



Message from Tami Miketa, Manager of the Small Forest Landowner Office

In this message, I am stepping away from my traditional forestry related topics to speak about the critical issue we are all facing at this difficult time.

We are in the midst of some very uncertain and unprecedented times, and our level of anxiety is extremely high. The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and can cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. Below are some tips and thoughts I have come across that have inspired me and I want to share with you.

First of all, we all need to focus on the good you're doing for others. Always remember, by staying at home, you are doing your part in protecting the vulnerable people in your neighborhood and community who are at risk for the severe form of COVID-19. Indeed, knowing others will benefit from your decisions and health authorities are genuinely grateful for your efforts can make stressful situations easier to bear.

Don't get stressed about being stressed. The more you resist stress, the worse it gets. Instead, interpret the extra adrenaline as having a high energy level or an energy burst. Perhaps you can use the energy and take a run, take a walk through your woods, or just feel it flow through your veins.

Keep things in perspective. Sure, there are big things going on now. However, our brains can make relatively small things look really big, too. Remember that your financial portfolio is not your life portfolio. Your ability to think, talk, walk, see, hear, and love are way more important than the current value of a financial investment. Our brains are unable to process many things at one time, so our full attention becomes focused on one problem. Gratitude is not a corny practice; it is bringing ourselves back to reality when we've lost perspective. Multiple times a day, list your blessings — shelter, food, health (focusing on what is working, not just what isn't working) and, most of all, the people in your life.

Reconnect with family and friends. In these times of social distancing, use and appreciate the time to read, write, get home tasks done, watch movies, play board games with the family, and connect. Remember the people far away who could use some interaction. FaceTime your family, call your aunt, or Skype your old college buddy. Make sure they are doing well, and if they're not, lend an ear and your warmth.

Take care of yourself. Eat nutritiously, with plenty of veggies and some fruit, and get enough sleep. If you have trouble sleeping, don't try too hard. Obsessing about how vital it is to get to sleep won't get you back to sleep. Think of it as a perfect time to meditate. Going over thoughts again and again? Try writing them down.

Practice good mental health. It is important during any stressful event to check in with yourself and your own mental health. You cannot help take care of others until you have taken care of yourself.

Remember that the situation is evolving. Some decisions are easy: If you're sick, stay away from others. If you have plans that are two months from now, and there's no penalty for postponing a decision, remember that the right answer may become very clear by that time, so why stress now? On the other hand, if you're responsible for organizing an event, canceling sooner rather than later will let others make better plans. Overall, remember that the importance of our community's wellbeing should be more important than saving a few dollars.

Know how to deal with emotions and when to ask for help. Accept your emotions for now. Otherwise, you'll get sad about being sad or anxious about being anxious. You don't need to justify your emotions. Simplify them and let go of the metaphors you hear in songs and movies. Know it will pass. If it's prolonged, please ask for help. Talk to a counselor and/or your primary care provider. Getting help when needed is a sign of maturity and wisdom. Don't wait until you're at wit's end, get help early and often.

Include helping others as part of your Covid-19 game plan. As I mentioned earlier, it's very normal to think of protecting yourself and your family first. However, if things get difficult in your community, I encourage you to keep an eye out for how you can help others. Reflect on how you might contribute to the strength and well-being of others beyond your immediate family, particularly if things get worse. Of course, this would not mean ignoring guidelines around public safety, or foolishly exposing yourself. But do think of how you might help others.

Roll with the punches. Because the COVID-19 pandemic is rapidly evolving, every day brings something entirely new and unexpected. These disruptions to our cherished routines can be another big source of anxiety. Try to create new routines, new structure and find new positivity to create comfort in the home. Sometimes there are projects that we always wanted to do but never had the chance because we've been too distracted or busy. It might be the perfect opportunity to finally check boxes on that to-do list that we've been putting off.

Most of all, be kind and compassionate. We've evolved to take joy in helping others, connecting with others, and working in teams. The happiest people are not the richest ones but the ones who have learned to be compassionate. Think of the people closest to you and how you want them to be happy and healthy, and then bring those same thoughts and feelings to others. Be generous with your kind words and your kind deeds. We all will benefit, and so will you. COVID-19 is a wakeup call and our salvation is in our compassion.

Asking someone if they are okay, leaving a note at the neighbors to see if they need something while you run to the store, sharing a supportive smile as you pass strangers on the street, these are all ways folks across America are showering acts of kindness on each other during these unprecedented times.

Here are some other ideas to help others:

- Message and/or call to check in on friends and family. This is especially important for our senior and immunosuppressed communities. Remind them that they are not alone.
- If you know of someone who needs resources (food, goods) but is unable to leave their home, you can send them a virtual gift card or order necessary items to be delivered directly to them (via online stores, grocery delivery, etc.).
- Show gratitude for first responders, folks in medical fields, and those organizing food banks. You can do this by message, phone call, e-card, or the like.
- Donate online to local non-profit organizations that are helping people through the crisis (food banks, shelters).
- Gratitude letter writing is a great way to spread some kindness. Order postage online, and send a note to someone who could use a smile.
- Do you miss connecting with people? Try coordinating virtual meet and activities to give people some structure and fun. Virtual book clubs or game night, live-tweet movie/show watching, or any other activity that can be shared via social media and/or streaming.
- Small businesses are taking a hit from lack of customers. To help with this, purchase gift cards that you can use at a later time, or gift to family or friends. The extra funds will help them keep their operations open. Check to see if they have opened an online shop with delivery.
- Spend some time with your pet or walking neighborhood dogs. Maybe foster a pet if you would like some animal companionship.

Remember, self-isolation measures are temporary. Like all other disease outbreaks, COVID-19 will pass, and life will return to normal. Because we don't know when that day will come, we just have to wait it out. By following the guidelines issued by public health and practicing good hygiene and social distancing, we can help ensure the health care system doesn't get overwhelmed all at once. The best way to manage anxiety is by focusing on the positive that we have around us right now.

I would love to hear some of the things that you're doing to help yourself, your family, and your community. If you would like to share, please send me an email and I will post them on our website at <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/sflo>.

There's light at the end of the tunnel, and remember, we can do this!

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