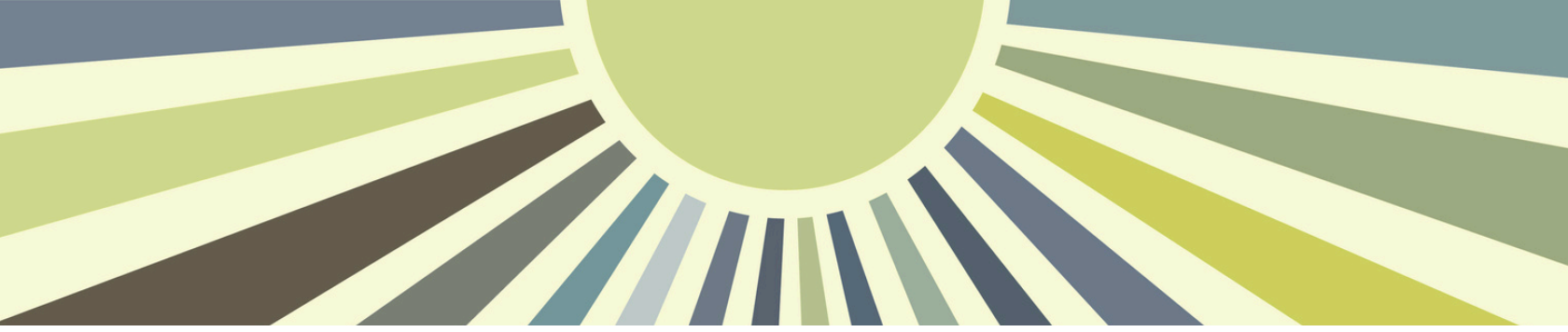




Skagit Conservation District

Summer Newsletter 2026





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Youth Events

Poster Contest

The Skagit Conservation District hosted its annual Poster Contest in honor of **Soil and Water Stewardship Week** (April 26 - May 3, 2026). The theme for 2026 was "Soil: Where It All Begins." The contest was open to Skagit County students grades K-12.

This year's overall winner is Mariela Cholula-Ortiz, an 11th grader at Mount Vernon High School. She has been awarded a \$50 Tri-Dee gift card, a plaque, and professional framing of her winning poster!

Category Winners (Per Grade Level):

K-1: Adelyne Strauss, Summersun Montessori, kindergarten

2-3: Fiona Hagen, Island View Elementary, 2nd grade

4-6: Anberlin Jansen, Centennial Elementary, 5th grade

7-9: No Entries

10-12: Mariela Cholula-Ortiz, MVHS, 11th grade

Honorable Mention: Evelyn Cates, Evergreen Elementary, 4th grade

Runner-Up Overall Winner: Arya Youngren, MVHS, 11th grade

Overall Winner: Mariela Cholula-Ortiz, MVHS, 11th grade

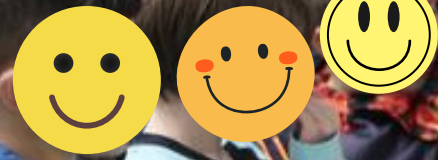


Youth Tour



This May, twenty Skagit County elementary classes participated in the Youth Conservation Tour at Pomona Grange Park. A total of 475 students rotated through 7 educational stations led by local experts, gaining hands-on experience and knowledge about natural resource stewardship. This event is always a hit with the kids! One student, in awe of the entomology station, even exclaimed "This is better than Mountain School!" That's pretty high praise if you ask us!

Youth Cont.

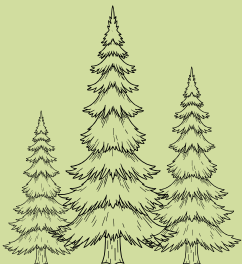


Watershed Model

During this school year, the Skagit Conservation District presented its watershed model to 975 students across the County. Through this interactive model, students learn how stormwater runoff can carry pollution into local waterways and explore ways that we can all help to protect water quality.



Arbor Day



In honor of Arbor Day this April, Skagit Conservation District distributed 500 Douglas fir seedlings to students throughout Skagit County. This annual initiative encourages young people to learn about the importance of trees and their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. By planting and caring for seedlings, students gain hands-on experience in environmental stewardship while helping to improve local landscapes and wildlife habitat.

Envirothon



After winning for Skagit County at the Northwest Regional Envirothon in Woodinville this past March, Mount Vernon Christian High School competed at the 2026 State Envirothon Competition in Okanogan County this May and placed 5th overall in Washington State! We are proud of their hard work and dedication. Congratulations, Mount Vernon Christian! Way to represent Skagit County!

*Congratulations,
MV Christian!*



Community Wildfire Ambassador Program

Every community is unique with its own quirks, important places, special people, and strengths. We all want to protect these valuable spaces, but without neighborhood-wide education and action, wildfires have the capacity to catch us off guard and devastate whole communities at a time. Having an advocate in risky areas can be invaluable for creating local resilience.



May is wildfire awareness month, and we were thrilled that 12 people from 8 communities joined the Whatcom and Skagit CD Wildfire Resilience Team for training to become Community Wildfire Ambassadors. Through a program developed by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Washington Resource Conservation & Development Council, these Ambassadors will work with CD staff to help distribute wildfire resiliency information to their communities, coordinate risk reduction projects, and advocate for fire mitigation work. Neighborhoods at risk from wildfire will benefit from having an advocate who lives locally and is familiar with area challenges, concerns, and advantages!

"My primary interest in the Ambassador Program is learning new strategies to keep our neighborhoods resilient and safe from wildfires. Connecting with other Firewise leaders is a fantastic resource for the entire group."

– Community Wildfire Ambassador

During this initial training, new Ambassadors learned about how wildfire risk is categorized, wildfire behavior, the forecast for the upcoming fire season, and resources available to individuals and communities for reducing wildfire risk. In addition to continued support from Whatcom CD in the form of workshops, technical assistance, and outreach materials,



Community Wildfire Ambassador Program



Ambassadors now have the opportunity to network with one another and share their experiences, successes, hurdles, and common issues.

Only time can tell the impact this program will have, but while facing a summer of El Niño and drought, it's more important than ever to equip people to assist their communities in understanding wildfire mitigation. We are grateful to be able to work with Guemes Island, Holiday Hideaway, Valley View/Butler Hill, Norway Park, Chuckanut Bay Neighborhood Assn., Colony Mountain, and Mount Baker Rim, to keep our corner of Washington prepared and resilient.

"Living in the forest makes you more aware of the actual danger of fire. I'd like to understand how to best mitigate the risks. [I'm] willing to help and encourage others around practices."

– Community Wildfire Ambassador

Every neighborhood can be empowered to improve their safety! If you would like to learn more about the Community Wildfire Ambassador program or schedule a free Wildfire Risk Assessment for your home or community, reach out to our wildfire resiliency team:

rwalters@whatcomcd.org
abryson@whatcomcd.org



Dairy Lagoon Cover

Project Highlight



Before



After

A local dairy in Skagit County recently implemented the first lagoon cover in Western Washington. Funding from the WA State Climate Commitment Act allowed Washington State Conservation Commission's Alternative Manure Management Program to provide cost share assistance which helped install an approximately 32,000 square foot lagoon cover which prevents the escape of methane from the lagoon into the atmosphere where it would trap up to 80% more heat in our atmosphere than CO₂.

The farm was able to pipe this trapped methane directly into a rigid walled digester where it can be converted from gas to electricity. The farm estimates an increase in energy production by 1,000,000 KWH annually. This power is sold to PSE to help supply green energy on the Western Washington power grid.

The final benefit of this practice is that it allows flexibility in digester run time so the farm now has access to a flexible storage space during engine work. This means they will have to flare less often during periods of maintenance, further reducing CO₂ and methane emissions.

Pasture Management Planner



JUNE

- Avoid under grazing- don't allow the grass to get ahead of the livestock.
- Mow pastures to prevent them from going to seed and losing nutritional value or set aside the pasture to grow hay.
- Continue weed pulling or treatment like mowing and dragging.
- June is a great time for manure applications. Contact the CD if you would like to rent our ground-driven, broadcast manure spreader.

JULY

- Continue to rotate, drag, and clip pastures.
- Check for erosion where livestock congregate and move feed, water, and mineral blocks to distribute your animals more evenly.
- Plan your winter confinement area and footing.
- Stay vigilant on weed control, it's important to keep weeds from going to seed.
- Start thinking about purchasing hay and feed for winter.

AUGUST

- Do not feed animals hay or grain on the ground while the soil is dry. This will create bare spots where weeds can invade, and horses can get sand colic from ingesting the dirt.
- Plan for fall reseeding. Order seed, lime, and fertilizer and reserve SCD equipment.
- Purchase additional hay and feed.
- Avoid overgrazing your pastures.
- Buy local flowers or visit a U-Pick flower farm!



NEW EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE

We are now offering a Woods GT40 rototiller as part of our Equipment Share Program!

Facts about the Woods GT40:

- Manufactured in 1998
- PTO driven, 15-40 horsepower tractor required for running the machine.
- Connects to tractor via standard 3-point connection
- 40" tillage width
- Maximum tillage depth of 7"

With a 40 inch tillage swath, this rototiller is perfect for small garden prep, and less suitable for large fields. Rototillers are a great tool, but keep in mind that they can contribute to soil compaction, so we recommend to use sparingly.



To learn more, check out our Equipment Share Page:
skagitcd.org/equipmentshare

A decorative banner of stars in red, blue, and grey colors curves across the top left. In the top right corner, there are stylized fireworks in red and blue.

Fires on the Fourth

July 4th is the busiest day of the year for fighting human-caused wildfires. Fireworks alone spark an average of 25,000 fires each year across the U.S.

Before you celebrate with fireworks, bonfires, and grilling, check local restrictions and practice fire safety. Attend a professional firework display instead of personal ones. If you are having a campfire, make sure it is fully extinguished and cool to the touch when you're done.

Consider swapping fireworks with some fun and safe alternatives like:

- noise makers
- bubbles
- glowsticks
- music

Help protect your home and community from wildfires this summer by making safe choices for July 4th. Happy celebrating!





NW Team Local Working Group meeting

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (an agency under USDA that provides financial and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners) has set dates & locations for Local Working Group Meetings happening across WA! These meetings are open to all, and allow the public to provide input directly to NRCS to improve their support of locally led conservation.

 **Date & Time:** August 3, 2026 from 1:00-2:30 PM

 **Location:** 6975 Hannegan Road, Lynden, WA 98264 or virtually via Zoom

 **Contact:** Sarah Tanuvasa (sarah.tanuvasa@usda.gov, 360-488-4819)

 **Zoom Info:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83707483160?pwd=Ut2nJSz7hNswRGa5pTVOnZlZYdSNlE.1>

- o Meeting ID: 837 0748 3160
- o Passcode: 144207
- o By Phone: +1-253-205-0468, 83707483160#, *144207#

For more info, go to <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/washington/washington-local-working-groups>

Garden Guide

Small Space Gardening



“Small Space” and Balcony gardening is more limited than gardening with access to land, but these small spaces add up and can make a huge difference!

Most of us know that bees are an important pollinators. They pollinate both our crops and wild plants, providing us with **one-third of the food we eat**. The natural food web would collapse without pollinators helping wild plants to produce berries, fruits, seeds, and other edible parts. Unfortunately, pollinators worldwide are in decline, losing numbers to threats like pesticide poisoning, habitat loss, and disease. The good news is that no one is too small to help! All of our actions add up. Urban development often leaves wildlife without pathways to safely move between habitats, but we can decrease habitat fragmentation by growing plants that bridge the distance between suitable habitats. Blooming trees, shrubs, and wildflowers provide pollinators with nectar and pollen to eat.

Even very small spaces can help wildlife by providing rest, food, water, and places to hide. Elevated habitats, such as balconies and roofs, can provide space for birds and insects, while ground-level habitats benefit amphibians and small mammals too.

By providing local wildlife with native plants, we increase their chances of survival. Additionally, plants help filter and reduce stormwater runoff, regulate air temperature, and purify the air. There are so many good reasons to add a few plants to your space (especially native plants)! Unsure how to start? We have some tips!

Planting on a balcony or deck

Do you have a balcony or deck? You can put plants there! Just make sure to check the weight capacity first! Residential balconies typically support 50-100 pounds per square foot when in good repair (check for cracks or signs of water damage and avoid applying weight if you notice these!). Saturated garden soil weighs 75-100 pounds per cubic foot. Distribute weight evenly to avoid overloading areas, positioning heavier planters near load bearing walls and medium containers evenly. Avoid permanent heavy fixtures. Consider using lightweight potting mixes with 50-60% perlite, pumice, or vermiculite to reduce container weight. (For more information on calculating balcony load limits: <https://urbangreenthumbs.com/container-garden-soil-balcony-weight/>)

Garden Guide

Continued



Selecting Plant Containers

While standard round pots are easy to find, they aren't the most efficient use of space; Square pots fit side-by-side with less gap, and planting several plants in a long, rectangular planter may be better than grouping several smaller individual pots. (The smaller the container, the faster the soil will dry out). Multiple plants can be combined in one pot of appropriate size, but make sure plants sharing a pot have the same water needs and are getting their preferred amount of light. Choose pots based on the type of plant: If they'll become large, they'll have large root systems and need a deeper and wider container than plants with a shallow root system. A plant in too small of a container won't have room for the roots to grow, and may need to be watered more often.

Larger pots are less sensitive to environmental changes in temperature and require less frequent watering, but are heavier, take up more floor space, and may be more difficult to move. If there are weight restrictions, consider plastic, fiberglass, or other lightweight containers.

Determine what plants will thrive in your space by figuring out your hardiness zone. Then select plants in your zone based on how much light your garden space will receive as well as any space, water, and weight restrictions. Trying to grow a plant outside its preferred environment is asking

for trouble, so choose the "Right Plant" for the "Right Place".

Assessing Sunlight Conditions

How many hours of direct sunlight does the area receive daily?

- Full Sun: Areas that get 6 or more hours of sunlight. Choose sun-loving plants like tomatoes, peppers, alliums, rosemary, thyme, lavender, sunflowers, asters and sedums.
- Partial Shade: Areas with 3 to 6 hours of sunlight. Consider plants like blueberries, huckleberries, broccoli, peas, heuchera, astilbes, violets, etc .
- Full Shade: Areas receiving less than 3 hours of sunlight. Select shade-tolerant plants such as beets, chard, lettuce, ferns, hostas, bleeding heart, etc.

Maximize Your Space

Use window boxes and deck rail planters to expand the growing space. Make use of vertical space by using hanging planters, and trellises. Grow taller sun loving plants like tomatoes and cucumbers where they can shade plants such as lettuce, spinach and peas that prefer cooler areas. Basil does great next to tomatoes!

We love this topic, and could fill up several more pages! But our newsletter is also a small space, so to learn more, head to the vast garden of knowledge at <https://www.skagitcd.org/post/small-things-can-make-a-big-difference>

Register
for our

Stormwater Systems Workshop

- *How do stormwater systems work?*
- *Who's in charge of them?*
- *What maintenance do they need?*
- *What happens if they aren't maintained?*



Aug 12, 2026, 6:00– 8:00 PM
Port Commissioners Room,
15400 Airport Dr, Burlington,



Little Habitats

Seeking Community Input on Urban Planting Projects to Benefit Wildlife

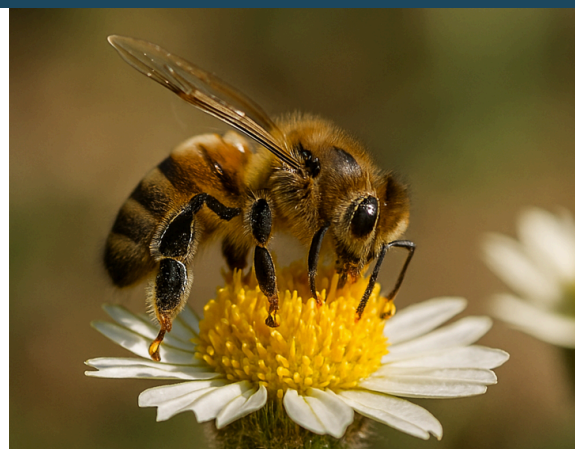


What is the problem?

The Skagit River area is our home. As more land is developed for buildings and roads, wild areas shrink and animals lose their food and shelter. It also traps them by taking away their travel corridors. Reducing natural areas also makes flooding, air pollution, and heat in our communities worse.

What can we do?

By planting native plants in small spaces around our cities- like traffic circles, roadsides, and shared community areas- we can help reconnect wildlife habitat and give pollinators, birds, and small animals a place to thrive. These plantings also help slow down and clean rainwater before it runs into our streets and waterways. They can also help clean the air, grow fruits, store carbon, and keep paved areas cooler.



How will we do it?

Our plan focuses on three things: planting native plants, planting shade trees, and improving how soil absorbs rainwater. We'd like your ideas on where and what to plant. The plantings can support species that the community cares most about by giving them food and shelter, as well as providing natural spaces for people to enjoy. We will choose plants that don't need much upkeep, so they can thrive for many years without a lot of extra work.

Help us find a project site and share your ideas in this brief survey!



[SKAGITCD.ORG/GARDENING](https://www.skagitcd.org/gardening)

Knotweed Control

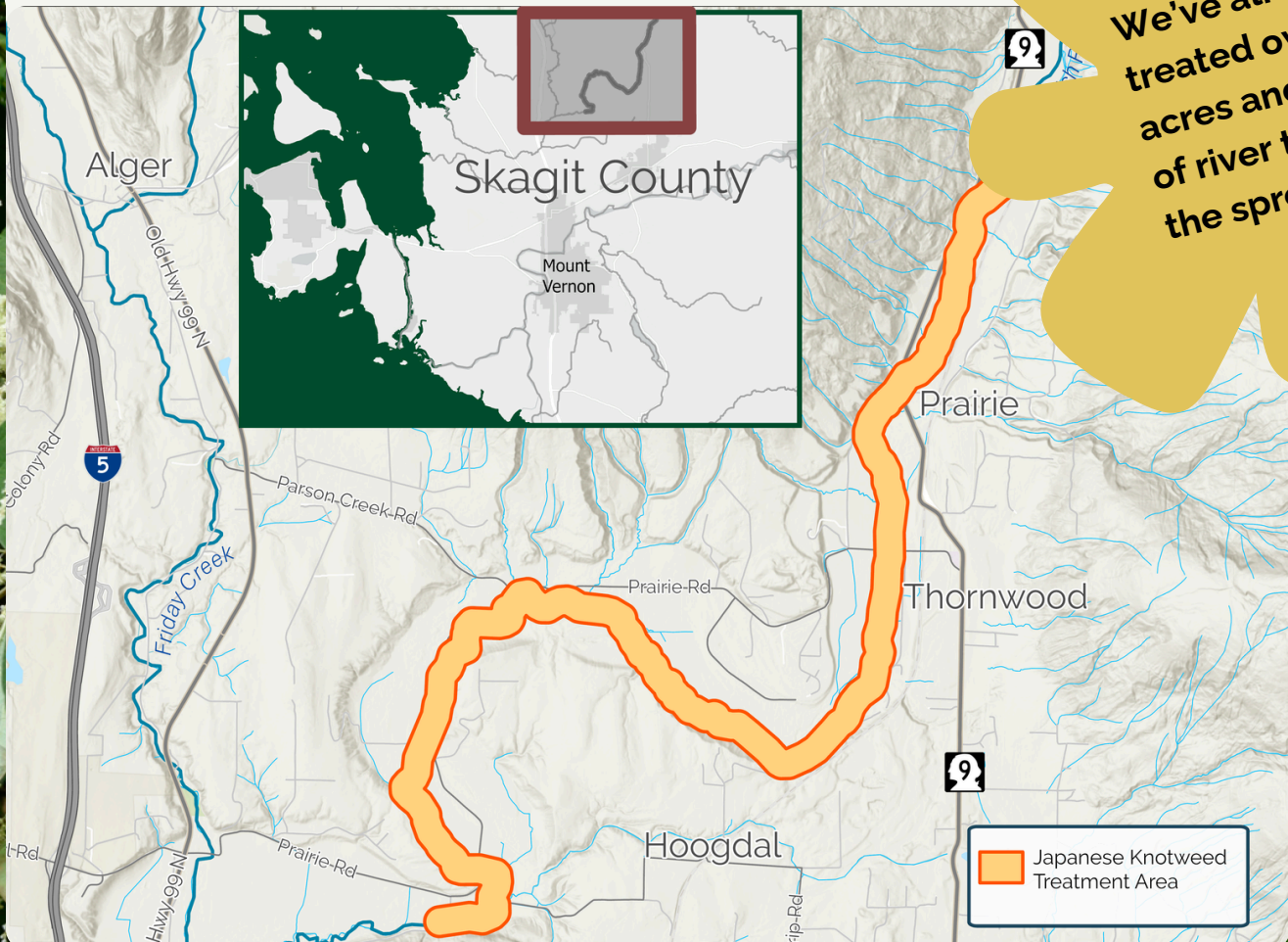
Knotweed is a very aggressive escaped ornamental that can form dense stands, crowding out all other vegetation and degrading wildlife habitat. It can also create a fire hazard in the dormant season. It is difficult to control once established.

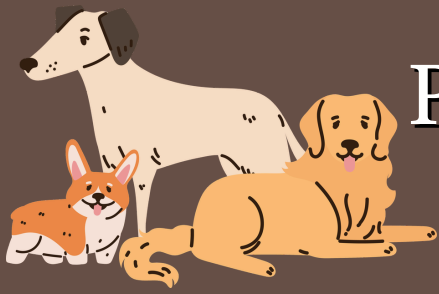
We are looking for knotweed along the Samish river and offering free herbicide treatments this June and July!

Contact us if you have knotweed on your property on the Samish River

allison@skagitcd.org, 360-970-3345

We've already treated over 20 acres and 4 miles of river to stop the spread!





Pet Waste and Environmental Stewardship (Poo-wardship)

Picking up poop is NOT the best part of having a pet, but it's in the job description. Otherwise, you're risking the health of your pet, your kids, and even the shellfish you have for dinner. When it rains, bacteria in pet poop travels very easily from backyards, parks, and trails to the nearest stream or storm drain. Healthy kids, pets, fish. It's all connected. Pet waste **ALWAYS** goes in the trash.

What's the problem with dog poop?

For one, it's gross to step in dog poop. But there's much more to it! Like human poop, pet poop is raw sewage that contains pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites that can make pets, people, and wildlife sick. Some of these pathogens can last for years in the environment or your backyard. People and pets who wade or swim in poop-polluted water or eat shellfish harvested from it are at the greatest risk of getting sick. Plus, the nutrients in dog poop can cause weed and algae growth in lakes, which can reduce the oxygen that fish and other aquatic life need to survive.

What are the solutions?

The best solution to keeping water safe from pet poop pollution is simple: Bag it and put it in the trash.

Bagging and trashing dog poop is the preferred disposal method. The bag

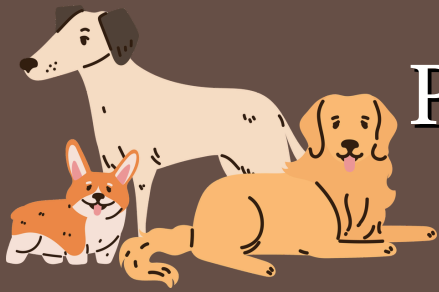
protects everyone from contact with the pathogens, and landfills safely contain the pollutants. Trash haulers and public health professionals agree - the best thing to do is bag and trash dog poop.

Won't dog poop just break down naturally?

Dog poop is raw sewage, just like human poop. Dogs also eat a much different diet than wild animals, so their poop is not natural. The poop may appear to break down, but the parasites and germs stick around. Bacteria left in the soil travels into streams, rivers, lakes, and eventually the Puget Sound when it rains. Dog poop must be treated the like the health hazard it is.

What if I don't live or walk near the water?

It may be hard to imagine, especially if you don't live next to a body of water, but your pet's poop left on the ground affects the water quality of lakes, streams, and marine waters in our area. Rainwater picks up everything it touches, including dog poop, and carries it to the nearest drain or ditch. Those ditches and drains collect rainwater runoff and carry it into a nearby waterway. When the rainwater finally makes it to our creeks, lakes, and bays, it brings with it a little bit of all the poop it touched on the way. When you think about how many dogs we have around... that's a lot of poop!



Pet Waste and Environmental Stewardship (Poo-wardship)

Can I bury or compost dog poop?

Nope. Buried poop is still full of bacteria and can still pollute the water. Most compost conditions don't properly treat or remove the pathogens and parasites in poop. That's why your yard waste hauler doesn't want dog poop put in the yard waste bin. Pet poop should never be placed in your home compost bin or directly on your landscape.

Is it really better to use plastic bags instead of leaving poop on the ground?

We agree that plastic isn't great for our environment, but it is currently the best and safest option we have for disposing of pet waste. We recommend purchasing dog bags made from recycled plastic or, better yet, reusing your own plastic produce or newspaper bags. At home, try using a scooper stick and a bag-lined bin to reduce the amount of plastic you use.

What's the deal with biodegradable bags?

While some bags indicate that they are biodegradable, this doesn't mean they should be left on the side of the trail or thrown into the woods. These bags are only designed to break down in an industrial compost facility, which isn't where poop should be sent. Left along the trail, they're just more litter.

We recommend purchasing dog bags made from recycled plastic or, better yet, recycling your own plastic produce or newspaper bags from home.

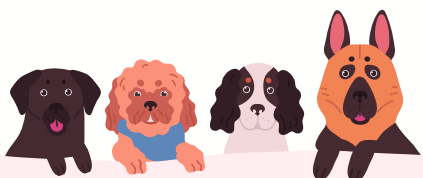
What if I leave bagged poop on the trail to pick up later?

Bags left on the side of the trail for later pickup may be left with the best intentions, but more often than not, they are never retrieved on the way out. We wish we could put more trash cans out, but cans on trails would be too difficult and expensive to empty. Using a bag carrier or keeping a hard-sided plastic food container in your bag are two hands-free solutions for packing out poop.

How is dog poop any different from other wildlife poop?

As domesticated pets, dogs are not part of our natural environment. Keeping pet waste out of our waterways is something we can control and is an important part of keeping overall bacterial levels in our waterways low. Wildlife poop can also impact water quality, especially when they show up in numbers that are higher than natural, such as when people are feeding them. Avoid attracting wildlife to your home or parks.

Every little bit counts and helps to protect your family, public health, and water quality.



Thank you!

UPCOMING SEASON

We're already planning some of our favorite autumn events! Don't miss out on these popular community classes:



JUDY RESERVOIR

Learn about the source of our drinking water



BAKER DAM

Learn about the source of our power



TAYLOR SHELLFISH

Learn about the source of our shellfish

Dates for these and other autumn events are TBD. Watch our social media and [events](#) pages for details, and reach out if there are any specific topics you'd like featured!



Come see what's possible when you partner with a Skagit Conservation District Farm Planner! A landowner in Mount Vernon is welcoming us on site to demonstrate their completed projects, which include improvements to a heavy use area for mud control, installation of covered manure storage, and other work around the farm to protect soil and water health. Watch our social media pages for more details soon!



Youth Tour

The following organizations provided invaluable support for this year's Youth Tour. Their dedication and expertise helped make this a memorable educational experience for hundreds of students!

- Sierra Pacific Industries
- The Department of Natural Resources
- Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group
- Bob Gillespie - Entomologist
- Skagit Land Trust
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA Forest Service
- And Sierra Pacific Foundation, who paid for school bus transportation!

Poster Contest

Thank you to our volunteer judges for helping with this year's Soil and Water Stewardship Week Poster Contest!

- Crystal Briggs, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Sean Howard, Skagit Valley College
- Lisa Miller, ECO Restore Consulting and Design
- Anna Thomas, Skagit County Public Works/Natural Resources Division

WADE Raffle

And we are so grateful to:

- The Lincoln Theater
- Cask & Cleaver
- elSage Designs
- Christianson's Nursery

For their donations to our WADE raffle basket, benefiting continuing education for conservation district staff, so that they can continue to bring expert knowledge to our community!



Thank you for reading this issue of the SCD 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 or (360)428-4313. We'd be happy to hear from you!