

Final Results

FW01-019

Tilth-Agroforestry Niche Demonstration Project – Native Forest Restoration for Sustainable Wild Craft Production on the Farm

Location:
Langley, Washington

Funding Period:
April 2001 - December 2002

Grant Award:
\$4,500

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OBJECTIVES

This agroforestry project is designed to address the degradation of native forest lands, where landowners log, bulldoze and burn the forests in the mistaken belief that they are improving the agricultural potential of the land.

ABSTRACT

The agroforestry project of South Whidbey Tilth was begun in the spring of 2001 on 11 acres of land owned by South Whidbey Tilth, a sustainable agriculture chapter of the Washington Tilth Association. The South Whidbey Tilth chapter, formed in 1982, and its land are on Whidbey Island in central Puget Sound.

The project has created a demonstration site located in a high-visibility area along the north-south highway that traverses the long narrow island of 70,000 residents. The 6-acre parcel of forest land comprises a “parked out” stand of sparse Douglas fir trees with an understory of non-native grasses and blackberry brambles.

The understory has been removed using a variety of methods, and project members began planting trees in the fall of 2001.

In addition to restoring the forest land, the project is sustainably harvesting foliage, roots, seeds, berries and the like, for use as ornamentals, food and herbs, to be promoted and sold in limited quantities at the tilth chapter’s seasonal farmers market. Although the refreshed forest will not reach full production for at least five years, selling the wild crafted products by the end of the second full year of the project will help communicate the potential for such sales to other farms and producers in the area.

SPECIFIC RESULTS

In May 2001, blackberry and thistle undergrowth was cleared with a brush hog on about 5 acres. The first complete mowing, May 1, took about seven hours, and the area was mowed three more times during the growing season. The forestry consultant, Elliott Menashe, determined the best times to mow the blackberry, just as plants were gathering enough energy through green growth. Invasive plants around trees, where the brush hog couldn’t reach, were removed by hand. In addition, as an experiment in blackberry eradication and control, a quarter acre was tilled in late September and planted to an annual rye crop to discourage revegetation.

Two 12-foot by 12-foot beds were created in the Tilth garden, and potted plants, salvaged and purchased, were planted in March 2002. Some of the plants will be planted into the forest understory and others will be offered for sale at the farmers market. Another bed, 20 by 20, is planned in the Tilth garden for long-term propagation of native plants for sale or transplant. Initial plantings will include Oregon Grape and Evergreen Huckleberry, two valuable understory species not easily salvaged from the wild.

Tilth volunteers and workers began transplanting selected native forest understory plants in the fall of 2001. Trees and shrubs were salvaged from road construction and other sites or donated. Shrubs included Sword Fern, Salaal and Red Huckleberry. Trees included nine Garry Oaks, three Western Red Cedars, two Cascara trees, three Douglas Maples, three Vine Maples and a Short Pine. Hog wire was placed around some trees to protect them from deer and rabbits, and a temporary fence was constructed in 2002.

In addition to the plants propagated from seed in pots, like Oregon Grape and Evergreen Huckleberry, the project has purchased and potted bare root deciduous tree and plant seedlings, including Cascara, Mountain or Douglas Maple, Vine Maple, Twinflower, Pacific Dogwood, Mock Orange, Kinnickinnick, Oregon Grape Tall, Red Elderberry, Ninebark, Douglas Spirea and Snowberry. The 120 plants were held in capillary beds, until the fall of 2002, when they were either sold at the farmers market or transplanted into the forest demonstration site.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Forests either lost or replaced with non-native vegetation will be reclaimed with native plants and trees, from which landowners can opt to sell wild crafted products or plants and trees, enabling them to become more economically sustainable on their property. In addition, the newly refreshed forest lands, with their native plant species, will help maintain the land's health and provide habitat for wildlife.

FARMER ADOPTION AND DIRECT IMPACT

While there have been no reported emulations among landowners of the project's reforestation, the high visibility along the main Whidbey Island highway is receiving significant attention.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS OR NEW HYPOTHESES

In addition to the basic components of the project, members now hope to establish selected wild edible mushrooms in the forest plot. In addition, in collaboration with the Washington Department of Transportation, the Island County Public Works Department and other public entities, South Whidbey Tilth plans to create on its property a facility to salvage plants from road construction and other land-disturbing projects.

DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

During the Saturday farmers markets in 2001, customers (at least 50) hiked up the hill to visit the forest restoration site, and the project coordinator Mike Seraphinoff says he expects an increasing number of visitors as the project evolves.

In addition, information has been disseminated monthly through the South Whidbey Tilth newsletter and through a brochure created on the project. Copies of the brochure and photos of the project were sent in the spring of 2002 to the *Washington Tilth Journal*, the Washington State University Extension Master Gardener Program and WSU's sustainable agriculture newsletter. In addition, an article was slated for publication in spring 2002 in *The South Whidbey Record*, a community newspaper that reaches 8,000 households.

PRODUCER INVOLVEMENT

While no other producers have been directly involved, many of the 100-plus member households of South Whidbey Tilth have contributed numerous hours working as volunteers in the project.