



Legislation Text

File #: 2023-0316, **Version:** 2

A MOTION requesting the executive to identify and analyze mature forests in King County, and to transmit two reports.

WHEREAS, forests provide multiple benefits on both the local and global scale, and

WHEREAS, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated that forest management activities play a key role in the mitigation of climate change, and the Washington state Legislature has found that forests are one of the most effective resources that can absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and

WHEREAS, King County's 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan states that there are substantial carbon and climate benefits to maintaining, protecting, restoring, and expanding the more than 811,000 acres of forest land in King County, and that recent studies combining carbon sequestration potential and risk of loss due to wildfire, insects, and disease rank the coastal and Cascade forests of Oregon and Washington among the highest priority for protection, and

WHEREAS, in 2021, the executive developed a 30-Year Forest Plan, which lays out priorities and goals associated with King County's forests, as well as strategies for achieving those over the next thirty years, and

WHEREAS, in addition to greenhouse gas mitigation benefits, the 30-Year Forest Plan states that King County's forests provide benefits to human health, salmon habitat, and water quality and quantity, in addition to the economic benefits of timber, and

WHEREAS, "mature forests" are forests that were logged in the first half of the twentieth century or earlier, that naturally regenerated rather than being replanted, and that retain biological, structural, functional, or genetic legacies of natural and old-growth forests, and

WHEREAS, mature forests, on their way to becoming old-growth habitats, embody the species

diversity, genetic richness, and intricate structural complexity of their natural predecessors, and

WHEREAS, these older forests store more carbon in standing wood, downed woody debris and in the soil compared to younger ecosystems, and the conversion to younger plantation forests results in an immediate release of carbon when logged, as well as a reduction in the overall carbon store because of the current shorter harvest rotation age, and

WHEREAS, the significant historical logging impact on Western Washington's old-growth forests necessitates the preservation of the remaining, unprotected mature forests for safeguarding the essential biological, genetic, and ecological heritage that once characterized the Pacific Northwest's forests, as well as retaining all the benefits mature forests provide, and

WHEREAS, twenty-one counties, including King County, deeded roughly 546,000 acres of forest lands to the state during the 1920s and 1930s and, in exchange, the state committed to managing the properties as trust lands and giving most of the revenue from timber sales and other revenue-producing activities back to the county and junior taxing districts, and

WHEREAS, the state has managed the state forest trust lands within King County to balance economic, environmental, and recreational interests for nearly one hundred years, and

WHEREAS, The Washington Supreme Court affirmed in *Conservation Northwest, et al. v. Commissioner of Public Lands, et al.* that... there are "myriad ways DNR could choose to generate revenue from the state and forest board lands or otherwise put them to use for the benefit of the enumerated beneficiaries," and

WHEREAS, King County has benefited from the state's responsible stewardship of state forest trust lands, which have provided a valuable source of revenue and economic support for the county and its people but, in light of the climate emergency and other benefits that forests provide, some of the state forest trust lands in King County may better serve the community if owned and managed by the county and protected from future timber harvesting;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The council requests that the department of natural resources and parks undertake a study on mature forests in King County. The study should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. A definition of mature forests using the Washington state Department of Natural Resources definition of Maturation I classification in Guide to Identifying Mature & Old-Growth Forests, Van Pelt 2007, or in any updated definition based on best available forest ecology science;
2. An analysis of the total acreage and ownership of mature forests that are subject to timber harvesting;
3. A map showing the location of mature forests that are subject to timber harvesting;
4. An analysis of which mature forests are both subject to timber harvesting and either:
 - a. owned by King County; or
 - b. managed by the state as any type of state forest trust lands;
5. Identification of tribal governments that, as comanagers of the mature forests, shall be consulted when considering county applications for the Trust Land Transfer program and the Natural Climate Solutions program or when considering reconveyance of state forest trust lands or substantial changes in management plans for county-owned forest lands;
6. An analysis of the revenue impacts to the trust beneficiaries, including King County, if timber harvesting were to be discontinued on the lands identified in section A.4. of this motion. The analysis should take into account opportunities to generate revenue from sale of carbon credits and through selective harvesting for forest health;
7. An analysis of the greenhouse gas impacts if timber harvesting were to be discontinued on the lands identified in section A.4. of this motion. For parcels where site-specific information is available, the analysis should make use of that information in analyzing greenhouse gas impacts. Where no such information exists, the department should estimate based on the best available information;

8. Based on the greenhouse gas impacts identified in through the analysis in section A.7. of this motion, a calculation, using the United States Environmental Protection Agency methodology for calculating the social cost of carbon, of the socialized financial costs if timber harvesting were to be discontinued on the lands identified in section A.4. of this motion;

9. An analysis of how preservation of the forests identified in section A.4. of this motion would contribute to achievement of the greenhouse gas reduction targets identified in the county's Strategic Climate Action Plan;

10. For any mature forests that are managed by the state as state forest trust lands, an analysis of whether those lands are eligible for reconveyance or another type of transfer to county ownership; and

11. Identification of parcels that would be strong candidates for state funding through the Trust Land Transfer program or the Natural Climate Solutions program to mitigate fiscal impacts of preserving the parcels.

B. The executive should electronically file two reports. The first report should contain the information in section A.1. through 5. of this motion and section A.10. and 11. of this motion, and the second report should contain the information in section A.6. through 9. of this motion. The executive should electronically file the first report and a proposed motion acknowledging receipt of the report no later than June 30, 2024, with the clerk of the council, who shall retain an electronic copy and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers, the council chief of staff, and the lead staff for transportation, economy and environment committee or its successor. The executive should electronically file the second report and a proposed motion acknowledging receipt of the report no later than September 30, 2024, with the clerk of the council, who shall retain an electronic copy and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers, the council chief of staff, and the lead staff for transportation, economy and environment committee or its successor.