

Central Coast Educators 'Blown Away' by Multiple Facets of Forest Management

By Heidi Smith

Even when you live in timber country, it can be hard to see the forest for the trees. Just ask the 14 teachers from Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties who recently attended an 'Engaging Communities in Sustainable Forestry' workshop. Several described themselves as 'blown away' by the amount of work and care that goes into forest management.

PEI's Coastal FieldSTEM Coordinator Julie Tennis and South Sound FieldSTEM Coordinator Lara Tukarski facilitated the two-day in-person workshop through funding from Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Community Grant and on the ground support from the WA Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee and others.



Teachers visiting Custer Creek Tree Farm

Participants toured a lumber mill in Raymond courtesy of Weyerhaeuser, Butte Creek Day Use Area with DNR Assistant Region Manager Steve Ogden and M & H Tree Farm with owner/forester Nick Somero - and that was only day one.

The next day they visited Bob and Lynette Falkner's Custer Creek Tree Farm, a property that has been in Lynette's family for over 130 years, engaged in Project Learning Tree, national environmental education resources and discussed ways to engage their students in forest education.



Aside from presenters, several of those who accompanied the group were highly knowledgeable, including Andy Perleberg, Regional Extension Specialist and Forestry Team Leader with WSU Extension, Patrick Mahoney, Forest Management Resource Instructor at Grays Harbor College and Tim Falkner, who helped run a demonstration of the Custer Creek Tree Farm mill. “There were many experts in the group who added greatly to the wealth of information that was being shared,” one participant reflected.

The cumulative effect was compelling. “During our debrief, one of the teachers talked about having no idea that there was so much to the world of forest management,” says Tukarski. “She had thought forestry was all clear cuts and horrible for the environment and she



Teachers viewing a saw mill at Custer Creek Farm

didn’t know the environmental benefits of managing forests. She shared that spending time with the small forest landowners who had cared deeply for their land for generations had also changed her thinking, and everyone else was in agreement.”

As the workshop concluded, those involved in presenting tours and sharing knowledge volunteered to be resources for the educators and their students says Tennis. Teachers also received Project Learning Tree guides, Explore Your Environment for grades K-8 and Focus on Forests and Green Jobs for grades 9-12. Based on their post-workshop evaluations, participants plan to use them. “The experiences we had and the connections we made were fantastic,” reported one. “I feel much better prepared to talk to students about forestry.”