



Proposed Lake Whatcom Inter-trust Exchange

A STEP TO WHATCOM COUNTY POTENTIALLY ESTABLISHING A PARK

Whatcom County has indicated its interest in requesting reconveyance (a kind of land transfer) about 8,000 acres of State Forest Transfer trust lands in the Lake Whatcom landscape, about 8 miles southeast of Bellingham. The land is owned by the State and managed by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Under state statute, a county may request reconveyance of these types of trust lands for public park use.

Currently, multiple types of trust lands are intermingled in the Lake Whatcom landscape. The County and DNR first began reconveyance discussions in the spring of 2007. Since then, the agencies have defined the steps necessary to proceed with reconveyance, and formalized that understanding in an agreement. The agencies now are approaching two major steps: the first is an exchange of state lands to position trust ownerships for the proposed reconveyance and the second is the reconveyance itself.

Lake Whatcom Inter-trust Exchange

Each of the state trusts owns specific parcels of lands. The state's reconveyance statute, RCW 79.22.300, applies only to State Forest Transfer trust lands. Because the Lake Whatcom watershed contains multiple categories of state trust land intermingled around the lake, DNR needs to consolidate the State Forest Transfer trust lands. A land exchange is the way this is being accomplished. Properties must be exchanged for property of equal value. After exchange, the blocked up State Forest Transfer lands and the other state trust lands each would continue to be managed to benefit their respective beneficiaries.

Of the 8,000 acres of State Forest Transfer trust land that are of interest to the county, 4,700 acres need to be repositioned in the proposed Lake Whatcom Inter-trust Exchange.

Common School, Scientific School, Capitol Grant, and State Forest Purchase trust land (formerly known as Forest Board Purchase) are to be exchanged for State Forest Transfer trust land (formerly known as Forest Board Transfer).

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Portions thereof of the following described lands:

Sec 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34 & 35, T38N, R04E; Sec 1, 11, 12, 13 & 24, T37N, R03E; Sec 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30 & 31, T37N, R04E; Sec 19, 30 & 31, T37N, R05E, W.M., in Whatcom County.

Background—why the county may request the reconveyance

Early in the 1900s private forest landowners harvested much of western Washington. This was before many landowners saw the long-term merits of replanting trees for future harvests. Many landowners abandoned the lands, and the tax delinquent parcels reverted to the counties, which did not have resources to manage the thousands of acres of cut-over lands.

Fearing that commercial forestry was disappearing in the state, the Legislature specified that these lands were to remain in forestry, to be managed like the other forested state trust lands, and much of

revenue from them would go to the county in which they were situated, as well as to the state general fund, earmarked for education. The counties then deeded (transferred) them to the state. The Legislature specified that the county could request reconveyance of the lands only for park purposes. The Legislature directed one of DNR's two predecessor agencies—the Department of Forestry—to replant the lands and manage them. For more efficient management, beginning in the 1960s DNR began blocking them up into large forest landscapes, intermingled with the other state trust lands—such as in the forest blocks at Lake Whatcom.

Options after inter-trust exchange

Following the inter-trust exchange that consolidates large blocks of State Forest Transfer land, the land will be eligible for Whatcom County to request reconveyance from the Board of Natural Resources for public park use.

The exchanged Common School, Scientific School, Capitol Grant, and State Forest Purchase trust lands will remain in State ownership and continue to be managed by DNR.

DNR-managed state trust lands

Led by Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark, DNR manages more than 3 million acres of state-owned trust lands—forest, agricultural, range lands and commercial properties that earn income to build schools, universities and other state institutions, and help fund local services in many counties. In addition to earning income, trust lands help protect habitat for native plant and animal species, clean and abundant water, and offer public recreation and education opportunities statewide.