

THURSTON CLIMATE MITIGATION COLLABORATIVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



January 10, 2024

Board of Natural Resources
Department of Natural Resources
1111 Washington Street SE
Mail Stop 47001
Olympia, WA 98504-7001

Dear BNR:

Thurston County has earnestly accepted DNR's offer to collaborate on a forest-management strategy for county trust lands that was put forth in the June 7, 2023 letter from Commissioner Franz to the Board of County Commissioners ("BoCC"). Reflecting the interests of our beneficiaries and community members, the BoCC prioritizes protection of mature, structurally complex forests because of their unmatched value in sequestering and storing carbon, among many other benefits. According to data presented by DNR on September 25, Thurston County has 2,110 acres of unprotected pre-1945 forest on DNR-managed lands (although we believe that number is now less than 2,000 acres after recent DNR harvests).

The BoCC and local constituents have repeatedly requested that these stands be protected for their ecological and social values, rather than logged. This has included requesting that some of these acres be included in the Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) program to transfer 2,000 acres out of trust status, or within DNR's Carbon Project. However, when the announcement was made on December 18 about lands selected per the NCS proviso, we were disappointed to hear that none were in Thurston County. This letter affirms the county's continued commitment to conserving mature forests on state lands in Thurston and requests the opportunity to participate in the NCS proviso and/or future approaches to protect mature forest. In the interim, we request that timber sales with mature forest be paused.

The Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative (TCMC) is a partnership among Thurston County, City of Lacey, City of Olympia, and City of Tumwater that are working together to achieve mutually adopted greenhouse gas reduction goals. Each year, the TCMC selects one or more initiatives for focused regional coordination. For 2024, the group elevated State Forest Lands Management Advocacy as a top priority because of its high potential for carbon sequestration. With this letter, the three cities are joining the county in its call to DNR to protect structurally complex, carbon-dense forests in Thurston County. As municipal leaders, we recognize that protection of rural forests is an essential strategy to mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis for all our residents.

Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative
c/o Board of County Commissioners
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TDD/TYY 711 or 1-800-833-6388

Since the county has been engaging with DNR, none of the proposed management tools have yielded results in terms of conserving Thurston County's mature forest stands. As these conservation attempts idle, most of the County's forests that still contain mature stands are scheduled for cut by 2026. The County and the TCMC now must seek alternate strategies to protect these forests which are critical to meeting our climate goals.

The NCS proviso that authorized the transfer of the 2,000 acres also established the Carbon and Forest Management Workgroup, which is tasked with examining the relationship between forest management and atmospheric carbon sequestration and storage in DNR-managed forests. It is our understanding that this workgroup has a report due to the Legislature at the end of 2024, and we are optimistic this effort will identify new options for conservation of mature forests.

We request that DNR and the BNR pause upcoming timber sales in Thurston County containing stands meeting the definition of "Maturation I" (according to the Van Pelt guide) until the Carbon and Forest Management Workgroup has had a chance to complete its work and report back to the Legislature.

Thank you for your continued collaboration and do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any further information.

Very truly yours,

Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative Executive Committee:

Lisa Parshley

Olympia City Councilmember Lisa Parshley,
Chair

Carolyn Cox

Lacey City Councilmember Carolyn Cox

Eileen Swarthout

Tumwater City Councilmember Eileen Swarthout

Emily Clouse

Thurston County Commissioner Emily Clouse

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