

For Immediate Release

DNR Selling Off Century-Old Forest Near Discovery Bay

The Legacy Forest Defense Coalition filed a lawsuit this month in Jefferson County Superior Court, alleging multiple and continuing violations by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources of its own Habitat Conservation Plan and Policy for Sustainable Forests.



Owl Perched on a Tree Branch in the Last Crocker Timber Sale
Photograph by Joshua Wright

The fate of thousands of acres of rare, old lowland forests hang in the balance as DNR, under the leadership of Commissioner Hilary Franz, proceeds to hand forests like this over to commercial logging companies.

On December 7, 2023, the Legacy Forest Defense Coalition appealed the decision by the Board of Natural Resources to approve the "Last Crocker" timber sale. The appeal was filed in Jefferson County Superior Court.

This timber sale would clearcut one of the last remaining blocks of nearly century-old lowland forest on the east side of the Olympic Peninsula.

"Natural lowland forests have all but disappeared from the Puget Sound lowlands," said Stephen Kropp, Director of the Legacy Forest Defense Coalition. "Protecting the few old, natural or 'legacy' forest remnants is critical to preserve the natural genetic and biological diversity of the region, improve the resilience of our forests to climate change, and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires."

Understanding the Value of this Unique and Special Place

Drive north on Highway 101 toward Discovery Bay, then turn right onto Leland Valley Road East, and you will see Douglas fir trees towering close to 180 feet over the roadway. Up on the hillside to your right, is one of the last remaining century-old, lowland forests on the north end of the Olympic Peninsula.

The forest, located in the middle of an historic glacial outwash plain, is composed of a diverse mosaic of open stands populated by century-old fir and cedar trees, ancient standing dead snags, patches of red elderberry, huckleberry, and waist-high sword fern. Traveling through this legacy forest is truly a journey of discovery.

This forest was selectively logged, probably sometime in the 1920's, and left to grow back on its own. As a result, much of the original vegetation, understory trees, standing snags, and downed trees were preserved. Because this forest has never been sprayed with herbicides, and was allowed to regenerate naturally, it closely resembles the natural and old growth forests that once dominated the Olympic Peninsula.

DNR Violating Its Own Permit

"Our interest is in seeing DNR manage its land in a manner that is consistent with the objectives of its Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), and existing policies that are intended to conserve biodiversity and prevent the future listing of endangered species," said Kropp.

Old-growth forest management targets are the primary means provided in the HCP and DNR's Policy for Sustainable Forests for achieving those objectives on the Olympic Peninsula. Federal permits require that DNR maintain or restore between 10 to 15 percent of state forestlands to old growth conditions by the year 2096.

Currently, DNR is behind in meeting its old-growth forest targets across most of Western Washington. The Legacy Forest Defense Coalition has presented dozens of documents, letters, and reports, and a wealth of supporting data to DNR that clearly demonstrates that their permit requirements and policy objectives cannot be met if they continue logging those forests that are most likely to achieve old growth status by 2096.

There are about 76 acres of older, natural, structurally complex forest that would be destroyed by the "Last Crocker" timber sale. LFDC is asking the court to invalidate the Board's approval of the timber sale based on DNR's failure to account for the timber sale's probable and significant adverse impacts to the environment, and to prohibit DNR from commercially logging any part of the forest that may be classified as structurally complex.

More information on this timber sale is available here:

<https://www.wlfdc.org/last-crocker>