



5.0 Existing Forest Management Resources in King County

Departments and Groups Within King County that Support Rural Forests

King County's Forestry Program is housed within DNRP's Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD) and partially supported by DNRP Parks Division. Forestry Program staff have two primary responsibilities: support private forestland owners and manage DNRP-owned forestland. The Forestry Program provides technical support to private landowners and to Parks land management staff, so they are able to develop strong forest stewardship plans and have the resources they need to restore and maintain productive and resilient forest ecosystems.

There are six positions dedicated all or in part to the King County Forestry Program. The primary staff include two professional foresters, one forestry technician, and a strategic planner. Auxiliary staff include a regulatory/permitting specialist and the manager of the Agriculture, Forestry, and Incentives Unit. The three County foresters provide technical advice to landowners on topics such as forest health, timber enhancement, improvement of wildlife habitat, and protection of water resources. County foresters also provide forestry expertise needed to develop Forest Stewardship Plans on units in the Parks portfolio and lead implementation of the stewardship actions identified in the plans. Foresters are key participants in discussions about forest management policies within DNRP. One of the professional foresters serves as staff liaison to RFC.

The County encourages private forest landowners to develop Forest Stewardship Plans and assists with plan implementation. County foresters review and approve stewardship plans required for enrollment in CUT programs, building permits within FPD, and TDR Program or Forest Legacy applications; they also support development of forest management plans that are needed to obtain flexibility under the County's Critical Areas Ordinance. When appropriate, County foresters assist landowners with securing private contractors able to implement actions identified in the Forest Stewardship Plans and will provide guidance to navigate the State's Forest Practices Act permitting process.

WLRD also supports an additional forest team position that is responsible for landscape-scale forest conservation issues, which recently included development of the King County Forest Carbon Program²⁹ and the 30-Year Forest Plan.

Additional responsibilities of the Forestry Program include working with KCD and the WSU Forestry Extension Office to co-sponsor coached forest planning workshops that are held several times each year for forest landowners. County foresters work with KCD to support community wildfire risk reduction planning and implementation, which will increase in importance with elevated wildfire risk due to climate change. Lastly, WLRD supports a regulatory/permitting specialist position to assist landowners in addressing County land use code issues.

The Forestry Program is responsible for implementing several mandates and policies, including the Forest Stewardship Plan Public Rule³⁰, and is fully integrated into the many services that the County provides. The Commission has determined that the Forestry Program fulfills the following functions, in addition to providing the services described in the preceding paragraphs:

²⁹ <https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/water-and-land/forestry/forest-carbon.aspx>

³⁰ <https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/forestry/public-rule-2014/forest-stewardship-public-rule-2014-revision.pdf>



1. **Legal mandate:** Under the Growth Management Act, the state requires the County to “protect natural resource lands and rural character.” The Commission maintains that simply identifying forestland of long-term commercial significance and establishing forest zoning is insufficient. The state requires the County to act. Likewise, the Countywide planning policies, Comprehensive Plan, and Rural Economic Strategies call for the County to undertake actions to retain the extent and health of forests. Active participation by private forestland owners in the stewardship of forestland is essential to retaining healthy forests in King County.
2. **Ensuring compliance with King County Code:** Forestry Program staff assist rural residents in understanding and complying with County regulations and guidelines. Foresters are available to help with the writing of forest stewardship plans, and to support DLS-PD staff in reviewing plans, carrying out targeted technical assistance, providing forest stewardship education, and monitoring implementation. In addition, certain permits from DLS-PD and participation in CUT (Appendix B) and TDR (Appendix C) require forest stewardship plans to be approved by County foresters. WLRD also employs a Regulatory and Permitting Specialist who is charged with working closely with farm and forestland owners to help them navigate permitting challenges.

DLS-PD has reported better compliance with regulations when clients can be advised, at no charge, by County foresters. WLRD foresters and DLS-PD now work together so that foresters can smooth the way for landowners seeking forest-related permits. This reduces the time that DLS-PD needs to work on each permit, provides landowners with greater process clarity, saves landowners time and money, and has resulted in higher rates of compliance.

3. **Build positive relationships with rural residents:** A major part of a King County forester’s job is building relationships with rural residents so that rural residents have a voice in the development of regulations and policy. Field staff understand the rural programs and the issues faced by farmers, forestland owners, and rural residents. Rural residents can perceive King County government as urban-based and distracted from rural affairs by the broad responsibilities of County government. Forestry staff ensure that policy makers and environmental interests better understand natural resource issues, including the viewpoint of the rural area.
4. **Promote voluntary compliance with King County Comprehensive Plan:** The most effective and acceptable method to landowners for achieving native vegetation (forest) retention called for in the Comprehensive Plan on individual parcels has been through a suite of incentives. These include education through classes and workshops, on-site technical assistance, assistance to develop Forest Stewardship Plans, CUT programs, access to cost-share programs, and other tools.
5. **Provide Forestry expertise to ground-truth policies and programs:** In-house expertise helps ensure that policies and programs support rural residents. Forestry Program staff are within County government and are in close physical proximity to other County programs. Therefore, the other programs that serve the rural area have the benefit of the skills and expertise of the Forestry Program. Foresters assist staff in the TDR Program, DLS-PD, WLRD Stormwater Services, and Water Resource Inventory Area Salmon Recovery Planning, among others.
6. **Implementation of forest management plans for County-owned property and enforcement of forest conservation easements held by King County:** King County is responsible for both management of King County Parks-owned forests and the monitoring and enforcement of the restrictions imposed through forest conservation easements held by the County. Forest Program staff



coordinate development and implementation of forest stewardship plans that cover forestland in the Parks portfolio. Parks staff are responsible for monitoring working forest conservation easements that were developed in collaboration with the County's TDR Program.³¹

Tribal Interest in Forest Conservation

Tribes in King County. Tribes retained a broad range of rights when they agreed to treaties that supported Euro-American expansion and many of those rights relate to management and use of forestland.³² Additionally, several Tribes, most notably the Muckleshoot Tribe³³ and Snoqualmie Tribe³⁴, have been acquiring forestland in King County, which will afford them greater management control. Tribes in the region own 32,000 acres of forest in King County and that land is often managed for multiple benefits. For example, the Muckleshoot Federal Corporation³⁵ owns and manages the Tomanamus Forest, which is managed for long-term sustainable timber harvest while also maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitat, providing medicinal and food plants, and preserving areas of cultural importance.

Government Entities and Resource Agencies that Support Rural Forests

City of Seattle. The 90,638-acre Cedar River Municipal Watershed and 8,400-acre Tolt River Watershed are both owned by the City of Seattle to provide drinking water for the greater Seattle area, while also aiming to increase biodiversity and facilitate development of old growth forest conditions. www.seattle.gov/utilities/protecting-our-environment/our-water-sources/

³¹ <https://kingcounty.gov/services/environment/stewardship/sustainable-building/transfer-development-rights.aspx>

³² www.ltgov.wa.gov/washington-tribes/

³³ <http://www.muckleshoot.nsn.us/>

³⁴ <https://www.snoqualmi-tribe.us/>

³⁵ NW Treaty Tribes. 2019. "Muckleshoot Tribe's Tomanamus Community Day: Connecting with the Land and Community." <https://nwtreatytribes.org/muckleshoot-tribes-tomanamus-community-day-connecting-with-the-land-and-community/>





King Conservation District. KCD helps jurisdictions, landowners, and residents steward their forests, street trees, and open space to enhance wildlife habitat, reduce stormwater runoff, and improve human health and well-being. KCD's Rural Forest Stewardship and Wildfire Resiliency programs provide technical assistance, forest stewardship planning, wildfire safety evaluations, forest fuel reduction projects, and funding opportunities for land managers with fewer than 5 acres of woods in unincorporated King County. KCD's Urban Forest Stewardship Program offers technical assistance, project management services, and project funding to member jurisdictions to support their urban forestry programs. <https://kingcd.org/programs/better-forests/>

Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and cost-share support to landowners so that they can better conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. www.nrcs.usda.gov

Tacoma Watershed. The Green River Municipal Watershed, owned by a variety of public and private entities, encompasses 148,000 acres of forestland surrounding the Green River and its tributaries between the Chinook and Snoqualmie passes in the western Cascades. Agreements between federal, state, Tribal, and private landowners limit watershed access and protect forest health. www.mytpu.org/about-tpu/services/water/water-source/green-river-watershed

United States Forest Service. USFS owns and manages the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest, making them the largest single landowner in King County for ecological benefits and recreation. www.fs.usda.gov

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. WDFW enforces state and federal laws that protect natural resources, in addition to providing active management for publicly owned land and water access areas. WDFW prioritizes protection of fish, wildlife, and ecosystems while providing commercial and recreational opportunities. <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about>

Washington State Department of Natural Resources. WADNR partners with King County in forest conservation through land exchanges and land purchases. In addition, they permit Forest Practices for Class II through IV-Special practices (applications for Class IV General permits are managed by DLS-PD) and coordinate with federal agencies, local governments, and fire districts for wildland fire suppression efforts. <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/forest-practices>

Washington State Parks. Washington State Parks make up over 8,000 acres of land in King County and are managed primarily for outdoor recreation and public enjoyment. www.parks.state.wa.us

Washington State University Extension Forestry. WSU Extension provides forestry research and technology transfer, serving as a conduit that connects landowners and practitioners to best available science. <https://forestry.wsu.edu/>





Private/Nonprofit Entities that Support Rural Forests

Forterra. Forterra is a land conservation, stewardship, and community building organization that works with a diverse set of partners to purchase and protect ecologically valuable land in western Washington. www.forterra.org

Green River Coalition. Green River Coalition collaborates with community, municipalities, nonprofits, educational institutions, and other agencies to protect and enhance the Green River watershed. www.greenrivercoalition.org

Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust. Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust is made up of a diverse coalition of directors, technical advisors, and staff that work to conserve and enhance the landscape between Seattle and the Cascade Mountains. www.mtsgreenway.org

Northwest Natural Resource Group. Northwest Natural Resource Group provides ecological forestry consulting and forest management planning services to optimize the economic and ecological potential of forests. www.nnrg.org

The Nature Conservancy. The Washington Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, which is the world's largest conservation organization, partners with local groups to conserve forests and other natural areas throughout Washington. <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/washington/>

Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land works to create and protect parks in order to bring benefits of nature to all people and communities. www.tpl.org

Washington Trails Association. The Washington Trails Association protects and advocates for trails and public land throughout Washington to reduce barriers for hikers and protect important recreation areas. www.wta.org

Washington Environmental Council. The Washington Environmental Council builds partnerships and coalitions and advocates for effective and equitable policies to ensure that working forests are managed sustainably and continue to provide benefits for all Washington residents. <https://wecprotects.org/about-us/>



6.0 Summary of Funding and Resource Needs

Forestry programs within WLRD are primarily supported by funding provided through the Surface Water Management (“SWM”) fee assessed to all parcel owners in unincorporated King County. The program also receives a relatively small annual allocation of funds from the King County General Fund to support the RFC and from Title III of the Secure Rural Schools Act for wildfire education. Combined, those funding sources support the equivalent of 4 FTE staff in WLRD that are primarily focused on forest conservation and management issues.

DNRP’s Parks and Recreation Division supports the management and operations of County forests. The Parks Division does not have a dedicated forestry position but provides funding for 1 FTE housed in WLRD (split among two positions) to support forest restoration work on Parks property; those positions reside within WLRD. As needs dictate, WLRD-funded forestry staff are assigned to support Parks forest stewardship activities. Parks funding for forestland management is primarily provided by the Parks Levy, a 6-year, voter-approved, Countywide property tax. In addition to dedicated forestry support, this levy supports the daily efforts of Parks Division operation crews and land use planners to conduct site inspections for safety and cleanliness, manage public access, and monitor/manage the health of native species. Volunteer coordinators foster community engagement with tree plantings and restoration events. The Parks Division also contracts with forestry consultants and contractors to provide technical expertise and to accomplish large-scale forestry projects.

Parks Division is building the next generation of forest stewards through its internship program. Interns from the University of Washington and Green River College work with DNRP staff to learn from forestry professionals, prepare forest stewardship plans, and complete other activities and projects that advance the natural land management work of Parks Division and WLRD. New in 2021 is the Parks Youth Conservation Corps, a teen internship program for high school-aged students interested in environmental justice, conservation, and natural land stewardship.

Funding for land protection, either through conservation easements or fee title, comes from a variety of sources, including the Parks Levy, Conservation Futures Tax, TDR Program, and state and federal grants.

Although the RFC and King County have yet to estimate the cost for full implementation of the actions outlined in this report, it is understood that additional funding and staff capacity will be required. A combination of existing and new sources of funding would need to be aggressively pursued if the vision outlined in this report is to be realized.

In addition to the desire to meet landowner needs, there is justification for enhancing financial support for forestry programs (both County-run and partner programming) because forestland generates significant income for King County. King County generates revenue from the harvest and management of forestland through a number of federal and state programs. Federal programs include Payment in Lieu of Taxes, which compensates local jurisdictions for lost property tax due to federal ownership. In 2019, King County received \$876,011 as payment in lieu of taxes for the 358,429 acres of federal land in the County.

There is a much smaller federal program, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, that was created to support local communities. Many rural communities had depended on tax revenue from timber harvested on federal land, but saw those payments decrease significantly as the level of harvest on federal land declined in response to land management changes in support of endangered species. While most of the Rural Schools Act funds are applied to municipality operations,



one section, Title III, specifically earmarks funds for wildfire education and preparedness. King County has received an average of about \$15,000 per year for the past 5 years through Title III.

As a comparison, forestland-related revenue through state-managed programs is significantly greater. The Washington State Department of Revenue manages the timber excise tax program. In place of a property tax on trees, timber owners pay a 5% excise tax on the stumpage value of their timber when it is harvested, with 4% allocated to counties and 1% allocated to the state. In 2019, King County received nearly \$1 million from excise tax receipts on private land harvests. DNR also manages forestland that is held in trust for counties and local governments. In 2021, King County received over \$5.3 million from proceeds on DNR-managed trust land. Relatively little of the funding generated by those programs is allocated specifically to forest protection or management.

King County landowners are assessed a SWM fee that is based on land classification and the amount of impervious surface. The SWM fee is used for landowner technical assistance, maintenance and construction of projects, and land stewardship to protect public health and safety, and to protect and restore the waters and lands in unincorporated King County. A small portion of those fees supports forestland protection and management.

Although forest management decisions are not driven by the potential to generate revenue, income from the sale of timber from Parks' forestland is dedicated to forest restoration projects. Between 2015 and 2020, an average of nearly \$38,000 was generated annually from timber sales on land in the Parks Division portfolio. Timber revenue is expected to increase as the rate of forest restoration increases in fulfillment of key County initiatives.

Landowners in King County also are assessed a fee that is used to partially support KCD. KCD manages a very successful Landowner Incentive Program (LIP), which provides cost share to landowners who implement agriculture and forest land management practices. The KCD LIP will provide up to 75% of the project cost (to a maximum of \$22,500 per project).

Because the need is great, it is recommended that King County consider allocating a greater proportion of the nearly \$7 million per year that the County generates from forestland to support the actions outlined in this report.

7.0 Monitoring Progress and Reporting

The actions recommended in this report should be revisited annually to evaluate progress, reprioritize actions, and revise workplans, as needed. King County should prepare a progress report using Appendix A as a template, and label each action based on whether significant progress has been made, some progress has been made but more is needed, or no progress has been made. In addition, a short description of any accomplishments should be presented with each action. The RFC will dedicate one meeting each year to review the progress and provide comments on the prioritization and implementation of recommended actions. A comprehensive review and update of the report should be conducted in 2031.

As part of an onboarding and training process, this report should be reviewed with all new RFC members at the start of their term and King County staff should assist RFC members to provide regular updates to the King County Council and King County Executive.