

## Dealing with Drought in the Landscape

Unprecedented drought conditions and a scarcity of water means we need to prioritize our irrigation needs. Whether farmers make a profit (thus survive) or not depends on whether they have adequate irrigation water. For homeowners, the focus should be on plant survival rather than aesthetics.

A homeowner's highest priority should be the area immediately around the home, especially in areas susceptible to wildfire. Consider the following water conserving ways to help your landscape get through the drought:



- ✓ Convert some of your lawn into a less water-demanding landscape. Consider this drought a reason to transform lawn areas into carefree beds of drought-tolerant shrubs and perennials as seen in the photo. Start now by covering the lawn with a foot of mulch. Use biodegradable cardboard or construction paper instead of landscape fabric. If you have particularly troublesome weeds, you can kill the existing vegetation by covering the area with black plastic for a few months.
- ✓ Many well established plants should be able to survive without irrigation, and many others will get by with one good soaking (1-2" of water) in July and August.
- ✓ Turf grass does not stay green through the summer, not even in a normal year. It's natural for it to go dormant, but too many weeks without water can do permanent damage. About one inch of water for each dry month will keep grass alive and it will green up quickly when the fall rains start.

### EVERY DROP COUNTS

- To save up to 1,000 gallons per month, time your shower to keep it under 5 minutes
- Turn off the water while you brush your teeth to save up to 4 gallons a minute
- While waiting for tap or shower water to warm up, capture the cold water in a bucket to use for outdoor watering.
- Visit <http://wateruseitwisely.com/100-ways-to- conserve/>



- ✓ Set your lawn mower height to 2 ½ inches or more. Taller grass shades roots and holds soil moisture better than short grass.
- ✓ Use a mulching mower. Leaving lawn clippings on your grass keeps the soil cooler, retains more moisture and recycles nutrients.
- ✓ Install decks, patios and pathways in areas where lawn struggles through the dry summer.

## PIC Project Ready for Implementation

Pilot implementation of the recently developed Pollution Identification & Correction plan will begin later this summer. The pilot project will take place in the Meadowbrook Creek and Three Crabs area. A public meeting to explain the project to project area residents is scheduled from **6:30-8:00PM on Wednesday, August 12th at the Dungeness Schoolhouse**. A postcard invitation will be mailed out to residents and property owners in the PIC project area. Check the District website for more information on the PIC implementation project.

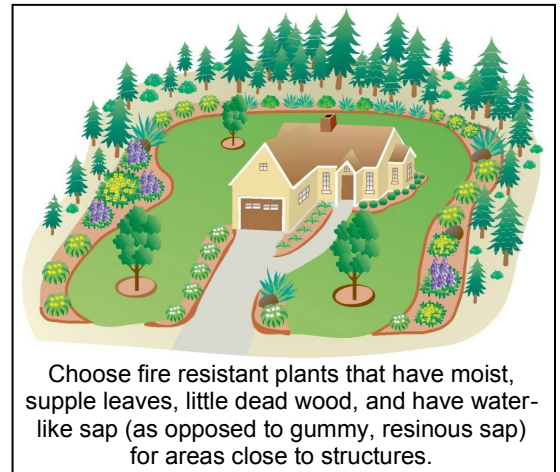
## **Drought and the Risk of Wildfire**

Our state is in the midst of a serious drought, so serious that wildfire has already burned well over 1,000 acres of rain forest, of all things, in Olympic National Park. Stream flows in the Elwha and Dungeness rivers are about one-quarter their averages and what little snowpack that accumulated this past winter is long gone.

Record-setting heat and drought have heightened the risk of wildfire, which should not be taken lightly, especially if you live in or adjacent to a wooded area. Begin preparing for wildfire by developing, discussing and practicing a disaster plan with everyone in your home.

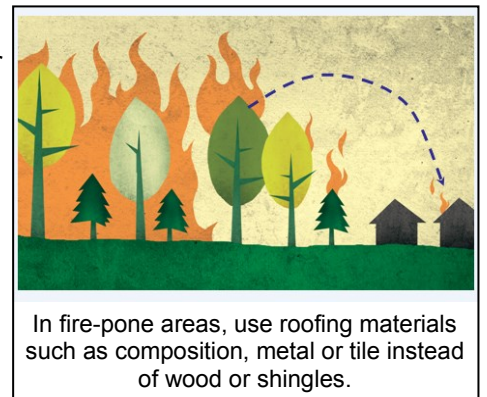
### **Your disaster plan should include the following:**

1. Details for care of pets and livestock
2. Cell phones programmed with emergency numbers
3. Identification of at least two ways out of your neighborhood
4. A designated meeting place
5. A defined defensible space of at least 30 feet around structures



### **Some things you can do now to reduce wildfire risk and prepare for disaster include:**

- Be particularly careful with fire and obey burning bans.
- Make sure your address marker is easily viewed from the road.
- Ensure easy access to your home by fire-fighting equipment. Driveways should be at least 12 feet wide with a 15-foot vertical clearance and slope of less than 5%.
- Keep tools such as a shovel, rake, axe, handsaw or chainsaw, and water hoses readily available.
- Maintain an emergency water source. If you have an irrigation system, make sure it is operable even if you've turned it off in order to conserve water; it may come in handy in case of fire.
- Store firewood away from the house and other structures.
- Clean leaves, needles and debris out of roof gutters.
- Trim off limbs that hang over the roof.
- Enclose areas under decks to prevent embers from blowing in.
- Remove dead vegetation and debris from around the house and under decks.
- Remove "ladder fuels" – the lower limbs of large trees and understory vegetation that allows small grass fires to become hard to control tree crown fires. Within your defensible space, prune trees so lowest limbs are 6 to 10 feet from the ground or understory plants.
- Keep grass short around structures, wood piles and propane tanks, gradually increasing grass height to 8 inches as you move away from the house.
- If possible, irrigate the area of your landscape within 30 feet of your home. When using bark mulch try not to put it right next to structures, or make sure it remains moist to prevent ignition. Gravel or decorative rock is often a better choice for covering soil near structures.
- Remove plants that are high in resins, oils and waxes from close proximity to your house. Examples include most evergreen trees and shrubs, lavender and rosemary.
- Delineate your defensible space, at least on the windward sides of your house, with a fuelbreaks of noncombustible material such as a gravel driveway or path, or maintain a wide swath of lawn.



## **Drought Tips for Horse and Livestock Owners**

- ✓ **Pastures:** Overgrazing pastures during drought conditions damages plant roots, which can cause long-term damage. Rotate animals through pastures or remove entirely if grass gets shorter than 3 inches. This will help plants recover quicker in the fall when the rains come.
- ✓ **Weeds:** During drought conditions weeds might be the only green plants in the pasture, making it more likely that animals may ingest them. Walk pastures once a week to ensure no poisonous plants have popped up that may harm or kill animals.
- ✓ **Stock Watering:** Install float valves (*see photo at right*) on water troughs to prevent wasting water if a hose accidentally gets left on. To reduce mosquito larvae infestations, add a small amount of vegetable oil (coats the surface and traps larvae), mosquito dunks, or goldfish, rather than dumping out the whole tank.



- ✓ **Wildfire:** Be prepared to evacuate immediately in the event of a wildfire. Have a truck and trailer handy and ready to go. Consider ways to put your contact information on animals in case they have to be turned out with others at an evacuation location. Large plastic cattle ear tags are very durable and great for writing on with a permanent marker. They can be paired with a plastic zip tie to fasten on a halter or tied with a breakable rope around necks of cattle, sheep and goats (don't use a very strong rope in case the animal were to get hung up by the rope).

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## **Aquifer Recharge Project Update**

Construction is scheduled to begin anytime on a shallow aquifer recharge project along Carlsborg Road. This will be the first fully functioning aquifer recharge site in the Dungeness Valley.

An irrigation pipeline installed a few years ago to replace open ditch will convey water from the Dungeness River to the recharge site during the snow melt period between May 15 and July 15. The water infiltrated into the ground during this time period will enhance low stream flows later in the summer.

Perforated pipe installed in drain rock and backfilled will comprise the vast majority of the recharge system. Clallam Conservation District is the lead for construction and the Clallam Ditch Association is the owner and operator. A grant from the Department of Ecology is paying for construction.

Due to the proximity to the Dungeness River, the recharge at this site is designated for Dungeness River flow restoration. Two other projects in the design phase will be for mitigation of impacts from permit exempt wells that were put to use since January of 2013. A few other recharge sites are under consideration for additional Dungeness River flow restoration.

## **Reservoir Project Update**

This summer is serving up to be a harsh reminder that reliance on snow in the mountains for summer water storage may not be such a good strategy, especially if climate change impacts play out as projected. Like aquifer recharge, which is one form of water storage, planning work is underway on above ground storage in the form of a reservoir.

Numerous agencies and organizations are partnering on the development of a large off-stream reservoir on Department of Natural Resources land just west of River Road. This project has the potential to store over 1,500 acre-feet of water for late summer irrigation. This equates to 25 cubic feet per second of flow for the last month of irrigation season, or over half the flow of water withdrawn from the Dungeness River. And, the location of the proposed reservoir would allow it to be used to capture winter storm runoff that currently contributes to flooding in the city of Sequim. This has the makings of a truly win-win project.



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Clallam Conservation District is a sub-division of state government created to promote the stewardship and conservation of natural resources in Clallam County. Public meetings are held at 3:00 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month at the Clallam Conservation District office, 228 W First St., Suite H in Port Angeles (top floor of the Armory Square Building).

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- ⇒ Drought Preparation for Landscapes
- ⇒ Preparing for Wildfire
- ⇒ Drought Tips for Horse & Livestock Owners
- ⇒ Irrigation Project Updates

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