



## WA Community Forest Development Letter of Support

Dear Members of the Washington State Legislature,

Community forests are working forests owned and managed by municipalities, government agencies, Tribes, and non-profit organizations for the benefit of local communities. We/I recognize that community forests offer a collaborative solution towards protecting Washington's lands and communities.

Community forests keep the working landscape working by protecting important forestlands from conversion and development. These projects protect forest sector jobs while also securing conservation values of the land in perpetuity. In this way, community forests allow for people living in rural areas to participate in forest management decisions and long-term planning. These efforts promote ongoing economic development while balancing multiple values for the benefit of the public.

Washington has the unique opportunity to support the continued growth and development of community forests. A 2018 study by the Department of Natural Resources identified over 20 community forest projects that are seeking funding near term to support their land acquisition goals. However, existing state level funding programs are currently limited in their ability to meet this demand or to provide the right kind of funding that would allow for full-ownership of forestland by the local community.

In 2019, the legislature provided over \$1.3 million in funding support for community forest acquisitions in Glenwood and Chewelah as well as for the development of a management plan for the proposed Nason Ridge Community Forest at Lake Wenatchee. These efforts were previously identified as priorities by DNR. However, a permanent process for evaluating these projects was not established alongside. We recognize that while ongoing funding support for community forest development is crucial, so too is a process which ensures that proposals are evaluated in an ongoing, fair and transparent way.

**During the 2020 legislative session, we urge you to establish a dependable and transparent funding mechanism with independent agency oversight to support the acquisition and development of community forests in Washington State. Projects like these guide meaningful investment in communities - in a way that protects jobs, lands, livelihoods, local business, and our quality of life.**

Please email [bdair@sustainablenorthwest.org](mailto:bdair@sustainablenorthwest.org) or visit our web page at <http://nwcommunityforests.org/2019/12/20/support-washington-community-forests-in-2020/> to sign on to this letter.