

ORDINANCE NO. _____

ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO DEVELOP A WHATCOM COUNTY FOREST RESILIENCE PLAN

WHEREAS, active forest management combined with the strategic conservation of mature and old-growth forests can ensure both a thriving timber economy and healthy forest ecosystems for fish and wildlife, carbon sequestration and storage, recreation, watershed health, wildfire, **pest, and disease** resistance, and climate resilience; and

WHEREAS, healthy, intact forests provide improved water quality, augment summer low flows, stabilize steep slopes, and attenuate downstream flood impacts; and

WHEREAS, forestry issues are multidisciplinary, requiring diverse expertise in science, industry, climate, and natural resource management; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County Council seeks experts from diverse backgrounds, including educational and professional experience, to help advise the County on issues relating to forest management and resilience; and

WHEREAS, three departments within Whatcom County government have some jurisdiction around forestry issues and forest land management, including Parks & Recreation, Planning & Development Services, and Public Works; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County has several advisory committees and commissions comprised of community members with expertise relevant to forestry issues and managing forest lands in Whatcom County, including the Forestry Advisory Committee, Climate Impact Advisory Committee, Wildlife Advisory Committee, Planning Commission, and Parks & Recreation Commission; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County has several local planning and regulatory documents with a nexus to forestry, including but not limited to, the [Comprehensive Plan](#), [Climate Action Plan](#), [WRIA 1 Salmonid Recovery Plan](#), [Shoreline Management Plan](#), [Critical Areas Ordinance](#), and [Lake Whatcom Management Program Work Plan](#); and

WHEREAS, the 2021 Whatcom County [Climate Action Plan](#), adopted on November 9, 2021, includes a chapter on Forestry outlining three key strategies:

1. Protect and enhance carbon storage and sequestration in forest ecosystems.

2. Increase forest health, survival and climate resilience through forest management practices that reduce wildfire risk, increase soil moisture, and stream flows, and preserve wildlife habitat.
3. Promote climate resilient planning and programs to maintain our forest economy for recreation and wood products through leadership and education.

WHEREAS, on August 9, 2022, Whatcom County Council passed [Resolution 2022-036](#) establishing priorities for Whatcom County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan update, which included several strategies and actions to support climate resilient forests and a thriving timber economy; and

WHEREAS, over the last couple years, the Whatcom County Council has actively engaged Commissioner Hilary Franz, the Washington State Board of Natural Resources (BNR), and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff on several timber sales, state legislation, and the pilot carbon project; and

WHEREAS, on January 25, 2022, the Whatcom County Council sent a [letter](#) to DNR requesting a pause on Bessie Unit 2 to allow for County staff to engage DNR staff and representatives from the local forestry community to review the proposed harvest and recommend possible actions to more fully address climate resilience concerns; and

WHEREAS, on January 10, 2023, the Whatcom County Council sent a [letter](#) to DNR providing feedback on Phase II of the Carbon Project; and

WHEREAS, on May 9, 2023, the Whatcom County Council sent a [letter](#) to DNR including requests to explore co-management opportunities, take advantage of new state programs and funding, and temporarily pause the Brokedown Palace timber sale for further evaluation; and

WHEREAS, on June 7, 2023, Whatcom County received a [letter](#) from Commissioner Hilary Franz outlining DNR's efforts to conserve ecologically valuable forests, an overview of state forest policies, new funding sources, and invited the County to engage with DNR to develop a strategy for how DNR manages county forest trust lands in Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, forest management on state public lands is guided by the 1974 Washington State Forest Practices Act and associated forest practices rules, the 1997 State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), the Policy for Sustainable Forests, and other policies—none of which address the causes or impacts of climate change; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County also has a number of county owned forest lands that would benefit from more active management including Lake Whatcom Park and Canyon Lake Community Forest; and

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2 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Department is currently
3 working on a Request for Proposals to develop a forest management plan for Lake
4 Whatcom Park, which is land that was reconveyed from DNR in 2014; and
5

6 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Public Works Department is actively
7 working with the Whatcom Land Trust, Nooksack Indian Tribe, and other key
8 partners on the Stewart Mountain Community Forest Initiative, which includes
9 additional forest land acquisition, a forest management plan, and potential
10 opportunity for more County owned forestland; and
11

12 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County will benefit from increased coordination and
13 collaboration around all forestry related issues including the management of public
14 forestlands; and
15

16 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County will benefit from the development of a task
17 force dedicated to reviewing relevant County policies, programs, organizational
18 structure, and staff capacity, in addition to fully engaging all levels of government
19 and relevant stakeholders in the development of a unified forest resilience plan for
20 our local forestry resources, including a framework for engagement moving
21 forward.
22

23 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED** by the Whatcom County Council that
24 Whatcom County establish a multi-departmental, multidisciplinary Forest Resilience
25 Task Force as outlined in Exhibit A.
26
27

28 **ADOPTED** this ____ day of _____, 20____.

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30
31 ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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35
36 _____
Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

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38
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40 APPROVED AS TO FORM:

WHATCOM COUNTY EXECUTIVE
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

41
42
43
44 [Karen Frakes by phone 9/21/2023/ch](#)
45 Civil Deputy Prosecutor

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

() Approved () Denied

Date Signed: _____

EXHIBIT A

2. ~~xxx~~170 FOREST RESILIENCE TASK FORCE

Sections:

- 2. ~~xxx~~170.010 Established**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.015 Sunset**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.020 Purpose**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.030 Function**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.040 Permanent Members**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.050 Additional appointed members.**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.060 Term of office.**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.070 Organization – Meetings**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.080 Committee Staffing**
- 2. ~~170~~~~xxx~~.090 Reporting**

2. ~~170~~x.010 Established.

There is hereby established the Forest Resilience Task Force.

2. ~~170~~x.015 Sunset.

This Task Force will sunset on December 31, 2025 unless otherwise extended by the Whatcom County Council. All members' terms will end when the Task Force sunsets.

2. ~~170~~x.020 Purpose.

The Task Force is created to develop a comprehensive Whatcom County Forest Resilience Plan, which will include a framework for engagement with local, state, federal, and tribal governments and relevant stakeholders on issues relating to forest management and resilience. The Task Force will report to the Whatcom County Council and Executive.

2. ~~170~~x.030 Function.

The Task Force will consider input from diverse experts, stakeholders, and community members to develop a comprehensive Forest Resilience Plan with science- and evidence-based strategies and actions towards sustaining a thriving timber economy, restoring healthy forest ecosystems for fish and wildlife, addressing stream high and low flow issues, enhancing carbon sequestration and storage, promoting robust recreation opportunities, improving watershed health (including Lake Whatcom), improving wildfire, **pest, and disease**

1 resistance, and increasing the overall resilience of Whatcom County's
2 forests to climate impacts. The Plan will include a framework for
3 engagement and coordination with local, state, federal, and tribal
4 governments and relevant stakeholders on forestry issues. The Plan
5 will also include community values and desired outcomes to inform
6 forest management plans for publicly owned forest lands. The Task
7 Force will also review relevant County policies, programs,
8 organizational structure, and staff capacity, and include its findings
9 and recommendations in the Plan.

10
11 **2.170*.040 Permanent Members.**

12 The Task Force will include fourteen permanent members. The
13 following representatives will be appointed by their designated
14 department, agency, council, committee or commission:

- 15
16 A. One representative from the Whatcom County Parks & Recreation
17 Department;
- 18
19 B. One representative from the Whatcom County Planning &
20 Development Services Department;
- 21
22 C. Two representatives from the Whatcom County Public Works
23 Department;
- 24
25 D. One representative from Lummi Nation;
- 26
27 E. One representative from Nooksack Indian Tribe;
- 28
29 F. One representative from the Washington State Department of
30 Natural Resources;
- 31
32 G. One representative from the United States Forest Service;
- 33
34 H. Two representatives from the Forestry Advisory Committee;
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36 I. One representative from the Climate Impact Advisory Committee;
- 37
38 J. One representative from the Wildlife Advisory Committee;
- 39
40 K. One representative from the Planning Commission; and
- 41
42 L. One representative from the Parks and Recreation Commission.

43
44 **2.170*.050 Appointed Members.**

45 In addition to the permanent members designated above, the Task
46 Force will include eight community members, appointed by the
47 Whatcom County Council:

- A. One community member with expertise in forest management and/or wood products industry;
- B. One community member with expertise in owning and/or managing forest lands for conservation purposes;
- C. One community member with expertise in climate, salmon recovery, and natural resources policy;
- D. One community member with expertise in watershed management (including Lake Whatcom) and/or land use planning;
- E. Two community members with expertise in relevant science disciplines; and
- F. Two representatives from trust land beneficiaries.

2. [170x.060](#) Term of office.

Permanent and appointed members are eligible to serve the entire duration of the Task Force as established in 2. [170x.015](#). [Should the task force duration be extended, members will serve no more than four years, in accordance with the Whatcom County Charter 3.23.](#)

2. [170x.070](#) Organization – Meetings.

Meetings of the Task Force will be open and accessible to the public and will be subject to the Open Public Meetings Act. The Task Force will determine its own meeting schedule. Written records of meetings, research, findings and recommendations will be kept and made available to the public. The Task Force will adopt its own rules and procedures for the conduct of business.

2. [170x.080](#) Committee Staffing and Funding Support.

The Task Force will have full support from the Whatcom County Council, Executive's office, department staff from Parks & Recreation, Planning & Development Services, and Public Works, and locally delivered paid consultant assistance to conduct and complete its tasks in an efficient and effective manner.

2. [170x.090](#) Reporting

The Task Force will submit to the Whatcom County Council and Executive the Whatcom County Forest Resilience Plan no later than September 30, 2025. The Task Force will provide at least two progress reports to the Council before a final presentation and submission of the Plan.