

College grows a new crop of foresters

Grays Harbor has innovative degree program

By PATRICK WEBB
Chinook Observer

ABERDEEN, Wash. — The forestry program at Grays Harbor College is branching out.

For some years the college has offered an associate's degree as a natural resources-forestry technician. Now educators have begun a bachelor's degree in applied science in forest resource management.

It's one of three practical bachelor's degrees offered by the college, which has a main campus in Aberdeen and satellite classrooms in Ilwaco and Raymond.

And it's needed because so many skilled professionals who manage Northwest forests are no spring chickens.

"The average age of foresters is in the 50s, so there are a lot of people retiring," said Alex Bastos, hired last fall to lead the bachelor's degree program. "There's a big demand in Grays Harbor County and all of western Washington."

The traditional lumberjack image of plaid shirt and heavy boots has been refined — to add a college degree in the back pocket.

"People have to under-



Grays Harbor College

On a field trip to the Capital Forest during a 2012 silviculture class, Washington Department of Natural Resources foresters describe the conditions of a stand of trees associated with a research project to Grays Harbor students, including Christina Cozad, Michael Schweitzer, Ryan Rohr, Brittany Deakin, Mathew Edwards, Kyle Hillery, Tommy Browning and Dave Houk.

stand that modern forestry is not that logger stereotype any more," said Bastos. "The new forester knows the technical side, computers, as well as field work. It's a highly trained professional who knows about environmental policies, caring for endangered species, plants and animals, and the law."

The bachelor's degree began in collaboration with Green River Community

College in Auburn with the approval of the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. Green River received a national grant as seed money; its program focuses on environmental impacts, while the one at Grays Harbor emphasizes forest management.

The Aberdeen curriculum includes technology, involving computer analysis and use

of drones, heavy machinery issues, and the study of invasive species, wildlife, harvesting policies, soils and law.

Growing a program

Todd Bates leads the associate's program. He joined the college 10 years ago to supervise the management of the forest around the mothballed Washington Public Power nuclear plant at Satsop in col-

laboration with the Port of Grays Harbor.

Grays Harbor College had a forestry program in the 1970s until the mid-1980s, but budget woes and other issues caused it to disappear.

Reviving the associate's degree program while having a 1,200-acre real-life outdoor classroom, in addition to the much smaller wooded land around the Aberdeen campus, was a boon. Although it is a half-hour drive away, Bates said the time lost traveling is worth it because of the practical opportunities. It offers students hands-on experience in management, including an annual timber sale. They learn replanting is a priority. "It's been a win-win situation," he said.

Bates sees the advanced training as a natural growth from the associate's degree.

"Our thrust is to develop field foresters who can hit the ground running, and they need to be familiar with the current technology," he said. "We used to make maps by hand and now it's by computer — but it's a merging of both worlds. Our current foresters have to know everything from the past and everything that's going on right now."

"Employers want people they hire to have a familiarity with technical stuff, but people who can also orient themselves in the woods. We teach students to assess the whole

picture, not just look at a stand of trees for harvest, but know about soils, slopes, conditions and what to do to manage them."

Good stewardship

Bastos did his undergraduate training in his native Brazil before moving to Japan for advanced degrees including a Ph.D. His key area of study was using GPS in a forest environment.

Having settled in the United States, he embraces the modern philosophy of good stewardship.

"In the history of the Pacific Northwest there is a lot of pride in the land and the need to properly manage the land," he said. "We have some native students who feel that they should take some responsibility to manage the land of their ancestors."

The college invites interested students from Pacific County to inquire about the program, including requirements, and investigate financial aid options.

Lucas Rucks, the college's dean of workforce education, offers a simple summary of why it is important.

"As we learn more about the healthy lifecycle of a working forest, as well as improve practices to preserve and protect natural resources, we expect our graduates to make a positive impact all over the world," he said.

Justices skeptical of Washington state over salmon habitat

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seems unlikely to allow Washington state to get out from under a court order to restore salmon habitat by removing barriers that block fish migration.

The justices heard arguments Wednesday in a long-running dispute that pits the state against Indian tribes and the federal government.

At issue is whether Washington state must fix

or replace hundreds of culverts. Those are large pipes that allow streams to pass beneath roads but can block migrating salmon if they become clogged or if they're too steep to navigate.

Twenty-one tribes and the federal government sued Washington in 2001, arguing that the pipes have caused a reduction in salmon. The tribes say they have been deprived of fishing rights guaranteed by treaty.

The state says the work could cost \$2.4 billion.

Oregon officials kill 2 wolves in effort to save livestock

By ANDREW SELKSY
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon wildlife officials shot and killed two wolves from a helicopter Wednesday in an attempt to reduce killings of cattle by the predators.

The killings have reignited a debate between the state, ranchers and environmentalists about how to manage wolves, which were hunted down for 100 years

until they disappeared in 1947.

Another young female wolf was shot and killed by a state wildlife official in April on private land where previous depredations occurred. All three wolves belong to the Pine Creek Pack, which roams in Baker County, and has killed four calves and injured six others in recent days, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said.

State Fish and Wildlife Commission meets in Astoria

The Daily Astorian

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission meets in Astoria today and Friday — the first time the commission has met in the city since former Gov. John Kitzhaber's plan to phase commercial gillnetters off the Columbia River main stem in 2012.

Commissioners plan to tour several sites around Clatsop County today. They will visit Bornstein Seafoods in Astoria, marbled murrelet nesting habitat in Oswald West State Park and tidal res-

toration work at McDonald Slough in the Nehalem estuary. They will also visit Gearhart to discuss issues related to a large elk herd.

The commission will meet all day Friday at the Clatsop County Fair & Expo Center in Astoria. The agenda includes an annual report on wolves in Oregon, game bird regulations, record-keeping requirements for commercial Dungeness crab sales, Pacific halibut regulations and rule-making related to ocean salmon fisheries. The meeting begins at 8 a.m. and is open to the public.

Farms look to 'salmon-safe' label to help lure discerning consumers

By EILIS O'NEILL
KUOW

In a big grass pasture in the shadow of Mount Rainier, hundreds of chickens are crowded around a little house where they can get water and shelter from the bald eagles circling overhead. This is the original location of Wilcox Family Farms, an egg farm that also has locations in Oregon and Montana.

Jim Wilcox says his farm didn't always look like this, but, over the past 20 years, his customers both at small, upscale grocery stores and at big chains like Costco started asking a lot of questions. They wanted to know if Wilcox farms were good stewards of the land. If they had a good carbon footprint.

And this: "Since we have so many waterways that we either border or run through our property, are we taking good care of those?" Wilcox recalls.

So the Wilcoxes started responding to those concerns. And they started collecting labels: organic, all-natural, cage-free, non-GMO. All those certifications are supposed to make customers feel good about looking out for their family's health and protecting the environment.

One of the eco-labels Wilcox Farms acquired in recent years is "salmon-safe," a label more often seen on craft beer and Northwest wine bottles than egg cartons.

The whole thing started because the Wilcoxes' 1,500-acre Washington state farm borders the Nisqually River, which has runs of steelhead and salmon. And farming can be hard on fish. Think pesticides, irrigation draining creeks, and, Wilcox says, "with all these chickens, as



KUOW

The original location of Wilcox Family Farms, an egg farm, is in the shadow of Mount Rainier.

'Since we have so many waterways that we either border or run through our property, are we taking good care of those?'

Question posed to Jim Wilcox
of Wilcox Family Farms

you might imagine, we have tons and tons of fertilizer" — that is, chicken manure.

The salmon and steelhead in the Nisqually River have been declining for decades, and that's a huge concern for the Nisqually Tribe.

"When the first fish comes back, you thank that salmon for coming home and sustaining your life," Billy Frank Jr. said in an interview before his death in 2014. Frank was a member of the Nisqually Tribe and a legendary activist for tribal fishing rights.

"We can't Band-aid this watershed," he said of the Nisqually River. "We've got to think about it for all of us: for everyone to have clean water,

quality and quantity of that water, to have salmon, to have them trees, to have all that medicine out there."

The way Wilcox tells it, Billy Frank Jr. is a big reason he decided to change the way he runs his farm. It was Frank who encouraged Wilcox to stop using pesticides, plant trees by waterways and keep chicken manure out of the water. That would earn him a "salmon-safe" certification for his eggs. Wilcox says

he decided "that's where our future lay."

The salmon-safe label was created in the late 1990s to try to translate consumer interest in salmon into money for farmers who did right by fish.

Wilcox Family Farms has changed how it raises chickens in order to protect the Nisqually River and its fish. Those changes have earned the farm a "salmon-safe" label for its eggs.

"We started out working with vineyards in the Willamette Valley," Dan Kent, the executive director of Salmon-Safe, recalls. Today, he says, more than 800 farms from Alaska to Northern California have the certification, including a full third of Oregon's vineyards.

But things haven't worked out exactly as Kent had hoped. Not enough consumers know what salmon-safe means — and that means not enough are willing to pay more for staple food items like eggs that carry the label. But a different class of buyers does know what salmon-safe means, and they're interested: grocery stores.

"What we've learned over the years," Kent says, "is that the real value we can deliver to certified landowners is market access."

In other words, given the choice, certain high-end supermarkets lean toward salmon-safe options. Kent says his next goal is to start working with more wheat, apple and dairy farmers to earn the certification and use it to market their products to grocery-store buyers.

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