

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

COUNTY COURTHOUSE

311 Grand Avenue, Suite #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010



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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

January 23~~9~~, 2024

Hilary Franz, Commissioner of Public Lands
Department of Natural Resources
111 Washington Street SE
MS 47001
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Commissioner Franz,

The Whatcom County Council ~~is supportive of the~~ efforts ~~of by~~ the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to increase ecological, watershed, and community resilience to future climate impacts through the safeguarding of structurally complex, carbon dense forestland. Furthermore, we appreciate the incorporation of County Council input in the identification of forestland for conservation through the state’s Climate Commitment Act (CCA), as requested in a letter to the Whatcom County Council from Hilary Franz, Commissioner of Public Lands, on December 18, 2023.

DNR selected ~~62750~~ acres of mature forestlands in Whatcom County for potential inclusion in the 2,000 acres to be set aside statewide with funding from the Natural Climate Solutions proviso.

Whatcom County lands identified as candidates by DNR include:

<u>Anderson Creek Trusts</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Brokedown Palace Trusts</u>	<u>Acres</u>
State Forest Transfer	190	State Forest Transfer	42
Scientific School	83	Common School <u>and Indemnity</u>	<u>1033</u>
State Forest Purchase	64	<u>Total</u>	<u>52</u>
Common School and Indemnity	233		
Agricultural School	4		
Capitol Grant	1		
<u>Total</u>	<u>575</u>		

We understand these parcels were selected by DNR for their structural complexity and proximity to existing protected habitat. The conservation of the Anderson Creek parcels will allow mature stands enable the creation of a large Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) within the Lake Whatcom ~~W~~watershed to someday become old-growth forests, which provide a range of watershed and ecosystem benefits. ~~and The conservation protection~~ of the Brokedown Palace parcels will help ensure the continued health of adjacent old-growth reserves as well as the nearby Middle Fork Special Habitat Area. The strategic conservation of these forestlands will provide benefits to Whatcom County residents for generations to come.

The Whatcom County Council concurs with DNR’s plan to transfer the selected 62750 acres of Whatcom County forestland from trust status for conservation purposes once replacement lands have been identified. We ask that you please consider the following as you continue to move forward:

1. We concur with your decision to amend the Brokedown Palace map to remove 23 acres of previously harvested, young plantations, which do not meet the proviso definition of "structurally complex, carbon dense".

2. We fully support DNR's efforts to promptly locate and acquire replacement parcels better suited for continued commercial timber production that will benefit trust beneficiaries. We acknowledge that revenue generated from these replacement lands may be deferred by years or decades, and therefore we ask that DNR support any efforts to expedite identifying and purchasing replacement lands and to mitigate the short-term financial impacts felt by junior taxing districts and beneficiaries. While we understand that DNR prefers to purchase replacement lands within the County, we are also open to pooling with other counties should that help move the process forward quicker and with more certainty. Additionally, we suggest that DNR consider retaining a qualified, third party consultant to appraise the subject areas in a timely and transparent manner. Answering the valuation questions during this legislative session is of utmost importance. However, we have concerns about short-term impacts to trust beneficiaries due to delays in revenue from the replacement lands. We ask DNR and the legislature for continued collaboration as we look to offset these negative impacts. We encourage DNR to work with the legislature on programs that could provide short-term compensation to all affected beneficiaries, particularly school districts, that are awaiting replacement funds.

- 1-3. We understand that DNR designating these forestlands as a potential Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) may have implications for public access and recreation. We look forward to working with DNR and the public on the development of site-specific plans that preserve existing recreational uses consistent with Whatcom County's existing recreational plans, DNR's Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan, and allow for low impact, responsible recreation and protecting the cultural and ecological values these lands have to offer. We recommend DNR explore designating these parcels as a Natural Area Reserve that accommodates a variety of recreation uses, similar to the Harriet A. Spanel Natural Area Reserve that covers part of the Blanchard State Forest.

Thank you for your work. We look forward to our continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair
Whatcom County Council