



Community Forest Training Program: Ownership, Governance, and Funding

December 2, 2025

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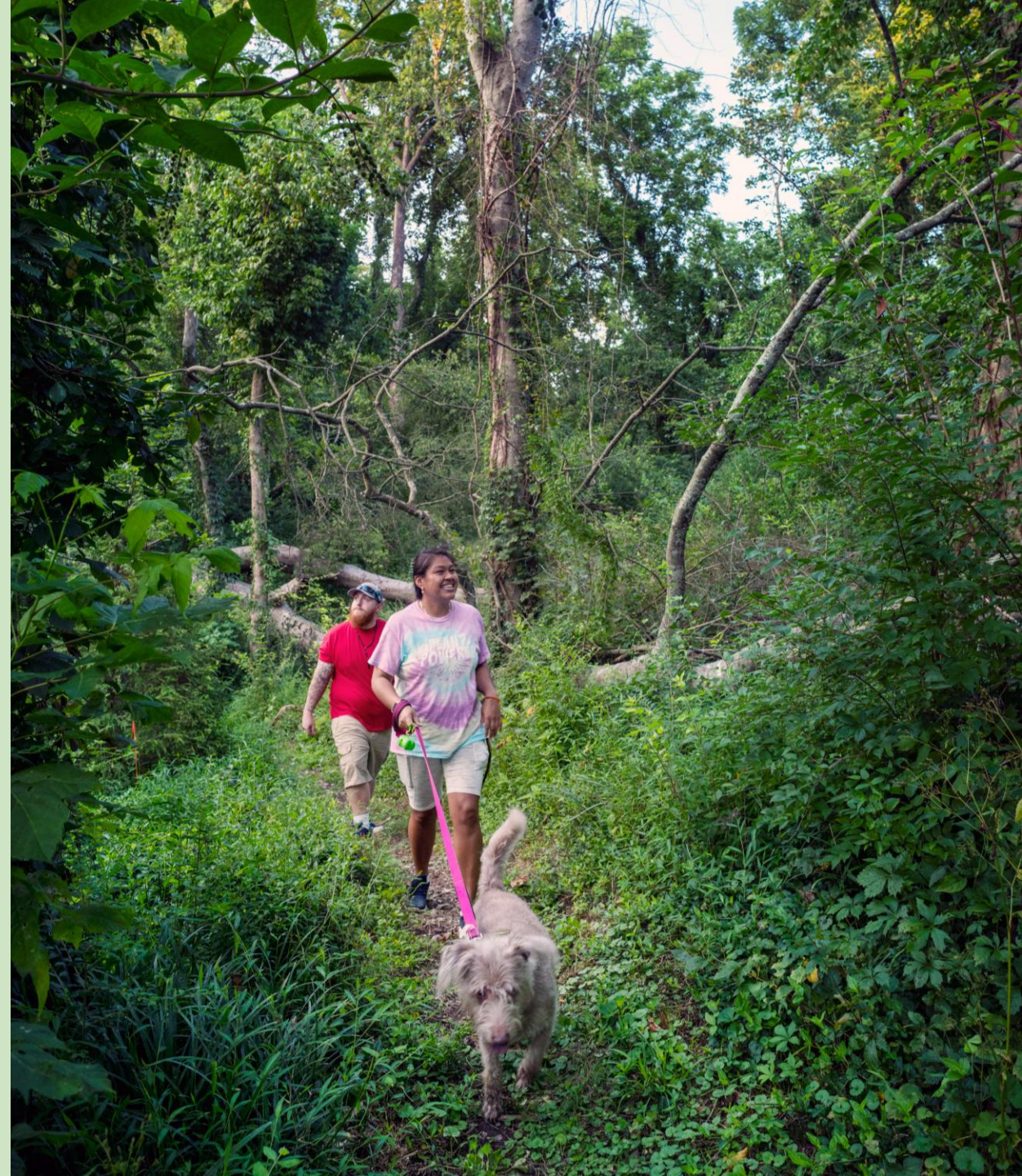
Welcome!

Warm-Up Poll: Which of the funding sources listed have you used for a community forest **or** other conservation project? (Select all that apply.)



Agenda

- Session 1 Recap
- Ownership, Governance, & Funding Models for Community Forests
- Panel Discussion: *Exploring Community Forest Models Across the Country*
- Q&A
- Next Steps



Defining Community Forests

What makes a community forest different than other forms of conservation land?

1. Community ownership

Municipal or county ownership, land trust NGO ownership

2. Community participation in management

Stakeholder committees, governmental commissions, facilitated public meetings, town votes, etc.

3. Benefits flow back to the community

Community benefits tied to community priorities: economic (timber or drinking water), social (recreational access or outdoor education), ecological (wildlife corridors or wetlands)

4. Permanent protection

Conservation easement, deed restrictions, or grant agreements

Benefits of Community Forests

For the forest...

- Local stable ownership
- Long-term sustainable stewardship
- Habitat protection and connectivity
- Water quality protection
- Slowing fragmentation
- Conserved forever

For the community...

- Economic vitality
 - Timber
 - Recreation
 - Tourism
- Community resilience
 - Drinking water protection
 - Flood resilience
- Preserve local character
- Build community
- Open access & recreation
- Outdoor classroom

Setting the Table for Success

- ❑ **Be intentional about how you engage citizens and experts.** Community forests require a participatory process that's different from a traditional land protection process. The more you're intentional about inviting people in and blending community input with rigorous expertise, the better result you will get.
- ❑ **Expect a longer timeline.** These projects do not happen fast – if you've never been through the process, the idea that it could take 18-36 months might seem surprising.
- ❑ **Pick a compelling property.** The land should have unique value to the people that live in that place. It's one of the ways you get people to show up and go through a longer process.
- ❑ **You don't need a piece of land to start this process.** Know that your starting point can be different depending on where your community is.
- ❑ **Identify a local champion.** Every project needs someone or some group of people that live in the community and have this as their priority. Outside orgs can help with the real estate piece, but longevity and long-term success requires sustained community leadership.
- ❑ **Establish a mechanism for effective community leadership.** This process can't be owned or led by a municipal agency or professionalized staff alone. Community members must have a voice and authority in the process. A committee or other volunteer board that fits within your municipal structure is key.

Explore Community Forest Resources

Looking for more? Explore our website to find...

- More information on the Community Forest Training Program
- Recordings and presentations from this series
- Community forest reports, case studies and resources

10MinuteWalk.org/Communities-of-Practice-Community-Forests



Community Forest Training Program: Series Overview

5-month, virtual workshop series designed to provide land managers with the **strategies, skills, and resources** needed to create and sustain community forests.

Session Dates:

- November 4: Principles of Community Forests
- December 2: Ownership, Governance, and Funding
- January 6: Community Engagement and Visioning
- February 3: Management and Stewardship
- March 3: Project Implementation





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Rodger Krussman
Vice President,
Director of Conservation



Community Forest Ownership & Governance

Who can own a community forest? How are decisions made about a community forest?

4 basic structures, with nuances:

**Municipal
Ownership**

**County
Ownership**

**Nonprofit
Ownership**

**Tribal & Indigenous
Ownership**

Community Forest Ownership & Governance

Who can own a community forest? How are decisions made about a community forest?

4 basic structures, with nuances:

Municipal Ownership

1. Volunteer-based Governance (Selectboard, Conservation Commission)
2. Professionalized Management (Parks, Forestry)
3. User Group Management/Operation

County Ownership

1. Professionalized Governance
 - Elected officials dictate staffing

Nonprofit Ownership

1. Land Trust Ownership (local or regional)
2. User Group Ownership
3. Partnership with municipality or county

Tribal & Indigenous Ownership

1. Tribe Ownership
 - One or multiple tribes
2. Tribal or Indigenous Nonprofit Ownership

Community Forest Governance

How are decisions made about a community forest?

- For a project to be a community forest, community must lead decision-making.
- Specific governance structures depends on state laws.
- Link governance model to your project's specific goals/benefits.
- One size fits *one*!

Examples

- Multi-town ownership with multi-town board
- Management Committee
- Conservation Commission

Questions to consider:

- How will the community members who use/benefit from the project participate in decision-making processes?
- How will you set up seats at the table for other stakeholders (beyond professional staff or your Board of Directors)?

Community Forest Funding

How are community forests funded?

Federal & Regional

- USFS Community Forest Program
- USFS Forest Legacy Program
- USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
- NFWF Mitigation Funds
- USFWS Cooperative Endg. Species Grant
- DOT Scenic Byways Funds

State and Local

- State Conservation / Open Space Funds
- Municipal Bonds
- Clean Water Funds (SRF)
- Community Economic Development Funds

Private

- Philanthropy
- Private Grants
- Private Investors (land banking or shared revenue streams)

Revenue Generation

- Responsible Extraction (timber, etc.)
- Recreation
- Carbon Credits



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Panel Discussion: Exploring Community Forest Models Across the Country



Erin McKay
Chelan County
Natural Resources
Department, Forest
Health Program
Manager



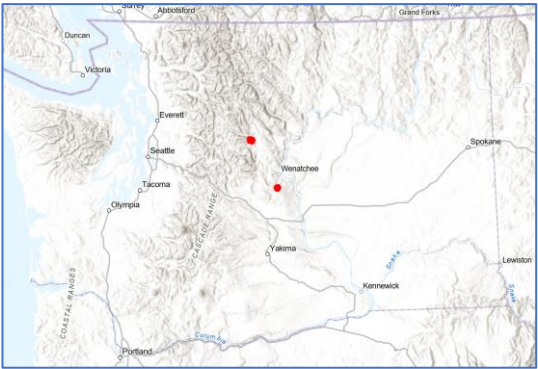
Matt Lessnau
City of Ilwaco
Council Position 4,
Mayor Pro tem



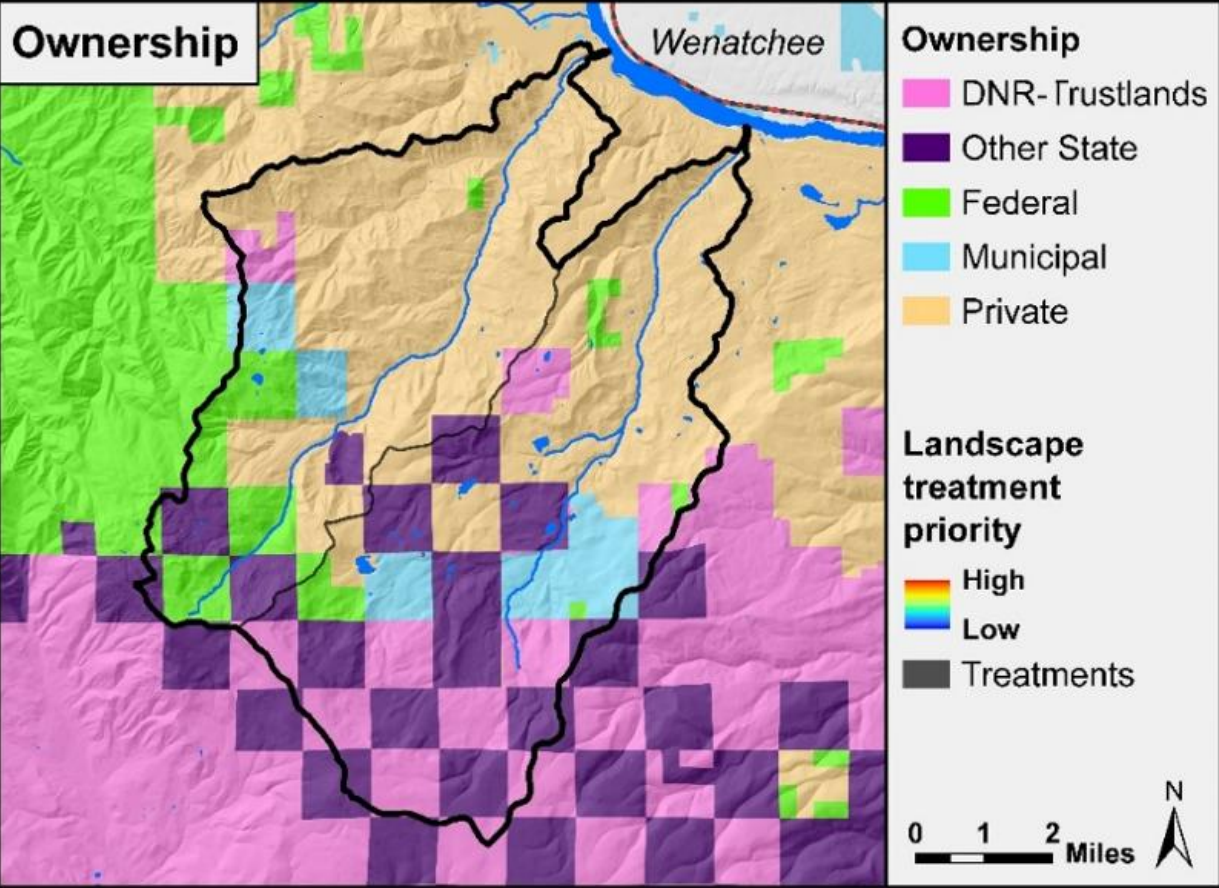
Rodger Krussman
(Moderator)

Community Forest Management

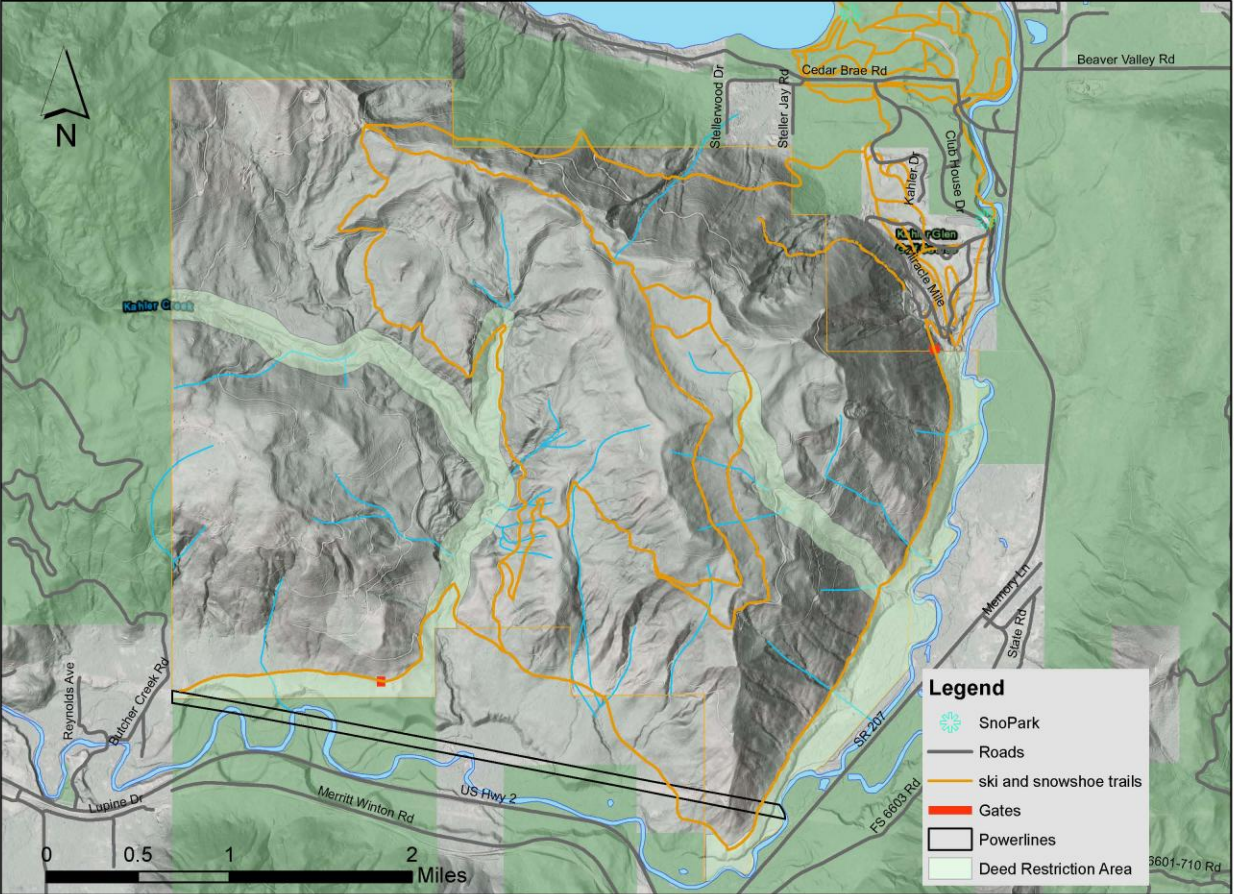
In Chelan County, Washington



Stemilt-Squilchuck Community Forest



Nason Ridge Community Forest



Stemilt-Squilchuck Community Forest

- County acquired ~3,400 acres in 2012 from Longview Fibre
- Patchwork ownership with State, Private, and Federal lands
- USFS Community Forest Program and local grants and donations
- Managed by Chelan County through the Stemilt Partnership
- Water, wildlife, and recreation
- 2018 DNR Priority Planning area for Forest Health Restoration
- Cross-boundary landscape scale forest restoration underway
- Over 3,000 acres treated across ownerships since 2018 to shift forest structure and increase wildfire and ecosystem resilience

Nason Ridge Community Forest

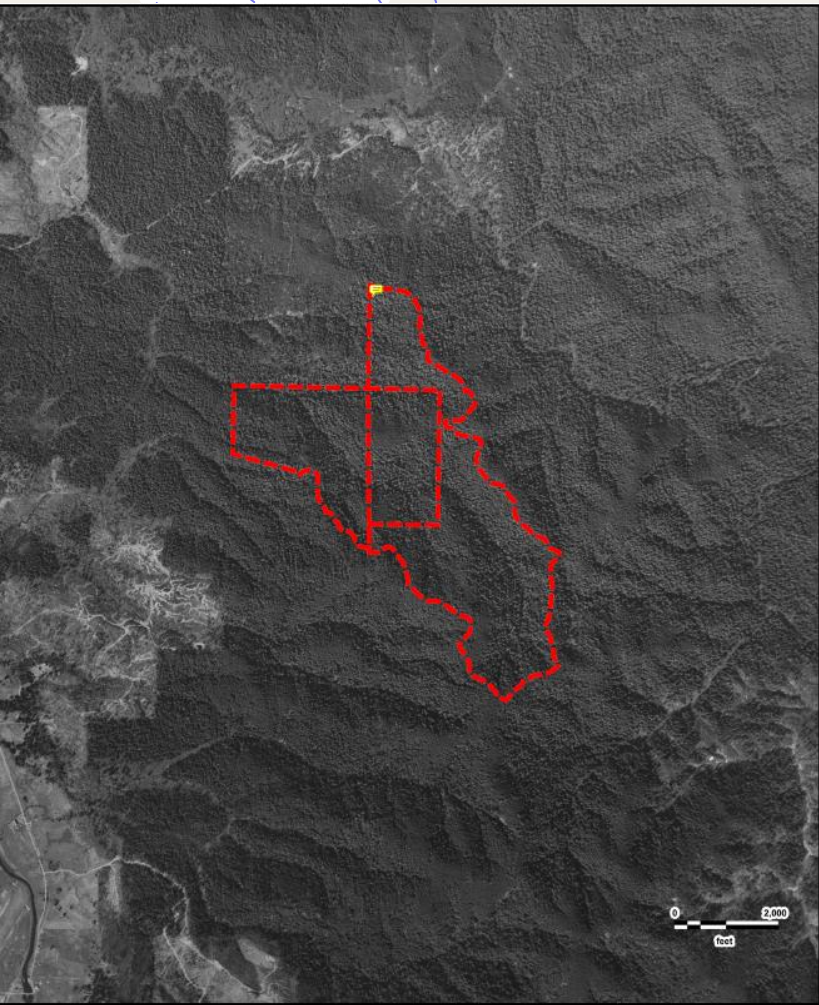
- County acquired ~3,700 acres in 2022
- Previously industrial timber land
- RCO Community Forest Grant, RCO Salmon Recovery Grant, WA Dept of Ecology Water Quality Grant, and local donations
- Nason Ridge Stewardship Group provides input on management decisions
- Watershed and Forest Restoration
- Recreation Access
- Future of active management

SUCCESS IN ILWACO

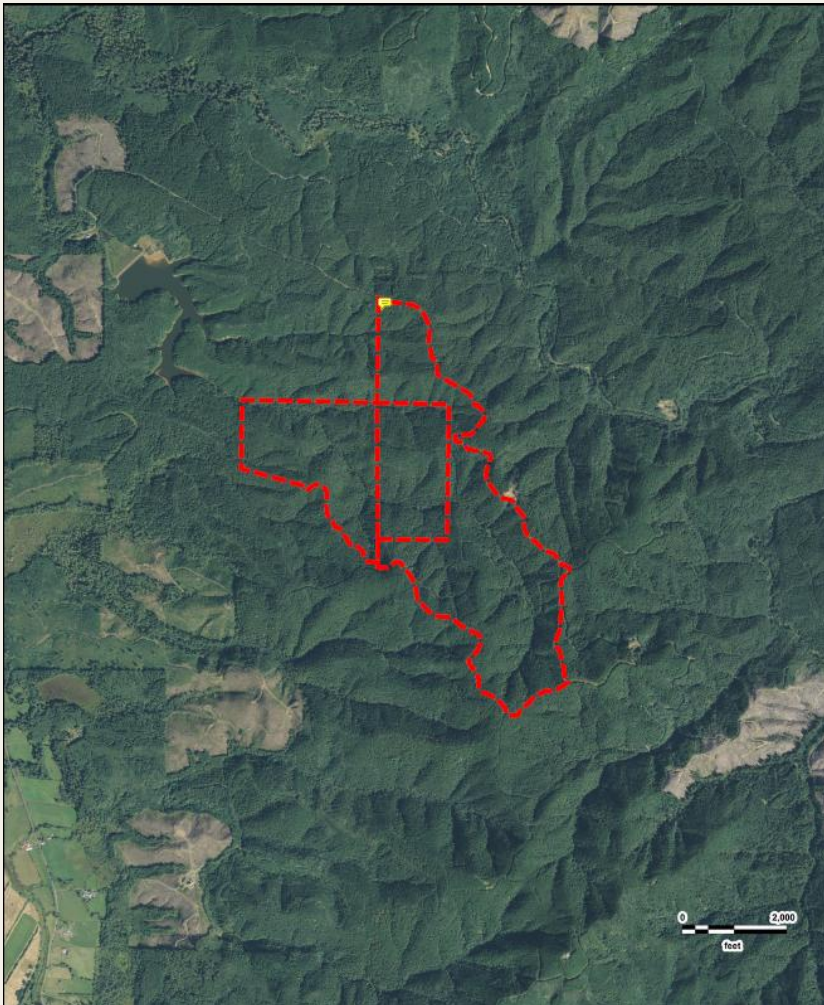
BEAR RIDGE COMMUNITY FOREST +

MATT LESSNAU, CITY OF ILWACO

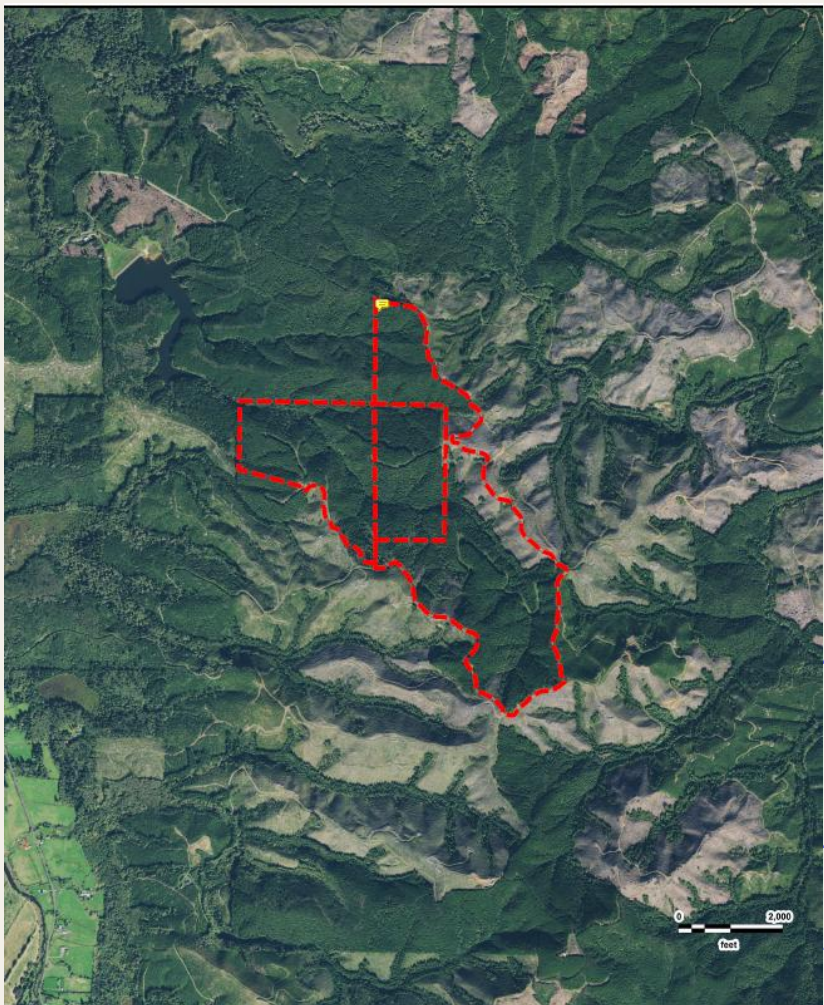




Bear Ridge Community Forest
1956



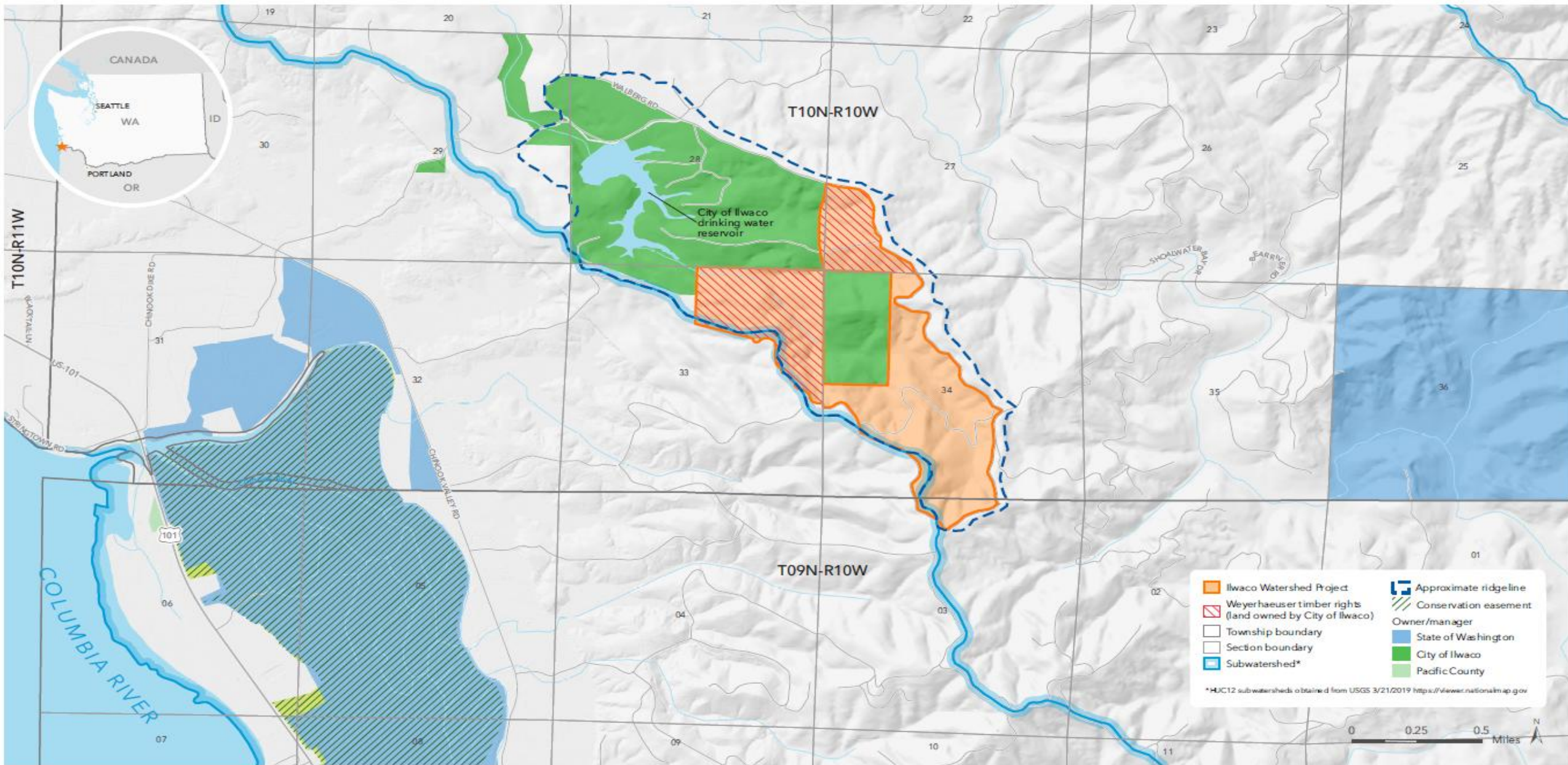
Bear Ridge Community Forest
2009



Bear Ridge Community Forest
2019



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City of Ilwaco Watershed Project

PACIFIC COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Exhibit B



Funding Strategy & Execution

+Funding Sources

- + Cash on-hand: Timber harvest in 2019
- + State: DOE + legislative appropriation
- + Federal: USDA + congressional community projects / earmarks (HUD)

+Due diligence

- + Grant writing, negotiating, surveys, timber cruise, appraisal, boundary line adjustments, audits, grant requirements, site visits, accounting...



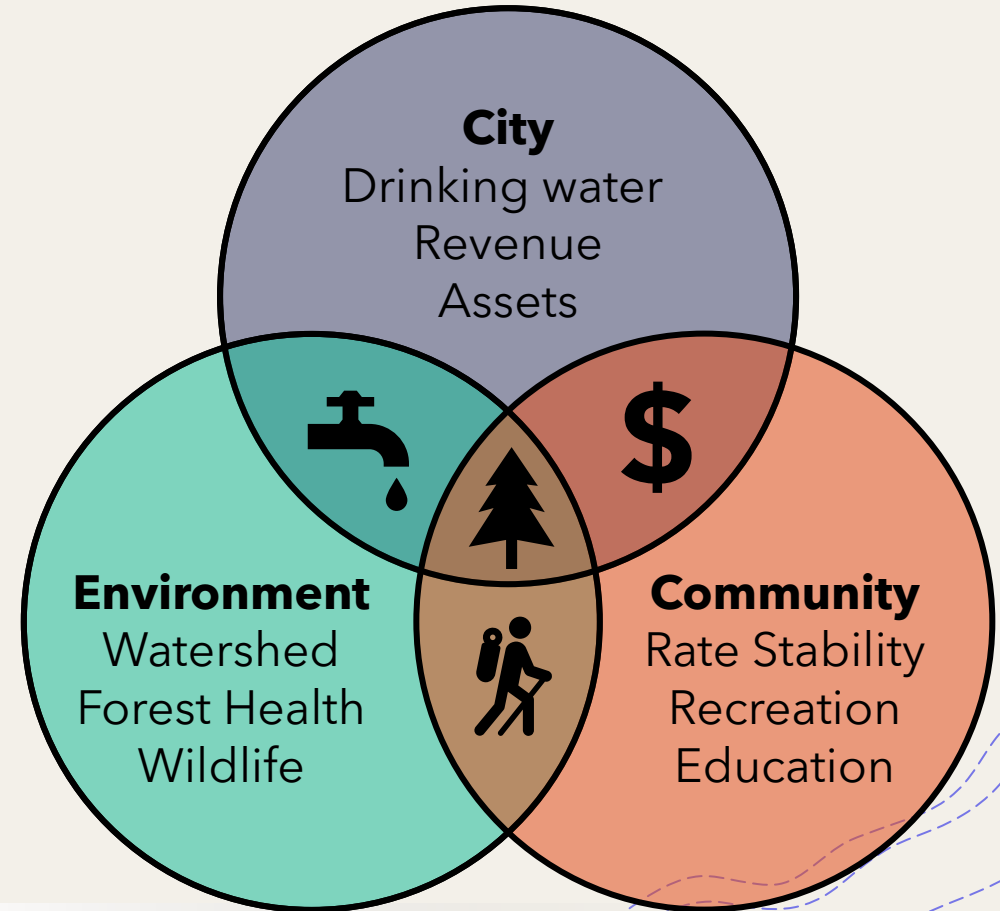
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Protected Watershed & Diverse Asset

+Project Goals

- +Protect water quality
- +Enhance forest health & resilience
- +Social and economic benefits through education & recreation

100% City Owned & Managed



Thank you!

Matt Lessnau

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www.ilwaco-wa.gov/bear-ridge-community-forest



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Q&A

Please share your questions in the chat!



Exit Ticket

Please complete a brief, 2-minute exit ticket to help inform future sessions!

Scan the QR code or click here:

<https://forms.office.com/r/7EAB7gedA6>

Community Forest Training Program: Session 2 Exit Ticket





Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,364 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places; raised \$93 billion in public funding for parks and public lands; and connected nearly 9.4 million people to the outdoors.

To learn more, visit [tpl.org](https://www.tpl.org).

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Next Steps

- Complete the Exit Ticket:
<https://forms.office.com/r/7EAB7gedA6>
- Report-Out Slides & Recording
- **Session 3: January 6, 2025**
Community Engagement

Thank You!