work Group, and they developed a VSP Work Plan which was subsequently approved at the state level.

What does VSP do? The Work Plan, as adopted, sets Goals and Benchmarks that when met, will recognize all of the great conservation practices that are implemented by the agricultural producers in Douglas County, and make regulatory measures unneeded. Local technical service providers, such as the South Douglas Conservation District, the Foster Creek Conservation District, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service not only provide expertise to assist landowners, but may also be able to provide financial incentives as well.

The Work Plan also provides for accountability for all the conservation that is done by our producers county-wide. Reports are sent in to the Washington Conservation Commission which document what has been sustained and completed. Time flies....and the next major report, marking five years since adoption of VSP in Douglas County, is due in 2021. It will be available on line.

Douglas County has made great strides in meeting goals and benchmarks identified in the plan, and our producers continue to be super stewards of the land. The next meeting of the Work Group will be in November, and all are invited to participate.

For more VSP information contact:

South Douglas Conservation District -Our website has a survey you can take to evaluate your current conservation practices.

Foster Creek Conservation District is the lead entity for Douglas County Voluntary Stewardship Program. Visit their website at fostercreekcd.org. They also have the survey and more details about the program.

South Douglas Conservation District

P.O. Box 246, 206 N Chelan
Waterville, WA 98858
(509) 745-9160 •
www.southdouglascd.org



Staff Member

Carol Cowling, *Coordinator*
southdouglascd@conserveva.net

Board of Supervisors

Mike Lesky *Chair*
Eileen Bone, *Vice Chair*
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Please Remember to Recycle

