

Washington Forest Futures: Land Conversion and Cascade Foothills Forestry Viability Study

As forest lands convert to higher market value non-forestry uses, owners of the state's private working forests find it increasingly difficult to justify maintaining ownership of their productive forest lands. Converting forest lands to urban uses diminishes their environmental services and constrains the economic, social, and ecological functions of adjoining private and public forest lands. In this study we address the legislative intent of "assessing the trends and dynamics that commercial and residential development play in the conversion of the state's forests to non-forestry uses, analyzing the relationship between development and the conversion of forest land uses, and developing alternatives for landowners and communities in developing and implementing innovative approaches to retaining traditional forestry while at the same time accommodating new uses that strengthen the economic and natural benefits from forest lands."

Methodology

We will identify land uses across the state and analyze where areas of existing and likely forest land use (working and non-working) have changed to non-forest land uses, and identify factors that appear to influence forest land conversion. We will also identify a range of policy and market incentives to assist forest landowners in keeping Washington's forested landscapes intact. There is no single data source or analysis that cohesively describes the status of the forest land base across the entire state. This study provides a rare opportunity to collaborate and build a conceptual model to analyze and display both the current status of forest lands statewide, and factors related to land use change.

The Cascade Agenda Forestry Work Group, led by the Cascade Land Conservancy, will provide major support in preparing recommendations related to Western Washington Cascade foothill forests. The Working Group will be supported by UW College of Forest Resources analyses, and will focus on the Cascade Foothills region in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties, with recommendations for alternative approaches in Whatcom, Skagit, Thurston, and Lewis counties. The Working Group's objective is to develop consensus and recommendations on policies and programs to assist large and small landowners and communities in developing and implementing innovative approaches to retaining traditional forestry and accommodating new uses that strengthen both economic and natural benefits of forest lands.

Anticipated Outputs:

- Identification of areas of high, medium, and low levels of forest land use change in both spatial and tabular form at a statewide level.
- Description of forest land use conversion patterns by ownership types at a statewide level and detailed parcel-level information for specific sample areas in the state.
- Identification of factors associated with forest land use conversion and how to assess those factors at both a regional and local level.
- Assessment of the effectiveness of innovative approaches for valuing non-market services provided by Washington's public and private forests.
- Identification of incentives and disincentives that facilitate or impede the maintenance of working forests in areas susceptible to land conversion, and programs that could minimize conversion of forest lands to non-forest uses.

Contact: Ara Erickson arake@u.washington.edu (206) 543-7418 or Professor Gordon Bradley gbradley@u.washington.edu (206) 685-0881