



August 14, 2020

Dear Bob Winslow, DNR:

The 31 undersigned conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations strongly urge the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to promote a robust trust land transfer (TLT) project list for the 2021-2022 Biennium of the Washington State Legislature. We are writing to support the Cascade River parcel nominated by the North Cascade Conservation Council.

Support for the Trust Land Transfer Program

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages more than 3 million acres of state trust forest, agricultural, range, and commercial properties that earn income to fund schools, universities, capitol buildings, and other state institutions and help fund local services in many counties. We understand that DNR strives to improve returns from state trust lands; however, not all trust lands are best suited for income production.

Some trust lands also provide important habitat for fish and wildlife as well as recreation and educational opportunities for the general public. These lands may also possess low potential for income production due to factors such as critical fish and wildlife habitat, public use demands, environmental and social concerns, steep slopes, poor or unstable soils and other issues that complicate income production.

The Trust Land Transfer (TLT) program presents an opportunity to retain these special lands in public ownership while maintaining and improving economic returns to trust beneficiaries. The trust beneficiaries are compensated for the assessed value of the land at the time of transfer.

The timber funds go directly to the school trust beneficiary and the underlying land values go to purchase more productive lands to be managed for greater returns in the future.

Since its inception in 1989, the trust land transfer program has preserved more than 128,000 acres of state land for fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, education, and other community uses. In doing so, DNR has also sustained and improved potential future economic returns for schools and state and local governments. However, in the last few years, appropriations for the TLT program have decreased from a high of \$171 million in 1989 and an average of \$55 million in appropriations per biennium over the last sixteen years. In the last two biennia budgets have only appropriated about \$10 million. We urge the DNR and the State Legislature to reinvest in the TLT program at the average appropriation level or higher.

Support for the Cascade River Nomination

Specifically, we are writing to endorse the Cascade River project, proposed by the N. Cascades Conservation Council. We urge the agency to include this project in its list of recommended TLT projects to the Legislature in advance of the 2021 legislative session.

The Cascade River TLT nomination includes about 1,200 acres and would provide the following ecological, recreational and economic benefits:

- The proposal includes lands that have been identified by the agency as limited timber production due to steep and rocky terrain, landslides, presence of old-growth forests and other factors. Revenues received from a TLT transfer would benefit school trust beneficiary directly and the underlying land values go to purchase more productive lands to be managed for greater returns in the future.
- A willing recipient, should TLT occur, has been identified – Seattle City Light (SCL). SCL has received several TLT's from DNR in the Skagit Basin, and has proved an excellent partner in protecting ecological and recreational values.
- The proposal protects a host of Federally Threatened/Endangered species, including Chinook salmon, wild steelhead, bull trout, Northern spotted owl, and the marbled murrelet. Chinook salmon are the primary food source for the Southern Resident Orca population.
- The proposal protects a segment of a Federally designated Wild and Scenic River.
- The proposal protects old growth forest.
- The proposal enhances enjoyment/appreciation of the Cascade River as a river for experienced whitewater kayakers

While COVID-19 has caused significant economic demands, we must not abandon our focus on conservation. There have been substantial investments in the TLT program, and the payoffs have been significant. We are protecting the places that Washingtonians love while preserving the revenue stream that pays for necessary services. The TLT program is unique in that it exchanges non-performing assets with real sources of revenue. We cannot backslide given the broad community and long-term economic benefits despite the significant near-term economic headwinds.

We urge the DNR to protect the Cascade River project and advocate vigorously for a strong TLT program in the 2021 legislative session.

Sincerely,

Tom Uniak
Executive Director
Washington Wild

Robert Kaye
Chair, Conservation Committee
North Cascades Audubon Society

Brad Throssell
State Chair
Washington Council of Trout Unlimited

Phil Fenner
President
North Cascades Conservation Council

Kelsea Hill
Social Media Manager
Twin Sisters Brewing Company

Luke Baugh, CEO
Joshua Larsen, COO
Triad River Tours

Lee First
Waterkeeper
Twin Harbors Waterkeepers

Anna Wille
Co-founder
Women for Wild Lands

Taylor Robertson
Marketing & Sales Director
Werner Paddles

Michael Nash - Founder
Irene Nash - Co-Owner
Hard Core Paddles LLC

J Michelle Swope
Washington Regional Coordinator
Native Fish Society

Connie Gallant
President
Olympic Forest Coalition

Greg Haller
Executive Director
Pacific Rivers

Michael Kirshenbaum
Conservation Director
Skagit Land Trust

Peter Bahls
Executive Director
Northwest Watershed Institute

Dave Werntz
Science and Conservation Director
Conservation Northwest

Annie Cubberly
President, Polly Dyer Cascadia Chapter
Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Wendy McDermott
Director, Rivers of Puget Sound & Columbia Basin
American Rivers

Mari Kemper
Owner
Chuckanut Brewing Co

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director
American Whitewater

Jennie Goldberg
Director
League of Northwest Whitewater Racers

Saul Weisberg
Executive Director
North Cascades Institute

Shanna Gachen
Whitewater Director
Washington Kayak Club

Kurt Beardslee
Executive Director
Wild Fish Conservancy

Tony Luciano
Owner/Brewer
Stones Throw Brewery

Marlies Wierenga
Pacific Northwest Conservation Manager
WildEarth Guardians

John McGlenn
President
Washington Wildlife Federation

Mike Town
State Forest Lands Chair
Sierra Club

Joseph Bogaard
Executive Director
Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition

Chris Gerston
Owner
Backcountry Essentials

Bill Wheeler
President
Washington State Council of Fly Fishers International