



King County

Rural Forest Commission Strategic Priorities

Recommendations and Actions for Conservation
of Forestland in King County



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Recommendations and Actions for Conservation of Forestland in King County

February 2022



King County

Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Water and Land Resources Division

Forestry Program

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King County Rural Forest Commission

The King County Rural Forest Commission (“RFC” or “Commission”) was established in 1997 (Ordinance no. 12901) to provide guidance to King County Council and the King County Executive on policies, programs, and regulations affecting rural forests and to advise on ways to conserve forestland and retain working forests in King County. Specifically, the Ordinance established that “The purpose of the Commission is to advise the Executive and Council in their efforts to encourage forestry in the rural area. The Commission should apply its efforts to making forestry viable in King County’s rural area.” The Commission helps ensure that rural viewpoints are incorporated into the development of regulations that affect the largely forested rural area. Commission members are appointed by the County Executive and Council and represent a variety of constituencies, including small and large private forestland owners, Tribes, professional foresters, forest-based businesses, public forestland managers, and conservation organizations. The RFC is supported by staff from the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP).

Over the past nearly 25 years, the Commission has regularly advised the Council, Executive, and DNRP senior leadership about issues that affect the timber industry and forestland owners. That advice has occasionally taken the form of comprehensive reports, such as the 2009 “Actions Required to Retain and Conserve Forests in King County;”¹ and King County has been able to implement most recommendations outlined in those reports (see Section 3 below for a more detailed summary of progress on the 2009 report). However, RFC’s focus has most frequently been issue-specific and has included the following:

- Reviewing forest stewardship plans for County- and agency-owned forestland
- Recommending changes and additions to King County governing plans/initiatives, including the Comprehensive Plan, Strategic Climate Action Plan, and 30-Year Forest Plan
- Proposing amendments to sections of King County Code that affect forestland owners and the ability to manage forestland effectively
- Advocating for enhanced King County support for staff and programs that benefit forestland owners, including support for King Conservation District forest programming, and King County foresters
- Supporting Forest Stewardship Council certification of King County forestlands that are managed to enhance forest composition and structure via timber removal and replanting
- Commenting on site-specific land use actions that can establish a precedent for land use activities Countywide
- Acknowledging that forests in King County provide highly valued services, including timber production, recreation, stormwater management, and carbon sequestration

¹ <https://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/forestry/commission-meetings/KCRFC-ForestActions2009.pdf>



Commission Members

(Name and Primary Rural Forest Interest Area Represented)

Dr. Monica Paulson Priebe, Chair
Academic forester

Steve Horton
Forestland owner 40-500 acres

Amy LaBarge, Vice-Chair
Professional forester

Liway Hsi
Forestland owner 40-500 acres

Wendy Davis, Executive Committee
Forestland owner (40-500 acres)

Mari Knutson
Advocate non-timber values;
residential forestland owner <20 acres

Steven Moses, Executive Committee
Tribal representative

Grady Steere
Forestland owner > 500 acres

Laurie Benson
Washington Department of Natural Resources

Brandy Reed (*ex officio*)
King Conservation District

Jeff Boyce
Professional forester

Martie Schramm (*ex officio*)
US Forest Service

Andy Chittick
Local forest products;
residential forestland owner (<20 acres)

Brendan Whyte (*ex officio*)
Washington State University Extension

Wyatt Golding
Non-timber values of forestland





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Land Acknowledgement

King County Rural Forest Commission acknowledges that we are on the indigenous land of Coast Salish peoples, whose descendants have formed the Duwamish (dx^wdəwʔabš)², Muckleshoot (bəqəlšuł), Puyallup (spuyaləpabš), Snoqualmie (sduk^walbix^w), Suquamish (dx^wəq^wabsš), and Tulalip (dx^wlilap) Tribes. We thank these caretakers of the land who have lived, and continue to live, here since time immemorial.

² See <https://www.puyalluptriballanguage.org/basics/alphabet.php> for an introduction to the Lushootseed language.



Acronyms

CPPs	King County Countywide Planning Policies
CUT	Current Use Taxation
DLS	Department of Local Services
DLS-PD	Department of Local Services-Permitting Division
DNR	Washington Department of Natural Resources
DNRP	King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks
FPD	Forest Production District
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GMA	Growth Management Act
KCCP	King County Comprehensive Plan
KCD	King Conservation District
LCI	Land Conservation Initiative
LIP	Landowner Incentive Program
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Parks	DNRP, Parks and Recreation Division
PBRS	Public Benefit Rating System
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
RFC	Rural Forest Commission
RFFAs	Rural Forest Focus Areas
SCAP	Strategic Climate Action Plan
SPU	Seattle Public Utilities
SWM	Surface Water Management
TDR	Transfer of Development Rights
USFS	United States Forest Service
WDFW	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
WLRD	DNRP, Water and Land Resources Division
WSU	Washington State University



1.0 Executive Summary

The King County Rural Forest Commission (“RFC”) aims to advise the King County Council and the King County Executive in their efforts to conserve forestland, retain working forests, and encourage forestry in rural areas. In 2016, approximately 811,000 acres in King County were classified as being dominated by “forest cover,” within a total ownership of approximately 889,000 acres (“forestland”). Forestland includes non-forest features like roads and rivers, but also includes land in early stages of regeneration that may not be classified as “forest” when assessing cover with aerial photography. The nearly 890,000 acres of forestland in King County provide multiple benefits, including storing carbon, providing innumerable ecological services, supplying timber, creating jobs, and contributing to local communities’ economic, physical, mental, and cultural health.

To ensure the longevity and health of these critical forests, the RFC has outlined a vision with three principal components:

- Maintenance of forestland in King County (i.e., no net loss)
- Management of forestland to improve forest health and to be resilient to climate change
- Prevention of conversion of working forests to other uses and maintenance of a working forestland base and viable forest-based industry

The primary goal of this RFC Strategic Priorities report is to advise various elements of King County government on important actions needed to ensure healthy and resilient forests into the future. The report is meant to guide policy at the King County Council and Executive level, in addition to serving as a guiding document for future RFC commissioners, the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (“DNRP”), King County foresters, and collaborating agencies. The report supports other plans developed by King County that include strategies focused on forest conservation, such as the Clean Water Healthy Habitat Strategic Plan, the Strategic Climate Action Plan (“SCAP”), the Land Conservation Initiative (“LCI”), and the 30-Year Forest Plan.

The report’s recommendations are grouped into four focus areas, 16 objectives, and 65 actions. The RFC has tried to be as thorough as possible with information available at the time of writing, but recognizes this report is not exhaustive and changing situations may add to the priorities, objectives, and/or actions. However, the actions detailed in this report, if fully implemented, will make significant contributions to retaining, conserving, and restoring the health of King County’s forestland. The focus areas and objectives highlighted in this report include:

Focus Area 1: Protection, Restoration, and Stewardship of Private Forestland

- Objective 1.1: Protect remaining priority privately-owned forest tracts not currently under easement, with special focus on protecting contiguous blocks of forest and meeting LCI goals.
- Objective 1.2: Improve access to needed technical assistance to enable private forest landowners to retain forest cover and enhance forest health.
- Objective 1.3: Encourage forest stewardship through education, planning, active forest management, and partnerships.
- Objective 1.4: Increase the availability and access to financial incentive programs to support implementation of forest stewardship practices by small forest landowners.



- Objective 1.5. Promote understanding of the benefits of commercial timber production in King County and support increased production of locally produced forest products.
- Objective 1.6: Reduce operating and permitting costs for forest management and remove permitting and other roadblocks to forestry practices.
- Objective 1.7: Explore opportunities to expand programs that monetize ecosystem services on private and public land.

Focus Area 2: Acquisition, Restoration, and Stewardship of County-owned Forestland

- Objective 2.1: Strengthen stewardship planning protocols for King County forestland.
- Objective 2.2: Implement and monitor stewardship plans for all Parks Division forest units of 200 acres or more.
- Objective 2.3: Identify opportunities to monetize ecosystem services to fund forestland acquisition and management.

Focus Area 3: Wildfire Hazard Reduction

- Objective 3.1: Expand delivery of community and landowner wildfire risk management and safety planning services.
- Objective 3.2: Develop a comprehensive approach to rural wildfire planning.
- Objective 3.3: Reduce risk to public forestland from park visitors.
- Objective 3.4: Improve King County capacity for wildfire response and training.

Focus Area 4: Tribal Sovereignty and Cultural Resources

- Objective 4.1: Consult with Tribal Governments about forest management and protection.
- Objective 4.2: Engage with Tribal Governments early in any forest planning process.

Each focus area contains a series of relevant recommended actions. Thirty-six of the 65 recommended actions are a continuation or enhancement of work that is already being done by King County, usually in collaboration with partners. Those actions were deemed important enough to continue in the years ahead; however, it was recognized that many of those actions are currently under-resourced and the County and partners may not be able to achieve desired objectives without additional staff and/or financial support.

The remaining 29 of the 65 recommended actions are not currently included in work plans for King County forestry staff and partners. While each of these actions is important for the health and longevity of King County forests, the RFC recognizes that not all actions can be implemented immediately with limited resources. It is further noted that many actions are interrelated (e.g., forest restoration and wildfire resiliency) so they will not be implemented in isolation. New actions have been grouped based on their implementation priority, with the highest priority actions needing to be implemented immediately ("now"; 10 of 29), moderate priority actions needing to be implemented within the next 3 to 5 years ("soon"; 12 of 29), and the least urgent actions recommended for implementation in the next 6 to 10 years ("later"; 7 of 29).