

# Sustainability Notes

RE SOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

WINTER 2008

I RECENTLY ATTENDED a presentation in which a biologist discussed the value of marine riparian areas to the integrity of the natural system at Cherry Point. A riparian area is the interface between upland and aquatic habitats. Marine riparian areas are valuable because they provide shade for fish that spawn on the beach, stabilize bluffs to prevent erosion, filter pollutants before they reach the water, and provide important nutrients to marine species.

The presenter delivered the results of his research on the stomach contents of migrating juvenile salmon. It turned out that the majority of the food sources that these fish were eating were not marine organisms but terrestrial in origin. These young salmon, that hug the shore during migration, hide from deep-water predators and eat bugs such as tent caterpillars. This was a surprising piece of information for many in the room, as they assumed that a fish living in the marine environment would be eating marine invertebrates.

The speaker went on to discuss research that identified isotopes from the marine environment in the tops of mature trees growing deep in the forest, hundreds of miles from the sea. What was the source? Migrating salmon, of course. The dead fish are eaten by terrestrial animals that then travel deep into the forest, where they deposited their scat. He then commented that these isotopes had also been found in agricultural soils in eastern Washington. This part of our fair state is, of course, growing in its prominence as wine country. This leads one to an inevitable conclusion: salmon = wine.

Well now, as a lover of the red, this notion gives me pause. By losing our salmon, are we losing an important stream of micro-nutrients that play a subtle role in forest health and the vitality of our agricultural soils? With no salmon, will my cabernet lose some important but almost imperceptible essence?

And what about those fungi that dwell below the surface of the soil? Apparently, some fungi and other “epi-parasitic” plants form relationships with the trees around them through mycorrhizal relationships that connected the finest root hairs to the finest strands of fungi. It used to be that scientists thought this was a one way relationship, with the fungi and epi-parasitic plants living off of the tree. In recent years, however, scientists are finding what, for lack of a better term, they are calling a vitamin that is produced by the fungi and given back to the tree. Hmm...another very subtle relationship that we have only recently begun to see.

It seems that, every where we look, we can find these sorts of subtle, but important relationships in the natural world. And if we look a little deeper, we can see that they affect us, too. Pollutants ride global air currents to find their way to the arctic, making polar bears and some Inuit people the most contaminated mammals on earth. We cut down forests in the Amazon, only to belatedly begin to understand that the band of forests that blanket the equatorial regions of the earth act as giant lungs, literally breathing for the planet!

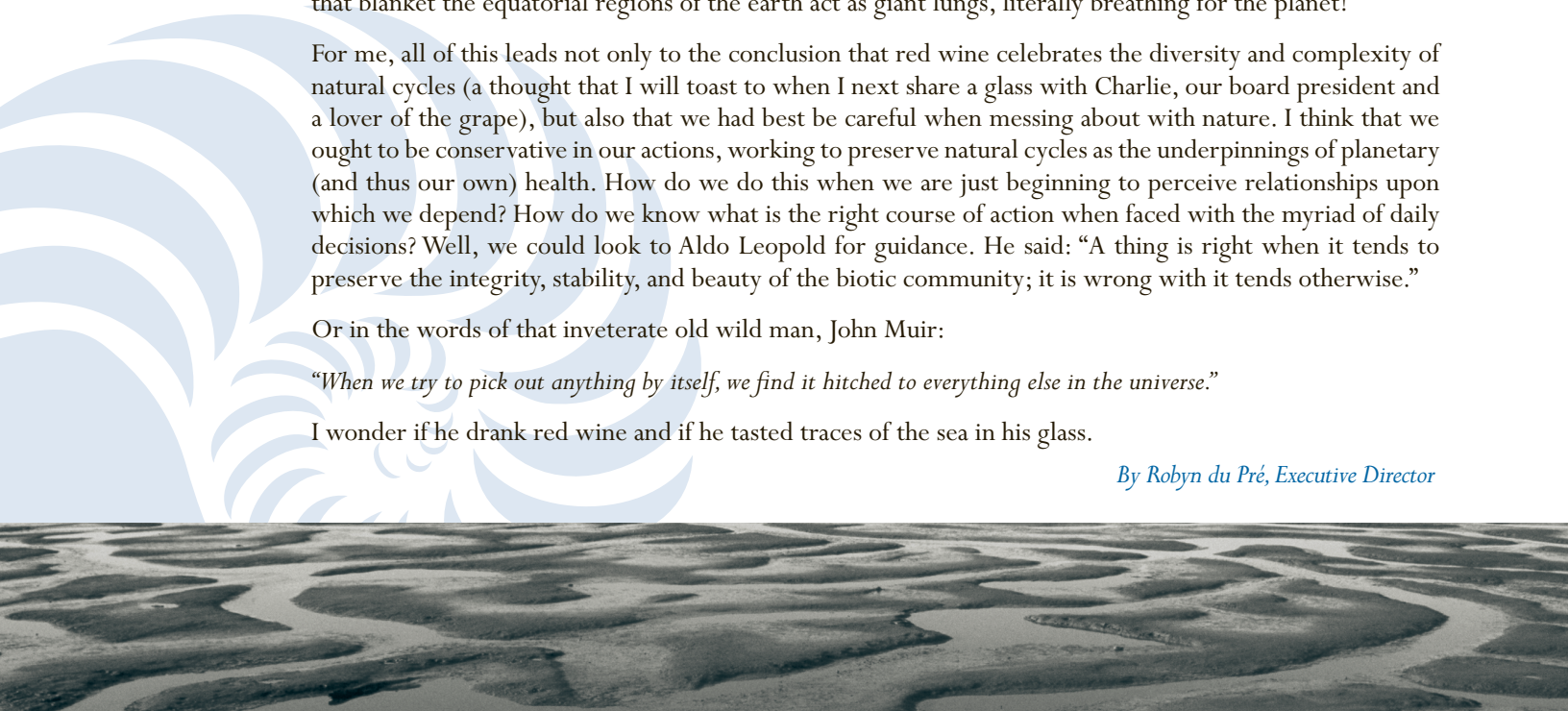
For me, all of this leads not only to the conclusion that red wine celebrates the diversity and complexity of natural cycles (a thought that I will toast to when I next share a glass with Charlie, our board president and a lover of the grape), but also that we had best be careful when messing about with nature. I think that we ought to be conservative in our actions, working to preserve natural cycles as the underpinnings of planetary (and thus our own) health. How do we do this when we are just beginning to perceive relationships upon which we depend? How do we know what is the right course of action when faced with the myriad of daily decisions? Well, we could look to Aldo Leopold for guidance. He said: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community; it is wrong with it tends otherwise.”

Or in the words of that inveterate old wild man, John Muir:

*“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”*

I wonder if he drank red wine and if he tasted traces of the sea in his glass.

*By Robyn du Pré, Executive Director*



# Seattle's Recycled Plastics Market Gets a Boost

By Lisa Friend, Recycling Outreach Coordinator

RE SOURCES IS LEAVING the farm and taking our agricultural plastics recycling program to the big city this year. This country mouse will help Seattle landscapers and greenhouses find options for recycling nursery containers, greenhouse film, irrigation materials, and other low-grade plastics. Funded by Seattle Public Utilities, this program will establish regular

plastics recycling collection at six or more Seattle-area sites this spring and augment drop-off recycling programs for flower pots and nursery flats.

Our goal in Seattle is to document 23 tons or more of plastics collected for recycling this year and set the stage for recycling growth in the future. In order to do this, we have begun to build a network of recycling businesses interested in collecting greenhouse plastics. The next step is to connect with the greenhouses and nurseries to help them streamline their recycling programs. Once these fundamentals are in place, we will complete the picture by connecting haulers, processors and producers to create a solid, well-supported recycling system that did not exist a year ago.

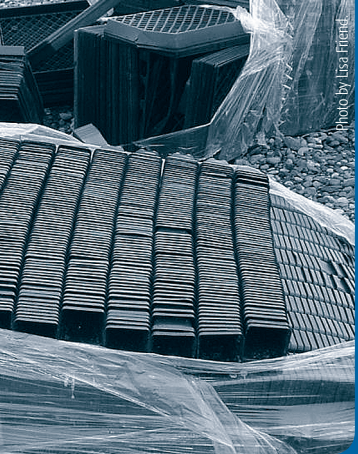
## What happens to the plastics?

Some recyclers sell horticultural materials to washing facilities that clean the plastics and process them for re-manufacture into new products here in the U.S. or Canada. Other companies sell the plastics abroad, while still others are experimenting with processes that convert the dirtiest plastics into liquid fuel. New items made on the west coast from recycled plastic include garbage bags, shingles, plastic lumber, and bottles to hold painting products.

## Nurseries Save on Garbage Costs

While they do not get paid for recycling their plastic waste, participating greenhouses and nurseries save money on their garbage disposal costs. In the long run, efficient collection and marketing systems are the only way these new recycling programs can become self-sustaining.

RE Sources would eventually like to see all the area's farm and garden plastics re-made into useful items here in the northwest. Once we find out how much plastic there is in Seattle, how clean it is and how easy – or difficult – it is to collect, we'll be in a better position to encourage new manufacturing in this region.



Smith Gardens locations along the I-5 corridor already have their plastics collected for recycling.

## 2008 Environmental Heroes Chosen

RE Sources is happy to announce our 2008 Environmental Heroes:

- **Tim Wahl** for his long career planning and acquiring parks and trails for the people of Bellingham. His vision and careful negotiations skills have led to some spectacular acquisitions, including Woodstock Farm.
- **Jim Edwards** for his dedication and enthusiasm for educating people of all ages about the wonders of the natural world at Tennant Lake Interpretive Center.
- **Donna Merlina** who started the Whatcom County "Bike To Work and School Day" years ago and continues to advocate for a car-free world.
- **Roberta Vollendorff** for decades of citizen activism for Greenways, the Chuckanuts, and waste and recycling issues. "Bobbi" has worked on every Greenways levy, started the sustainability program in the Mount Baker School District, and served for many years as a board member of RE Sources.
- **Al Hanners** will receive a Lifetime Achievement Award for his work to preserve native plants through the Washington Native Plant Society as well as his many years of citizen activism on the cleanup of Bellingham Bay, the health of the watershed, and his continued voice as a prolific writer for the Whatcom Watch.

Heroes were nominated by members of the community and chosen by a panel of judges for their hard work, dedication and commitment to the environment. We also tend to favor un-sung heroes, who are not generally recognized for their work.

Heroes will be honored during a dinner banquet on April 19, 2008 at the Northwood Hall in Bellingham. The focus of the event is, "Growing Community," and will feature a keynote address by Saul Weisberg, Executive Director of the North Cascades Institute.

Tickets to the event are \$50. To reserve your seat or table of 8, contact Megan Artz at [megana@re-sources.org](mailto:megana@re-sources.org) or 733-8307.

Recycle your agricultural plastic.  
Contact Lisa Friend, Recycling Outreach  
Coordinator at [recycle@re-sources.org](mailto:recycle@re-sources.org)  
or 360-733-8307

Reserve your seats today!  
The room fills up fast!

# BAYKEEPER EXPANDS STORMWATER PROGRAM

*By Lee First, Field Investigator*



Volunteers observe muddy water draining into a storm drain in Mount Vernon during a Skagit County training.

**Report pollution problems from construction sites or other sources. Contact Field Investigator, Lee First at [leef@re-sources.org](mailto:leef@re-sources.org) or 360-733-8307 and she'll check it out.**

In 2004, BAYKEEPER Wendy Steffensen received a phone call that would open a new chapter for the North Sound Baykeeper program. A concerned local resident was calling to report a plug of sediment moving from an active construction site into a local stream that flowed into Lake Whatcom. Not only was the content of the call alarming, it demonstrated to Wendy that citizens are important watchdogs of local pollution sources. This realization led to the formation of RE Sources' Stormwater Team.

Since its formation, the Stormwater Team has recruited and trained over 35 local citizens to inspect construction sites, assess them for their potential to pollute and document what they see. In the last 3 years, Baykeeper staff, interns and volunteers have visited over 2,000 construction sites in Whatcom County and filed over 350 complaints to regulating agencies. Some of these complaints have led to fines for the contractor, and many led to corrective actions.

It is a documented fact that in urban areas, runoff from construction sites accounts for a large proportion (sometimes more than 50%) of the sediment reaching waterways. That sediment can create havoc in local water bodies, especially salmon-spawning streams, where sediment can clog fish gills, kill aquatic insects, and smother fish eggs. Because of this concern, and due to the rapid pace of development in Skagit County, RE Sources has expanded the stormwater program south into Skagit County.

As part of this expansion, I was hired as the new Field Investigator. In addition to keeping in close contact with our growing network of volunteers, I will recruit and train new volunteers, manage the water quality data and visit and inspect construction and industrial sites to assess their stormwater impact.

In early January, our first training class for Skagit County volunteers was held in Mount Vernon. There is now an enthusiastic group of volunteers in Skagit County eager to keep an eye out for polluted stormwater runoff in their community. Our new volunteers are trained to look for correct erosion control measures, to determine if muddy water is leaving a site, and if there is evidence of other pollution. My next task will be to expand our network of relationships with stormwater inspectors in Skagit County and the cities of Mount Vernon, Anacortes, Sedro-Woolley, and Burlington, just as we have in Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham. Once our volunteers get busy, the local inspectors are going to hear from us!



## **Congratulations, Wendy and Greg!**

North Sound Baykeeper, Wendy Steffensen and her husband, Greg Waters announce the birth of their first child:

Liam Michael Corry-Steffensen Waters

Born: December 31, 2007; 7:41 am

7 lbs, 13 oz, 21 inches



# RE Store Door

By Crina Hoyer, Program Director

The door section of the RE Store is one of my favorite places to browse. Oh, don't get me wrong, I'm not looking for a new portal for my bathroom or kitchen, I look in this section for inspiration. I once used an old, painted screen door to add a faux entryway on a particularly drab wall of a shed.

I've balanced thin, beautifully carved doors between two file cabinets and created one-of-a-kind desks. I've even thought about using a door as head boards, coffee tables, bookshelves...the list goes on and on.

Turns out I'm not the only one who sees the potential of doors.

photos: Crina Hoyer



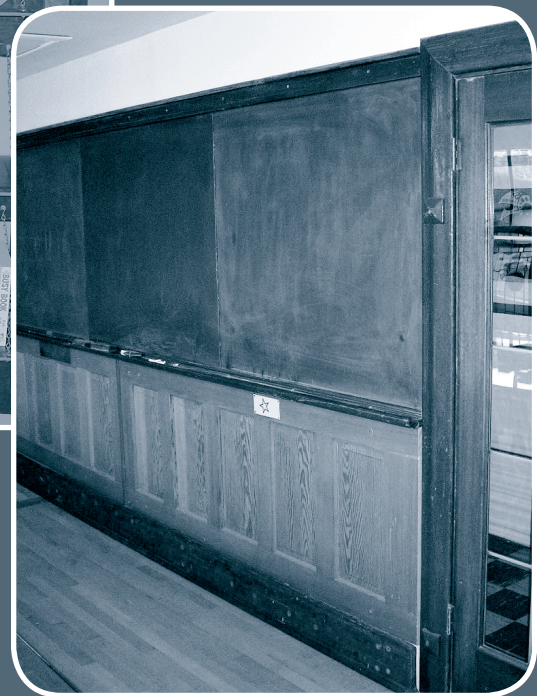
The panels of this door were carefully cut-out, reattached as shelves and supported by pieces of used chain. An old glass knob was added for detail and voila-a unique book shelf!

Panel doors, below, are artfully arranged to create this one-of-a-kind wanes coting in the conference room of the Seattle REStore. Trimmed with old bleacher boards and topped with a chalk tray from an old school, this detail is eye-catching and very chic.



photo: Robyn du Pré

This children's easel, left, was made by cutting a panel door in half, hinging it at the top and attaching a piece of slate chalkboard to one side.



photos: Marty Brennan

In addition to shopping the RE Store for material to use in traditional ways (a door to hang in a doorway, for example), many of our supporters re-purpose items such as doors, seeing the potential of the material to take new forms. Do you have photos of some of your creative projects? We'd love to feature them. Send pictures and a brief description of the work you did to Jason@re-store.org.

# JOIN and GIVE

Please select the amount you would like to give:  \$25  \$50  \$100  \$250  \$500  Other \_\_\_\_\_

This donation is for:  General membership support  Sustainable Living Center

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

## PAYMENT METHOD

My check, made payable to RE Sources, is enclosed.  Please charge my credit/debit card

I prefer to make monthly or quarterly donations with my credit/debit card. I understand I can cancel at any time with a simple phone call.

Monthly  Quarterly donation of:

\$10  \$15  \$25  \$50  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please charge my  Visa  Mastercard

Card No: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Save paper and a stamp! Visit [www.re-sources.org/join-donate.htm](http://www.re-sources.org/join-donate.htm) and click on the "donate now" button to make a gift with your debit/credit card via our secure online website.

## Be cool, become a member today

*By Bernadette Castner, Development Director*

RE SOURCES HAS played a vital role in connecting community members with personal solutions to challenging environmental issues for the past twenty-five years. Through a variety of programs, including the Baykeeper, Beach Naturalists, and our beloved RE Stores, we have a proven history of working for community sustainability in western Washington. As a non-profit organization, RE Sources depends partially on foundation dollars to launch our community programs and campaigns. And while this kind of funding gets new programs off the ground, we always need community supporters to help these programs grow.

One such program is our upcoming Be Cool campaign, an innovative program that will challenge individuals to make lifestyle changes to personally combat climate change. We believe that people want to do the right thing when it comes to environmental issues. Sometimes, though, an issue like global warming is too daunting for people to feel like they have any power to make a significant difference. Be Cool approaches global warming in a tangible, solution-oriented way, providing community members with the tools and resources they need to feel like they are making a positive difference. Keep your eyes open this spring as we launch this fun and empowering new program.

Another way to make a positive impact is by becoming a member of RE Sources! Your membership dollars help us protect our home and safeguard our unique and wonderful quality of life. In addition to financially supporting what we do, our members feel like they have ownership in RE Sources and in our community. RE Sources will continue to seek funding support from foundations as well as government grants and contracts, but your membership contribution provides the pivotal tipping point to growing innovative programming such as the Be Cool campaign.

To become a member of RE Sources, visit our website at [www.re-sources.org](http://www.re-sources.org) or contact me at 360-733-8307 or [bernadettec@re-sources.org](mailto:bernadettec@re-sources.org).

We hope you like the new look of our newsletter. We plan to focus on different programs each issue so if your favorite segment is missing this quarter, you'll be tickled when it appears in an upcoming issue. Visit our website for more up-to-date information and in-depth articles.

[www.re-sources.org](http://www.re-sources.org)

**Farewell to Nate Moore,**  
Bellingham RE Store Manager.  
You will be missed.

## Upcoming Events

### **Green Drinks:**

March 5<sup>th</sup>, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 5-7pm

### **Environmental Heroes Banquet**

April 19<sup>th</sup>

### **Lunch with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.**

June 26<sup>th</sup>

Check our website for locations, details  
and more information: [www.re-sources.org](http://www.re-sources.org)

## Thanks to the following:

- **David King of the Stewart King Partnership** for pro bono architectural drawings for the SLC remodel
- **Our amazing board of directors** for all their hard work in 2007
- **Joseph and Florence Francis Family Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation**
- **Whatcom County** for a contract to continue classroom-based education, focused on waste reduction and recycling.

### **Thanks also to: Advisory committee members from 2007:**

Lynn Trzynka  
Pete Nygren  
Jack Kimmes  
Sheila Hardy  
Mary Humphries  
Ken Carrasco  
Cindy Franklin  
Hugh Lewis  
Doug Robertson

Printed on FSC certified,  
100% post consumer  
recycled paper, generated  
with wind power



By using this paper, RE Sources preserved  
1.41 trees for the future, saved 599  
gallons of wastewater, prevented 131 lbs  
of greenhouse emissions and kept 66 lbs  
of solid waste from disposal.