WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF LAND TRUSTS

Principles for Carbon Sequestration & Climate Adaptation Invesments

Land trusts across Washington protect and manage nearly 230,000 acres of land via fee ownership and conservation easements, a 38% increase since 2010. These lands offer many benefits: protecting water quality and storage; conserving fish and wildlife habitat; producing agricultural and forest products; offering places for outdoor recreation, fishing and hunting; and providing ecosystem services including carbon sequestration and natural hazards mitigation.

Carbon sequestration is the long-term storage of carbon, aiming to either mitigate or defer the effects of climate change. Forests, grasslands, marine environments and other natural resources absorb approximately 15 percent of US carbon emissions, as a natural part of the carbon cycle. Land trusts have the ability to both prevent conversion of lands to development and to implement management practices that increase carbon storage in forests, agricultural soils, and grasslands.

Climate change adaptation addresses current and future impacts of sea level rise, changing weather patterns, more frequent and intense storm events, and increasing risk of wildfire and flood. Through conservation and management of critical areas, land trusts can mitigate climate change impacts. Efforts to protect freshwater resources, improve water storage, retention and availability, and improve floodplain management will become increasingly necessary as the risk of drought and occurrence of severe storms grows. Land trusts' ongoing work to improve landscape connectivity will become increasingly important as a way to help fish, wildlife and plants adapt to a changing climate.

WALT supports carbon sequestration and climate adaptation strategies that invest in natural resource conservation and restoration, and offers the following principles:

- Land trusts should have a role in implementing carbon sequestration and climate adaptation strategies that include elements of land and water protection and restoration.
- Carbon sequestration strategies should be based on the best available science, and require demonstration of the potential to sequester and store carbon.
- Science-based strategies should include conservation, restoration, and improved management of forests, agricultural and/or aquatic lands; including creating new incentives that promote forest conservation, improved forest management, and conversion of unforested lands into forested lands (afforestation).
- Climate change adaptation strategies should include investments that improve the ability of land to increase water storage and availability, recharge drinking water supplies, and mitigate the impacts of flooding; as well as mitigate the impacts of rising seas and severe coastal storms to shorelines.
- Washington should continue to support and improve landscape connectivity to enable fish, wildlife and plant species to migrate and adapt to a changing climate.
- Policies should include funding to prevent the conversion of natural resources that are critical to implementing climate strategies.
- Funding should be flexible and sustainable over the long term.