

## Weekly Legislative Update: **Forests**

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### Bills Needing Action This Week

*Remember, only authorized members can speak for the League; the Issue Chairs will do that, **so please leave the "Organization" box blank.** A more powerful influence is many voices speaking for themselves rather than many voices speaking for the League.*

**HJR 4210 Adding a new section to the Washington state Constitution regarding the conservation and protection of the state's natural resources.** While Washington state has a robust set of environmental protection laws, as written, these laws are unable to ensure equitable and adequate environmental protection in all situations. Among their limitations, gaps and loopholes allow for harmful levels of pollution. The laws are unable to keep up with emerging contaminants and new technologies, only providing protection after the fact once irreparable harm has been inflicted. Existing laws also fail to include adequate ability for regulators to fully address unique circumstances, including equitable treatment of all communities, and as a result not fully stopping damage to our communities. Please sign in Pro.

 **Sign in PRO on HJR 4210 [here](#) by 12:30 PM on January 29.**

**Write to your legislator and ask them to support \$8 million in capital budget funding** for qualified projects at Morning Star, Blakely Island, Hamma Hamma Balds, Stavis Creek, Trout Lake and Middle Fork Snoqualmie. Forest conservation is a perfect fit for Natural Climate Solutions funding because forests sequester carbon. A small appropriation this year builds on the success we had last year revitalizing the **trust land transfer** program at DNR. **Trust land transfer protects** special state trust lands that are under-performing economically and contain ecologically valuable features. Communities and Tribes all over the state are excited by the prospect of an opportunity to have a real say in the future of public lands. Trust land transfer is a win-win-win, for conservation, trust beneficiaries, rural communities, and even working forests.

Conservation advocates are again asking for help to protect special places around Washington state. DNR's trust land transfer (TLT) program has conserved nearly 130,000 acres of unique landscapes during its first 30 years of its existence. However, TLT needed to be revitalized after public support for the program dwindled and legislative appropriations dried up. In 2023, Washingtonians spoke up and successfully urged legislators to revitalize TLT as a conservation tool.

Now, we have a unique opportunity to secure additional funding in the 2024 legislative session for **more TLT projects** using higher-than-expected carbon auction revenues from the state's Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) account. NCS funding makes perfect sense for TLT because forests sequester carbon!

 **Ask your legislators to support Capital Budget Funding for Trust Land Transfer Projects [here](#).**

## Bills We Support

**HB 1423/ SB 5372 Authorizing the department of natural resources to create and manage a trust land transfer program** that moves ownership of trust lands that are determined to be more suitable for natural or wildlife areas, parks, recreation, or open space out of 'trust' status. It also provides revenue to K-12 trust beneficiaries by depositing the timber or lease value of transferred parcels into the Common School Construction Account. The land value of the transferred properties is then used to purchase replacement trust lands that have better income potential for trust beneficiaries. (\$8 million Natural Climate Solutions Account)

**HB 1818 Concerning the exclusion of compensating tax when land is sold to a governmental entity intending to manage the land similarly to designated forestland or timberland.** This bill creates an exception to additional and compensating tax when there is a sale or transfer of designated forestland or timberland to a governmental entity. Typically, when forestland is changed to another use, it is then taxed at market value. This allows DNR to purchase forest land likely to convert to housing without paying hundreds of thousands of dollars in compensating tax because the forest is zoned residential.

**SB 6121 Concerning biochar production from agricultural and forestry biomass.** Biochar is a carbon-rich material produced by heating biomass. It is mainly used to improve soil nutrient availability, aeration in soil, and soil water filtration. This bill asks the Department of Natural Resources to encourage a specific process to produce biochar using mobile units that reduce emissions. The bill specifies using less than 150 green tons a month of clean biomass. Clean biomass cannot contain contaminants at concentrations not normally associated with virgin biomass. Small scale biochar production is preferable to corporate, industrial scale biochar which some conservationists fear will lead to the inappropriate exploitation of forests.

The **Governor's Proposed 2024 Supplemental Budget** contains proposals LWVWA supports:

- **Develop forest carbon storage and sequestration projects:** The Recreation and Conservation Office will establish a program to support private, Tribal, and local government landowners as they conduct management practices that go beyond regulatory requirements and increase long-term carbon storage. Pg. 42
- **Upper Green River forest carbon storage:** The Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) main water source is the upper Green River watershed. A large private timberland holding has

become available for purchase. TPU will begin to purchase these lands and manage older forests to protect water quality, increase carbon storage, and improve aquatic habitat for salmon. Pg. 42

- **Community Forest Projects:** LWVWA signed on to a **letter** to Governor Inslee asking for funding for two projects in Whidbey Island and Hoquiam. Pg. 46.

## Bills We Are Watching

**HB 1078 Concerning urban forest management ordinances.** We opposed this bill last year because it precluded a city's option to protect legacy trees. A new version appears to make use of a tree bank optional in city or county planning.

**HB 1971/SB 6193 Concerning a rangeland fire protection association pilot project.** The bill creates a 5-year pilot project to allow rangeland fire protection associations to offer a coordinated approach to wildland fire suppression by taking advantage of the quick initial attack capabilities of those already out on the land, addressing the desire of those living and working in wildland areas to be active participants in protecting three areas in E. Washington. How will this activity be monitored for sustainable forest practices? For example, how will RCW 76.04.465 *Certain snags to be felled currently with logging* be monitored?

**HB 2243 Social equity land trust By Request: Department of Natural Resources.** This bill would create a new trust beneficiary for supporting childcare. DNR could buy new land, harvest it or (potentially) sell it for conversion. It does not require use of carbon credits to create revenue. Childcare is an important public purpose that needs greater state and federal support. The new WA capital gains is earmarked in part for this purpose and just delivered 500 million to early learning.

**HB 2333 AN ACT Relating to assessing the carbon sequestration potential of state-owned lands for the purpose of generating offset credits under the climate commitment act.** Assessing the carbon sequestration potential of state-owned lands for the purpose of generating offset credits under the climate commitment act.

**SB 6120 Concerning the Wildland Urban Interface Code.** Wildland urban interface mapping would be eliminated. All counties, cities, and towns may complete their own map of areas at greatest risk from wildfire. Is there a consistent standard for choosing areas of risk in cities, towns, and counties? Could a city decide not to map a WUI area because it wants to develop it.

## Bills We Oppose

No bills at this time.

## How You Can Be Involved

- If you are interested in a particular bill, use the links above to go to the webpage for that bill. These pages include staff summaries and reports including those who testified PRO versus CON on the bill. There is also information about how to access videos of hearings that have been held.
- If your available time permits you to do nothing else, please scan the [LWVWA Legislative Action Newsletter](#) each week (it's distributed each Sunday during the legislative session) and respond to the Action Alerts .
- If you have more time and are interested in a particular topic, we always appreciate and can use your assessments of bills, law implementation, and future concerns. For Forests topics send assessments of a few paragraphs to a few pages and include the sources of the facts you rely on. Send them to [Kate Lunceford](#), Forests Issue Chair.
- If you want to engage more in a current topic, such as [Dept. of Natural Resources Sustainable Harvest Calculation](#) or other forest issues, one of our coalition partners probably has a focused action project underway that you can join. Contact me to discuss opportunities.

[Kate Lunceford](#), Forests Issue Chair.