



AgForestry Leadership Program - Class 44

CAPSTONE: Public Policy Projects and Leadership Philosophies



"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

-Eleanor Roosevelt

AgForestry Leadership Class 44 began their journey October 2022. Over the past 18 months, that journey included a curriculum with 3 Modules consisting of 11 in-state three-day seminars, a seminar week in Washington DC, and a two-week international seminar to Panama and Costa Rica. Additionally, they developed and completed two Capstone Projects: a personal leadership philosophy and a public policy project. This document provides a summary of both.

MODULE 1: PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

In Pullman, Spokane and Wenatchee, Class 44 took a deep dive into who they were as leaders, and who they wanted to become. They began the work on clarifying their values, examining their weaknesses and strengths, and working on public speaking.

The aspects of mindfulness, self-regulation, emotional intelligence and the way my DiSC personality processes information in conjunction with other people's personalities has been revolutionary for me. I now am actively thinking about my words and actions and trying to see in real time just what I'm reacting to and how it's making me feel. This zoomed out level of self-awareness has the potential to change every single relationship in my life, both personal and professional and I hope will make me a better listener and person.

- Class 44 Participant on Module 1

MODULE 2: LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC POLICY

During the Seattle seminar, Class 44 took a close look into how public policy works, what the levers are, and how to affect them. Then the class traveled to the Olympia and Washington DC seminars to see government and policy in action at both the state and federal levels.

Our most recent public policy module experience was a fast-paced and fun journey. It is amazing to see how closely I am positioned as a citizen and as a professional to the political process. These seminars demystified the public policy process, making the system entirely more accessible. Ultimately, I feel empowered to affect change in my district, state and country. I feel ready to take my career to the next level, knowing now that this once mysterious world runs on regular, dedicated, passionate people like myself.

- Class 44 Participant on Module 2

MODULE 3: LEADERSHIP IN SYSTEMS THINKING

Seminars in the second half of the Leadership Program covered the state: Longview, Yakima, Bellingham, Vancouver, and Walla Walla to experience case studies of local leadership in action and the effects of policy on local issues. The Module 3 final seminar is international and Class 44 journeyed to Panama and Costa Rica looking at their policies and the impact of U.S. policy.

My takeaway from the Systems Thinking Module is exactly that, thinking, innovating and rising to be better at any given opportunity. Leaders need to adapt, collaborate, innovate, communicate and strive to keep our natural resources available for future generations.

- Class 44 Participant on Module 3

AGFORESTRY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM CLASS 44 MEMBERS:

Amber Itle: Department of Agriculture, State Veterinarian, Bellingham

Andy Perleberg: Washington State University, Extension Forester, Cashmere

Carolyn Groom: AgWest Farm Credit, VP-Credit, Pasco

Carrie Nelson: Dept. of Natural Resources, District Manager-Rivers District, Tacoma

Colin Towne: Weyerhaeuser, Forester, Centralia

Derek Friehe: Friehe Farms, General Manager, Moses Lake

Eric Dixon: South Columbia Basin Irrigation District, Assistant Manager, Kennewick

Justin Stang: Hama Hama Co., Wholesale Manager, Olympia

Madi Roy: Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Economist, Yakima

Maggie Elliot: Washington Hop Commission, Science and Communications Director, Moxee

Megan Schultz: Weyerhaeuser, Logistics Manager, Kalama

Natalie Sahli: Dept. of Natural Resources, Aquaculture Land Manager, Olympia

Rosa Dekker: East Columbia Basin Irrigation District, Treasurer/Admin.-Assist. Manager, Othello

Ryan Baye: WA Assoc. of Conservation Districts, Director-Leg. & Membership Services, Lacey

Tammy Edmonds: Darigold, Field & FARM Manager, Kennewick

Tiffany Pitra: Yakima Chief Hops, Senior Sensory Manager, Yakima

Tyler West: AgWest Farm Credit - Relationship Manager, VP, Seattle

Wioletta Skotnicka-Kowalec: Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Director Grower Relations, Richland

CAPSTONE: GROUP PUBLIC POLICY PROJECTS

Class 44 was assigned to public policy teams of 4-5 participants. Each team chose a public policy issue that they worked on throughout the program to develop a policy solution.

PROJECT TITLE:

AGRICULTURAL PEST AND DISEASE RESPONSE ACCOUNT

Participants: Maggie Elliot, Tyler West, Rosa Dekker, Andy Perleberg, and Amber Itle

Problem Statement: Currently, Washington State's lack of readily available funding, delayed approvals, and restricted geographic eradication scope has led to pest and disease establishment, jeopardizing agricultural crops and livestock in Washington State.

Benefits of Solving the Problem: Agricultural food systems will be protected through rapid response. Financial costs will be minimized by preventing outbreak amplification. Agricultural industries, communities, and our food system will be healthier in Washington State.

Goal: To ensure agricultural pests and disease outbreaks are promptly controlled and eradicated in Washington State.

Objectives:

- Collaborate with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and industry stakeholders to support adequate funding to address pest and disease threats in our state.
- Establish an Agricultural Pest and Disease Response Account that is accessible annually by the WSDA to execute control measures before diseases and pests become established.

Actions: Propose and introduce funding legislation through the agency process to establish an Agricultural Pest and Disease Response Account in Washington State.

Status: SHB 2147 "Agricultural Pest and Disease Response Account" was approved unanimously by the legislature (at \$1 million for 2024); SHB 2147 has been transmitted to the Governor and is awaiting signature.

PROJECT TITLE:

FEDERAL EXEMPTION FOR THE CONNELL HIGH SCHOOL COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSE PROGRAM:

EXPANDING ACCESS TO COMMERCIAL LEARNERS PERMITS BY REDUCING THE MINIMUM AGE REQUIREMENT.

Participants: Eric Dixon, Derek Friehe, Natalie Sahli, Wioletta Skotnicka-Kowalec

Problem Statement: The scarcity of qualified and licensed commercial vehicle drivers is having a nationwide impact. With over 70% of nation's goods and over 80% of agricultural products being transported by truck across the country, industries like agriculture and timber in Washington State heavily rely on trucking for various operations. Despite efforts across the country to enhance education and training opportunities for individuals seeking a commercial driver's license (CDL), federal laws regarding CDL, and commercial learners permit (CLP) age requirements are impeding the growth of programs like the one at Connell High School. As a result, high school students are missing out on valuable opportunities in this field.

Benefits of Addressing the Issue: By addressing the current age requirement barrier for obtaining a commercial learner's permit (CLP), students enrolled in the Connell High School CDL course could obtain their CLP at 17 years old and their CDL license at 18, immediately after graduation. Currently, students under 18 cannot complete the mandatory 160 hours of behind-the-wheel practice time and must enroll in a secondary training course after turning 18. This additional time and financial investment discourage young prospective drivers from entering the field. Expanding and enhancing the Connell High School CDL program could serve as a model for other counties and school districts in Washington State. This exemption could significantly alleviate the current CDL driver shortage in rural communities and provide a viable career path for high school students, especially benefitting low income and minority students.

Goal: Increase the number of CDL holders serving agriculture and natural resources industries.

Objectives:

- Receive a 5-year exemption from Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to lower the age requirement CLP from 18 years of age to 17 years of age for students enrolled in the Connell High School CDL program, under CFR §383.25(4).
- Assist in development of a comprehensive CDL high school program that provides full training, enabling students to obtain their CDL immediately after graduation, with a model that will be replicable in other high schools.

Actions: Exemption request was submitted to FMCSA on behalf of Connell High School, CTE teacher and author of the CDL program curriculum Charlee Dansie, January 2024.

Status: Waiting on decision from the FMCSA with review timeline taking up to 6 months.

PROJECT TITLE:

CREATING CONNECTIONS FOR YOUNG, BEGINNING, AND SMALL PRODUCERS: FIRST ANNUAL YOUNG PRODUCERS ROUNDTABLE

Participants: Carolyn Groom, Carrie Nelson, Madi Roy, Colin Towne

Problem Statement: The agricultural business environment in Washington State is becoming increasingly difficult, especially for aspiring producers as the average age of farmers increases (59.3 years old in Washington) and the number of farms in the state decrease (10% in the last five years). This difficult business environment is compounded by a lack of access to physical resources, such as affordable land and capital, and connection to trusted advisors and community. To be successful, young and beginning producers need support in the way of community, connections, and knowledge sharing.

Benefits of Solving the Problem: By enhancing support for young and beginning producers we can equip aspiring producers with tools to overcome the barriers that inhibit success. This will help to protect the viability of Washington agriculture into the future.

Goal: To understand the challenges faced by producers and what resources they need to overcome those barriers.

Objectives:

- Interview key stakeholders and producers.
- Clearly identify the barriers to entry associated with agricultural production for young, beginning, small (YBS) and historically underserved producers (HUP) to define, analyze, and provide solutions with real impact.
- Design an annual event that creates a space for connection, collaboration, and networking to overcome challenges identified
- Partner with a state agency to ensure longevity of an annual event.

Actions: Create, with the support of the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), a round table event to bring young, beginning, and historically underserved agricultural producers, agribusinesses, and policy makers together to discuss challenges within the industry and create opportunities for community, connection, and knowledge sharing.

Status: The young producers round table is scheduled May 29, 2024: opening for WSDA's Agricultural Viability Conference. The group is finalizing the agenda, marketing the event, and facilitating the roundtable.

PROJECT TITLE:

**FUNDING AGRICULTURAL, NATURAL RESOURCE,
AND FORESTRY CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN
WASHINGTON STATE**

Participants: Ryan Baye, Tammy Edmonds, Tiffany Pitra, Megan Schultz, Justin Stang

Problem Statement: Various factors, including an aging workforce, globalism, economic shifts, technology, and a lack of interest and educational opportunities, have led to a labor shortage in the agricultural, forestry, and natural resource fields, and if unaddressed, this trend is projected to continue and potentially worsen.

Benefits of Solving the Problem: Addressing the labor shortage in natural resource fields in Washington would yield long-term benefits such as: decreasing dependence on imported food and strengthening self-reliance, limiting current food trade imbalance or deficits, reducing unemployment, generating and retaining more local income, and alleviating some of the pressure on our social assistance programs. By taking an educational approach, more immediate benefits include preparing the next generation for careers in agriculture and increasing agricultural literacy among adults.

Goal: To educate youth in Washington to pursue career opportunities in the agricultural, natural resource, and forestry sectors.

Objectives:

- Engage and educate legislators about the mission of Pacific Education Institute (PEI) and ask to support the Youth Engaged in Sustainable Systems (YESS) program.
- Secure \$1.5 million in supplemental funding for the YESS Program through a budget proviso to Section 522 (2) of HB 2104.
- Obtain additional funding for youth programs that will have a positive impact on the industries in which we work.

Actions: Request further funding to expand the YESS program to include the employment of additional coordinators, expand the program to add 12 cohorts across the state, and allow younger students (age 14-17) to participate.

Status: The budget proviso was not included in the House of Representative’s proposed FY25 Supplemental Operating Budget released February 19, nor in the Legislature’s final budget adopted March 7. The next opportunity to seek funding will be the 2025 Legislative session.

CAPSTONE: Individual Leadership Philosophies

Throughout the 18-month Leadership Program, participants received journaling prompts after each seminar which were periodically reviewed by Program Staff to guide the participant into diving deeper into their leadership beliefs or struggles. Using their journaling responses as a guide, each participant created and shared a synopsis of their Leadership Philosophy.



AMBER ITLE

I LEAD WITH PASSION

I use ENERGY and OPTIMISM to strive for EXCELLENCE and make a difference for the cause, the people, the animals and the community.

I LEAD WITH INTEGRITY

I uphold ETHICAL principles, embrace TRANSPARENCY, engage in HONEST conversations, and do what I say I will do.

I LEAD WITH VULNERABILITY

I use COURAGE to be AUTHENTIC, recognize my intrinsic biases, and embrace DIVERSE perspectives.

I LEAD WITH CURIOSITY

I crave KNOWLEDGE and embrace an adventurous spirit to seek opportunities to LEARN from others and build CONNECTIONS.

I LEAD WITH RESILIENCE-

I use adversity as an OPPORTUNITY to grow, ADAPT, lift up others and dig for treasure.

I am a humble, hardworking collaborative leader that relies on trusting relationships to carry out a results-oriented, shared vision. I challenge the system and seek courageous change with integrity, curiosity, and vulnerability. I am passionate for the work and all the people who are part of that work. I foster an empathetic and supportive environment that removes barriers, empowers others and creates opportunities. I use connections and resilience to give back and fuel the virtuous circle.



ANDY PERLEBERG

Leaders value the character of courage and embody the personality of taking risks. Leaders prioritize safety and the protection of relationships. We care about the future of daily implications and we focus on the horizon. Paying attention to conditions, feelings, and the social ecology of groups enables us to bring out the best in others and protect them. Leaders are trusted. Leaders seek chances to advance themselves through learning and sharing lessons learned. Leaders want choices, value benefits of diversity, and vet information to generate best decisions. Leaders don't try to take pain away and are patient with the hurt. Leaders orient direction and give hope, create expectations, and develop confidence in destinations. Leaders don't let bad days win; they turn the page while adjusting from the circumstance. A leader motivates family, friends, and colleagues, providing an unrivaled example of knowledge, purpose, and grit. Finally, leaders care the most.



CAROLYN GROOM

My leadership philosophy is rooted in cultivating joy and making a meaningful difference in the lives of those around me. I believe in the importance of dreaming big and setting ambitious goals when creating an inspiring vision to use as a guiding light. I strive to set a positive vibe where we are courageous enough to try, celebrate each other's success, view failure as an opportunity to grow, and laugh just as hard as we work. In essence, by fostering a culture of joy, believing in a compelling vision, and prioritizing a positive impact, I believe we can create strong, meaningful connections with one another and work together to shape a future for our communities filled with purpose, innovation, and fulfillment.



CARRIE NELSON

Innovative leader with attention to relationship building and collaboration focused on problem solving, growth, ethics, integrity, and efficiency. A leader who leads by example, encourages collaboration, creative problem solving, thinking outside the box, and critical decision making. A leader dedicated to authenticity, approachability, communication, trust, curiosity, growth, courage, kindness, honesty, and integrity. Leading with a sense of team, openness, acceptance, and kindness. As a leader, I accept and acknowledge my own faults, challenge myself to grow and lead with vulnerability and accept those around me. A leader, I challenge the system looking for a cultural shift from hierarchal structures, and past cultural norms; I effect change.



COLIN TOWNE

To call upon a common analogy of a pack of wolves, or cute puppies rather!... Lead from within. Lead as part of the pack. To be a member of the team and to influence others from a level of authenticity and equality. I believe that it is critically important to be a member of the team that you are leading first and foremost. To a reasonable degree, be in the trenches alongside them, sharing in the challenges. It is through this avenue that you can have meaningful influence to lead as appropriate throughout changing circumstance. Sometimes you need to sit back, stay in the background, and rely on the strengths of your team. Other times, a strong, guiding voice to give others direction is needed. But no matter what the situation calls for as a leader, the trust and authenticity is there with your team, or “pack”, to achieve success.



DEREK FRIEHE

As a leader, I get the opportunity to create and build a culture that will lead to organizational health and success. I get to create conditions that build trust within the team, where people can assume positive intent with each other, and where constructive conflict can lead to better outcomes with less politics. As a leader, I get to build a cohesive leadership team that practices vulnerability and transparency. I aspire to be a leader that listens, is open to feedback, and empowers others to make decisions, even if it involves failure. The best leaders I’ve encountered, and what I hope to be, are: humble, hungry and (emotionally/intellectually) smart. The foundation for a great leader is humility – the ability to admit when you are wrong and can admit that you don’t have all the answers.



ERIC DIXON

At this point in my journey through life, inspiration, collaboration, and communication are core principles that stand out amongst effective leaders. A good leader inspires those around them to share a common vision and be their best selves. Through collaboration, leaders bring together people, or groups of people, to accomplish tasks that would have never been possible if they had set out to do them on their own. Lastly, without effective communication, the ability to inspire and collaborate would be nothing but fantasy. Everyone has the ability to become a great leader, but they must be willing to take the ever evolving and lifelong journey to get there.



JUSTIN STANG

My leadership philosophy revolves around the relentless pursuit of continual improvement, anchored in the values of honesty, transparency, communication, empathy, and resilience. I believe in fostering an environment where honesty and transparency build trust, communication fosters collaboration, and empathy cultivates understanding and support. Through resilience, we navigate challenges with courage and determination, emerging stronger. By embracing these values, we create a culture of growth, where every individual is empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents toward shared goals. This philosophy not only drives personal and professional development but also ensures collective progress and sustained success.



MADI ROY

I believe that the true mark of a leader is someone who lives out, and stays true, to their values in every moment of the day. Leadership is not a hat worn at one moment and taken off the next. A true leader imbues the characteristics of authenticity, humility, curiosity, creativity, grit, and servitude throughout every aspect of life. Leadership is a verb – an action taken that exemplifies, and inspires, others. A leader serves others through small actions and by demonstrating virtues while also elevating, guiding, and acting as a catalyst. Above all, leadership is about love – loving who you are and using that love to relentlessly pursue your passions, respect others, and ultimately promote positive change.



MAGGIE ELLIOT

May my leadership be a light

When I am fast, I will not run from darkness -
I will stand
I will fight, win, lose, and learn.

When I am afraid, I will not tether myself to fear -
I will love
I will listen, empower, share, and endure.

When I am hurt, I will not poison myself with hate -
I will forgive
I will unite, dignify, build, and heal.

When I am weary, I will not withdraw -
I will dream
I will laugh, weep, savor, and embrace

I offer my star
To the constellation of humanity
And revel in the beauty of
Our wide, wondrous world

May my leadership be a light



MEGAN SCHULTZ

A good leader is honest with their people and shares information. Some of the best leaders I have followed have allowed me to make my own mistakes. This was acceptable as long as the mistakes were learned from and did not happen again. A good leader is not a dictator and is not a micro-manager, but rather a guide and mentor.

Modeling the way is a skill that I find very important in a leader. Setting a good example is extremely important. Demonstrating curiosity, competence, thoughtfulness, and decisiveness all play into this. This would also include showing others how to lose gracefully and how to admit when you are wrong, or when a mistake is made.



NATALIE SAHLI

I lead in an authentic manner, one that upholds my values and allows me to achieve my long-term goals. I am committed to leveraging my privilege and influence to dismantle structures of oppression. I earn credibility through hard work and persistence and maintain trust through humility and respect. I uphold empathy as my greatest strength and understand it serves myself and others best when I set boundaries. There are no limits to creativity in leadership and problem solving. I take any opportunity for freedom of expression to create joy for myself and others.



ROSA DEKKER

As a leader I hope to inspire people to do better at their job and leave their workplace better than they found it. I hope to inspire a sense of belonging and pride on what they accomplish every day and have a vision that goes further than just work and carries into what defines them, I hope to help them see their values connected with the work they do.

I envision my impact as a leader on others as an example and hope to inspire people to fulfill their aspirations and go above and beyond their shortcomings. I want more autonomy instilled in the people I lead, I want people to ask questions, but also think about the answers while interacting respectfully and efficiently.



RYAN BAYE

People will remember the negatives comments more than the positive ones.

Have confidence and instill it in others.

Fail at least once every day.

No one can read your mind – you have to speak out.

Don't just wait- make your own opportunities.

You don't always have to give 100% - amazing doesn't mean perfection.

You are who you want to be – you can only control your actions.

Emotions are not a bad thing – don't turn yourself off.

You cannot be everything to every person – you can't please everyone.

There is a time for everything – remember to read the room.

Always push the bubble – do what scares you.

Listen to everything, you don't know what's important.

Meet people where they are – not where you want them to be.

Understand other perspectives – they may be right.



TIFFANY PITRA

To lead from the heart,
Seeking connection to learn what activates your inner passion.
To work with purpose,
Sharing my vision for a future that includes *everyone*.

It has been said, "Life is a process of becoming (Anais Nin).
Becoming requires intentional stillness.
Sometimes, it involves great risk.

To speak with gentle honesty—
(and to listen),
Practicing empathy with the commitment to understand.

To live a life of significance
(not success),
Choosing in each moment to give my best to you.



TAMMY EDMONDS

As a quiet leader, I value one on one relationships that build trust and respect. In these moments, it's important to me to understand the strengths of others and encourage or challenge them to continue their journey.

To me kindness is a pillar I abide by. Kindness does not mean weakness in a leader; rather firm kindness promotes in others curiosity and achievement.

Lastly courage is a new muscle I am using with deliberation as a leader. Speaking up, asking the questions, challenging the process and sharing the vision from a place in the heart is extremely powerful.

AgForestry has given me my confidence back, has made it okay to be vulnerable, and to struggle with who I am and aspire to be. I have found my courage, and I am excited for what the future holds for me.



TYLER WEST

Leaders exist in all areas of life, and therefore leadership exists in everyone, dynamically and continuously moving from thoughts, to behaviors, to interactions, culminating in our shared experiences. It is our responsibility as leaders to live our values, elevate others and the values we all share. We commit ourselves to this task, we commit to our teams, we commit to our shared goals, relying on one another and sharing in the challenges and the achievements. As leaders, we cultivate these bonds and relationships that create our shared journey, for we can only succeed together. Together, we participate in and influence the processes that shape our world. It is our goal to impact, steer, and guide our teams towards our shared goals, continuously striving to improve, learn, progress, and achieve our goals.



WIOLETTA SKOTNICKA- KOWALEC

“Leadership Is an Attitude”

I value every individual's voice and contribution, regardless of their position. Empathy is key in my leadership approach, and I strive to continuously improve my emotional intelligence and flexibility. I accept people as they are and prioritize fairness in all aspects. I am committed to promoting and supporting others' growth and success. As a leader I aim to create collaborative teams and provide the necessary tools for everyone to succeed. I avoid making assumptions and passing judgment, instead focusing on understanding, and supporting each individual's journey.



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

-Margeret Mead
