

UP IN THE CANOPY

Tree researcher gives legislative aides new view



Tony Overman/The Olympian

Richard Ramsey, a natural resources budget analyst for the Washington Senate Ways and Means Committee, uses climbing ropes to ascend a 200-year-old Douglas fir

Tuesday afternoon in Millersylvania State Park. Legislative aides visited the forest to learn about tree canopy research projects at The Evergreen State College.

Educator seeks to reach decision-makers via tree-climbing

BY JOHN DODGE
THE OLYMPIAN

Ann-Marie Sweeten had a close encounter Tuesday with a light green fluorescent spider 40 feet high in a tree at Millersylvania State Park.

Vicki Era looked down onto the tops of vine maple leaves from a vantage point she'd never had before.

They were among a dozen state legislative aides who gathered in a cluster of old-growth trees for a firsthand lesson in tree canopy research from professor Nalini Nadkarni of The Evergreen State College.

Nadkarni has spent much of her summer taking people from all walks of life up into the canopies of trees. Her goal is to instill a sense of wonder and awareness about the ecological interactions

that take place where the treetops meet the rain, mist and sun.

Tree canopies are host to half the plant and animal species known to man. A big leaf maple found in the temperate rain forest of the Olympic Peninsula hosts as many as 90 species of moss and lichen, she noted.

Tree canopy research is a key to better understanding of everything from the effects of global warming to the forest nutrient cycle, she told her audience Tuesday.

And along the way, the scientist-educator with a conservationist bent might anoint a few more disciples for saving trees.

Tuesday's event was dubbed "Legislators Aloft."

"Many scientists are interested in conveying their research and thoughts di-

rectly to legislators and decision-makers," Nadkarni said.

She didn't snag any legislators on this glorious, late summer day. But the legislative aides that climbed into four different tree platforms are bound to share their experiences with the politicians they work with.

Vic Moon, a senior staff member on the Senate Natural Resources, Parks and Shorelines Committee, said the only major forestry issue likely to surface in the next session is a state response to forest health and wildfire risk.

However, he added: "The more people know, the better kinds of decisions you'll get."

Sweeten, a budget analyst at the state Office of Financial Management, scam-

pered up a tree to a fixed platform with ease that disguised her tree-climbing experience.

"The view is great," she shouted down from above.

Later, back on the ground, she marveled at the spider that climbed on her arm, and the overall experience.

She talked of the importance of saving forest habitat for salmon recovery, wildlife and future generations.

"If you didn't have this anymore, where would you go to get this feeling?" Sweeten asked.

It sounded like another Nadkarni tree ambassador talking.

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