



Legislation Text

File #: 2023-0314, **Version:** 2

A MOTION requesting the executive to develop and transmit a study regarding state forest trust lands currently managed for King County by the Washington state Department of Natural Resources.

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 sustainable timber, and

WHEREAS, twenty-one counties 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, in 2023, the governor signed into law Substitute House Bill 1460, which became Chapter 383, Laws of Washington 2023, and which established a new trust land transfer program, through which the Washington state Department of Natural Resources is authorized to transfer state forest trust lands to other public agencies, such as King County, and

WHEREAS, there are other mechanisms allowable under state law with which the state can transfer, sell, or otherwise convey state forest trust lands to local government ownership, and

WHEREAS, today, some of the state forest trust lands in King County may better serve the community if owned or managed by the county, and

WHEREAS, local ownership or management of state forest trust lands in King County would enable the county to have a greater role in decision-making processes, ensuring that the interests and needs of county residents are addressed to the fullest extent possible, and maximizing transparency and inclusivity, and

WHEREAS, local ownership or management of state forest trust lands in King County would also provide opportunities for enhanced collaboration between the county, local governments, and community groups, fostering partnerships that support sustainable forest management, economic growth, and public health, and

WHEREAS, the King County's ownership or management of state forest trust lands in King County would strengthen the county's ability to protect and enhance natural resources, implement innovative forest management practices and conservation strategies that combat climate change, promote outdoor recreation, provide green jobs, and foster a deeper connection between the community and the land, and

WHEREAS, county residents may be best served by some of the state forest trust lands remaining under state ownership and management as working forests, continuing to provide reliable, long-term timber supply

for homes, hospitals, and schools, revenue for the county, and green jobs for residents;

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

A. The council requests that the executive develop a study for state forest trust lands currently managed for King County by the Washington state Department of Natural Resources ("county trust lands"). The study should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. A review of all methods allowable under state law for county trust lands to be transferred from state ownership to county ownership, and a discussion of the specific benefits and risks to King County associated with each method. The methods may include, but are not limited to, reconveyance, trust land transfer, direct transfer, and land exchange;

2. A discussion of the potential short-term and long-term benefits and risks to the county of taking ownership of some or all county trust lands, including but not limited to environmental, health, equity and social justice, and financial or fiscal issues;

3. Identification of tribal governments that, as comanagers of forest lands, shall be consulted when considering transfer of lands through any of the methods identified in subsection A.1. of this motion;

4. Information on the amount of revenue generated for the county over the past decade through the Washington state Department of Natural Resources's management activities;

5. An evaluation of whether county management of county trust lands would support existing county efforts, including the Strategic Climate Action Plan, 30-Year Forest Plan, Clean Water Healthy Habitat Initiative, Parks Open Space Plan, Land Conservation Initiative, and salmon recovery efforts;

6. For each parcel or contiguous block of parcels of county trust lands:

a. the location of the land and size;

b. the forest type and age class;

c. identification of any recreational or other non-forestry uses currently present on the land;

d. any available information on logging that has taken place in recent decades, including dates and

amounts of timber logged;

e. an assessment of the conservation and recreation value of land, including but not limited to:

(1) what benefits acquisition of the land would provide to the county and its residents;

(2) which means of transfer identified in the analysis requested by section A.1. of this motion is

recommended; and

f. a recommendation by the executive on which parcels should be prioritized for acquisition;

7. Estimated timeframes for any transfers county trust lands identified under section A.6.f. of this section;

8. If a land exchange method is recommended as a means of transfer, an identification of what criteria the county would use to identify county-owned lands to be exchanged;

9. An estimate of the annual operations and maintenance costs for acquired county trust lands, and any other ongoing costs and lost or gained revenues associated with county ownership of these lands, including the feasibility of generating revenues through carbon credit sales, selective thinning for forest health, or other means;

10. For any county trust lands recommended to remain in state ownership, a list of potential strategies for cooperatively maximizing the environmental, social, and economic benefits of the forests contained therein in close collaboration with the Washington state Department of Natural Resources; and

11. Recommendations on any changes to state laws or rules related to reconveyance that would be necessary to align with the county's priorities and goals relating to forest conservation. Recommended changes may include, but should not be limited to, changes to the requirement in RCW 79.22.300 that reconveyed lands be used for public park purposes.

B. The executive should electronically file the report no later than July 1, 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 the transportation,

economy and environment committee or its successor.