

Re: Support for Community Forests 2023-25 Capital Budget Request

To Members of the Washington State Legislature,

We are writing to ask for your strong support for the \$13.6M requested by the Recreation and Conservation Office's (RCO) Community Forest Program in your 2023-25 capital budget. Community Forests allow people living in rural areas to have a direct stake in the ownership, use, and long-term management of important forestlands, while protecting their working status in perpetuity. In centering the needs of local stakeholders, community forests act as a critical tool to safeguard and unlock the economic, ecological, and social benefits Washington's working forests hold.

For nearly a decade, our state has seen increasing awareness of and support for this model of forest ownership and management in Washington and its potential role in rural economic development. In 2019, at the request of the Legislature, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) produced a report demonstrating the diverse statewide interest in locally-owned community forestry among cities, counties, Tribes, and nonprofits. In addition, an economic analysis of the Mt. Adams Community Forest in Klickitat County conducted in 2018 illustrated how more active management, cross-boundary partnerships, and the leveraging of local support typical of community forests can derive significant new economic benefits. We appreciate that you took action in the last capital budget to act on these findings and invested in some exciting projects across our state.

For the upcoming budget, RCO has requested funding for five vital community forest proposals from diverse partnerships across the state, ranging from the cities of Hoquiam and Montesano to the Nisqually Indian Tribe to Whidbey Island to Whatcom County. We encourage you to fund all five of these projects. Whether emphasizing new jobs in the woods, developing the next generation of foresters, preventing sprawl in fire-prone areas, or provisioning the cool, clean water we all rely on, these projects represent what is possible when diverse voices come together to envision a shared future for keystone forested lands.

Funding these projects will catalyze an extensive array of planned restoration, forest management, and recreational development activities. This on-the-ground work leverages significant local and federal funding, and will spur rural economies at a time when that investment is needed more than ever.

We urge you to show your support for these communities by providing \$13.6 million for community forests in your 2023-25 capital budget, as recommended by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. At a time when the health and well-being of our people, our environment and our economy are at the forefront of everyone's minds, community forest projects like these guide meaningful investments to protect jobs, lands, livelihoods, local business, and our quality of life.

Sincerely,

Tribes

Kalispel Tribe

Nisqually Indian Tribe

Local Governments, Organizations & Businesses

City of Hoquiam

Bainbridge Island Land Trust

Columbia Land Trust

Conservation Northwest

Dishman Hills Conservancy

EcoTrust Forest Management (EFM)

Forterra

Great Peninsula Conservancy

Jefferson Land Trust

Kittitas Conservation Trust

Lummi Island Heritage Trust

Methow Conservancy

Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust

Mt. Adams Resource Stewards

Nisqually Community Forest

Nisqually Land Trust

Nisqually River Council

Nisqually River Foundation

North Olympic Land Trust

Okanogan Land Trust

Ouroboros Foundation

Palouse Land Trust

Recreation Northwest

Sustainable Northwest

The Evergreen Land Trust Association

The Nature Conservancy

The Trust for Public Land

U.S. Forest Capital

Vashon Maury Island Land Trust

Washington Association of Land Trusts

Washington Conservation Action
(Formerly WEC/WCV)

Washington Water Trust

Washington Wildlife & Recreation Coalition

Whatcom Land Trust

Western Rivers Conservancy

Whidbey Camano Land Trust

Wildlife Forever Fund

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