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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.

"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 12<sup>th</sup> District, as well as the Chelan County Commissioners for their strong support and 46<sup>th</sup> 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 Rolfes 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 **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.