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## Artists, scientists collaborate on climate change exhibit

By KIMBERLY CAUVEL @Kimberly\_SVH 2 hrs ago



Forest scientist Dave Peterson (center) talks with artists Ann Vandervelde (left) and Lin McJunkin about preserving forest diversity during a walk Wednesday on Peterson's property near Lake Cavanaugh. The artists are preparing work for next fall's Surge exhibit at the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner.

Charles Biles / Skagit Valley Herald

The landscape holds many clues about what's happening in the environment.

Slabs of bark shed from a tree suggest beetles feasted there, a graying tree may have red pine needles because it didn't get enough water to survive the hot summer, and a chalky white material oozing along the trunk of a tree indicates it is infected with disease.

Those were some of the signs forester Dave Peterson pointed out Wednesday during a walk through his forested property near Lake Cavanaugh.

Peterson explained to artists Lin McJunkin and Ann Vandervelde during the tour that as the climate changes to one that is warmer and drier, it will be difficult for some young trees to survive and for older trees to grow, tree-eating insects and disease will spread to the region and wildfires will become more frequent and intense.

Peterson is one of several area scientists working with artists over the next year on art that will reflect climate science for a fall 2018 Surge exhibit at the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner.

Surge is a collaboration between the museum and the Skagit Climate Science Consortium, of which Peterson is a member. Surge is intended to spur discussions about the impacts of climate change on the region.

The Skagit Climate Science Consortium is a group of area scientists studying the impacts of climate change in the Skagit River watershed, which runs from the icy peaks of the North Cascades to the salty marine waters.

Those scientists, including Peterson with the U.S. Forest Service and University of Washington, are sharing their views of the changing landscape with artists in an effort to get the message of climate change out to more members of the community.

For many of the artists, portraying environmental issues is a common theme in their work.

“I’m so inspired to create in response to what I see happening in the world, particularly with climate change,” Vandervelde said while walking through the damp terrain of Peterson’s property.

Along the way, she and McJunkin — who are collaborating to create a canvas painting and glass sculpture piece — took photos of the details pointed out by Peterson.

The artists saw beauty in the squiggly marks beetles left inside the bark of a tree, the patterns of leaves and moss, and the wilted leaves of a fern that endured a long, hot summer.

While walking over fallen leaves and twigs, Peterson said that with longer, drier summers ahead, he expects to see changes in the types of trees that survive and how fast or large they grow.

“It might take three or more consecutive drought years before we see lasting impacts, but that might be what we see at the end of the century,” he said.

Peterson and McJunkin previously met at her Conway area art studio Aug. 16 to discuss the methods she uses to create glass art.

Scientist Greg Hood, another member of the Skagit Climate Science Consortium, took another artist team into the Fir Island marshes Aug. 24.

Dimitri Katsaros and Barbara Miller, a husband and wife photography duo from Bellingham, said they focus on landscape photography and panoramas, and have an interest in estuaries, such as where the Skagit River meets Skagit Bay.

Over the coming months, these and other scientist-artist teams will maintain contact while the artists develop photographs, paintings and glass work to reflect the scientist’s findings and what they mean for the region’s communities.

Next year, MoNA will evaluate the art to determine whether it is scientifically accurate enough to be included in the Surge exhibit.

The exhibit will open in Oct. 2018 and be held for three months. That will mark the third and longest-running Surge exhibit, which has evolved each year since it began.

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