



STRATEGY FOR ADVANCING COMMUNITY FORESTS IN THE NORTHWEST

1 The Northwest Community Forest Coalition

The Northwest Community Forest Coalition is focused on supporting the emergence, development, and management of community forests in the Pacific Northwest. Formed in May 2015, the Coalition brings together practitioners and experts representing community-based organizations, land trusts, counties and jurisdictions, private corporations, and regional and national non-profit organizations. Created in response to the growing pressure on Northwest forests from increasing population, development, and climate-related disturbances, Coalition members have a shared vision that the community forest model will help stem the tide of forest loss, fragmentation, and degradation, while supporting an array of ecological services and providing fuel, fiber, jobs, and recreation to surrounding communities.

2 Overview

This document is an outline of potential options for advancing community forest priorities in the Northwest. The purpose of the document is to clearly articulate the near and long-term goals, as well as, the roles and responsibilities, of the Northwest Community Forest Coalition partners in achieving desired outcomes. This document is meant to build and maintain a broad perspective on the multiple pathways available to enhance existing capacity and support for community forests. The audience for this document includes partners who regularly engage with the Coalition through Steering Committee meetings and individual points may be communicated with external partners and policy makers. This strategy is a living document that reflects ongoing conversations with policy makers and leaders in Washington and Oregon. Although sections are numbered for reference, this does not suggest any particular ordering of priorities.

3 Overarching Goals

- Build a broad base of support for increasing the scale and extent of community-owned forests in Washington and Oregon.
- Build capacity of community-based organizations to meet land acquisition needs and ensure the long-term viability of local ownership and management of community-owned forests.
- Advance public policies that meet the multiple goals of maintaining working forestland, permanent protection of conservation values, and rural economic development.
- Build support for and work to improve existing and proposed state-level programs that fund community forest creation or expansion
- Provide support for the management of community forests through and beyond acquisition.

4 Strategic Priorities

- [Advocate for increased state and federal support for community forests and elevate the profile of a community forest style management model.](#)
- Build cross-sector partnerships with a focus on developing consensus among conservation and community-based organizations, as well as the forestry and private sectors to better engage with state agencies, county government, and forestland owners and managers. In partnership with these groups, build public support and develop public responsiveness for community forest needs through targeted outreach to communities, lawmakers, and key decision-makers.
- Conduct an economic assessment and assess the opportunity to match public investments in working forest conservation and community forest creation with private philanthropic funding and social-impact investment.
- Ensure the long-term viability of community forests by securing resources and partnerships for on-going stewardship and management.
- Focus on improving outcomes associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion both within the proceedings of the Coalition and in projects served by its members.

5 Near-Term Activities for Addressing Community Forest Priorities

5.1 Support Washington's State level community forest programs.

- Improve the Washington Community Forest Trust Program to ensure non-state applicants are eligible to own and manage community forests. Enhance community participation in decision-making, including appropriation of timber revenue to local priorities and projects.

5.1.1 Potential Pathways

- Create a State based grant program through the DNR Community Forest Trust Program to complement the Community Forest Grant Program (CFP) at Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), that provides acquisition funding to “shovel-ready” municipal government, Tribal, or non-profit community forest projects. Program is modeled on and meant to complement the existing USDA Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.
- Create a pathway that allows for DNR to serve as a holding partner alongside community forest organizations in order to acquire and protect lands at risk of conversion, for some determined period, with the goal of ultimately transitioning

ownership and management permanently to the local organization, Tribe, or municipality. Explore a concession or land lease option for DNR community forests.

- Acknowledging DNR's priority to have land holdings that are non-fiduciary and non-set aside reserves, create a category for projects within the existing community forest trust program that allows for DNR to hold and manage lands that are important for such qualities as, "recreation," "watershed integrity," "natural heritage" or "community character," with community oversight, but which are distinguished from local community-owned forest projects. Move "non-fit" DNR lands and existing CFT program projects that are better suited for this designation into this new category.

5.1.2 Support Active Community Forest Programs

- Continue to advocate for support for the RCO Community Forest Program, Washington DNR Community Forest Trust Program, the US Forest Service Community Forest Grant Program, and the US Forest Service Forest Legacy Programs by highlighting the success of active community forests.
 - Increase the applicant pool for regional applications to each funding opportunity.
 - Ensure effective education, publicity and resources for new potential community forest projects to help fund pathways to establishment within Washington and Oregon.
 - Engage regional community forest managers to request legislative support for continued funding into future funding cycles through the utilization of site visits, engagement events, and information sharing.

5.2 Develop a Reflecting Community Forest Program in Oregon.

5.2.1 Utilizing the experience gained through the development of Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO)'s Community Forest Grant Program:

- Create a pathway that allows shovel ready community forest projects to access state specific funding for property acquisition.
- Connect Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's priority around watershed restoration as a potential resource for community forest development.
- Utilize support from Oregon's Department of Forestry to advise on a pathway to implement this funding mechanism.

5.3 Align State Funding Programs and Stakeholder Efforts to Support Community Forest Priorities

5.3.1 Proposed Carbon Initiatives and Programs

- Washington's proposed Carbon-Tax Working Forest Conservation Program is designed to be accessible and useful for community forest projects and provides funding for fee simple and easement acquisition.
- In Oregon, work to ensure that the cap and investment legislation includes dedicated funding for working lands. Types of investments could include direct payments for carbon sequestration on forestlands, easements that maintain working lands and wildlife habitat, and wildfire risk reduction to maintain forest health and sequestered carbon reserves.

5.3.2 Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds

- For community forests focused on water quality protection, especially for municipally owned community forests, the Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs) are accessible as a source of low-interest land acquisition financing. Project application and ranking processes require changes to be more amenable to green infrastructure investments, specifically, adjusting application processes to better align funding priorities with benefits associated with green infrastructure and expanding eligible entities to include community-based organizations, land trusts, and other non-profit corporations.

5.3.3 Ecosystem Services

- **Carbon** - where appropriate, carbon projects are developed to provide additional value stream opportunities to community forest projects.
- **Water** - building on work in the Nisqually watershed through current National Estuary Program grant with Nisqually Land Trust, Nisqually River Foundation and Washington Environmental Council, explore options for creating an ecosystem service market for water quality that provides funding for land acquisition or stewardship on community forests.
- **Stormwater** - retrofit options for developers in King, Pierce, Snohomish and Clark counties to mitigate against stormwater impacts by preserving forestland from conversion, increasing tree cover or restoring riparian areas as utilized as tools to protect community forests and fund stewardship operations.
- **Avoided Fire Costs** - explore options to pay for wildfire preparedness and forest health treatment as an avoided cost against impacts to at-risk communities and local water supplies, for example following the Blue Forest Conservation approach.

o Recognize the value of avoided conversion, effectively quantify the benefits to communities of the expansion of Wildland Urban Interface, forest land

fragmentation prevention, and connecting subsidization to property hardening efforts.

- Help align active community forest sites to wildfire mitigation and resilience programs regionally and federally.

5.4 Engage and Educate Local Communities, Lawmakers and Landowners

5.4.1 Build Project List for Future Community Forest Projects

- Work in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources, Washington Association of Land Trusts, and other partners to develop a project list of potential future community forests in Washington.
- Work with Oregon Department of Forestry, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, and other partners to develop a project list of potential community forests in Oregon.
- Work with coalition partners to utilize available tools & resources to identify potential future community forests.

5.4.2 Engage Communities and Provide Local Leaders with Tools and Resources

- Build broader awareness of the community forest movement by conducting targeted outreach in communities where community forests already exist and where they are proposed.
- Support conversations around community forest goals and priorities, and engage local communities, landowners and stakeholders in community forest visioning processes.
- Develop and share relevant resources and tools that respond to community needs.
- Build local advocacy capacity for community forests.
- Ensure engagement with Tribal nations and recognition of Tribal concerns in regards to community forest priorities.
- Provide examples of community forest management plans as a resource for potential community forests.
- Utilize education and publicity materials to advocate for increased State and Federal support for community forests.

5.4.3 Standardize Tracking Metrics to Ensure Success of Community Forest Sites.

- Metrics to be tracked include, acreage of forest protected, acreage of non-forest protected, regional economic impact, acres harvested, estimated number of site

visitors, gallons of drinking water provided, area of habitat sustained, acres to be treated for increased resiliency to wildfire and more.

- Develop a template to report benefits of community forests to the communities served.
- Connect metrics of engagement back to the Coalition's website, ensure the information aligns with research being performed by partner organizations and institutions.

5.4.4 Establish a Connection Between Private Funding Sources and Community Forests.

- Utilize partnerships stemming from Coalition members and regional conservation leaders to better connect community forests to larger philanthropic investments.
- Build relationships with local, regional, and national funders to overcome challenges to place-based initiatives and reduce the steps needed for individual community forests to secure private funding.
- Ensure availability of bridge buyers to create realistic timelines for acquisition of community forests properties.

6 Longer-Term Activities

6.1 Education with Key Decision Makers and Legislators

- Conduct targeted outreach to state lawmakers with a focus on natural resource management and community and economic development.
- Convene larger community forest discussion group among state lawmakers in partnership with state agencies and coalition members.
- Meet legislators in their communities to discuss opportunities for community forest projects of local impact and importance.
- Engage with county-level government associations and with county commissioners.

6.2 Create Economic Development and Business Plans for Community Forests

6.2.1 Economic Development Planning

- Advocate for community forests as opportunities around which to center economic development associated with forest products, ecosystem services, tourism, recreation and other community wealth building activities.

- Work with existing community forests and those under development to create economic development and business plans designed to be adaptive and to maximize local benefits.
- Create strategies that diversify value streams from community forests.
- Encourage the development of sustainable and place-based value-added supply chain strategies that maximize local benefit from community forest-based enterprises.
- Collaborate with Tribes on community and economic development efforts.

6.2.2 Locate Demand

- Build partnerships in demand centers for products that come from community forests.

6.2.3 Build Cross-Sectional Partnerships

- Build bridges beyond the conservation community to leverage additional support for community forests that bring together economic development, education, agriculture, tourism and recreation, and renewable energy interests.

6.3 Create Public-Private Partnerships for Funding and Capacity Support

6.3.1 Develop Relationships with Impact Investors

- Explore opportunities for creating local investment opportunities in community forest projects through impact investment vehicles.

6.4 Leverage Additional Federal and Local Resources

6.4.1 Local Conservation Programs

- Examine local and county-level conservation programs and advocate for policies that best support priorities for community forests.

6.4.2 Federal Programs

- Support federal efforts to continue funding for USFS Community Forest program, Forest Legacy and other important Farm Bill Programs.
- Ensure state funding programs are capable of partnering with and complementing federal programs.

NW Community Forest Coalition Strategy

- Leverage NRCS programs such as the Regional Conservation Collaborative Program (RCCP) and Conservation Innovation Grant program (CIG) to support local community forest efforts.
- Explore options to use the Statewide Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) to support the acquisition and conservation of community forests for local economic development as well as climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Advocate for the continuation of Federal level funding programs that support community forest efforts.

This strategy is a living document meant to grow and adapt as conditions and opportunities change over time. The Northwest Community Forest Coalition will review this document periodically to assess progress against stated priorities and goals.

Glossary:

Advocacy: NWCFC defines advocacy as an approach to providing outreach and educational materials and opportunities. These materials are designed for policy makers, local communities, current and future community forest managers, and the general public. This work excludes lobbying for funding decisions around individual sites or within proposed legislation.

Community Forests: NWCFC defines Community Forests as forestlands that are owned and managed on behalf of local people to provide them secure and reliable access to the ecological, social, and economic benefits produced by the forests.

Conversion: NWCFC defines conversion as the clearing of forests to use land for another purpose, such as agricultural, residential, or commercial uses.

Wildland Urban Interface: U.S. Fire Administration defines Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) as the zone of transition between unoccupied land and human development. The line, area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.