

Weekly Legislative Update: **Forests**

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Budgets

The biennium budgets (2023 – 2025) have been released. There are three main budget categories: Operating, Capital and Transportation. The legislature will be engaged in reconciling the budgets over the remaining days of the session.

I have been particularly interested in budget allocations relating to the 1) Carbon Sequestration **Strategy**, and 2) Carbon Sequestration **Forests**, which appear in both the House and Senate Operating budgets, with the funding source being the Natural Climate Solutions account (revenue derived from the purchase of “allowances” by emitters in Washington State).

The **House Operating budget** includes funding for the Department of Ecology and Department of Natural Resources to develop a multiyear strategy for natural and working lands to ensure carbon sequestration efforts are designed to help meet greenhouse gas limits.

- Ecology: \$1,604 million
- Natural Resources: \$ 400 million

- This funding would create the first ever state-wide roadmap with metrics for carbon sequestration and storage across the landscape (e.g. lands, forests, aquatic lands, shrub steppe) and be designed to help meet the state’s GHG targets.
- The strategy should provide a centralized and shared approach across agencies to provide consistency and verifiable results.
- The final product must provide a foundation for Natural Climate Solutions Account spending that maximizes return on investment and clarity for carbon sequestration and storage work moving forward.

The **Senate Operating Budget** is focused on the purchase of carbon dense, structurally complex forests (the “carbon workhorses”). These lands would be managed for increased carbon sequestration and carbon storage.

- Natural Resources: \$83 million

- \$70 million for forest land purchase in a Westside timber county.
- \$10 million for silviculture projects to promote healthy, resilient forests.

- \$3 million for contracting with a facilitator for convening a stakeholder group to collaborate on protection of older timber stands.

Bills We Support

HB 1032 Mitigating the risk of wildfires through electric utility planning and identification of best management practices appropriate to each electric utility's circumstances. LWVWA supported SB 5803-2022, but it was met with much resistance from the electric utilities. Senator Rolfes considered the concerns and introduced SB 5039. It now appears that the electric utilities are mostly in favor.

~ 4/11 passed the legislature; now on the Governor' desk for signature

HB 1460 Concerning the Department of Natural Resources land transactions, revenue distributions, and creation and management of a trust land transfer program. These bills will help revitalize the Trust Land Transfer program. Here is a [fact sheet](#) about TLT. The Governor's budget included \$10.6 million for Trust Land Transfer – an insufficient, yet promising start to revitalizing TLT. Advocates for the TLT revitalization program will be asking the legislature for \$25 million for the 10 projects on the list. For more details about the program and list of the projects see DNR's [Trust Land Transfer-Land Portfolio Management Tool](#).

~ 4/8 Senate Rules - Do pass with amendments; passed the legislature

HB 1578 Improving community preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience to wildland fire health and safety impacts in areas of increasing population density, including in the wildland urban interface. These bills intend to improve community preparedness and resilience, while mitigating wildland fire health and safety impacts in the urban/wildland interface.

~ 4/11 Senate Rules – Adopted as amended; passed the legislature

SB 5390 Establishing a programmatic safe harbor agreement on forestlands. This bill would facilitate participation in safe harbor agreements for spotted owl habitat protection. These agreements would be voluntary, incentive-based and available to any nonfederal forestland owner. The Department of Natural Resources would consult with and rely on the Department of Fish and Wildlife for technical assistance (interagency agreement).

~ 4/7 Passed the legislature; now on to the Governor's desk for signature

Bills We Are Opposing

HB 1018 Changing the expiration date for the sales and use tax exemption of hog fuel to comply with the 2045 deadline for fossil fuel-free electrical generation in Washington state

and to protect jobs with health care and retirement benefits in economically distressed communities. This bill intends to extend the tax exemption for hog fuel until 2034. The exemption covers hog fuel used to produce electricity, steam, heat and biofuel. Currently 14 facilities are covered by this exemption. These 14 facilities are among the **highest greenhouse emissions emitters** in the State, and they are not covered by the Climate Commitment Act. I testified in opposition to this bill on 3/23.

~ 4/4 Executive session Senate Ways & Means – Do Pass (Majority)

~4/4 Executive session Senate Ways & Means – WITHOUT RECOMMENDATION (Minority)

~ 4/4 2nd reading by Senate Rules – NO progress at this time

~ Bill appears to be dead

HB 1789 Expanding revenue generation and economic opportunities from natural climate solutions and ecosystem services. Several troubling strikers and amendments were passed on March 7 in the House floor vote. Along with other members of the Environmental Priorities Coalition, I testified in opposition to this bill on 3/30.

~ 4/3 Executive session Senate Ways & Means – No action taken

~ Bill appears to be DEAD

How You Can Be Involved

- Local Leagues in Washington have action chairs that coordinate action teams. Some local Leagues have environmental teams to take action locally. Contact your local League action chair to find out and join.
- You may also express your opinion on legislation with the LWVWA issue chairs. We will take your perspectives into consideration as we determine our support for legislation and prepare testimony. Sherri Dysart, Forests Issue Chair, sdysart@lwvwa.org.
- [Pacific Northwest Forest Climate Alliance](#) is an organization dedicated to exploring the intersection of forest protection and climate justice. Many of the most renowned forest scientists are affiliated with this organization.