

Forest Legacy Program in Washington State

Program Purpose

In 1990, Congress created the Forest Legacy Program to protect environmentally important forestlands threatened by conversion to non-forest uses – mostly commercial or residential development. This national program protects private forest lands primarily by paying for conservation easements that buy up development rights. This assures that the traditional uses of private forestlands and the natural resource values embraced by the public are protected for future generations.

Lands acquired through the Forest Legacy Program are “working forests,” properties managed to produce forest products and to provide non-commodity values such as healthy riparian (streamside) areas for fish and wildlife, and scenic, cultural, and recreation resources.

The USDA Forest Service administers the national Forest Legacy Program, promoting the long-term integrity of forestlands using cooperative efforts of willing landowners, state lead agencies, and a State Forest Coordinating Committee. Through the program, the federal government funds up to 75 percent of the project costs, with the remaining 25 percent provided by the state or other conservation partners.

Forest Legacy Program Goals

- Provide present and future timber management opportunities
- Protect water quality
- Provide habitat for native fish, wildlife or plants
- Protect existing landscapes to discourage further fragmentation
- Incorporate federal program goals to ensure Washington projects meet the intent of the authorizing legislation

Washington State’s priority is to focus resources where conservation planning and partnering with other organizations provides the best benefits for protecting forest lands and their associated uses.

Washington Forest Legacy Program History

Washington is one of the five original states to participate in the program. Former governor Booth Gardner designated the State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as Washington’s lead agency for managing the Forest Legacy Program. DNR established the program’s goals, objectives, and parcel evaluation criteria in the Washington State Assessment of Need (AON).

From the beginning, Washington has worked to support the national and state program objectives. Forest Legacy financial resources are leveraged with partners (federal, state, local government, private corporations, non-profits, interest groups and foundations) to

maximize conservation benefits. Partners have worked together to help consolidate forest landscapes to meet Legacy goals and the goals of all partners. The Mountains to Sound Greenway landscape in the Interstate-90 Corridor includes many successful Washington Forest Legacy projects.

In 1999 the program branched out from supporting the Mountains to Sound Greenway to protecting tracts of forest land at risk of converting to non-forest uses across a broader area. In October 2004, Washington State amended the original AON that focused on Snohomish, King and Pierce Counties to include all counties with eligible lands. DNR has since acquired conservation easements in Kitsap, Mason, Kittitas and Skamania Counties, and acquired land in Klickitat County.

Project Selection

Each state and territory may submit up to three projects (the total of all projects may not exceed \$20 million), which are evaluated by a national panel to determine priority.

When a state receives more than three applications, the state also convenes a panel to determine which projects to forward for national consideration. Applications may come directly from landowners, or a landowner may work with a land trust to help facilitate the process.

The national prioritized list is submitted to Congress as part of the President's budget proposal. The final budget agreement determines how many of the projects will receive funding. Over the past few years annual appropriations have been around \$90 million, which funds approximately 15-20 projects out of the 60 or so that are submitted.

Appropriations come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is made up of revenue from offshore drilling for oil and gas.

Projects that rise to the top of the list must meet Forest Legacy criteria very strongly (see FLP Project Scoring Guidance under "Files"), and demonstrate national significance regarding the impact of the forest land on the local or regional economy and on environmental values such as water quality and habitat for key species.

The grant process is lengthy. Often the time between applying for a grant and actually closing on a funded project is two to three years.

For more information see the Forest Legacy FAQ document, also posted on this site under "Files".