

TRIANGLE ASSOCIATES

# UPDATE TO WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

WHATCOM COUNTY FOREST RESILIENCE TASK FORCE





# AGENDA

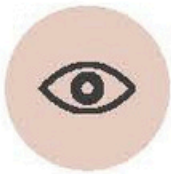
1. Task Force Progress Update
  - a. Plan Development
  - b. Subcommittees
2. Community Values Background and Results
3. Next Steps



# TASK FORCE APPROACH

## GOALS

- "What we hope to achieve"*
- Describe what the plan is intended to accomplish. The goal set the foundational purpose of future actions.



Step 1

SET GOALS

## THREATS

- "What factors have led to current conditions"*
- Identify and prioritize threats that need to be addressed to achieve objectives.
  - Identify the sources and impacts of threats.



Step 3

IDENTIFY  
CRITICAL  
THREATS

Step 2

DEFINE  
OBJECTIVES

Step 4

IDENTIFY  
ACTIONS

Step 5

DEVELOP  
FINAL  
PLAN



## OBJECTIVES

- "How we define success"*
- Develop based on planning targets and include information about the current and desired status of that target.
  - Objectives include associated measurable indicators so they can be evaluated and tracked.



## ACTIONS

- "What actions are needed to meet our goals and address critical threats"*
- Identify & prioritize actions to address threats and achieve goals and objectives.
  - Develop the suite of actions that are needed to implement.
  - Identify enabling conditions to support implementation across all actions.

# PLAN STATUS TO DATE

- 19 Task Force Members
- 8 Task Force Meetings since July 2024
- 4 Task Force Subcommittees:
  - Climate Informed Forest Management
  - Forest Industry and Economics
  - Forest Management Coordination
  - Stewardship and Land Use
- Drafted Plan Goals, developing Objectives



# TIMELINE

|                                       | Plan Components Development |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|-------------|---|--|---|-----|---------------------|--------------|
| Draft Plan Components                 | July                        | August                | Sep                     | Oct                        | Nov                     | Dec                           | Jan               | Feb   | Mar         | Apr   | May  | Jun                                       | Jul | Aug                 | Sep          |
| Background & Policy                   |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Outline                               |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Forest Resilience Definition          |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Goals                                 |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Community Values                      |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Objectives                            |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Threats                               |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Strategies/Actions                    |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
|                                       |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Monthly Task Force Meeting            | Kick Off                    |                       | Meetings 2-5: Set Goals |                            |                         | Meetings 6 & 7: Approve Goals |                   | Meetings 8 &9: Discuss & Approve Objectives |             | Meetings 10 & 11: Discuss & Approve Threats |  | Meetings 12&13: Discuss & Approve Actions |     |                     |              |
| Subcommittee Work in between Meetings |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         | Define Objectives             |                   | Identify Threats                            |             | Identify Actions                            |  |   |     |                     |              |
| SUBCOMMITTEES                         |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Climate-Informed Forest Management    |                             |                       | 1st Meeting             | 2nd Meeting                | 3rd Meeting             | 4th Meeting                   | 5th Meeting       | 6th Meeting                                 | 7th Meeting | 8th Meeting                                 | 9th Meeting                                  |   |     |                     |              |
| Forestry Industry and Economics       |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Forest Management Coordination        |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Stewardship & Land Use                |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| ENGAGEMENT & COUNCIL UPDATES          |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
| Community Values                      |                             | Assessment Interviews |                         | Develop & Implement Survey |                         |                               | Survey Analysis   |   |             |   | Share Draft Plan components with Key Parties |   |     |                     |              |
| County Council Updates                |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   | Update 1                                    |             |   |  | Update 2                                  |     |                     | Final Update |
| PLAN DEVELOPMENT                      |                             |                       |                         |                            |                         |                               |                   |   |             |   |  |   |     |                     |              |
|                                       |                             |                       | Draft outline           |                            | Community Values Report |                               | Drafting the Plan |   |             | Draft 1: Complete                           |  | Incorporate Edits                         |     | FINAL PLAN DUE 9/30 |              |

## Key

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
|  | Technical contractor drafting      |
|  | Task Force review                  |
|  | Task Force development             |
|  | Technical contractor incorporation |
|  | Triangle development               |



# APPROVED GOALS

Goal 1. County-owned forest lands are managed for resilience to current and future climate-related impacts.

Goal 2. All other forest lands are managed for resilience to current and future climate-related impacts.

Goal 3. Forests in Whatcom County are managed using science-driven approaches that foster healthy ecosystems, enhance resilience to climate-related stressors, and ensure the sustainability of ecosystem services.

Goal 4. Local, state, federal, and tribal governments and other stakeholders collaborate on planning and implementing consistent forest resilience strategies.

Goal 5. All sectors of forest landowners manage forests for resilience while meeting their individual needs and priorities.

Goal 6. Local government collaborates with partners and stakeholders to provide access to resources and implement incentives that support forest stewardship and retention of forest cover.

Goal 7. Forest ecosystems provide hydrological, ecological, and socioeconomic benefits.

Goal 8. A thriving timber industry, working forest land base, and their associated economic benefits are vital components of forest resilience.

Goal 9. Sustainable recreation opportunities deliver economic and health benefits to local communities.

Goal 10: Whatcom County forest and tree canopy cover is retained and increased where ecologically appropriate.

Goal 11: Local, state, federal and tribal governments, stakeholders, and others work together to align and implement forest management and resilience strategies.

Goal 12: Forest resilience is improved through active forest land stewardship.

Goal 13: Forest benefits are optimized and diversified.





# TASK FORCE SUBCOMMITTEES

**CLIMATE-INFORMED  
FOREST MANAGEMENT**

**FOREST MANAGEMENT  
COORDINATION**

**FOREST INDUSTRY AND  
ECONOMICS**

**STEWARDSHIP AND  
LAND USE**





# SURVEY GOAL

Solicit community input on core values and interests related to Whatcom County forests to incorporate into the Whatcom Forest Resilience Plan.





# SURVEY LIMITATIONS

- Convenience Sample
  - Snowball approach
  - Not representative of Whatcom County demographically
- Limited timeline (approximately one month)







# SURVEY DEVELOPMENT & DISTRIBUTION

- Survey questions were informed by the results of the assessment interviews and drafted in collaboration with Task Force members to incorporate their expertise
- Triangle created promotional materials to support distribution by Whatcom County and Task Force members
- 372 total responses
- Survey was open for 32 days





# ● ● ● KEY FINDINGS: CHARACTERISTICS OF A RESILIENT FOREST

- **Biodiversity & Structure:** Diverse native species, multiple layers, varied growth stages, natural disturbances.
- **Ecosystem Functions:** Supports clean water, carbon storage, soil health, and groundwater recharge.
- **Adaptability:** Resilient to wildfires, drought, pests, and climate change.
- **Wildlife Habitat:** Provides shelter and food for species from predators to pollinators.
- **Natural Regeneration:** Self-sustaining through seed dispersal, nutrient cycling, and growth.
- **Forest Management:** Uses thinning, selective logging, and prescribed burns for sustainability.
- **Human Use & Connectivity:** Balances recreation, conservation, industry, and landscape connectivity.
- **Minimal Human Impact:** Advocates for reduced clear-cutting, roads, and development.





## KEY FINDINGS: PRIMARY PURPOSE, THREATS & INVESTMENT

- **Ecosystem Services:**

- Respondents ranked **ecosystem services** as the primary purpose of forests in Whatcom County followed by **climate resilience**.
- Respondents ranked **ecosystem services** as the most personally valuable aspect of Whatcom County forests followed by **recreational opportunities**

- **Land Use:**

- Changes in land use, increased development, and conversion of forest land to other land uses were ranked as the **biggest threat** to achieving forest resilience.

- **Investment:**

- Respondents top ranked priority for promoting forest resiliency was to **increase investment in future acquisitions of timber land** and/or conservation easements by public agencies and/or partners to implement resilient forest management practices and public education to support sustainable use.





# ASSESSMENT INTERVIEWS

- Triangle completed 12 assessment interviews with key stakeholders in the fall of 2024





# KEY CHALLENGES TO FOREST RESILIENCE

## FRAGMENTATION OF FOREST LAND

Land parcelization and development reduce forest land continuity, harming long-term resilience and economic viability.

## RECREATIONAL MISUSE

Unauthorized activities like off-road vehicle use and trail building lead to forest degradation; stronger management and enforcement are needed.

## LACK OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Without diverse plantings and proactive management, forests become more vulnerable to pests, disease, and environmental stress. Monocultures and failure to introduce climate-adapted species reduce long-term resilience.

## CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS

Increasing fire danger, drought, and rising temperatures necessitate adaptive management strategies.



# NEXT STEPS

- Community Values
  - The results of the community survey and assessment interviews will inform the Community Values section of the Plan
- Plan Development
  - Draft Objectives, Threats, and Actions
  - Plan Review process







**THANK YOU**