At the first of April, Robert Barker became the newest member of Whatcom Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors. Bob was appointed by Washington State Conservation Commission to fill the position vacated by Veronica Wisniewski, who has been a valued Board member for six years.

When asked why he wanted to become involved in the District as a Supervisor, Bob answered, “I’m very interested in conservation, especially as it relates to the agricultural area.” An issue of great importance to Bob is ensuring the viability of agriculture while addressing other critical resource concerns, such as creating and protecting habitat for salmon and coping with limited water supplies as the population and the demand for clean water increases.

Bob comes to the District well prepared to address such issues. Bob received his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Biology and Physiology at the University of British Columbia before earning his PhD at the University of California in Berkeley. Following his educational degree pursuits, Bob served as a professor of biochemistry in the College of Medicine at University of Iowa and chairman of the Biochemistry Department in the College of Agriculture at Michigan State University. In 1979, Bob headed to Cornell University. At Cornell, Bob served as Director of the Biology Division, as University Provost and, just before he retired, as the Director of the Center for the Environment. Cornell’s Center for the Environment involved all of Cornell’s colleges, particularly the College of Agriculture, in the Center’s focus on sustainable development. After fourteen years at Cornell, Bob retired in 1993 and came to Whatcom County.

Bob has become familiar with the District through his involvement in the...
State Legislature Takes District Supervisor Election Off General Ballot

Last November, due to a change in state law, Whatcom Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors election was placed on the county’s general election ballot. The District’s share of the cost for being part of that general election was nearly $20,000. Fortunately for this District, the legislature will allow our upcoming Board of Supervisor election, scheduled for June 18, 2002, to be carried out under the former election rules for districts (set forth in RCW 89.08). This means Whatcom Conservation District, not the county auditor, will oversee the June election. Except for last November’s inclusion on the county’s general ballot, the District has organized its own elections in the past.

Along with the return to the former election rules, the state legislature requested that a work group be appointed to review conservation district election procedures and prepare recommendations for changes and improvements.

Bob Barker Appointed to Board continued from page 1

Conservation Reserve Enhancement program (CREP), into which he has enrolled just over 43 acres. Bob’s research skills and involvement in the planting process of restoring riparian buffer areas on his property since 1997 has been helpful in establishing protocols and specifications to ensure success in CREP planting projects.

We welcome Robert Barker to his new position on our Board of Supervisors!

Otter Lake, Michigan, to pursue family business ventures and a bit of farming. We’ve all enjoyed working with Bill and told him to come back and visit if he starts to miss the rain (Bill likes his rain in the form of snow). The Board and staff of the District wish Bill well in his future endeavors.

Bill Sickner Leaves The District

Bill Sickner, a Dairy Planner with the District for the past year and a half, has decided to return to his home town of Otter Lake, Michigan, to pursue family business ventures and a bit of farming. We’ve all enjoyed working with Bill and told him to come back and visit if he starts to miss the rain (Bill likes his rain in the form of snow). The Board and staff of the District wish Bill well in his future endeavors.

Erica Fifer Earns Professional Engineering License

Congratulations to Erica Fifer, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employee, for earning her Professional Engineering (PE) license in Civil Engineering, Water Quality. Erica’s eight years of experience (four years of college plus four years of field experience) qualified her to sit for the 8-hour long PE exam in October 2001.

In 1998, after graduating from the University of Washington’s College of Engineering with a Bachelor of Science degree, Erica began working in the NRCS Lynden field office. Prior to 1998, Erica worked during the summers for NRCS offices in Renton, Ephrata, and Mount Vernon.

With her new PE credentials, Erica is able to stamp plans, certifying that designs are in compliance with standards specified by professional engineering principles. Erica is involved with designing agricultural structures such as pipelines, culverts, waste storage ponds, waste storage structures, and bridges. Though a PE license was not required for her work with NRCS, Erica chose to pursue the achievement on her own. Erica said, “We increasingly deal with other agencies and different levels of government, so I wanted to have the license. Being able to stamp a design speeds up the approval process with other agencies.”

Whatcom Conservation District staff members work closely with Erica and other NRCS employees to address natural resource management issues and provide support to the local agriculture community.

WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT – Mission Statement: the Whatcom Conservation District promotes conservation education and provides technical assistance to foster a healthy relationship between the environment and people.
Volunteer Monitoring Continues

In the Bertrand Creek watershed, Stream Team volunteers continue to gather twice monthly water quality samples to be tested for fecal coliform levels. (See “Volunteer Highlights” below.)

Into the Woods Event

District staff participated in the “Into the Woods” event that took place at Berthusen Park and was coordinated by Lynden Pioneer Museum. Bertrand Creek runs through Berthusen Park and provided an opportunity to educate the approximately 40 tour attendees about the Bertrand watershed. Staff used a watershed model to demonstrate the process of nonpoint pollution and the potential effects on water quality. District staff and other guides provided information about salmon lifecycle and habitat needs, salmon species found in Bertrand Creek and Fishtrap Creek, and the benefits of riparian habitat restoration. Thanks to Alyce Werkema for coordinating a great event celebrating the heritage and natural history of such a special park.

Fishtrap Creek

Two second grade classes from Fisher Elementary got their hands dirty helping to plant native vegetation along Fishtrap Creek in early April. Cathy Dexter’s and Leslie Price’s classes first received visits from District staff to talk about watersheds, stream restoration, and salmon biology and habitat needs. Following the classroom visit, the classes walked to Lee Mielke’s property on Fishtrap Creek to get some hands-on experience planting trees and exploring the great outdoors existing just beyond the borders of their school property.

Stream Team Volunteer Highlight

Many thanks go to Kathy Frank and Glenn Boodey who have been donating their time toward water quality testing efforts in the Bertrand Creek watershed. Kathy, Glenn, and their son Chris, all participated in the series of Stream Team classes that took place during fall 2001. Since that time, Kathy and Glenn have assumed the responsibility of gathering twice monthly water quality samples from two sites along Bertrand Creek.

Kathy and Glenn moved from the Midwest to the Bertrand Creek watershed in 1979. Glenn grew up in rural Ohio and Kathy grew up on a farm in Minnesota. Kathy and Glenn were attracted to Whatcom County because of their love for “outdoor stuff” and the “proximity to the mountains and the coast.” The family was interested in participating in the Stream Team “to learn more about the Bertrand watershed, the creek, and the habitat around the creek.” When Kathy talks about the creek and her home, she smiles and says, “Bertrand is a pretty creek.”

The water quality samples gathered by Kathy and Glenn are analyzed at the Northwest Indian College’s state accredited lab for the presence of fecal coliforms. The presence of fecal coliforms in the water indicates recent fecal pollution by animals or humans (i.e. failing septic systems, manure from livestock, etc.). Thanks to the efforts of volunteers and residents of the Bertrand Creek watershed, water quality testing has shown a steady decrease in levels of fecal coliform. Since water quality testing began in 1998, the fecal count in the Bertrand Creek watershed has been reduced by 75%.

Thanks again to Kathy and Glenn for being such great volunteers!
Why Compost?

- Work with nature! Compost helps us protect the land from our “trash,” and the soil benefits from the natural product of decomposition.
- Save $$ (you won’t need as much fertilizer and/or water, and your curbside trash will decrease!)
- Generate less waste. Compost is one solution to our solid waste woes.

Benefits of Compost to the Garden:

- May reduce incidence of plant diseases & other harmful organisms
- Loosens up clay soils so air and water can penetrate.
- Helps sandy soils retain water and nutrients
- Adds essential nutrients and soil microorganisms

How to Use Compost:

- In the flower or vegetable garden, or around trees & shrubs
- For house plants and planter boxes
- As part of a seed starting mix
- On the lawn, as a top dressing (if screened)

Local Sources of Compost:

- Cornerstone Farms, 8508 Van Buren Rd. (at Lindsay Rd), Everson (360)-966-4895
- Smit Dairy, 9039 Guide Meridian (1 mi. N. of Lynden), WA. (360)-354-3583
- Growsource, Inc., Hannegan & Division, Bellingham, (360) 966-3302

Contact the WSU Whatcom County Cooperative Extension for more composting ideas, 360-676-6736 or e-mail: joycej@coopext.cahe.wsu.edu Visit the web site at http://www.whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/

Add These to the List of Things That Shouldn’t Be Mixed

GRASS CLIPPINGS & WATER

From time to time residents of areas along streams have reported to us their annoyance at finding lawn clippings in water. So to all you yard custodians who think creeks are a dandy place to get rid of your turf trimmings, please consider other options for disposing of your cut grass. Here’s why:

- Decomposing lawn clippings rob water of the oxygen that aquatic organisms like fish require. During the summer, the effects of lower and slower stream flows combine with rising water temperatures to decrease levels of dissolved oxygen. To occur, the process of decomposition needs oxygen. By adding fresh grass clippings to streams to decompose, you are adding to the problem of low oxygen levels in our streams!
* Lawns are frequently sprayed with herbicides and insecticides. Trace amounts of these chemicals are likely to remain on grass long after treatment. Some of these pesticides are known to harm birds, mammals, beneficial insects, fish and other aquatic life forms. Salmon, for instance, experience a decreased ability to smell when exposed to even very low concentrations of diazinon, an ingredient in commonly used insecticides. The decreased ability to smell adversely affects a salmon’s

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
As of February 2002, Whatcom Conservation District’s CREP project numbers reached a total of 52 officially signed contracts. The spring planting season will end in April, but many more landowner CREP plans are being developed for future implementation during the fall planting season and beyond. On Whatcom County CREP projects, the average buffer width is 147 feet and the average rental rate is $346 per acre per year.

What is planted in the riparian areas?

The “riparian” area or zone is the land and vegetation that borders water bodies (streams, wetlands, etc.). Riparian buffer zones involved in CREP project areas are planted to trees and shrubs that are adapted to the site. Whatcom County CREP projects include a mixture of native evergreens (Douglas fir, grand fir, western red cedar, shore pine, sitka spruce) and native deciduous trees and shrubs (willows, cottonwoods, big leaf maple, alders, serviceberry, red osier dogwood, etc.). In general, CREP planting plans specify 625 stems per acre to be planted in a ratio consisting of a 40% conifer and 60% deciduous mix. Three years after plants are installed, specifications require that CREP projects maintain a 500 stem per acre stocking level. By initially planting 625 stems per acre, a 20% plant mortality level is allowed.

What methods are used for planting?

A mixture of mechanical and hand planting techniques are used in local CREP projects. Two CREP contractors have purchased tree-planting machines that typically would be used by tree planting farms. The tree-planting machines speed the process of getting the mixture of species into the ground in a consistent manner in terms of spacing and correct planting depth. Workers pre-sort the plant species into the appropriate ratios and then ride along in the planting machine to place the plants into the planting “shoe”. The planting shoe digs the hole, places the tree into the hole, and backfills. A worker follows behind to ensure that no air pockets are left around the newly planted tree. Tree protection tubes and stakes are installed later. Before the planting machine is used, the area to be planted is subsoiled and tilled.

Maintenance of CREP projects is ongoing throughout each growing season (May through October). CREP pays maintenance costs for first five years of the CREP contract. If you are interested in finding out if your property qualifies for CREP or you want to know more about the program, please contact Wayne or Sabina at Whatcom Conservation District (360) 354-2035.

ability to avoid predators, thus resulting in death. An interesting website with information about pesticides and health issues is http://www.uni.edu/yardsforkids.

* People who choose to live near water, including streams, generally do so because they enjoy the beauty. What they don’t enjoy is finding litter, including yard debris from their upstream neighbors, in the middle of something that would normally give them pleasure.

GRASS CLIPPINGS & WATER continued from page 4

Here are some alternatives for getting rid of lawn clippings:

1. Compost them (see related article).
2. Use them as a garden mulch.
3. Use a lawn mower with a mulching blade. As long as the grass clippings filter through into the grass and aren’t clumping together, the decomposing clippings provide nutrients to your lawn, especially nitrogen, and reduce the need for fertilizer.
4. Have your sanitary service provider pick up your yard waste.
5. Drop lawn clippings off at the yard waste disposal site on Woburn Street (across from Bayview Cemetery) in Bellingham.
District Plant Sales Rise Sharply – Ten Mile Grange Shelters Sale From Storm

Maybe it was the economic downturn that urged people to be more mindful of wanting to get the most for their money. Or maybe during these times of international and domestic uncertainty, people are thinking more about how they can spend their money close to home. Whatever the reason, the number of customers for the District’s annual plant sale was up 45% from last year’s sale! This year almost 300 customers purchased just over 18,000 trees and shrubs!

Not only were sales up, but luck was on the District’s side. This was the ninth year the District held a plant sale during the second weekend in March. Prior to this year’s sale, previous sales have been held outside on the grounds of the Ag Service Center. Due to this year’s early March subfreezing temperatures, snow on the ground, and a howling wind from the northeast, packaging pre-orders and conducting a plant sale outside didn’t seem like such a good idea.

Thankfully, Ten Mile Grange came to the rescue. The grange, located directly across Hannegan Road from the Ag Service Center, gladly agreed to let us hold the sale inside their building. Thanks to the Ten Mile Grange for helping to make this year’s plant sale more enjoyable and successful. And thanks to all of our plant sale volunteers and customers for taking an active part in enhancing the landscape of the county through planting all those trees and shrubs!

Proceeds from the plant sale are used to fund educational efforts of the District.

Spring 2002 ANNOUNCEMENTS

NW Regional Envirothon - Tuesday, April 16. Snohomish Conservation District hosted this year’s high school natural resource competition. Highlights and results from the competition will be announced in the summer 2002 newsletter issue.

2002 Whatcom County Sixth Grade Forest Conservation Tour - May 6-9. Coordinated by WSU Cooperative Extension, this annual tour exposes hundreds of county 6th graders to various aspects of forest and ecosystem management. The tour is held at the Olsen Creek Seed orchard located on the “Y” Road.

Soil and Water Stewardship Week - April 28 to May 5. This year’s theme for Soil and Water Stewardship Week, selected by the National Association of Conservation Districts, is “The Gift of Trees.” See article on page 7 for more detail.

Shuckin’ on the Spit - Saturday, May 4 from 3-7pm. The first annual Shuckin’ on the Spit festival will take place at Resort Semiahmoo to support the Drayton Harbor Restoration Project in its commitment to increase regional public and private awareness of the rich array of shellfish resources in Drayton Harbor - and to reach the goal of harvesting oysters in May 2004. The festival will feature fun and educational activities for all ages, food and live music. Entrance fee is $15 per person, with children under 10 years free. Profits will benefit the Drayton harbor Restoration Fund.

Nomination Petitions for Conservation District Board of Supervisor - due at Conservation Commission in Olympia May 20.

Conservation District Board of Supervisor Election - Tuesday, June 18. Contact the District about the location of polling sites.
Whatcom Conservation District is happy to announce that this year’s Soil and Water Stewardship Week will be officially observed from April 28 to May 5, 2002. This year’s theme for Soil and Water Stewardship Week, selected by the National Association of Conservation Districts, is “The Gift of Trees,” which urges us to understand and appreciate the many environmental, as well as economic, gifts that trees provide. Some of those gifts include:

* Climate modification: Trees provide summer shade and winter windbreaks.
* Air pollution reduction: Trees filter dirt and chemical pollutants from air.
* Erosion control/ Runoff reduction: Especially where trees grow on stream banks, strong root systems help to provide stability and prevent stream banks from washing away.
* Soil enrichment: Trees can restore productivity and organic matter to soils.
* Water quality protection and enhancement: Trees near streams capture soil and nutrients as they wash down from the uplands and reduce amount of pollution entering the streams.
* Wildlife habitat enhancement: Because forested buffer zones near streams contain the greatest habitat diversity, they are very important as wildlife habitat areas.
* Water temperature modification: Shade from trees and shrubs helps to keep water temperatures cool to hold more dissolved oxygen, which is important for maintaining fish and aquatic organisms.
* Economic crop: Products made from trees are all around us, from obvious things such as wooden furniture and homes to less obvious products such as chemicals, dyes, food, spices, medicines, etc.

**“One generation plants the trees; another gets the shade.” - Chinese proverb**
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