



## CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

### FORESTS

*The forests of the Great Peninsula are complex associations of soils, creeks, a diversity of plant and animal life, and a highly evolved group of trees, many of which may attain great age, size and individuality. These spectacular forests provide countless benefits including clean air and water, conservation of biological diversity, maintenance of climate, forest products, outdoor recreation, and scenic landscapes. An Ecoregional Assessment conducted by The Nature Conservancy (March 2004) named the temperate lowland forests of the Great Peninsula a "Priority Conservation Area" of significant biological diversity. Unfortunately, these forests are threatened by one of the highest urban growth rates in Washington State (Washington State Office of Financial Management 2008). Protection and stewardship of this dynamic forest landscape, which provides critical habitat for native plant and animal species, a healthy human environment, as well as tangible products and livelihoods, is one of Great Peninsula Conservancy's highest priorities.*

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Great Peninsula Conservancy's **Forests Initiative** strives to protect the forest landscape of the Great Peninsula. This region, bordered by Hood Canal on the west and Puget Sound on the east, encompasses Kitsap, Mason, and western Pierce Counties, Washington. GPC's Forests Initiative focuses on leveraging voluntary support for conservation by forest landowners, with the latest market-based incentives for forest protection. The ultimate vision is to maintain a contiguous forest landscape wherever possible, while fostering the highest level of forest stewardship that is both beneficial to people and nature.

#### **In the long-term, GPC's Forests Initiative will:**

- Preserve contiguous tracts of forestland forever, contributing to local forest-based livelihoods and enhancing conservation of biological diversity.
- Promote responsible forest management that not only supports timber production, but also contributes to habitat enhancement and healthy watersheds.
- Stimulate snowballing of benefits related to forest conservation, like relief from climate change-related impacts and improved water quality.

Great Peninsula Conservancy has begun the groundwork for this multi-year Forests Initiative, which is expected to grow in future years. Specific strategies for achieving the Initiative's goals include:

#### **Educate landowners on forest protection while helping policymakers plan for long-term conservation of forests.**

Great Peninsula Conservancy is working with landowners and the Counties on the Great Peninsula to shape the conservation planning process for protection of forestlands. As an example, Kitsap County is currently developing its Rural Wooded Incentive Program, a smart growth ordinance to encourage cluster development on over 50,000 acres of private, rural wooded lands, while protecting large blocks of open space. Great Peninsula Conservancy is reaching out to the County and forest landowners to build consensus around our progressive recommendations that maintain and enhance responsible forest management and permanently protect forestlands.

### **Preserve and steward forests on the rural-urban fringe of our communities.**

Forests on the rural-urban fringe of our communities face the threat of conversion to residential and other urban uses. To counter this escalating threat, Great Peninsula Conservancy partners with willing landowners to place conservation easements on their properties. These conservation agreements permanently protect land from future development, while continuing their use as working forests.

### **Connect landowners to independent Forest Stewardship Council certification programs.**

Public acceptance of forestry as a viable option for preserving forestlands would be greatly enhanced with widespread application of environmentally-friendly forest management practices. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification provides the public with assurance that forests in this premier program are managed to the utmost environmental safeguards and social responsibility practices. FSC certification also has great potential to increase commercial value for lumber and other forest products, as the public increasingly is willing to pay more for 'green' forest products. Melding Great Peninsula Conservancy's knowledge of the local area and established position in the community with our project partner's technical expertise in forest certification, the project will support landowners who face the complex process of certifying their forests.

### **Investigate financial incentives to help private landowners access ecosystem service markets, specifically the newly-emerging forest carbon market.**

Healthy forests provide many ecosystem services to the public, including clean air and water, at no charge. Newly emerging ecosystem markets, primarily the forest carbon market, provide forest landowners an opportunity to be compensated for these services. Selling the forest's capacity to store carbon is one of the best ways to add value to protected forests in the coming years. Great Peninsula Conservancy and project partners will connect landowners with this new market.

### **Conservation Leadership**

Great Peninsula Conservancy's network of landowners and professional experts is important to the process of recruiting new partners in forest conservation. With a 30-year history of conservation accomplishments in the region, GPC has access to landowners, foresters, environmental professionals, and trusted members of the community. Working with these many partners, GPC's Forests Initiative will achieve win-win benefits for livable communities, forest biodiversity, and a healthy climate.

### **The Time is Now**

This exciting venture in forest conservation could not come at a more important time. Growth of urban areas on the Great Peninsula is making conversion of forestland to other uses an increasingly attractive option for private landowners and developers. Fragmentation and destruction of this reservoir of biological diversity is occurring at a rapid rate, as investors look to cash out without committing to the sustainability of the region.

*Without concerted efforts to protect these biologically rich forests now, liquidation of large blocks of forest landscape and loss of multi-generational family forests is a real possibility. Please join the effort to conserve the Great Peninsula's forests so our children, grandchildren, and future generations may enjoy them for years to come. Now is the time to act, before these great forests are lost forever.*

To learn more about GPC's Forests Initiative, please visit [www.greatpeninsula.org](http://www.greatpeninsula.org).