

# MEMORANDUM

TO: TCMC Executive Committee  
 FROM: TCMC Staff Team  
 DATE: August 28, 2023  
 SUBJECT: Annual Plan for Executive Committee Engagement in Forest Protection Advocacy

## Requested Action

Review and provide feedback on the proposed annual plan for Executive Committee engagement in Forest Protection Advocacy in 2023-2024. The proposed plan is described in this memo.

## Background

At the June 26, 2023 meeting, the Executive Committee approved the adoption of two regional initiatives related to advocacy for forest protection in Thurston County. These two initiatives were among the list of potential policy options detailed in the TCMC’s February 2023 *Carbon Sequestration White Paper* (CSWP), and were identified by the Staff Team as actions that could be advanced in the coming year.

### Rural Tree Canopy Targets

- Thurston County is now implementing the “Healthy Forests Project” which consists of an update to the County’s forest conversion ordinance, a countywide tree canopy assessment, and updates to rural and urban tree standards.
- The next step for the County is to analyze assessment data to set targets for tree canopy at the regional level, focusing on rural Thurston County. Established targets will be integrated into County’s Comprehensive Plan Update with goals and policies to guide future programmatic actions to enhance tree protection.
- The Executive Committee will engage primarily as advocates for rural forest protection at the County level. Individual committee members may opt to take the information back to their jurisdictions for consideration in developing their work plans for tree canopy protection in the cities and/or Urban Growth Areas (UGAs).

### State Forest Lands Management Advocacy

- This action was identified in the CSWP as a high-impact action for carbon sequestration with potential to affect large areas of rural forest at a relatively low cost (State owns >50,000 acres of timberland in Thurston County).
- The initiative has momentum as a result of ongoing advocacy by the Board of County Commissioners and other TCMC stakeholders (e.g., Thurston Climate Action Team).
- The Executive Committee specified that this advocacy will focus on the following goals:
  - Legacy forest protection and funding sources
  - DNR enrolling more land in its carbon project

## Proposed Forest Advocacy Standing Agenda Items

From October 2023 to December 2024, each quarterly TCMC-Executive Committee meeting agenda will include a standing agenda item titled “Forest Advocacy” with sub-items for the two initiatives. The items will consist of updates by Thurston County staff and/or Executive Committee member, discussion, and action related to the two initiatives as proposed below.

**Rural Tree Canopy Targets**

County staff will lead this item by sharing updates about the County’s progress on analyzing canopy assessment data, conducting public engagement, establishing rural canopy targets, and updating the Comprehensive Plan with tree canopy targets, goals, and policies. The item will be largely informational and may include action in the form of a letter of support if the Executive Committee moves to do so.

**State Forest Lands Management Advocacy**

Thurston County’s Executive Committee member will lead this item by providing updates on ongoing or emerging opportunities for forest advocacy at the state level. Representatives from external advocacy organizations may be invited to present to the committee if/as needed. The proposed action for the Executive Committee will consist of analyzing bills in the 2024 legislative session that relate to forest protection, specifically to the two identified focus areas: 1) legacy forest protection and funding sources and 2) DNR enrolling more land in its carbon project. The Executive Committee may consider co-signing a position letter on one or more of the most relevant bills.

**Proposed Schedule for Forest Advocacy Standing Agenda Items, 2023-2024**

<b>Executive Committee Meeting (approximate dates)</b>	<b>Rural Tree Canopy Targets</b>	<b>State Forest Lands Management Advocacy</b>
October 2023	INFORMATION: Canopy assessment data; BoCC direction for target setting; Preview of Comprehensive Plan public engagement schedule	INFORMATION: Preview of legislative session
Late January 2024 (legislative session underway)	ACTION: Letter of support for Thurston County rural tree canopy targets	ACTION: Analysis of proposed legislative bills related to forest protection; Position letter on one or more bills
March 2024 (ANNUAL RETREAT)	INFORMATION: Update on public engagement, tree canopy targets, and draft forestry sections in Comprehensive Plan	INFORMATION: Update on legislative session and status of target bills
	The Retreat will also include the selection of a regional initiative for next year.	
June/July 2024	INFORMATION: Update on Planning Commission review of draft Comprehensive Plan elements	INFORMATION: Report on legislative session outcomes and other emerging opportunities for forest advocacy
September/October 2024	INFORMATION: Next steps for County tree protection programs after the establishment of tree canopy targets	TBD

**Note on Limited Role of Staff Team**

Unlike other TCMC Regional Initiatives, the 2024 forest advocacy initiatives are intended to be advanced “via Executive Committee Advocacy with minimal Staff Team involvement.” The TCMC Staff Team as a whole does not have a scope of work for these initiatives and will not bring them to the jurisdiction parties for inclusion in respective workplans and budgets. Thurston County staff only are responsible for coordinating the updates and

action related to Rural Tree Canopy Targets. The Executive Committee is responsible for coordinating updates and action related to State Forest Lands Management Advocacy. Staff may assist with minor support tasks, such as incorporating Executive Committee recommendations into jurisdictions' Legislative Priorities or coordinating presentations by external advocacy organizations.

Beyond the specific Executive Committee actions proposed above, this Regional Initiative may indirectly contribute to the advancement of forest protection actions in the TCMC partner jurisdictions. Individual committee members may choose to bring information from these meetings back to their jurisdictions to advance tree canopy protection in the cities and/or Urban Growth Areas. The committee members are encouraged to use these meetings to share information and seek alignment on related activities. However, Thurston County is the only TCMC jurisdiction with a direct role in this Regional Initiative at the staff level. Any city-level actions related to tree and forest protection are beyond the scope of this Regional Initiative and are not the responsibility of the TCMC Staff Team.