

People & Places

Nursery cultivates native specialty

Scholls Valley Native Nursery values genetic diversity

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Many farmers wouldn’t be thrilled about a beaver dam flooding a portion of their land, but George Kral doesn’t see it as a problem. Though Kral acknowledges the beaver dam and surrounding wetlands are a significant sacrifice of property at his Scholls Valley Native Nursery, he said they provide tangible benefits to the land.

Before the beaver inhabited the stream on Kral’s nursery, it often consisted of a trickle of water. Now, the dam slows down and retains water on the property, resulting in perennial flows and perennial ponds.

“They push water into places you’d never imagine,” Kral said. “The whole landscape is re-watered.”

Kral has dedicated more than a third of the 60-acre property near Gales Creek, Ore., to a conservation easement, which limits his ability to fully use or develop the land.

Returning that acreage to a natural state does provide a valuable resource to the nursery in the form of seeds and cuttings from native plants, which are the company’s specialty.

Scholls Valley Native Nursery raises about 140 species of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, including sedges and rushes that are adapted to wet meadows, marshes and swamps.

While conventional farmers have generally bred



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

George Kral, owner of Scholls Valley Native Nursery in Gales Creek, Ore., focuses on genetic diversity to ensure native plants can thrive in a variety of conditions.

for consistency in crops — such as ensuring uniform ripening — Kral focuses on producing plants for genetic diversity, which is necessary for them to survive challenging conditions.

“We grow plants to fend for themselves,” he said.

The company collects seeds that mature at different times from a variety of locations, then plants them to directly grow nursery stock or for cutting blocks that will produce scions for rooting.

This process can generate plants that would normally be considered runts, but which can actually be more durable in tough circumstances.

For example, an acorn may sprout a white oak that grows 18 inches in a year while its sibling may achieve just six inches in height, Kral said.

The taller tree would normally be considered

superior, but its vigorous growth may prove unsustainable in thin soil that’s adequate for the more compact oak, he said. “It’s just a more conservative growth habit.”

Maintaining a diverse genetic base will be increasingly important as climate change pushes up average Northwest temperatures in the coming decades, Kral said.

According to data analyzed by Kral, the average August temperature in Oregon’s mid-Willamette Valley is now roughly 5 degrees Fahrenheit higher than in the 1940s.

At this point, the mid-Willamette Valley has a higher average temperature in August than the Umpqua Valley — a traditionally warmer climate — more than seven decades ago, he said. “That’s a huge shift.”

The change is evident with two native West Coast

species, white alder and red alder, in experiments Kral has conducted at several elevations.

The white alder, a historically northerly tree, is dying at the warmer, low-elevation sites while continuing to survive at higher elevations.

Meanwhile, the red alder, a southerly species, is thriving on the Willamette Valley floor.

For the Scholls Valley Native Nursery, the problem isn’t just an abstraction: Kral expects to start growing a different mix of native species that will remain viable in the climate of the future.

He’s written an article advising customers — often government entities and nonprofit institutions that conduct habitat restoration — they’ll need to be flexible in their product selections as temperatures rise.

“Managing natural resources



Western Innovator

GEORGE KRAL

Occupation: Owner of Scholls Valley Native Nursery

Hometown: Gales Creek, Ore.

Family: Wife, Sara, and five grown children

Education: Bachelor of Science in Forest Management from Oregon State University in 1988

Age: 55

is inherently dynamic,” Kral said. “You better be ready to change course or you’re going to hit a wall.”

Trained as a forester, Kral’s early experience with the nursery industry was as a federal employee charged with managing contracts for purchasing trees needed for reforestation.

Kral went on to work for the City of Portland, helping private landowners restore riparian habitats, which eventually led him to start his own landscape management and reforestation company.

The dearth of native species available for commercial sale at the time convinced Kral to begin growing his own, which evolved into the nursery he founded in 2003.

“I encountered the challenge of not finding the stuff I wanted to work with,” he said. “It’s like trying to build a house and all you get is bricks.”

Wildfires amplify concerns over forest management

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — Members of Communities for Healthy Forests said at a recent year-end meeting they are making progress in getting their message across to governmental agencies and the public regarding the recovery of forest lands following wildfires.

Communities for Healthy Forests is a nonprofit group that was founded 15 years ago with a mission of “informing the public and policy makers with facts supporting the need to restore forest lands after catastrophic fires.”

“Absolutely. We’re reaching folks at all levels, from the general public, the downtown folks, all the way up to the policy makers, the agency heads,” said Javier Goirigolzarri, executive director of the group.

Goirigolzarri said when CHF members traveled to Washington, D.C., in 2004, they could barely get through office doors to talk about the impact of catastrophic wildfires.

“Those we did talk to said, ‘Sounds interesting ... good luck to you all,’” he remembered. “Now there is significant congressio-

nal level language about the need to move forward with management of forests after fires.

“With more people dying, more communities being evacuated, more social and economic impact, finally people are talking about it, wanting to do something about these mega-fires,” he added.

Doug Robertson, another CHF member, said that in a perverse way, the increase nationally in catastrophic fires has elevated the discussion to a much higher level. There have been numerous multi-thousand acre wildfires in several western states in the past decade, the most recent being the Camp Fire in northern California that burned and destroyed the community of Paradise and killed 85 residents.

“People are taking this issue much more seriously now,” Robertson said. “They are looking in earnest at the recovery of forests after catastrophic fires and now are also talking about making forests more fire resilient.”

The Umpqua National Forest, east of Roseburg in Douglas County, Ore., has suffered a few of these fires. After touring one of the burned areas in 2002 and seeing the severity of stand-

ing and fallen dead trees and soil erosion, Roseburg area citizens formed Communities for Healthy Forests.

“We saw a jumble of dead logs, all set up to be fuel for the next fire,” said Lee Paterson, president of the CHF. “There was such tremendous waste.”

That tour included some areas that had already burned a second time, causing even more severe damage.

CHF represents rural communities and not politically polarized interest groups. Members are from business, education, utilities, and community and tribal agencies. Funding is provided by businesses, utilities, tribes and several Oregon counties.

“I see what is going on in our western forests, I see what is happening to the beautiful forests we have, that we had, and it makes me want to cry,” said CHF member Wes Melo who is a 24-year volunteer firefighter.

The group decided the best way to accomplish its mission to educate people about mega-fires and the lack of forest restoration after the flames and smoke had cleared was to produce videos with scientists and foresters presenting scientific information on forest management. The videos include

“The Carbon Factor,” “After The Fire Is Out,” “Smoke!” and “Adding Fuel to the Fire.” They’ve been widely distributed and shown during presentations to governmental agencies, conferences, elected officials, to chambers of commerce and service clubs, and to the public.

CHF’s original mission focused on emphasizing recovery and restoration after a fire, but in recent years the group has also included information on managing forests to prevent mega-fires. Members emphasize that sustainably managed forests are resilient forests that are able to withstand both the unexpected forces of natural and human-caused fires.

Goirigolzarri emphasized CHF is not advocating for clear cuts of burned areas, but rather selective cutting on these lands to salvage some timber for its value, reduce hazards, to clean up ground fuels to create fire breaks that will help prevent future mega-fires and to replant to help establish a new forest. The same management tools are being suggested for forests that are suffering and dying from insect infestations, resulting in more fuel for the fire.

“We have an epidemic of

trees and a fuel problem,” he said. “There’s not enough logging and prescribed burning activity to reduce the fuel loads. With appropriate thinning and the reduction of fuel loads to a manageable level, the forests can withstand the next lightning strike and not burn so severely that we lose an entire watershed.”

Another group, Sustainable Forest Action Coalition, with a mission similar to that of CHF, formed in Northern California several years ago. The two groups work together to get their educational information out.

“There’s work to be done to get the message out because there are those who want to minimize any work on these federal forest lands,” said Goirigolzarri. “We’re working to expand our effort, connecting with other groups of like mind, trying to gather our voices into one common cause. We need help from Washington, D.C., to fix this.”

Paterson said he hates to hear others “pigeon hole us as timber advocates.”

“We advocate for restoration of burned over land before it becomes an economic wasteland,” he said. “We are an environmental community, an environmental protection group.”

CALENDAR

SATURDAY, JAN. 19

Cattlemen’s Workshop: 8:45 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Blue Mountain Conference Center, 404 12th St., La Grande, Ore. The Cattlemen’s Workshop began in 2005 as the result of contentious current issues highlighted by regional beef seedstock producers, allied industry and university research & extension personnel. Over the years, the Cattlemen’s Workshop has continued to highlight the most current and relevant issues facing the U.S. beef cattle industry. Kim McKague, kim.mckague@oregonstate.edu, 541-562-5129. <http://www.cattlemensworkshopnw.com>.

THURSDAY, JAN. 24

Online Only Auction: 6 p.m., Miller & Co. Auctioneers, Portland. Oliver 550 tractor, implements, 1959 Mercedes 190D, shop tools,

primitives, lapidary equipment, lifetime collection of minerals, petrified wood, thunder eggs, obsidian, agates and items that can no longer be collected or imported. <http://www.jmillerauctioneers.com/awpcp/>.

TUESDAY, JAN. 22

Management Matters for Soil Health Workshop: 7:45 a.m.-3:45 p.m., Banyans on the Ridge, 1260 Palouse Ridge Drive, Pullman, Wash. The workshop will address soil health issues related to soil acidity. <https://bit.ly/2TgJdtd>.

2019 Annual Rice Grower Meeting-Woodland: 8 a.m.-11:05 p.m., Cracchiolo’s Market, 1320 E. Main St., Woodland. <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu>.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 23

39th Annual EcoFarm Conference: Asilomar Conference

Grounds, 800 Asilomar Ave., Pacific Grove, Calif. <http://www.eco-farm.org/conference>.

Washington-Oregon Potato Conference: 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m., Three Rivers Convention Center, 7016 W. Grandridge Blvd., Kennewick, Wash. Annual Washington-Oregon potato conference with industry and research updates, including keynote speaker Pablos Holman. Brandy Tucker, btucker@potatoes.com, 509-766-7123. <https://www.potatoes.com/potatoconference>.

Sudden Oak Death Workshop for Citizen Scientists: 5-8 p.m., Curry County Extension Office, 29390 Ellensburg Ave., Gold Beach. Learn about early detection of Sudden Oak Death Using Bucket and Stream Baits in a workshop for citizen scientists. To RSVP call Shawna at 541-572-5263 ext 25292 or

shawna.horner@oregonstate.edu <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/coos/>.

THURSDAY, JAN. 24

39th Annual EcoFarm Conference: Asilomar Conference Grounds, 800 Asilomar Ave., Pacific Grove, Calif. <http://www.eco-farm.org/conference>.

Mapping the Course: Timberland, Forest Products Processing and Fiber Issues for 2019: 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Heathman Lodge, 7801 NE Greenwood Drive, Vancouver, Wash. Sponsored by the Western Forestry and Conservation Association. <https://bit.ly/2SNMCPJ>.

FRIDAY, JAN. 25

39th Annual EcoFarm Conference: Asilomar Conference Grounds, 800 Asilomar Ave., Pacific Grove, Calif. <http://www.eco-farm.org/conference>.

SATURDAY, JAN. 26

39th Annual EcoFarm Conference: Asilomar Conference Grounds, 800 Asilomar Ave., Pacific Grove, Calif. <http://www.eco-farm.org/conference>.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 30

Cattlecon19: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 900 Convention Center Blvd., New Orleans. This is the annual convention of the cattle industry and NCBA Trade Show. <https://bit.ly/2ycMLDW>.

THURSDAY, JAN. 31

Cattlecon19: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 900 Convention Center Blvd., New Orleans. <https://bit.ly/2ycMLDW>.

FRIDAY, FEB. 1

Cattlecon19: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 900 Convention Center Blvd., New Orleans. <https://bit.ly/2ycMLDW>.



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