

Supplemental Budget Request

Status: Pending

Non-Departmental

Suppl ID # 3668 Fund 175 Cost Center 17500 Originator: Tawni Helms

Expenditure Type: One-Time Year 2 2022 Add'l FTE Add'l Space Priority 1

Name of Request: Stewart Mtn Community Forest - Phase I

X  Department Head Signature (Required on Hard Copy Submission) 4/26/22
Date

Costs:	Object	Object Description	Amount Requested
	7320	Land	\$1,500,000
	Request Total		\$1,500,000

1a. Description of request:

Whatcom County is working with community partners – including Whatcom Land Trust, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, and the Evergreen Land Trust – to develop a Stewart Mountain Community Forest that balances timber harvest, watershed health, and community access in order to maximize local benefits and local control of forest resources. Phase 1 of the Community Forest consists of 550 acres of the most ecologically and geologically sensitive forestland contained within the project area. The property consists of roughly 250 acres of riparian or inner gorge areas that will be managed for watershed health, salmon habitat, and slope stability. Additionally, the property contains roughly 300 acres of upland forest that will be managed as a working forest with the goals of producing high-quality timber products, local forestry jobs, and maintaining a healthy forest through selective harvest and thinning operations.

Whatcom Land Trust has been working closely with the property owner for over five years to facilitate this purchase, and will be executing the acquisition. The Land Trust has worked closely with the County and community partners to plan for how the property will work within the framework of the future community forest, and has expressed a desire for this property to be managed as part of the whole community forest project.

This request would contribute \$1,500,000 towards a total sale price of \$2,345,000. An additional \$300,000 would come from the Evergreen Land Trust via a grant from the Whatcom Community Foundation, and the remainder of the sale price and the associated closing costs (appraisal, appraisal review, phase 1 assessment, boundary line adjustment, closing and recording fees, etc.) will come from Whatcom Land Trust.

1b. Primary customers:

Whatcom County Residents

2. Problem to be solved:

The South Fork Nooksack River is currently listed as a 303d impaired waterbody for temperature, turbidity, and streamflow. Additionally, habitat degradation has compounded these impairments to lead to a precipitous decline in salmon populations in the South Fork Nooksack River Watershed. Additionally, rapid land turnover rates on Stewart Mountain – with 6 different landowners having owned the property in the last 30 years – has contributed to declining forest health, lack of available merchantable timber, and uncertainty around recreation access opportunities for residents. Adopting forestland into long-term, local ownership will help address these problems by allowing for long-term forest health planning, with an eye towards maintaining a sustainable timber supply and improving watershed health.

3a. Options / Advantages:

Another option would be for Whatcom County to complete the purchase instead of Whatcom Land Trust.

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Whatcom Land Trust has a long-term relationship with the current owner and has been able to negotiate the sale with them over the past 5 years. Whatcom Land Trust has worked with the landowner to complete much of the initial project due diligence, and has the capacity and experience to carry out the remainder of the due diligence including the appraisal reviews, boundary line adjustment, environmental assessment, survey, and title review. For these reasons, Whatcom Land Trust should purchase the land and Whatcom County will be able to hold a conservation easement to protect the public values of the property, realizing a large public benefit without having to pay the full price of acquisition or dedicate additional staff time to completing the due diligence and acquisition logistics needed to complete the project

3b. Cost savings:

550 acres of forestland will be acquired summer of 2022. Watershed and forest health benefits would increase incrementally over time. Public access benefits will be realized in future phases of the project that establish legal public access points to the property (either through additional Stewart mountain acquisitions or through current Acme Floodplain property acquisitions). Economic benefits of timber harvest would begin in the coming years, once the timber harvests are able to be planned and executed. All of these benefits would extend into perpetuity.

4a. Outcomes:

550 acres of forestland will be acquired summer of 2022. Watershed and forest health benefits would increase incrementally over time. Public access benefits will be realized in future phases of the project that establish legal public access points to the property (either through additional Stewart mountain acquisitions or through current Acme Floodplain property acquisitions). Economic benefits of timber harvest would begin in the coming years, once the timber harvests are able to be planned and executed. All of these benefits would extend into perpetuity.

4b. Measures:

The forest health benefits can be documented through forest health assessments. Watershed health benefits will be documented through current water quality and quantity monitoring that takes place within the watershed.

Success will be measured through the increased future streamflow at South Fork stream gauges, rebounding populations of South Fork Salmonids, opportunities for harvesting of high-quality timber products through selective harvests and forest thinning, and reliable public access to a beautiful riparian forest in Whatcom County.

5a. Other Departments/Agencies:

Conservation Futures Fund is utilized by other departments for conservation projects.

5b. Name the person in charge of implementation and what they are responsible for:

County Staff have ensured that enough funds are available in the Conservation Futures Fund to cover all planned upcoming expenses. Additionally, County Staff is currently working with Whatcom Land Trust to apply for grant reimbursements of the expenditure.

Whatcom Land Trust is responsible for project due diligences and executing the acquisition.

6. Funding Source:

Conservation Futures Fund