



Assault On The Forest Products Industry

Make your voice heard

By Frank Samuels

In Whatcom County an effort, primarily supported by environmental activist groups, has been mounted to permanently remove between 8,000 and 8,700 acres of productive forestlands owned and managed by the State Department of Natural Resources from the DNR's active harvest rotation.

Designated Forest Resources Provide Many Benefits

The lands are currently designated lands of long term commercial significance in the County's plans; lands set aside under Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) to assure the survival of one of Washington's premier resource industries. Many industry participants believe the removal is not only the beginning of the end for Whatcom County's forest products industry but, is a test case meant to serve as a template for similar attempts to remove productive forest from the DNRs inventory statewide.

Eighty to ninety years ago in Washington State, large acreages of logged lands ended up county hands due to tax forfeitures by landowners. The lands were often in poor condition, prone to wildfires, erosion and other problems. At the request of the counties the State legislature directed the lands be turned over to the State. The DNR following in the footsteps of its predecessor agency has managed the lands for forest health and revenue for a variety of State and local funds since.

In Whatcom County those funds provide support to two school districts, the County Library system, the Port of Bellingham, Whatcom County Conservation Futures, the State General Fund and DNR's own Forestry Development Account. In total, based on DNR materials, the reconveyance will cost those funds a total of about \$844,000 each year in addition to B & O and other tax losses coming as the result of loss of harvest opportunity.

Movement to Reconvey Property to County

Reconveyance is a process by which a County can request that lands conveyed to the State decades ago be given back to the County. By state law the process can only be undertaken if the requesting County is willing to use the lands to establish a park and that park use must be consistent with both the County's park plan and the State's parks and recreation plan.

In a day when the forest resource lands needed to support a healthy forest products industry are dwindling due to the removal of federal lands from the inventory, ever increasing restrictions on harvest due to species protection, larger buffers, and other impediments to harvest, very large scale removals represent a direct threat to the survival of the industry as a whole.

Attempts to remove more and more land via the reconveyance opportunity are likely to continue. If the forest products industry wishes to remain viable, it must resist inappropriate requests for reconveyance like that in Whatcom County by actively participating in the process. DNR appears to be willing to resist inappropriate requests but, DNR can only resist if given the tools it needs to properly examine a request based on the evidence before it. It is up to the forest product industry to provide DNR with alternative data opposing that counties, in partnership with activist groups dedicated to ending harvest state-wide provide.



Make a Stand

If you would like to stand up and make your voice heard regarding this issue, now is the time.

The State Board of Natural Resources meeting July 3, 2012 to address this issue, and must approve it before the Lake Whatcom Reconveyance can move forward.

The Board address is: PO Box 47000, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA 98504-7000. You can also email the Board at bnr@dnr.wa.gov, but be sure to identify the action being commented on — Lake Whatcom Reconveyance.