



Local Leaders,

*This is our fourth in a series of emails to elevate some core issues we've been working on. Let us know what you think or if there are any other issues spotlights you'd be interested in.*

This is an information heavy email today – if you don't have time to read it through, we encourage you to check out [this information on community forests](#) and reach out to us if you think this work is a good fit for your community and you'd like to partner with us.

**Let's talk about community forestry.** Community forests are working forests owned and managed by municipalities, government agencies, tribes and non-profit organizations for the benefit of local communities.

Community forests allow people living in local areas to have a direct stake in the ownership, use, and long-term management of important forest lands, protecting their working status in perpetuity. In centering the needs of local stakeholders, community forests act as critical tools to safeguard and unlock the economic, ecological, and social benefits Washington's working forests hold.

Community forests can deliver the triple-bottom line for communities, by providing the unique social, ecological and economic benefits communities need. These benefits include jobs in forestry and wood product production, public access and recreation, cultural activities, educational opportunities, clean and abundant drinking water, climate resilience, and fish and wildlife habitat.

With the conclusion of this legislative session, we're celebrating the inclusion of **\$16.3 million** in the capital budget to fund projects in **a new Community Forest Program** administered by the state's Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). This is a new and exciting program that supports the development of community forest projects across Washington, helping to maintain the state's working forest heritage.

**What is the Community Forest Program at RCO?**

The Community Forest Program provides funding to community forest projects to help them acquire forestland. On purchased land, funding may also support development of recreation facilities and restoration of forest health or habitats.

The grant program is open to local governments (like the ones you represent!), tribes, and nonprofits, and addresses a critical funding gap in the state: acquiring working forestlands, and managing them on behalf of local communities. Funds from the RCO program are also critical to help community forest projects leverage funds from federal, state, and private funding sources.

[Learn more about RCO's Community Forest Program and how to apply.](#)

### **What projects received funding this year?**

The \$16.3 million for the 2021-23 biennium supports six projects driven by local communities in Chelan, Jefferson, Pierce, Klickitat, Kittitas, and Kitsap Counties.

Three of these projects are highlighted here:

- [Check out this video from Mt. Adams Resources Stewards](#) about the importance of legislative funding for community forest projects, and its now-funded efforts to expand the **Mt. Adams Community Forest** in southern Washington.

Our sister organization Washington Environmental Council—alongside Mt. Adams Resource Stewards and a team of partners—studied the economic impacts of the Mt. Adams Community Forest between 2014 and 2017 and released a report with our findings. Highlights include a contribution of \$8 million in countywide economic benefits and 59 months of full-time equivalent employment in the local economy. Follow these links for a [summary](#) or the [full report](#).

- Jefferson Land Trust received funding to acquire land for the **Chimacum Ridge Community Forest**. [Check out this video on the early visioning for this project](#), and how it will contribute to the local community and businesses.
- The **North Kitsap Divide Block Community Forest** was also funded, is the largest remaining block of timberland at-risk for conversion in north Kitsap County, and is a key missing link in the planned route of the Sound to Olympics trail.

We hope the RCO Community Forests Program will be funded at this level or higher moving forward, so it can support the development of community forest projects across the state for years to come.

### **Why this matters for *your* community?**

This grant program is a new tool that can help communities like yours address local issues, such as increased fragmentation and conversion of working forestland, loss of forest sector jobs, higher wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface, and lack of secure public access for a diversity of community members. With this grant funding, communities are able to preserve working forestland while determining how a community forest can best serve their specific needs and interests.

### Local Leadership Opportunities

Consider opportunities to develop community forests in your community, and begin developing plans to [apply for a grant from the Community Forest Program in the future!](#)

### Partner Spotlight: Washington Association of Land Trusts



The Washington Association of Land Trusts (WALT) works to increase the collective strength and excellence of the land trust community in Washington, representing 32 non-profit land trusts across the state. Land trusts are central partners in many current community forest projects, and WALT was instrumental in the legislative effort to fund RCO's Community Forest Program.

[Check out the Washington Association of Land Trusts website for more information](#)

### Staff Spotlight: Rachel Baker



Rachel is the Forest Program Director at Washington Conservation Voters and Washington Environmental Council.

In addition to leading the work and policy direction of the forest team, Rachel currently focuses on policy and advocacy related to sustainable wood products, wildfire, and community forestry.

Contact Information: [r.baker@wcvoters.org](mailto:r.baker@wcvoters.org) // 206.631.2602

Learn more about community forests by visiting Washington Environmental Council's [website](#), or by reaching out to us. We'd love to be your partner in this work.

We'll continue to share information and resources on critical issues. Let us know what else we can do to be a resource for environmental progress in your community.

Best,  
Emily & Danielle

**Emily Krieger** • Political and Civic Engagement  
Manager

**Danielle Shaw** • Government Affairs Manager  
206.496.6484 •

206.631.2644 • [emily@wcvoters.org](mailto:emily@wcvoters.org)  
Pronouns: she/her

[danielle@wcvoters.org](mailto:danielle@wcvoters.org)  
Pronouns: she/her

**Washington Conservation Voters** • [wcvoters.org](http://wcvoters.org)  
1402 Third Avenue | Suite 1400 | Seattle, WA 98101