



# Skagit County Forest Advisory Board

[www.skagitcounty.net/NRForestAdvisory](http://www.skagitcounty.net/NRForestAdvisory)

**Chair:** Jamie Hillery

**Members:** Dave Chamberlain, Al Craney, Gordan Iverson, Kris McCall, Joel Dryen, Aubrey Stargell, Steve Tift, Peter Janicki, John Gold, Brett Greenwood, Carter Manning

## Meeting Minutes/Summary

**Wednesday, August 5, 2026**

### Attendance:

| Member                | Present | Absent |
|-----------------------|---------|--------|
| Chamberlain, Dave     | X       |        |
| Craney, Al            | X       |        |
| Iverson, Gordon       |         | X      |
| Hillery, Jamie, Chair | X       |        |
| McCall, Kris          | X       |        |
| Dryden, Joel          | X       |        |
| Stargell, Aubrey      | X       |        |
| Tift, Steve           | X       |        |
| Janicki, Peter        | X       |        |
| Gold, John            | X       |        |

**Others present:** Skagit County Commissioner Joe Burns; Carter Manning, Sierra Pacific; Jessica Epsy, Hampton; Gregory Nelson, National Center for Public Lands; Nick Kunz, Skagit Conservation District; Clare Sobetski, Youth Education and Outreach Program Manager, Department of Natural Resources; Skagit County Engineer Tom Weller; Eric Johnson, FAB Coordinator

**July 1, 2026, Forest Advisory Board (FAB) Meeting Minutes.** Corrected to note that David Neilsen and Tim Raschko are no longer on the Forest Advisory Board. Approved, with Correction.

### Brief Meeting Recap

The Skagit County Forest Advisory Board (FAB) August 5<sup>th</sup> meeting highlights include:

- Discussion of current forest management issues, including widespread wildfires in the region and their impact on communities and the importance of forest management practices to improve forest health and limit impact of future wildfires.

- An update on the successful Teacher Forestry Education Workshop that provided 15 STEM clock hours, received excellent program evaluations, and participants gained new insights into sustainable forestry practices.
- Approval of a request to support the Skagit Conservation District effort to collect native tree seeds, particularly Grand Fir cones, from county park lands.
- An update from Skagit County Engineer Director Tom Weller on multiple road and bridge projects across the county, including bridge rehabilitations and fish culvert replacements that will impact forest industry access.
- The recommendation of Carter Manning's nomination for FAB membership consideration to the Skagit County Board of County Commissioners.
- Discussed the potential benefits of Skagit County becoming an associate member of the American Forest Resource Council.
- A presentation from Gregory Nelson, Director of the National Center for Public Lands.

### **Wildfire and Forest Management**

FAB members discussed the sobering reality of forest wildfires. Kris provided updates on Hampton forestlands and that several timber sales were actively burning on the east side of the state, with three fires just outside of Loomis and another near Wenatchee. Crews were deployed to each, but resources were stretched thin — a recurring theme throughout the discussion.

A combination of poor forest health from lack of management and fuel moisture content on the eastside of the State at lowest levels for this time of year ever recorded — are making conditions exceptionally dangerous heading into peak fire season.

Discussion also touched on the possibility of moving to a Level 4 fire danger statewide with the lack of available suppression resources, fire conditions, weather, fuel moisture content, and fire behavior combining to create extremely dangerous wildfire conditions.

Al opened a broader conversation about forest management as a tool for fire prevention, noting that public sentiment is finally beginning to shift. The urban-wildland interface was highlighted as the most critical zone where management can make a meaningful difference. There was also discussion around research associated with the lack of fire resiliency in the unmanaged riparian buffers.

### **Forest Advisory Board (FAB) Administrative Activities**

Board members corrected the DRAFT July 1, 2026, Meeting Minutes/Summary to note that Tim Raschko and David Neilson were no longer members of FAB.

Eric announced that Sedro Wooley School District Superintendent Brett Greenwood was appointed to the FAB membership by the Board of County Commissioners.

FAB members discussed the nomination of Carter Manning for membership on Forest Advisory Board and reviewed his letter of interest and shared their appreciation for his interest in serving. FAB voted to support Carter Manning's nomination for FAB membership consideration to the Skagit County Board of County Commissioners.

Due to Eric's scheduling conflicts in September and October, FAB members decided to have the September and October FAB meeting both virtually.

### **American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) Associate Member Recommendation**

The Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) asked for additional information from FAB Members on the benefits for Skagit County being an Associate Member of AFRC. Chair Hillery distributed information and a handout of some important benefits for Board Members to review and discuss. The group discussed AFRC's valuable contributions to the industry, including their in-house legal counsel, federal issue monitoring, and participation in collaborative efforts for timber sales. Eric will incorporate additional comments from the FAB with Chair Hillery's handout and submit to the BoCC for consideration.

### **Educational Tours**

The group discussed both the recently conducted teacher education training and the upcoming Forest Health tour.

#### **Teacher Forestry Education Workshop**

The FAB received a report from Nick and Clare on the recent teacher workshop that included site visits to various locations, where teachers learned about forest management, genetics research, mill operations, with particularly notable engagement at the Sierra Pacific Industries cogeneration facility.

The tour included stops at Blanchard State Forest, Pacific Rim Tone Woods, Baker Lake, and Sierra Pacific Industries mill operations. Clare gave an overview of some of the outcomes/results of the forest management training for teachers, which received excellent evaluations with all participants rating it 10 out of 10. The training provided 15 STEM clock hours for the teachers and included guest speakers from various organizations. While attendance was lower than expected with 8 teachers

in attendance, it is a worthwhile investment and will work on additional marketing and outreach for future workshops/trainings.

### **DNR Forest Health Advisory Committee Tour**

Nick provided an update on the Forest Health Advisory Committee tour, scheduled for September 22<sup>nd</sup>. The tour will highlight forest health initiatives and management issues in the Northwest. Nick is working on the tour with Jen Watkins (DNR) and Jenny Coe (State Conservation Commission).

### **Native Tree Seed Collection**

Nick discussed a desire to conduct native tree seed collections on Skagit County park lands as part of a broader effort to address low seed availability, particularly for Grand Fir trees, and requested formal FAB support for this initiative. FAB members voted to support native tree seed collections within Skagit County parks and Chair Hillery was authorized to communicate FABs support to Parks Director Ken Hansen.

### **Skagit County Public Works Update**

Skagit County Engineer Tom Weller, provided updates on several road and bridge projects, including bridge rehabilitations and fish culvert installations, noting that many culvert replacements are being replaced with longer bridges rather than simple culverts due to regulatory requirements. County Engineer Weller presented a map-based overview of active and upcoming infrastructure projects, with particular focus on impacts to forest industry access including:

- Marblemount Bridge Rehabilitation
- Jordan Creek (Rockport Cascade Road) Temporary bridge — December washout
- South Osterman Creek (Concrete Sauk Valley Road) Fish culvert installation
- South Skagit Highway at Stevens Creek (near Old Day Creek Road) Fish culvert installation
- Noted WSDOT Projects on SR 9 North of Sedro Wooley and at Big Lake

### **Fish Passage Barrier Replacement**

County Engineer Weller noted that Skagit County has an estimated 3,200 culverts, with a significant portion of which are barriers to fish passage. The county is currently completing culvert replacements at roughly 1–2 per year — a pace that falls far short of the need. FAB members pointed out that the timber industry has already completed its portion of the fish passage work years ago, but the downstream private, city, county and railroad blockages remain the major unfixed fish passage barriers.

Tom noted an important distinction: many "culvert replacements" are actually new long-span bridges. A striking example is Gilligan Creek, where a 20 ft×12 ft culvert is being replaced with a 140-foot bridge — ironically the same length as the original bridge that was replaced by the culvert back in 1969.

The county is piloting a precast concrete modular system to see if it is cost effective and can expedite design and installation time/cost. It was noted that with more bridges the county will have to pay for more ongoing bridge inspections as well.

### **National Center for Public Lands Counties**

Gregory Nelson, Director of the National Center for Public Lands Counties (Center) presented remotely to FAB members sharing information on a broad set of public land and natural resource topics including the following items:

- The National Center for Public Lands Counties is a nonpartisan research center launched in 2024 by the National Association of Counties (NACO). The Center supports counties that contain federal lands through resource sharing, studies, research, and convenings.
- Highlighted the challenges faced by public lands counties, including revenue unpredictability from federal land management and the impact of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program that lapsed in 2024, resulting in payment reductions for counties like Skagit. Gregory explained that SRS was reauthorized through FY26 with back payments for FY24, but the lapsed program will still impact future PILT payments, potentially causing a \$400,000 loss for Skagit County over the next few years.
- Explained the complex relationship between PILT and SRS payments in Skagit County, explaining how PILT reductions impact the county general fund while SRS reductions impact the county road fund.
- Illustrated some of the Center's recent work including PILT 101 videos, a secure rural schools hub, and a report on wildlife habitat connectivity. Studies show that recreation activities on federal lands can actually be financially burdensome for counties due to increased search and rescue costs and explaining that recreation often creates costs for counties without generating revenue, particularly when combined with other forest management issues.
- Described the role of the Center plays in data collection and storytelling about the impact of declining natural resource industries and challenges and opportunities for Public Lands Counties while NACo works on policy advocacy and lobbying on issues like PILT and SRS on behalf of Counties.

- Emphasized the need for better data from the Forest Service about how revenue “streams” have changed due to new contracting instruments beyond traditional timber sales.

## **Actions and Decisions**

### **Eric**

- Correct July FAB Meeting Minutes/Summary to remove Tim Raschko and David Neilson.
- Forward Carter Manning’s nomination to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration.
- Finalize “Benefits of AFRC Membership” and send to Tricia and Jennifer for discussion with the Board of County Commissioners.
- Inform county staff that the September and October Forest Advisory Board meetings will be 100% virtual.
- Keep FAB Posted on the “Trust Land Stewardship Initiative” efforts.
- Invite Darrington District Ranger Camden Bruner to a future FAB Meeting.
- Follow up on status of Skagit County Fish Passage Barrier Inventory.

### **Jamie**

- Reach out to Gordy to make sure he can participate in a virtual meeting.
- Memo/letter to Skagit County Parks Director Ken Hansen to support native tree seed collections on Skagit County Park land.

### **John**

- Try to find a link to watch the NP Rule litigation hearing for August 21 and distribute.