



NEWS

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Nearly 7,000 acres of Forest Land Protected in Puget Sound

Mason County, WA. – The Trust for Public Land, Green Diamond Resource Company and Washington State Department of Natural Resources today announced they have permanently protected 6,967 acres of working forest land in Mason County at the southwestern end of Puget Sound.

The land, located on the Olympic Peninsula between Hood Canal and Case Inlet, will remain in active timber production while protecting water quality and wildlife habitat. It will also be available to the public for hiking, mountain biking and other outdoor recreation.

“Protecting these productive forestlands from future development safeguards local jobs, keeps vital habitat intact for wildlife and protects the quality of Puget Sound while providing public access for outdoor recreation,” said Paul Kundtz, northwest director for The Trust for Public Land. “It’s a real win-win for everyone involved.”

The land is owned by Green Diamond Resource Company, a Washington-based privately held forest products company, which will continue to manage it under a conservation easement that guarantees it will never be developed and will always be open for public recreation. Green Diamond’s lands in Washington state are managed under a Habitat Conservation Plan to protect 51 aquatic and terrestrial species while allowing for forest management.

“Mason County’s proximity to Puget Sound and Hood Canal makes it an attractive development opportunity,” explained Mike Pruett, vice president of land management and business development at Green Diamond. “By removing development rights on Green Diamond’s land, we ensure working forests will continue to be an important part of the economy in this region.”

The conservation easement was appraised and purchased for \$3.968 million. Funding for the purchase came entirely from the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program (FLP), which is specifically designed to protect environmentally sensitive forestlands that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. The easement will be held by the Washington Department of Natural

Resources (DNR), which will be responsible for long-term monitoring and enforcement of its restrictions.

“We appreciate the great partnership that allows us to conserve this forest and shoreline forever,” said Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark, who leads DNR. “Together, we can ensure this sensitive area continues to thrive.”

With two metropolitan areas only a half hour away and with high demand for affordable home sites, the land was highly vulnerable to subdivision and development. The 6,967 acres protected today is part of a larger effort to protect over 23,000 acres of this coastal forest over the next 5 years. There is currently funding proposed for the second phase of this project in President Obama’s fiscal year 2017 budget released in February of this year.

The project will also benefit the local shellfish industry. Mason County has one of the most productive shellfish growing areas in the nation. Shellfish harvesting is the County’s second largest industry. Incompatible development could threaten local water quality, which is essential to the industry’s survival. Securing a conservation easement on the property helps protect downstream water quality for shellfish on 1,400 acres of tidelands for more than 20 shellfish companies and 2,000 recreational and tribal harvesters.

“This conservation easement will help ensure that the water quality will be protected in the adjacent inlets. Those who enjoy, or make a living harvesting fish and shellfish will see a direct positive impact towards the long term health of this environment,” said Bill Taylor, president of Taylor Shellfish.

Healthy, productive waters for salmon and shellfish are also important for the Squaxin Island Tribe’s way of life.

“This will help protect water quality to sustain the long term treaty resources for future generations,” said David Lopeman, chairman of the Squaxin Island Tribe.

The FLP funding comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), the federal government’s main source of funds to protect land. LWCF, which was created by Congress in 1965, is funded not through taxes, but through royalties paid by energy companies for offshore gas and oil drilling. The program expired late last year but Congress recently extended the program for three years.

“It is so critical to protect our natural resources for future generations, and this project is great news for Mason County’s outdoor enthusiasts and local economy,” said U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA). “I’m proud to have fought for Forest Legacy Program projects through my support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and continued support for working forests like this one is so important for not just a thriving environment but a thriving Washington state.”

“We must protect our best forests from future development to ensure the viability of our shellfish industry and our recreation opportunities. I am pleased to see the Land and Water Conservation Fund—a Scoop Jackson legacy—to be used to permanently protect these 6,967 acres of land,” said U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), ranking member of the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

“This project is a prime example of the good work the Land and Water Conservation Fund does,” said U.S. Representative Derek Kilmer (WA-06). “It will help ensure our forestlands in Mason County remain a place that brings in visitors while maintaining working forests and helping shellfish growers by keeping our waters clean. Because of our work to successfully reauthorize the LWCF it will continue to help us protect our environment while creating opportunities for our local economy.”

The Trust for Public Land's mission is to create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Millions of people live within a ten-minute walk of a Trust for Public Land park, garden, or natural area, and millions more visit these sites every year. To share your story or learn more, visit www.tpl.org.

Green Diamond Resource Company is a privately held forest products company that owns and manages working forest lands in Washington, Oregon, and California. Learn more about Green Diamond Resource Company at www.greendiamond.com. In Washington and Oregon, the company's forest lands are independently certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) standard. In California, Green Diamond's forest lands are independently certified to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®) standards.

Administered by Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark, DNR manages more than 5.6 million acres of state-owned forest, range, commercial, agricultural, conservation, and aquatic lands. Of these, more than half are held in trust to produce income to support public schools, universities, prisons, and other state institutions. State trust lands managed by DNR provide other public benefits, including outdoor recreation, habitat for native fish and wildlife, and watersheds for clean water.

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