

# IMPACT REPORT

CLASS 44





# ANDY PERLEBERG

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Diversification in land use creates stability in product choices and creates conservation benefits for the landowner and society. However, agroforestry is an underutilized toolbox for farm, ranch, and family forest owners. As a result of my introduction to CATIE (Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center), I was invited to present at the 18th North American Agroforestry Conference and to create a durable interchange with WSU and CATIE students and faculty. Opportunities to increase agroforestry practices and our bioeconomy improves the health and beauty of family farms and forests, protect financial investments, and reduce risks.



# CARRIE NELSON

Module 3 – Systems Thinking – has been an examination of resiliency, connection, reflection, community, and curiosity. Throughout this last module we traveled throughout Washington focusing on specific industries and producers. We had the privilege and opportunity to travel to Panama and Costa Rica to talk with producers, government officials, and industry leaders about challenges and successes they experience. A common theme was that while we are separate countries with different governments, social economic circumstances, and societal challenges, we are also facing many of the same challenges and circumstances and can learn a great deal from one another.

One of our first meetings in Panama highlighted immigration concerns that Panama and Costa Rica face and how they each handle that challenge, which is different from America. But what it highlighted for me was the need for more open communication, understanding and a need to work together and stay curious.



Our visit to La Iguana and the tour of their chocolate farm and the way in which they have adopted Agroforestry was such a contrast to what we heard and say at the papaya, plantain, and pineapple operations. Discussion with the papaya growers reinforced the challenge they face in adopting a multi-crop approach to resilience rather than monocrops. It also further highlighted the grower's resilience, connection and curiosity.

As a leader, these instances reinforced in me a reminder to be curious, connected, and resilient. Reflection has further led to the reminder of finding what connects me to my team, my passion, and my curiosity.



# MAGGIE ELLIOT

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The Systems Thinking Module placed us in the heart of crossroads. How do we as a society navigate decisions in the face of complex problems?

Humanity was indelibly infused within the core of each dilemma. From the Columbia River to Paso Canoas, threaded through each engagement was the balance of choices. We considered the interface of ecosystems, politics, economies, and culture. We weighed ripple effects and unintended consequences.

To me, the most profoundly powerful people we met were also the most vulnerable. Individuals who bravely cast a different perspective and were grounded in their purpose with fierce clarity.

Our societies will always face problems. Issues dizzying in their complexity and historical nuances. This module helped me realize as leaders we can recognize our own lived experience is but a grain of sand. To hasten change, we need to assemble diverse teams. People who can listen with open minds and hold gritty truths. People who can recognize the blind spots in their bias and embrace a difference side of the story. People who can collaborate and build bridges to foster coalitions. I emerge from this experience empowered by the idea that change is driven by communities. Every day in our careers, our cities, our social circles, we have the ability to harness the talent, aptitudes, and passion of those around us. I can look around and bear witness to the darkness of problems presented in our world. But in Class 44 I also see compassionate, driven, capable people who want to imbue positive change. How can we solve complex problems? Together, not alone.



# ROSA DEKKER

The systems thinking module has shown me a different world, as I know it. I understand how little of the world I know and how much more I want to learn. I learned of so many things that are interconnected and sometimes that connection makes the two rival each other; water, fish, land, food--things that are essential and when we tried to put one above the other in importance, we start seeing the rivalry. Immigration and labor are another example of how both are controversial yet both are important to the economy, not only in the United States, but also paramount in Costa Rica.

The role of the United States working together with Costa Rica to promote shared goals using land while protecting nature was also eye-opening. I know that as humans, we always want to exploit our natural resources and it is necessary to have rules in place to ensure we use natural resources responsibly.

I was totally in awe of beautiful Costa Rica and its plantations of coffee, cacao, pineapples, bananas, and their venturing out in growing grapes. The thought process and extreme labor put in to making a vineyard productive in land that without the extreme financial influx would not exist. Having the capital to invest in high yielding crops is essential in Costa Rica just like anywhere else, but having the thrive and seeing how people who not necessarily have extra influx of capital, but have a very innovative mind was very powerful to see as well.

Overall, my takeaway from Systems thinking module is exactly that, thinking, innovating and rising to be better at any giving opportunity. Leaders need to adapt, collaborate, innovate, communicate and strive to keep our natural resources available for future generations. The comradery of the people I have met along this journey and their willingness to show us their livelihood and let us into their lives briefly was very welcoming and definitely made and affect how I see true leaders conduct themselves.



# RYAN BAYE

I now understand why everyone who knows about AgForestry's curriculum asks, "Where are you going on your international trip?" Two weeks in close quarters with 23 other people embedded in a world far removed from any previous life experience; that would be a transformative experience for anyone.

I will never take for granted again the value of certainty and predictability. In the first three days of our trip, we had two unplanned overnight trips, including an 18-hour bus ride from Panama City to San Jose, Costa Rica when the planned 90-minute flight was canceled. Never in my life have I traveled at such a pace, and it hit me on Day 3 that I never knew exactly where we were going, what we would be doing, or where I would be sleeping while on the trip.

I never truly appreciated having that expectedness, like knowing the details of my day, until they were taken away. Having no self-agency was a serious adjustment and as a class we had a conversation on Day 4 about better incorporating feedback and ensuring every individual knew how to give input and ask questions. Which was ironic for me, who works for a statewide association of conservation districts. The lessons learned would sound pretty typical for any good organization: getting buy-in from the group, power sharing roles, identified decision-makers, and dedicated check-ins about how everyone felt.



What became clearer during the trip was the reinforcement of the adage "if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." With over 20 people traveling as one collective, there were times when individuals didn't want to match the group's pace. It was a constantly changing dynamic, with active but unspoken negotiations between various clusters of people who wanted to move more quickly or more slowly whenever we had to operate as a group.

We were all used to working at our own pace and suddenly had to be thinking about everyone else's timing, preferences, and habits. Working for an advocacy organization, it was a re-emphasis of the power operating as a collective entity, and the power that stems from a group of people cooperating and working together.

Looking back on the last 16 months, I could write an entire book on AgForestry's impact on me. And while I'm sad to see the end in sight, the goal of AgForestry was never about how it could change me. Instead, I wanted to develop new tools and better prepare myself in my commitment to help my organization achieve its goals. So, this is not the beginning of the end of a journey, but rather the end of the beginning.



# TYLER WEST

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The International Seminar wrapped up a transformational systems thinking module. For me the powerful impact of the trip came from being immersed as a group in a new system, bringing many systems concepts together all at once in an unfamiliar setting. We all experienced new challenges together, explored new perspectives, and discovered many similarities and common goals. Our class overcame challenges and tackled changes to the travel itinerary, coming together to advocate for ourselves and each other. We explored what it meant to be American and witnessed the impacts, both positive and negative, that our culture and collective actions cause in Costa Rica and Panama. We connected and learned from people, families, businesses, and communities that are incredibly resilient and driven to improve and prosper, values that resonate with me and many others in our class.

The leadership lessons that I am taking away from this module revolve around the people involved in all these systems and experiences. From exploring natural resource issues and the justice system in Washington State, to immigration and food security issues in Central American, the common thread is the real impacts on lives, families, communities, and the real ability for people to drive outcomes. To me this highlights the paramount importance of basic leadership lessons and skills such as listening, building trust, sharing common goals and visions, and recognizing all contributors as a leader. We have all learned and practiced these building blocks during our time in AgForestry. I will challenge myself to apply them in a more compassionate and understanding way to the complicated problems that I face as a leader.



# JUSTIN STANG

As I continue on my leadership journey and finetune my individual leadership philosophy, I truly relished the ability to incorporate those themes into the study of systems in Module 3. I'm filled with an immense gratitude for the educational opportunities provided through these seminars, and I now possess an incredible filter and approach to recognize complex and wicked problems that allows me to gain perspective and understanding while maintaining my values. The countless folks that have shared their work and expertise with Class 44 in an effort to build bridges has been incredibly inspiring.

Additionally, I truly appreciate the aspects of the module that expanded our scope to better appreciate the vast environmental, social, and cultural factors that affect our policy issues and communities. It has been enlightening to see how the unexpected interconnectedness of seemingly unrelated parts of our community affect so many of the complex problems we face.



Experiencing "agriculture in action" both here and abroad has also allowed me a unique perspective of my own industry and illustrated how many commonalities there are in addressing challenges across many sectors both public and private.

Module 3 helped me align my leadership values, shape my priorities, and confront the intersection between my emerging philosophy and the greater world that I live and work in. I have seen the value in continuing to learn as much as possible about the challenges and complexity of multi-faceted problems and fostering an environment committed to understanding with empathy and compassion.





# WIOLETTA SKOTNICKA-KOWALEC

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The Systems Thinking Module was the most impactful on my leadership journey and on me as an individual. Each session was thought-provoking and brought out many emotions from sadness to anger, to hope and excitement. Each passing month I found myself with more questions about our state's history, our political system, our impact on the other countries, our communities, and our responsibility as citizens and as human beings.

The sheer impact and complexity of the issues we learned about is still overwhelming to me. From water management and its effects on our and tribal communities, immigration and natural resources work force, to justice system and perception of punishment in the society. During our international seminar, we saw some of the same issues from a foreign perspective, and how our country's economy and environmental policies influence others. Witnessing the hardship of thousands of migrants in Central America was very emotional and as an immigrant myself I felt very privileged at the opportunities in my life.

My perspective changed, I learned to look at issues at more complex level, not to make assumptions, to ask more questions. Each problem is like a spider web with intricate design and a multitude of connections. As leaders we have to make sure that each "connection" is represented and included in conversation and solution. Listening to and seeing other perspectives is crucial in communication and management of these "wicked" problems. It also emphasized for me the importance of youth education and social development. It left me thinking about the ways we can help, support, mentor at any level and any background even in our own small communities.

During each session we met so many amazing individuals and I learned from each one especially Maria Figueres, owner of Blanco y Negro farm in Turrialba, Costa Rica. When asked about the difficulties she encountered as a woman entrepreneur, Maria said "I do not see it this way, I have different energy, different things to offer, I run the business from heart and deep connection with land. I see difficulties as opportunities." Her positivity and leadership style stuck with me and inspired me to have more positive outlook and mindset.



# AMBER TITLE

In all of our systems thinking seminars, we learned the ways in which natural resources bring us together, divide us, and connect us in complex ways. From a leadership perspective, the iceberg mental model challenges us to not just think about what we see on the surface, but to identify our intrinsic biases, value diversity and tackle problems from different perspectives. We learned about collaborative governance and implementation of the multiple-streams framework firsthand from persistent leaders who crafted the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan. We learned about the complex intersection of natural resource policy with evolving societal values on the Columbia River that exemplified the economic and environmental ‘tradeoffs.’

Reform of any system takes courageous leadership and innovative thinking. At the Walla Walla State Penitentiary, we were challenged to think about the complexities of criminal justice and the immigration system in need of reform. We were challenged to think about what it would take to change from a system of punishment to one that includes a system of recovery, or a system criminalizing immigration to one that includes streamlined legal pathways and opportunities. Perhaps the first step in reform is to humanize these issues and bring transparency to the gaps and barriers in the systems that continue to fall short.

An 18-hour bus ride through Panama and Costa Rica gave us a limited but impactful insight into what refugees and immigrants experience as they seek opportunity. As I wheeled my suitcase across the Panama border with the feral dogs, unfamiliar faces, and families with children in tow, I couldn’t imagine being so desperate to choose that journey. The issues at our borders, and the concerns about resource strains related to immigration are not unique. As societal values have evolved, we are part of a generation of leaders that have to think about “repair” based on new information, data-driven decisions, and how we measure success. AgForestry has given me the privileged opportunity to understand and experience the complexities of the problems we are tasked to solve together: one natural resource, one incarcerated person, one immigrant, and one contentious issue at a time. The wicked problems we learned about in this module will take the collective efforts all of our AgForestry alumni, future leaders and my inspirational colleagues and friends in Class 44 to solve. The impacts of these unique experiences have been transformative to my lived experience and leadership trajectory. Pura Vida.

“WHEN WE TRY TO PICK OUT ANYTHING BY ITSELF, WE FIND IT HITCHED TO EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE UNIVERSE.”

— JOHN MUIR





# ERIC DIXON

As we wrap up the end of Module 3, the last few months of the AgForestry experience have been some of the most exciting. The real-world experiences gained in this module have been eye-opening and educational. In Longview I learned about the intricacies of the forest industry and got to visit a large-scale log export yard and lumber mill highlighted by the opportunity to go aboard a log ship during loading (even though those ornery longshoremen wiped grease all over the stair rails during our departure from the ship). Visits to Bellingham and Vancouver felt like trips to a different world even though they are just on the other side of the state. These trips were a good reminder to get out of our personal and professional silos to educate and make ourselves aware of all of these other things constantly going on around us. Throughout these seminars we were constantly exposed to

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differing or alternative viewpoints and ideas that may not be exactly in line with our own which offered up the opportunity for deep thought and personal reflection. The culmination of Module 3 was the international seminar to Panama and Costa Rica which was an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. From visiting the Panama Canal to touring a coffee plantation in the mountains of Costa Rica, we were immersed in local culture, processes, politics, and issues. In addition, the long days, travel complications, sickness, cramped quarters, and extended amount of time spent in close quarters with a large group of people was a test of patience, understanding, adaptation, and mental and physical stamina. These experiences have encouraged personal growth in multiple areas and have really reinforced the fact that Class 44 is made up of an amazing group of individuals. Although it has been trying at times, I feel lucky and blessed to have had the opportunity to go on the AgForestry journey with my classmates and two amazing group leaders.



# CAROLYN GROOM

Often, we talk about problems being complex and with multiple systems. For me, that creates an overwhelming sense of “Where do we begin?” and “What difference would it make?” Throughout Module 3, we visited with incredible problem solvers. What I value from those we’ve met is they understand that while their problem is complex, they still want to lead with determination to find an answer, even if it’s just to one part of the issue. Examples of this include the Timber, Fish, and Wildlife Agreement (TFW) for improved management of natural resources, the Yakima Basin Integration Plan for water solutions, the Steigerwald Refuge to protect wetlands, and Diversion Programs for at-risk youth that focus on restorative justice. I saw this theme of problem-solving continue throughout Costa Rica. From the cooperative structure of the papaya and coffee growers to Blanco y Negro’s mushroom farm, Costa Ricans are the definition of problem solvers. They have a shared set of values and have worked hard the past 30 years to reforest the landscape, protect wildlife and be a leader in environmentalism, all while continuing to honor the crops and food sources that are unique to their country. Seeing so many examples of strong leaders not being afraid to start, try, fail, try again, and ultimately make an impact for those around them has inspired me to live by the “Think global, act local” philosophy: take action today to improve my reach of influence and the impact will ripple far beyond.



*Carolyn Groom admiring the mushrooms that should be impossible to grow in Costa Rica, yet because of creative problem solving, are able to be grown suspended in the air at Blanco y Negro.*

# COLIN TOWNE

Module 3 in the AgForestry Leadership Program has been a whirlwind. It spanned the longest period of time, and exposed Class 44 to a large range of experiences: many different industries across Washington allowing each class member to passionately “show off” their professions and inform others of the unique and oftentimes similar challenges they face. I found tremendous value in traveling and exposure aspect of this module. I was fascinated learning so much about each industry. Now more than ever I feel proud to call Washington State my home and knowing all the amazing work to manage natural and agricultural resources keeps me excited for the future.

This module culminated in a trip to Panama and Costa Rica! The class was immediately faced with challenges relating to cancelled flights, small busses, sickness, and group dynamics. In my opinion, this set the stage for an eventful trip that was quite tough at times but as a result was even more rewarding. To place a theme on this capstone trip I’d relate it to “looking through the fog”. When the class visited the Poas Volcano National Park our views were initially obstructed by thick clouds and fog. Only after an hour or two of patience, hiking, and in one last attempt, the clouds lifted and we were rewarded with a spectacular view of an active volcano and one of the world’s largest craters.

I feel that “looking through the fog” explains more than just our visit to the volcano. In my own leadership journey throughout Module 3,

things have not always been clear or visible. Whether through my personal life and career challenges or the difficulties presented to us in AgForestry, the goal or end result is not always certain. However, with patience, perseverance, and a little bit of fun along the way, I am now able to look out and see a spectacular view. One that allows me to see all that I have accomplished with the help of my fellow classmates around me and a view that gives me confidence to be myself and develop the leadership philosophy that is true to me. Pura Vida!



*Amer Itle and Colin Towne*

# TAMMY EDMONDS

Module 3 on systems thinking really challenged me to broaden my perspective and while I thought I had a pretty good idea of what we were in for, I found that every layer added complexity and caused me to be curious and to ask more questions. When we switched gears into systems thinking it took me a bit to understand the interconnectedness and that making one decision for one player may affect another whole group of people in a potentially positive or negative way. I kept coming back to 'what is the wicked problem' and how do we make it fair for all parties or is there even a way to make it fair? How do we collaborate more so perspectives can be brought together for the good of the whole?



Traveling in Costa Rica and Panama gave me the opportunity to see a carbon-neutral dairy in action. What was interesting to me was how this was even possible: where did their thought processes come from? I loved their interconnected system with nature: use of natural fences to provide shade, a methane digester, byproduct feed and radiant UV rays to heat water were just some of the interesting tools they were using. They even changed the type of milking cow to better accommodate their climate.

System thinking requires deliberate thought, questions, patience, and then action. We kept seeing this repeatedly in conservation projects, bridge projects, forest restoration and fish passage projects throughout this module. For me systems thinking has expanded my horizons and will cause me to ask more questions and may cause me to pause to allow for thorough exploration of the whole.

# MADI ROY

Each of us, in our daily lives, at work, and in society are confronted by challenges. Challenges that are often characterized by a surface level understanding, but underneath are so complex and convoluted that if you dig in deep enough, it leaves you questioning all you know. These challenges are wicked problems. How many times have you heard that tearing out the dams will solve our salmon issue? Locking away criminals will improve society? Sending the migrants back will solve the problem? Such “solutions” do not do justice to the complicated nature of these wicked problems nor aid in mitigating impacts on our people and natural resources. Module 3 invited

each member in our class to grab shovels and dig in – dig into our deep-rooted beliefs and our understanding of how the world works. Our travels, throughout both Washington and abroad, have afforded each of us space to challenge our own beliefs in a trusted atmosphere alongside friends and colleagues -- fostering growth, understanding and development. AgForestry serves as a template for collaboration and improved understanding. A way in which we, in our daily lives and in our extended reach, can learn from others and work towards innovative and often radical solutions. AgForestry has strengthened my conviction that wicked problems can be overcome by the ability of people to understand alternative perspectives, be creative and remain curious.



# MEGAN SCHULTZ

Visiting the Panama Canal and seeing firsthand the challenges the Panama Canal Authority (PCA) faces, was the highlight of the international seminar, and likely of my year (professionally). Current events at the Canal are directly influencing my job right now, so being able to lay eyes on a part of the structure itself was hugely enlightening and incredible. Speaking with workers at the PCA brought to light many issues this area faces that I was not aware of such as the need to educate farmers on their impact on the Canal watershed to ensure there is not only enough water to transit vessels, but to provide clean drinking water for the communities around Gatun Lake. The operation of the Canal and the surrounding

area is even more challenging, with even more complexity, than I ever realized. Seeing the U.S. influence has exerted in the area of the Canal Zone – both politically and socially – was a shock. It made me start thinking more about the power the U.S. wields around the world and how this power can and should be used. This “aha moment” was continued in Costa Rica, with a visit to the U.S. Embassy. Speakers at the Embassy highlighted the good things our government has done to help positively impact the people and economy of Costa Rica and the region. It reinforced to me that even the smallest changes can have huge impacts, and how important caring leadership is when navigating sensitive issues – whether in the tiny Costa Rican community of Mastatal, or at the worldwide organization Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture. 🇨🇷





# NATALIE SAHLI

Privilege. Interconnectedness. Humanity. These were the themes that emerged for me from our Systems Thinking Module. Our experience traveling around the state and internationally to Central America exposed us collectively to an uncommon and privileged vantage point. From this view, themes in production, natural resources and society became increasingly interconnected, as the scale and the wickedness of the issues grew. However, beneath the surface of competing viewpoints and society's ails, there was the common thread of good, caring people. People who are benefactors, creative engineers and victims of the systems in place.

My takeaway as a leader from this experience is to look beyond myself and my network as I

approach problem solving and my daily life. What is the bigger picture? What is in my power to change, or not? What and who do I need to better understand? Where and how can I challenge the system? How can I be more inclusive to those oppressed by the system? These questions may or may not lead to systemic change, but they will certainly lead to a better understanding of the problem and to empathy for others.

Friends, producers, felons, migrants, we are all participating in our own systems, focused on our own struggles and goals. However, in viewing these systems wholistically, it is apparent, they are interconnected. Module 3 taught me that our local and global communities are small and interdependent. To feel this greater connection with humanity, to feel part of a bigger world, this was the most meaningful impact to me from our final months in AgForestry.



# DEREK FRIEHE

It's very difficult to look at Module 3 and narrow the impact these six seminars have had on me to a single paragraph. All of these seminars highlighted to me the complexity of natural resources, how they are used, who gets to use them, and the various and competing value systems involved in their use. AgForestry is unique in that it affords me the opportunity to be exposed and to become aware of all the different and often differing perspectives in natural resource management. As a class, we get to grapple with how these competing uses relate to our own value systems. How do our own values relate to dams, salmon, deforestation, water adjudication, trade barriers

land use, criminal justice, immigration, environmentalism vs. economic development, etc.? On many of these issues, my opinions have changed, been reinforced, been formed, and many times have raised more questions than answers. As a result, I've grown as leader and a person – and for that I'm thankful.

Also, because of our international seminar, I've grown in my ability to be flexible and adaptable. An 18-hour bus ride, red-eye flights, sicknesses, and a very rigorous agenda have forced me out of my comfort zone and strengthened my resolve to push through adversity. But along with that, deeper friendships were forged, much knowledge was gained, and so many good memories were made – it was an incredible trip.



# TIFF PITRA

The world's leading coffee development program is fixated on finding disease resistant varieties that can produce at different elevations and still deliver a quality cup. It's a tall order and something that could take years before finding the "answer." What can the industry do in the meantime? Can the green coffee buyer demand high quality standards as the grower struggles with yields due to a changing climate? How much is the gourmet coffee consumer willing to pay for organic beans? Can they calculate what percentage of the certification cost is passed off to the grower, the processor, the everyday coffee drinker? How can the rest of the industry adapt their technology to produce a high-quality cup if given an "inferior" bean?

A group of papaya farmers rallies together to form a cooperative, negotiating higher returns on their crop and securing stable contracts. Yet competing land management philosophies make it challenging to influence practices on a large-scale across the growing region.

I've been reflecting on my role at Yakima Chief Hops, working to bring different ends of the supply chain together, as well as considering my role as an American consumer of Costa Rican commodities (coffee, bananas, pineappl-

es). What first-world "demands" do I place on the producer without fully understanding the impact on the environment, the people, their quality of life? After visiting with farmers in Costa Rica, I feel a strong sense of responsibility to ask questions about where my food comes from and how to use my resources to support small producers around the world. As an ambassador for hop growers and a supplier for brewers, I will continue to stress the importance of communication and connection throughout the supply chain to support long-term solutions for a truly special industry.





VISION | To positively impact and enrich lives and communities in Washington State to meet challenges faced by agriculture, forestry, and natural resources.

MISSION | We cultivate leaders in agriculture, forestry, and natural resources who communicate, collaborate, inspire, and serve.

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