

For the past three years, financial support by the Whatcom County Farm Forestry Association and others has enabled the State Champion Forestry team from Mt. Baker High School to attend a national competition. While individual students may only compete at the national level once, the Mt. Baker team has climbed from an 18th place finish in 2007 to 13th place in 2008 to 6th place in 2009.

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Mt. Baker FFA places 6th at Nationals

The Mt. Baker FFA Forestry team placed 6th at the National FFA Forestry Career Development Event in Indianapolis, IN on October 22, 2009. Booker Schmidt placed 6th high individual and received a \$400 scholarship. Other team members included: Matt Cronk, Kurtis Zender, Joe Scarpete, and alternate Aaron Leavitt. All team members received a gold ranking (top 1/3 of all individuals). Forty teams and 160 FFA members competed in areas such as tree and tool identification, disease and pest identification, team cruising activity, timber and ecosystem management, chainsaw parts and troubleshooting, general knowledge test, and an individual impromptu issues interview with a professional on non-native invasive plant species and pest management.

This was the highest placing of any team west of Arkansas and it is rare that a west coast team places in the top 10. “Students had to learn east-coast and mid-west hardwoods and pines, only 5 of the 20+ species of trees we were familiar with. Cruising hardwoods is much more difficult and the margin for error is so high compared to cruising Douglas Fir. Western states are at a major disadvantage, but these students took it as a challenge. These students worked very hard since they won the state competition in April. After two graduated, they had to read a 400 page textbook during the summer to prepare for one small part of the contest. The amount of time and effort it took to get where these kids did at the national level is my proudest moment as an educator, many other coaches said the top 10 can’t be done by a west team,” said Todd Rightmire, Mt. Baker FFA advisor. This is also tied for the highest ranking a team from Washington has ever placed. Students received numerous donations from industry and community members to attend the convention and event. Husqvarna and the National FFA Foundation sponsored the event.