



MONDAY, APRIL 26, 2021

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State's Community Forest Program receives \$16.3 million in inaugural year

Six community forest projects to be funded in the capital budget

OLYMPIA - Washington's 2021-23 capital budget includes \$16.3 million for a new Community Forest Program administered by the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). This level of funding will support six projects driven by local communities in Chelan, Jefferson, Pierce, Klickitat, Kittitas, and Kitsap Counties.

The new Community Forest grant program, open to local governments, tribes, and nonprofits, addresses a critical funding gap in the state by supporting the acquisition and development of important working forestlands so they can be managed on behalf of local communities. In centering the needs of local stakeholders, community forests promote active management, restoration and development that provide immediate economic impact, while securing the lasting ecological and social benefits that Washington's working forests hold.

"The community forest program is one of our newest and most important conservation, economic and tourism development programs that we have established in recent years" said Senator David Frockt (46th LD - Seattle). "We wanted to step up and follow our good intentions with the funding to help make these projects a reality and to set the bar for what we can do in the years to come."

“In what was a year like no other, we are delighted by the strong funding levels proposed for community forests in the final capital budget,” said Nicholas Norton, Executive Director of the Washington Association of Land Trusts (WALT). “Despite this being a new program, it is clear that the Legislature recognizes the growing demand and need for local control of actively managed forestland.”

“Washington possesses some of the nation’s most iconic and productive forests, and we see community forests as a vital tool to allow these working landscapes to continue to flourish, while leveraging community voices and local capacity to unlock additional public benefits now and for future generations.

Increasingly, we are seeing our land trust membership, in partnership with cities, counties, and others, interested in using this model to help address local trends, whether it is increasing fragmentation and conversion of working forestland, loss of forest sector jobs, higher wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface, or a lack of secure public access to diverse user groups.”

Together, the six funded projects represent the diversity of what’s possible when people come together to envision a shared future for important working forestland. For example, Nason Ridge Community Forest, the top ranked project, would allow Chelan County to acquire over 3,700 acres that overlooks Lake Wenatchee.

“Tourism and outdoor recreation not only helps drive our local economy, but also our way of life, and Nason Ridge is a prime place where this happens,” said Curt Soper, Executive Director of the Chelan Douglas Land Trust. “Nason Ridge and adjacent Lake Wenatchee State Park alone host more than 400,000 visitors annually for year round access and enjoyment. The Nason Ridge Community Forest will generate local jobs through sustainable timber harvests, forest health restoration efforts, and outdoor recreation. We would like to thank Senator Hawkins and Representatives Steele and Goehner from the 12th District, as well as the Chelan County Commissioners for their strong support and 46th District Senator David Frockt for his leadership.”

The North Kitsap Divide Community Forest, another funded project, is the largest remaining block of at-risk timberland in north Kitsap County, and a key missing link in the planned route of the Sound to Olympics trail.

“Once open, the trail will create near continuous foot and bike access from the Mountains to Sounds Greenway to the Olympic Discovery Trail,” said Nathan Daniel, Executive Director of the Great Peninsula Conservancy, the project’s sponsor. “Not only will tourist dollars stimulate our local economy, but local residents will connect with nature and receive the physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors.

Now was really our only chance for this project to be acquired and managed for a combination of sustainable forestry, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat. Getting this project added to the Capital Budget was a real community effort led by Senator Rolfe and Representative Simmons, so I thank them both for their commitment to protecting this ecologically valuable block of forestland.”

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About the Washington Association of Land Trusts, The Nature Conservancy, and Washington Environmental Council

The **Washington Association of Land Trusts** (WALT) has been a unified hub for Washington’s nonprofit land conservation organizations since 2008. WALT unites its 32 member land trusts as a collective voice in the state legislature, while supporting a thriving community of practice to enhance the scale, impact, and relevance of the private land conservation movement.

The Nature Conservancy is the world’s largest conservation organization with a mission of conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. With offices in every state and at work in more than 70 countries, TNC is dedicated to a future in which people and nature thrive together.

The **Washington Environmental Council** is a nonprofit, statewide advocacy organization that has been driving positive change to solve Washington’s most critical environmental challenges since 1967. Our mission is to protect, restore, and sustain Washington’s environment for all.

About the Community Forests Program

The Community Forests Program (CFP) is an entirely new funding program administered by the Recreation and Conservation Office. CFP provides acquisition and development funding to local entities (cities, counties, Tribes, nonprofits, or agencies collaborating with local partners) so that they can acquire working forestland to be managed for multiple benefits based on community needs.

Funded Project Descriptions and Partner Quotes

- 1) Nason Ridge Community Forest (Chelan County Natural Resources) - The proposed Nason Ridge Community Forest, the top ranked project on the list, would allow Chelan County to acquire over 3,700 acres that overlooks Lake Wenatchee, a popular regional destination. Community management of this unique parcel would allow the county to secure and enhance diverse recreational opportunities in collaboration with the adjacent Lake Wenatchee State Park, provide habitat protection and restoration opportunities along 2.5 miles of Nason Creek (an important salmon and steelhead stream) and support active management to create new jobs and improve forest resiliency.

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- 2) Chimacum Ridge Community Forest (Jefferson Land Trust) - The second-ranked Chimacum Ridge Community Forest on the Olympic Peninsula would transform over 853 acres into an active resource for the community, and is supported by over 35 partners as part of a long-term community vision. It would open up 10 miles of new trails to drive local tourism, support direct access to forest products for local businesses, provide a safe haven for diverse cultural activities, and serve as an educational hub to develop the next generation of natural resource professionals.

“This is huge for our community and for Washington state. The Chimacum Ridge Community Forest is a project we’ve been working on with partners and community members in Jefferson County for more than 10 years. To see our legislators step up in such a big way for this new program is phenomenal and will really make a difference in the success of six great projects statewide.” - **Richard Tucker, Executive Director, Jefferson Land Trust**

- 3) Nisqually Community Forest - Phase 2 (Nisqually Land Trust and Nisqually River Council) - In 2010, in response to a growing interest in local forest ownership and management, a diverse group of stakeholders came together to develop a shared

vision for the future of forestry in the Upper Nisqually River Watershed in the form of the Nisqually Community Forest. This 1,280-acre addition would secure approximately 3.1 miles of Busy Wild Creek, rated a highest priority for protection in the watershed's Chinook and Steelhead recovery plans. This project would be added to a robust forest management plan that already generates steady annual production of commercial timber, while securing a key section of the most popular route in the Mount Tahoma Trails Association's hut-to-hut ski trail.

For a quote, please contact Justin Hall, Executive Director at Nisqually River Foundation at 360-438-8715 or justin@nisquallyriver.org

- 4) Mt. Adams Community Forest: Conboy Lake South Tract - This project would add an important 389-acre tract to the Mount Adams Community Forest, the oldest nonprofit-led community forest in the state. This key addition prevents the loss of at-risk resource lands that add to the ecological diversity and economic opportunities of the Mt. Adams region, allowing for innovative management to address the growing threat of wildfires to the local forest and an adjacent national wildlife refuge that is home to Washington's only nesting population of Sandhill Cranes.

“The Mt. Adams Community Forest has grown from a vision developed by a diverse group of community interests to protect working forestlands in southern Washington to a successful example of multiple use, locally directed and implemented forest management. With the threat of wildfires continuing to increase, it makes more sense than ever that we invest in sustainable forest management models that can mitigate damage from wildfires and steer housing development away from fire-prone forests. This expansion of the state's first non-profit owned community forest does exactly that while maintaining the rural character of the Glenwood Valley, protecting forest industry jobs and bolstering all-lands work to improve forest health led by Mt. Adams Resource Stewards. We would like to thank the community for giving us the chance to grow. We would also like to thank Senator King, and Representatives Mosbrucker and Corry.” - **Jay McLaughlin, Executive Director, Mt. Adams Resource Stewards**

- 5) Cle Elum Ridge Community Forest (Kittitas Conservation Trust) - The proposed Cle Elum Ridge Community Forest is composed of 1,250 acres that directly connects the Cities of Roslyn and Cle Elum with the Department of Natural Resource's 55,000 acre Teanaway Community Forest. This is the first step in allowing the community to achieve its vision of becoming a 9,400-acre model dry-pine community forest; a forest that stems rural development in high-risk areas, provides a critical fire management buffer for residents, supports an active forestry sector in Kittitas

County, improves water quality in the Yakima Basin, and gives unparalleled connectivity to some of the best outdoor recreational opportunities our state has to offer.

“The forests above Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Ronald have been a resource for the people of Kittitas County for generations to forage for berries and mushrooms, hunt meat to feed their families, collect timber and firewood, and serve as a place for people to recreate and children to play. Protecting and honoring the history of Kittitas County while celebrating our rural roots is extremely important to me. The money provided by the State of Washington for a community forest allows local residents the ability to control the future of these lands. This is a very powerful act. The State is investing in us, and has recognized that the future for the Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Ronald Ridge should be community driven, empowering the people to decide what is best for our future.” - **Laura Osiadacz, Kittitas County Commissioner and a member of the Checkerboard Partnership**

“I’m so glad that the Capital Budget Chair and Ranking members saw fit to include this important allocation in the final Budget. Being a community driven and supported project made it all the more easier to advocate for this funding.” - **Sen. Judy Warnick (R – Moses Lake) and Senate Ways and Means Committee member.**

“This funding is a giant step forward for creating a community forest on Cle Elum Ridge, where sustainable forest management will benefit the local communities, now and for future generations. We are so fortunate to have so many dedicated community members working hard to realize our vision of protecting these important lands in our backyard. We are all grateful for the leadership by Sen. Judy Warnick, Rep. Tom Dent, and Rep. Alex Ybarra in securing this funding for our community.” - **Melissa Speeg, Kittitas Conservation Trust, facilitator of the Checkerboard Partnership**

“Community forests such as ours diversify local economies. Local management and control helps create fire resilient communities, and provides for public access to our outdoor resources and education. Community forests do not just preserve land, but preserve a way of life. A quality of life for communities in Central and Eastern Washington.” - **Mitch Long, Executive Director, Kittitas Conservation Trust**

- 6) North Kitsap Divide Block Community Forest (Great Peninsula Conservancy) - The proposed North Kitsap Divide Community Forest is the last remaining large block of unprotected timberland in north Kitsap County, with some of the best growing

conditions in Western Washington. However, the 487-acre property is highly threatened with conversion to 24 rural-residential lots. This acquisition would not only protect the land's working status in perpetuity, but secure a key missing link in the planned route of the Sound to Olympics trail.

“The \$2.9 million awarded to Great Peninsula Conservancy makes up the lion's share of the funding needed to make The Divide Community Forest reality. This nearly 500-acre forest is an important piece of the long-time effort to protect an undeveloped corridor across the north Kitsap Peninsula. It's a win for everyone as it will provide essential habitat for wildlife and plenty of recreational opportunities for people. Getting this project added to the Capital Budget was a real community effort led by Senator Rolfes and Representative Simmons, so I thank them both for their commitment to protecting this ecologically valuable block of forestland.” - **Nate Daniel, Executive Director, Great Peninsula Conservancy**

"Once open, the trail will create near continuous foot and bike access from the Mountains to Sounds Greenway to the Olympic Discovery Trail. Not only will tourist dollars stimulate our local economy, but local residents will connect with nature and receive the physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors. Now was really our only chance for this project to be acquired and managed for a combination of sustainable forestry, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat.” - **Nate Daniel, Executive Director, Great Peninsula Conservancy**