



# **State Forest Lands Management in Thurston County**

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**Thurston Climate Mitigation Collaborative  
Executive Council Meeting  
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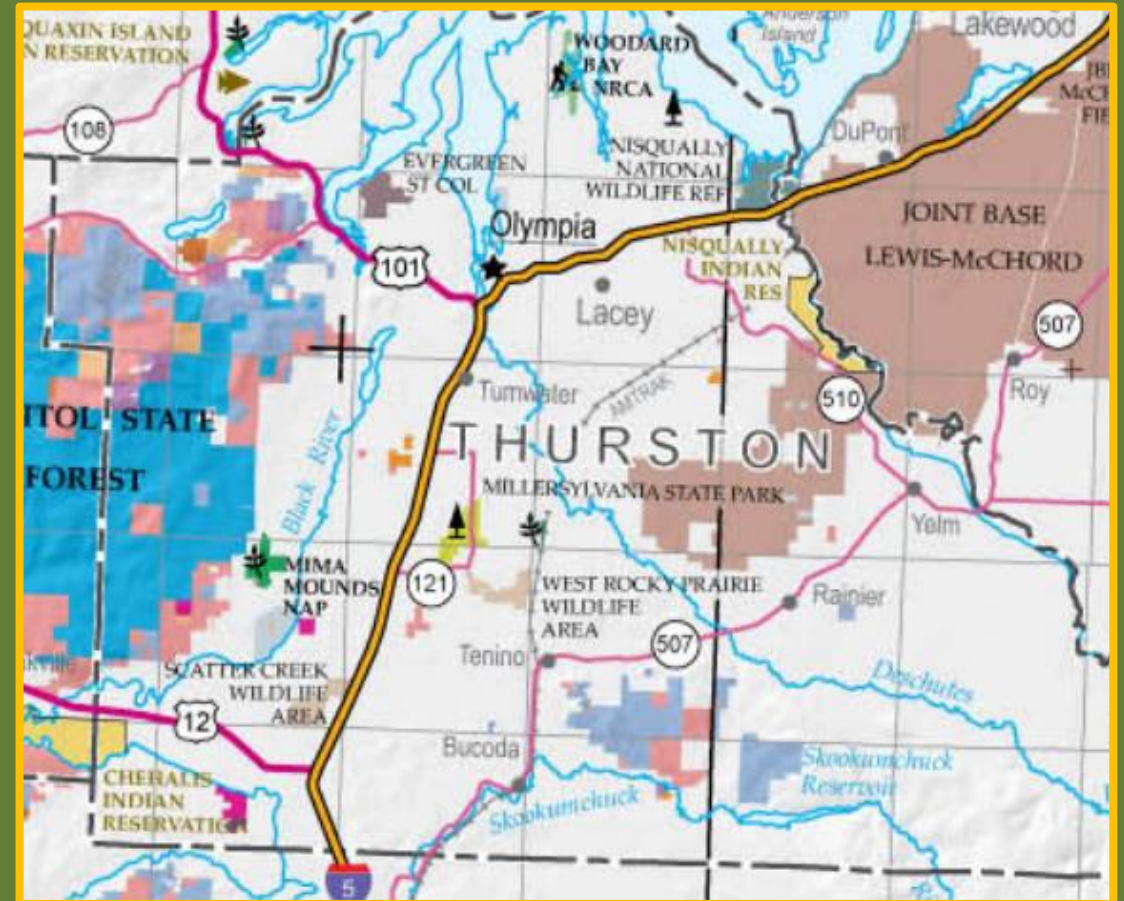
# Outline

- Brief overview of trust lands management
- CNW v. Franz Supreme Court decision
- Funds for carbon-dense forest conservation
- Management Opportunities: Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) & Sustainable Harvest Calculation (SHC)



# WA Trust Lands

- ~ 2.1 million acres of forested trust land
- Via Enabling Act & State Transfer Lands
- Managed for benefit of public & trust beneficiaries.
  - Common schools
  - Junior taxing districts (e.g. fire departments)
  - Capitol fund
- Historically '*benefit*' = timber harvest revenue
  - *Skamania v. Washington* (1982)
  - Maximum benefit = maximum harvest



DNR-managed lands in Thurston County. Color indicates trust beneficiary.



# CNW v. Franz Decision

July 2022 – Unanimous decision from Washington State Supreme Court  
DNR not required to generate revenue from timber harvest, but may elect to do so.  
DNR not required to maximize revenue in land management.

*“there appear to be myriad ways DNR could choose to generate revenue from the state and forest board lands or otherwise put them to use for the benefit of the enumerated beneficiaries.”*

Clarifies DNR's mandate to balance three obligations:

1. Compliance with state and federal law
2. Revenue for beneficiaries
3. Public benefit



# CNW v. Franz Outcome

Affirms DNR has the authority to manage forests for multiple benefits:

- Timber harvests & wood products
- Climate mitigation through carbon storage & sequestration
- Wildlife habitat & stream health
- Community use & wellbeing.

DNR has the authority to change forest management practices to increase public benefits, uninhibited by a timber volume requirement.

DNR has the authority to decide how to manage older forests and carbon.





# Funds to Conserve Carbon-Dense & Older Forests

2023 - 2025 capital budget

\$83 million from the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) for Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) to promote carbon storage & sequestration by:

\$70 million for:

- Protecting 2,000 acres of *structurally-complex, carbon-dense* forest from harvest.
- Purchasing replacement acres for encumbered lands
- Compensating trusts by adding working forests of equal *value* (likely > 2,000 acres) to the public land base.
- Available to Western Washington (& Kittitas) counties only.
- Letter of support from county legislative authority (*i.e.* county council, etc.) required before transfer.

\$10 million for:

- Silviculture treatments (Pre-commercial thinning, stand resilience, invasives control, etc.)

\$3 million for:

- Establish a working group of DNR, NGO's, Industry, County, Tribal, & Environmental Justice representatives to identify approaches to protecting older forests and forest resources.



# Funds to Conserve Carbon-Dense & Older Forests

- **8 counties requested:**
  - Whatcom
  - Snohomish
  - King (597 acres)
  - Pierce
  - Thurston (1029 acres)
  - Kitsap
  - Jefferson (500 acres)
  - Clallam (424 acres)
- **DNR nominated parcels in 5 counties:**
  - Jefferson (950 acres)
  - Whatcom (650 acres)
  - King (290 acres)
  - Snohomish (70 acres)
  - Clallam (69 acres)
- **Replacement Acres:**
  - 9,115 acres in Wahkiakum
  - 8,174 purchased with \$47.8 million of NCS funds
  - Some portion of these acres will be used as replacement for 2,000 acres of conserved older forest; some for encumbered lands

## **Benefits:**

- “Acreage of equal *value*” added to the trust (overall increase in trust land base)
- Private forests purchased and transferred to DNR, improved management of working forests



# Funds to Conserve Carbon-Dense & Older Forests

- DNR older forest nominations delivered to Board of Natural Resources during January meeting (01/03/2024).
- WCA and partners reviewing older forest nominations to assess effective acres of structurally complex older forest moved out of harvest rotation.
- DNR has not expressed openness to significant changes to selected acres
- No transfer of any kind will occur without approval from the county's legislative authority. Asked for by end of January.
- Initial discussions about future legislative allocation of more funds for encumbered lands and potentially older, structurally complex, carbon-dense forest





# Other Opportunities for Conservation

- Older structurally complex forests are only 70,000- 77,000 acres of the 2.1 million acres managed by DNR.

## Management Opportunities

- Habitat Conservation Plan
- Sustainable Harvest Calculation
- Extended Harvest Rotations



# **Habitat Conservation Plan**

- **Protects and manages habitat on DNR lands for threatened and endangered species.**
  - **Especially Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Salmon & Bull Trout**
- **Regulates activities on state lands including timber harvesting, pre-commercial thinning, and tree planting**
- **Stated HCP goal of 10-15% mature forests to comply with ESA**
  - **Older structurally complex forests are currently only 70,000- 77,000 acres of the 2.1 million acres managed by DNR.**



# **Sustainable Harvest Calculation**

- Sets DNR's 10-year harvest volume
- DNR models project likely commercial volume over the decade
- Once set, volume becomes an obligation driving DNR's management decisions
- DNR management has historically prioritized Net Present Value with an emphasis on timber over carbon sequestration, climate change, and other factors.
- DNR scoping 2025-2034 Western Washington now



# Extended Rotations

- Extended Rotations - Harvesting trees at 80+ years instead of 30-50 years of age.
- Variable Density Thinning (VDT) - forest management designed to accelerate growth by selectively harvesting portions of a stand at multiple intensities.
- Extended rotations combined with VDT are the most powerful natural climate solution in Washington State.
  - Increases carbon storage and sequestration.
  - Additional ecological benefits: biodiversity, water provisioning, wildfire risk mitigation
  - Economic benefits: potential for more valuable wood products and more local employment

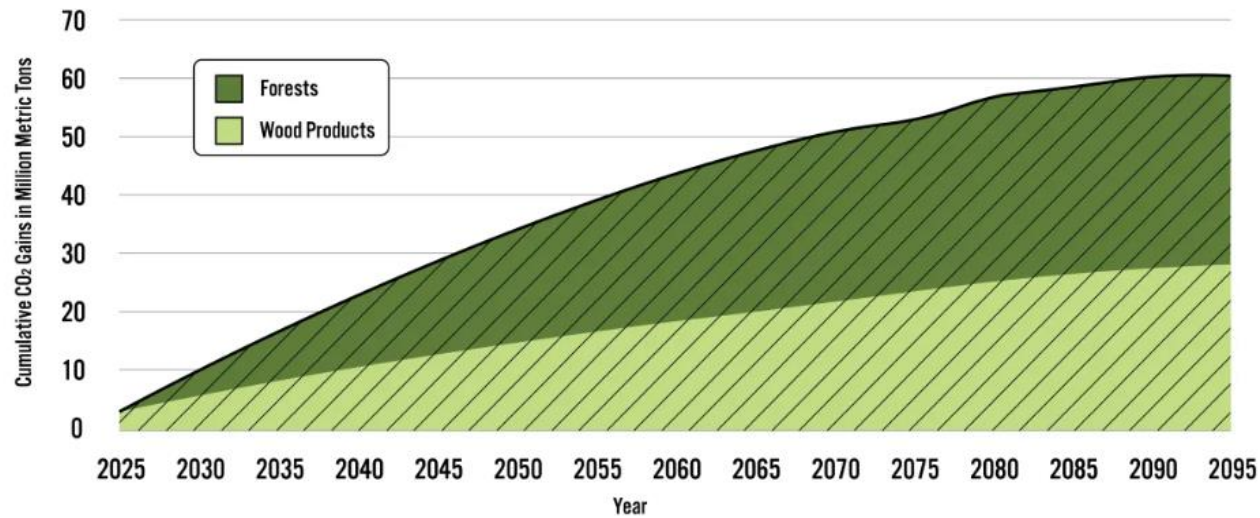


# Extended Rotations with Variable Density Thinning

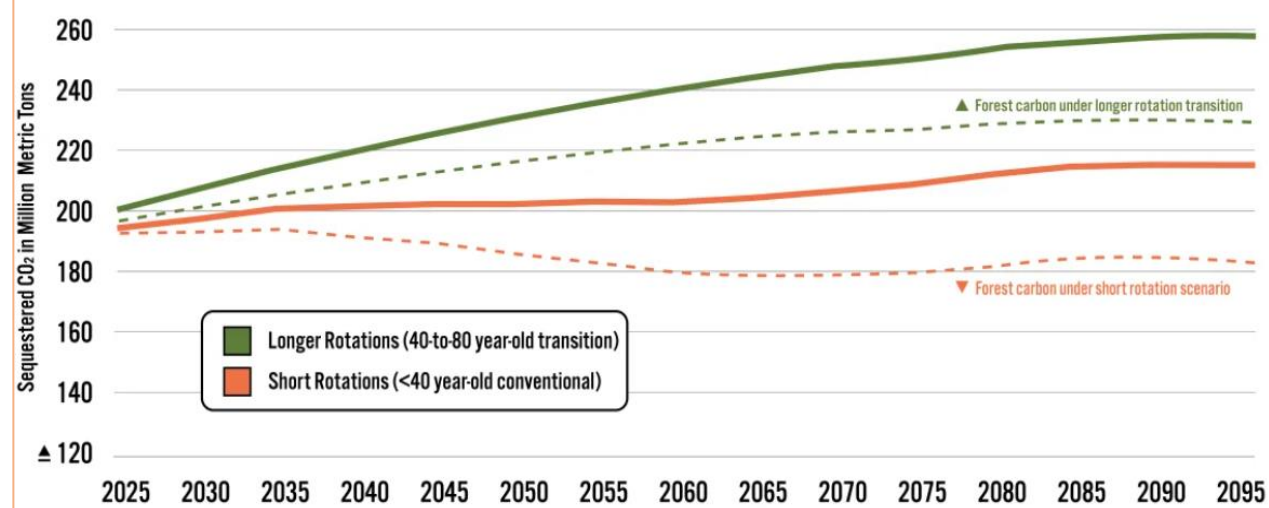
## Results of modeling from Resilient Forestry, WCA, and Conservation Northwest

Extended rotations on all DNR-managed lands can: **1. Store & sequester** more carbon. **2. Produce comparable volume** of commercial timber.

Cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> Gains on DNR West-side Managed Lands in Forest and Wood Products from 40-to-80 year-old Rotations by 2095



Total Sequestered CO<sub>2</sub> in Forest and Wood Products during 40-to-80 year-old Rotations vs. Conventional Short Rotations







# Conclusion

- NCS funds to conserve & replace trust lands are one of many options.
- CNW v. Franz makes clear:
  - DNR is not required to maximize revenue from harvests.
  - DNR has discretion over where and how they harvest forests.
- DNR and counties have many options beyond the binary choice of conserving or clearcutting forests.
- Current DNR practices will not reach HCP requirements for mature forests.
- DNR's 2025-2034 SHC is an opportunity to improve older forest recruitment.



# Questions & Outreach

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