



October 21, 2024

Governor Jay Inslee  
 Office of the Governor  
 P.O. Box 40002  
 Olympia WA 98504-0002

**RE: Support for \$30 Million Budget Request for Trust Land Transfer Projects for FY 25-26 Biennium**

Dear Governor Inslee:

The 116 undersigned conservation, recreation, and wildlife organizations strongly urge you to include \$30 million in your capital budget proposal for 8 projects in DNR’s Trust Land Transfer (TLT) program.

As you may recall, TLT is a land management tool that is used to reposition economically under-performing DNR managed state trust lands to be managed for their ecological and/or public benefits. The Legislature

provides funding for the value of these lands and DNR uses that revenue to purchase more economic and promising replacement lands to benefit trust beneficiaries.

This year marks the first time that DNR has fully utilized the new framework for project selection established by the passage of HB 1460 in 2023. Six of the eight projects put forth by DNR for consideration will go to federally recognized Tribes – a landmark move for the program. These projects represent the best projects put forth by communities around the state and we urge full funding in your budget proposal.

### Background on Trust Land Transfer

Since its inception in 1989, the TLT program has preserved more than 128,000 acres of state trust land for fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, education, and other community uses. Some of the state’s most treasured places like Mt. Si, Blanchard Mountain, and Deception Pass State Park have benefitted from TLT. At the same time, DNR has also sustained and improved potential economic future returns for schools and local governments. The legislature codified the program during the 2023 session with the passage of HB 1460, modernizing the underutilized tool. DNR has since drastically increased the transparency of the process to nominate, evaluate, approve and prioritize projects, with significant public input. An advisory committee ranked the applications, using criteria similar to that used by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office.

The TLT revitalization bill (HB 1460) also increased the flexibility of the TLT program to allow DNR to better manage its diverse land portfolio and meet the changing public expectations for public land. As a result, six applications from Tribes rose to the top, based on their ecological values, public benefit, community support, economic values and Tribal support. The Board of Natural Resources approved the ranked list of applications to submit to the Legislature for funding at its September 4, 2024 meeting.

### FY 2025-2027 Project Rankings

Project Name	Recipient	County	Size	Estimated value
Beckler	Tulalip Tribes	King	676 acres	\$4,000,000
Okanogan G	Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation	Okanogan	42 acres	\$450,000
Tract C East	Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation	Yakima	2,965 acres	\$4,400,000
Tract C North	Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation	Yakima	4,566 acres	\$6,800,000
Tract S South	Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation	Yakima	2,405 acres	\$3,700,000
Babcock Bench	WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife	Grant	1,071 acres	\$850,000
South Lake Ozette	Quileute Tribe	Clallam	372 acres	\$8,900,000
Middle Fork Snoqualmie	DNR Natural Areas Program	King	95 acres	\$900,000
<b>TOTALS:</b>			<b>12,192 acres</b>	<b>\$30,000,000</b>

Many of these projects will be transferred to Tribes for their stewardship. The parcels are often isolated, with limited existing public access, but important ecological features. For example, the Tract C projects are checkerboard parcels without public access and contain the headwaters of the Klickitat River and valuable habitat for migrating birds on the Pacific Flyway. A trust land transfer of these lands to the Yakama Nation would allow for ongoing protection of ecological resources while also securing funds for more productive and economic replacement lands elsewhere.

Other projects, like the Babcock Bench transfer to WDFW, will also allow for better management of the lands that are not currently producing economic returns to state trusts. They continue a strong tradition of stewardship and conservation in our state, ensuring that the right land manager is administering public land.

### **TLT and the Climate Commitment Act**

Traditionally, the legislature funded TLT from the capital budget's State Building Construction Account. However, when funding from the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) became available during the 2023 legislative session, the legislature decided to fund TLT with both State Building Construction Account funding (\$11.5 million) and the CCA via its Natural Climate Solutions Account (\$8 million). This made sense considering both the carbon sequestration potential for TLT and climate mitigation needs. During the 2024 session, the legislature funded an additional 9 TLT projects from the Natural Climate Solutions for \$10.8 million, contingent on the outcome of Initiative 2117. If I-2117 passes, the legislature should once again fund the TLT program from the State Building Construction Account or other capital budget sources given the significant benefits to the state.

### **End the \$30 million cap**

In addition to the above list, 22 other projects were submitted to DNR and passed their best interest of the trust analysis. With such a robust list of worthy projects, it's clear that DNR needs more funding for the TLT program. Unfortunately, the legislature limited funding to TLT to \$30 million in HB 1460 to address concerns from the timber industry that TLT would be used to remove timber from the harvest base and not be replaced. However, those concerns have been unfounded as DNR has moved quickly to buy replacement land, as noted by a [large purchase in 2023 of working forests in Wahkiakum County](#). We ask that you request the legislature to remove the cap, allowing more funding to flow into conservation and the acquisition of working forests.

### **Trust Land Transfer – A Win for Working Forests and A Win for Conservation**

Funding for trust land transfer continues not just the legacy of conservation in our state, but also protections for working forests. By ensuring funding is available to purchase replacement lands, TLT provides benefits to the timber industry as well. Its innovative structure acknowledges the needs of rural communities for timber industry jobs while providing climate benefits. More land for conservation and fewer working forests lost to conversion is a winning formula for all. As you complete your tenure as Governor, we appreciate your leadership on conservation and climate issues. Your previous support for the revitalization of the Trust Land Transfer tool was instrumental to needed reforms and replenished funding from the legislature.

We urge your continued support for TLT in your budget proposal.

Sincerely,

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