

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative Executive Committee

FROM: Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative Staff Team:
Linsey Fields, City of Lacey
Pamela Braff, City of Olympia
Alyssa Jones Wood, City of Tumwater
Rebecca Harvey, Thurston County

DATE: January 8, 2024

SUBJECT: State Forest Lands Management Advocacy

Requested Action

Review and approve a letter from the TCMC Executive Committee to the Board of Natural Resources requesting a pause on Thurston County timber sales containing mature, structurally complex forests.

Background

During the 2023 Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative (TCMC) Annual Retreat and subsequent Executive Committee (EC) meeting, the TCMC agreed to advance “State Forest Lands Management Advocacy” as a regional initiative in 2024. As opposed the other two regional initiatives (Residential Energy Efficiency and Electrification Campaign (EEE Campaign) and Home Energy Score Disclosure Policy) that are to be led by the Staff Team, the Forest Advocacy initiative is intended to be led by the Executive Committee with minimal Staff Team involvement. Specific focuses of this advocacy are to include the following:

- Legacy forest protection including a dedicated funding source for purchasing replacement stands of younger trees; and
- DNR enrolling more of its land in its Carbon Project.

The Thurston County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) has engaged with the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) throughout 2023 to identify management options to achieve the BoCC’s goal of protecting the county’s remaining acres of mature, structurally complex, carbon-dense state forestland. Colloquially called “legacy forests,” these older (pre-WWII), mixed-species Northwest forests are on a healthy trajectory to old growth status, and are some of the world’s most effective forests in terms of carbon storage and sequestration. Protecting the county’s remaining mature forests is therefore an important action to implement Strategy A5 of the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan and contributing to the Plan’s carbon sequestration goals.

Section 3130 (1) of the 2023-25 State Capital Budget (ESSB 5002) allowed up to 2,000 acres of structurally complex, carbon-dense forestland to be transferred out of state trust status with the

support of the County’s legislative authority. The proviso allocated funds from the Climate Commitment Act’s Natural Climate Solutions account to purchase replacement forestlands. Thurston County was among eight counties that made requests to DNR for their mature forests to be selected for this program, but when the announcement was made on December 18, Thurston County received no protected acres. The BoCC has also asked DNR to include Thurston County forests in their Carbon Project (another potential conservation tool), without success.

The same budget proviso that authorized the transfer of the 2,000 acres also established the Carbon and Forest Management Workgroup, which is directed to “examine the relationship between forest management and atmospheric carbon sequestration (absorption) and storage in DNR-managed forests.”¹ This workgroup has only met twice (November 8 and December 6, 2023) and their next meeting is January 10, 2024. They published a 2023 progress report and have another report due to the legislature due at the end of 2024.

The attached letter to the Board of Natural Resources (BNR) asks the Board to pause upcoming timber sales in Thurston County containing mature forest stands until the Carbon and Forest Management Workgroup has had a chance to complete its work and report back to the Legislature. The TCMC Executive Committee is being asked to review and approve the attached letter to the BNR. If approved by the Executive Committee, the letter will be ready to sign and send immediately. In addition, the Executive Committee is asked to direct the Staff Team draft a follow-up letter that makes the same argument and identifies specific Thurston County parcels listed on a future BNR agenda as proposed timber sales. The follow-up letter will be drafted and circulated to Executive Committee members to review and sign via email when the next BNR agenda is posted² that includes proposed timber sales in Thurston County.

Decision Options

Decision 1: Approve, sign and send the attached letter.

- Option 1: Approve the letter from the Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative Executive Committee to the BNR; and agree to sign and send the letter as soon as possible.
- Option 2: Approve, sign and send the letter with modifications.
- Option 3: Do not approve the letter.

Decision 2: Direct the Staff Team to draft a follow-up letter when the next Thurston County timber sales come up for approval by the BNR.

- Option 1: Direct the Staff Team to draft a follow-up letter to be circulated to Executive Committee members to review and sign via email upon release of the next BNR agenda that includes proposed timber sales in Thurston County.
- Option 2: Do not direct the Staff Team to draft and circulate a follow-up letter.

¹ <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/about/boards-and-commissions/carbon-and-forest-management-work-group>

² <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/about/boards-and-councils/board-natural-resources>

Attachment

- Draft Letter from the Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative Executive Committee to the BNR on Thurston County timber sales

THURSTON CLIMATE MITIGATION COLLABORATIVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



[REDACTED], 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.

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:

Olympia City Councilmember Lisa Parshley,
Chair

Lacey City Councilmember Carolyn Cox

Tumwater City Councilmember Eileen Swarthout

Thurston County Commissioner Emily Clouse