



Success
Story

Engaging Communities in Forestry Education

June 27-28, 2023

Pacific Education Institute (PEI), Hampton Lumber, Skagit Conservation District (SCD), Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and other community partners kicked off the first Engaging Communities in Forest Education workshop in the Norwest Region in June!

Over two packed days, SCD Forester Nick Kunz, SCD Conservation Specialist Taylor Scott, DNR Outdoor Education and Training Program Manager Clare Sobetski, along with PEI FieldSTEM Coordinators Amy Keiper, Megan Rivard, and Lara Tukarski, led a workshop for eleven middle and high school educators to gain a better understanding of the complexity of forest science and resource management in Skagit County.

“I used to think private timber companies didn’t consider habitat or look through an ecosystem lens, but now I think timber harvest is the end product of good ecosystem management.”



The workshop shifted participants perceptions about the timber industry and forest management.

The workshop was developed to help educators understand what forest land managers consider in their goal of sustainable timber harvest, which involves complex science and working with diverse community stakeholders.

“The conversation in the community is fairly one-dimensional right now; kids need to be shown that foresters are highly intentional about their management practices and there’s more to the conversation than the sentiment that all cutting is harmful, and the forestry industry is bad,” Forester Cory McDonald (DNR) told Keiper when first illustrating his vision for the project.

**“My mind is
BLOWN.”**

Forester Kunz shared his vision for teacher education and encouraged the creation of a story across the two-day experience. “I wanted educators to see the story of seed to harvest; I wanted them to hear from the diverse perspectives involved in forestry and see how it’s possible to have civil, respectful communication as a community. Our culture thinks of everything in terms of polarities, but we can model something better than that.”

The group was engaged from the very beginning on Blanchard Mountain when Megan Rivard (PEI) led an activity where educators participated in Project Learning Tree’s “Viewpoints on the Line.”



Learning about forest management practices at an SPI site



Each participant stood at a point on a line to represent how they felt about various statements about natural resource management and then explained their thinking to a partner who held a different view. Clare Sobestki (DNR) led a Blanchard Forest discussion among a diverse group of stakeholders, some of whom were part of the original Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee that developed the plan for management of the forest for multi-use, including timber harvest, recreation, and conservation.



Exploring a DNR site

The stakeholder group included Curt Veldhuizen from the Skagit River System Cooperative, Swinomish Wildlife Program Manager Tino Villaluz, Blanchard Horseman Association representative Mike McGlenn, Mike Hitchcock from the Skagit Land Trust, DNR foresters, and many others who, at times, disagreed with one another. This provided an authentic example of the rich dialogue educators can and should create in their classrooms to prepare students for civil discourse.

Teachers then hiked through the forest to see land at different stages of harvest by the DNR and learned about the Washington State Forest Practice Rules. They continued to build their understanding of forestry by touring the Washington Association of Conservation Districts Plant Materials Center with manager Jim Brown and experiencing a lesson from the Project Learning Tree “Explore Your Environment” guide.



Participants read a modified case study about Blanchard Mountain and its stakeholder community, and worked with a small group to agree on a management decision that would meet everyone's values. "My mind is just BLOWN," one participant said, laughing. She reflected on how greatly her thinking had changed from viewing logging as bad to understanding how managed forest lands serve multiple purposes and meet diverse community needs.

The group overnighted at Glacier Peak Resort and Winery, staying in cabins and enjoying an evening fire together. In the morning they donned fashionable orange safety helmets, vests, and hiking boots to get out in the woods like foresters! They explored a site managed by the DNR and briefly engaged in a student activity to measure the forest health using six ecological indicators, such as canopy cover, soil pH, and lichen count.



As the sun came out, they traveled further up the mountain amidst gorgeous views of Skagit County to watch a spectacular display of active logging, hear Peter Janicki of Janicki Logging Company talk about the role of technology in his work, and SPI forester John Gold share about land management for both ecological health and timber production.

Measuring forest health indicators

Susan David, Outreach Coordinator of Hampton Family Forests, led the group through the winding maze of highly stacked cut timber and powerful machinery of the mill to talk with several staff members.

They finished the day by hearing from small forest landowner Dave New and finally engaging with a classroom-based Project Learning Tree lesson to determine how to manage a fictitious 400-acre wood to meet ecological, social, cultural, and economic demands of the community.

The teachers left with 14.5 STEM clock hours, tired but brimming with new understanding and excited to see this work continue in their classrooms.



'Viewpoints on a line' activity

“Loved the content, the guest speakers, the free resources, the activities, the various sites. It was all absolutely amazing. I’m so excited to implement this in the fall.”