

NEWS RELEASE

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Lands Commissioner Sutherland Supports Proposed Blanchard Forest Management Strategies *Environmental review begins April 30*

OLYMPIA – Washington’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will begin environmental review on proposed Blanchard Forest Management Strategies, announced Doug Sutherland, Commissioner of Public Lands.

“I have studied the Blanchard Forest Strategies Group proposal,” said **Sutherland**. “They did an outstanding job, and I think their recommendations will help us accomplish all of the diverse benefits that Blanchard Forest trust lands can produce. I also reviewed all of the public input regarding the Strategies Group recommendations, and found that the public’s remarks reflect the full spectrum of issues addressed by the group, and reinforced the usefulness of their proposal.”

DNR’s proposal that now will go through environmental review includes the Strategies Group’s conceptual recommendations with a few minor changes. The proposal blends the continued revenue production for Skagit County services, with diverse habitats and different recreation experiences for visitors. A ‘core’ of about 1,600 acres on top of the mountain would be managed for older forest conditions. Trails link to Larrabee State Park in the northwest and Samish Bay in the southwest. DNR added a few elements that better incorporate recreation and education components to the proposal.

The proposal supports the important role of ‘working forests’ and the timber that fuels the natural resource economy in the area. A key element is financial compensation to the State Forest trust for lands protected in the ‘core.’ A standing advisory group would work with DNR’s forest land managers to offer input on proposed timber harvest designs and other activities on Blanchard trust lands into the future.

Legislature assists Blanchard Forest efforts with \$4 million

Due to the efforts by the Strategies Group members and DNR, the 2007 legislature has provided

\$4 million for DNR to purchase forest parcels adjacent to Blanchard to help sustain long-term forestlands for the State Forest trust of Skagit County, helping to compensate for those lands that will not be harvested in the Blanchard Forest ‘core.’

Strategies Group member **Mitch Friedman** said: “Our grandkids will be able to enjoy the same scenic views of the Chuckanuts that we do now: forested slopes without subdivisions or ridge-top trophy homes. The reason is this breakthrough agreement and the help of the Commissioner and the Legislature to move it forward.” Friedman is Executive Director of Conservation Northwest.

The next step is to take the proposal through the environmental review process, to make sure that we have not missed some unintended negative environmental consequences with the proposed strategies. Our region staff will lead that review, and then I'll take a look at the results before making a final decision on the strategies.

"We are very pleased to be moving forward with the united vision that will have a lasting positive outcome on the protection of our natural resources in both their productivity and beauty," said group member Kendra Smith, representing the Skagit County trust beneficiaries.

SEPA review April 30 through May 16

Under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), DNR will offer an opportunity for comment on the potential environmental impacts of the proposed strategies. DNR is the lead agency for the SEPA environmental review process. The responsible official has determined that the Proposed Blanchard Strategies do not exceed a significant level of environmental impact.

This proposal will be filed in DNR's SEPA Center in Olympia on April 30, 2007. Comments on this proposed 'Determination of Non-Significance' will be welcomed until **4:30 p.m. on May 16, 2007**. Submit comments to the SEPA Center at dnrmisepacenter@dnr.wa.gov, or Washington State Department of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 47015, Olympia, Washington, 98504-7015.

On April 30, documents about this proposal, including SEPA Threshold Determination, SEPA Checklist, proposed strategies and other information can be found on DNR's website: www.dnr.wa.gov .

Blanchard Forest Strategies Group

Blanchard Forest Strategies Group was a facilitated group process involving a representative of DNR and nine other participants representing the diverse community associated with Blanchard Forest. The Group developed and recommended a set of conceptual strategies for the management of Blanchard Forest state trust lands, a 4,827-acre working forest. The recommendations needed to be consistent with the legislature's direction to DNR for managing State Forest trust lands. DNR provided the Group with working forest guiding principles and policy framework. The flexibility in that framework allowed the group the opportunity to develop innovative and creative management alternatives for Blanchard Forest. The framework included producing sustainable revenue to the trust beneficiaries in Skagit County while providing ecological and social benefits, including recreational opportunities.

State trust lands, managed with care

DNR manages 3 million acres of trust lands to provide revenue for specific beneficiaries and benefits for the public. Revenue helps fund construction of public schools statewide, universities, other state educational institutions and prisons, and funds services in many counties as well as contributing to the state general fund. Revenue-producing activities on state trust lands include harvest of timber and forest products, leasing of agricultural lands (orchards, vineyards, row crops, dryland crops, and grazing), mineral leases, and leasing of communication sites and commercial properties.

Commissioner of Public Lands, Doug Sutherland, who administers DNR, is Washington's 12th Commissioner of Public Lands since statehood in 1889.

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