

Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan Implementation
Steering Committee Kick-Off
May 19, 2023@CTC
Notes

Attendees: Kevin Overbay, Chelan County; Shon Smith, Chelan County; Carmen Andonaegui, WDFW; Darcy Batura, The Nature Conservancy; Curtis Bryan, BLM; Jennifer Hackett, Northwest Portal; Larry Leach, DNR; Tiana Luke, The Wilderness Society; Scott Lynn, USFS; Mat Lyons, TREAD; Jon Meier, BLM; Gene Reed, motorized community member; Eunice Youmans, CDLT; Peter Dykstra, TPL; Mickey Fleming, CDLT; Mike Kaputa, Chelan County; Ann Welz, TPL; Jill FitzSimmons, Chelan County; and Kiah Patzkowsky, TPL.

Background:

- From 2014-2016, Chelan County, the Chelan Douglas Land Trust (CDLT), The Nature Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) led the community in creating a vision for the Upper Wenatchee River watershed, the Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan (the Plan).
- In 2022, with TPL's option of Chinook Forest Partners' 35,000 acres, Chelan County, CDLT, and TPL began meeting to talk about further implementation of the Plan.
- This Steering Committee was convened to discuss this opportunity for the TPL-optioned lands.

How We Got Here – The History and The Current Opportunity

- Since 2016, parts of the Plan have been implemented – Chelan County acquired Nason Ridge for a community forest and CDLT conserved other parcels. But implementation on a large-scale has been hampered due to former owners being unwilling to option their property to an NGO.
- From 2015-2022, Weyerhaeuser sold over 6,000 acres in Chelan County to private parties for development and recreation uses.
- In 2021, Weyerhaeuser sold 145,000 acres of their industrial forest lands west and east of the Cascades to Hampton Lumber.
- In 2021, Chinook purchased the Chelan County lands from Hampton and in 2022, optioned them to TPL to provide the community a time-limited opportunity to implement the Plan.
 - o Chinook, while a TIMO, believes they can still meet their fiduciary duty and achieve a return for their investors through a conservation sale.
 - o However, because Chinook does not have the staff to manage a recreation permit program as Weyerhaeuser did, nor does Chinook want to take on the associated wildfire risks, Chinook does not allow public use of its property nor issue recreational permits.
- The option TPL secured in early 2022 is a time-sensitive rolling option.
 - o TPL must acquire significant acreage from Chinook annually, starting in 2025, for TPL's option to continue to the end of 2030.
 - o Fortunately, progress is already being made to achieve these milestones.
 - The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest's (OWNF's) Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) proposal for Phase 1 (5,500-acres east of 97 and south of Camas Meadows Natural Area Preserve), a \$7 million request for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024 funding ranked #5 in the nation, well within the money. Assuming OWNF's Phase 1 proposal is indeed funded, and due diligence is successful, the USFS would likely acquire this portion by late 2025.
 - This August, OWNF will be submitting an LWCF proposal for Phase 2 (5,900-acres near Blewett Pass, mostly west of 97) for FFY 2025 funding. If funded and due diligence is successful, Phase 2 would likely close by late 2026.

The Property and its Values

A brief discussion of values followed (though this discussion was not meant to be exhaustive)

- Recreational access for summer and winter, both motorized and non-motorized
 - o The existing road network (including user-created trails built during Weyerhaeuser's recreation permit program) would be nice to maintain
 - More motorized use areas are needed and would provide economic benefits for the County
 - o Hunting is also an important community value that should be considered
- Wildlife habitat and corridors (WDFW noted they have new data for elk and mule deer migration for this area)
- Riparian areas for water quality and fish habitat
- Cultural values
- Opportunities for landscape scale forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction
- And some lands may best be suited for private sales, a goal of the Plan as well.
 - o If you hear of people interested in acquiring parcels for private use, please direct them to Peter Dykstra or Ann Welz. No action will happen on this front immediately, but TPL does want to gather names of these folks and is always willing to talk to folks about this.

Potential Land Managers

This discussion focused on the lands north of Phases 1 and 2 (since the USFS has/will be applying for funding for Phases 1 & 2). Mike Kaputa noted the following emerge when looking at the maps:

- Some of the remaining checkerboarded properties may make the most sense in USFS ownership.
- The larger contiguous blocks, such as Chumstick and Coulter, may best be suited for public ownership and public recreation.
- Some of the stand-alone parcels, and possibly Camas North, may be better suited for private ownership.

Mike Kaputa noted that while the County acquired Nason Ridge, it is not in the "land acquisition business." A property must have a lot of community support for the County to consider working towards a public ownership option because land in public ownership doesn't add to the county's tax base.

Larry Leach noted that DNR will likely be doing a strategic analysis of their Chelan County lands in a couple years, a process that may result in a desire to sell some DNR lands (or opportunities to swap for them), especially lands north of US 2. Being able to acquire some of DNR's lands could potentially enhance the opportunity for TPL-optioned lands.

Curtis Bryan noted that BLM will also be doing a strategic analysis of their Chelan County lands sometime in the next couple years and may also identify lands it wishes to surplus.

Mike Kaputa intends to follow up directly with DNR and BLM to discuss their plans further and to explore if any lands not within the USFS administrative boundary might be of interest to BLM.

Peter Dykstra noted that while the group could think about positioning potential DNR or BLM properties for later phases, we cannot slow down on the transactions given TPL's option is rolling. "There's an opportunity to be creative but not to paint a masterpiece."

Scott Lynn of the USFS noted that they would like to see a good portion of the lands protected, whether by the USFS or by others, to support the multiple benefits the community valued, as noted in the Plan, including to provide the opportunity for landscape-scale restoration, to meet the community's increased demand for recreation, and to protect wildlife habitat and corridors.

Carmen Andonaegui of WDFW noted that WDFW would also like to see a good portion of these lands protected for their multiple benefits though WDFW doesn't own significant land in this area and does not view itself as a logical long-term owner for any of it.

Potential Fundings Sources

- The USFS has access to LWCF funds and can apply for these funds annually
- State and local agencies and NGO's can apply for federal Forest Legacy Program funding annually and state funding every two years (next round opens May 2024)

Proposed Plan and Goals for Community Meetings

Meetings to update the community and gather input are proposed to begin in early August. It is hoped that Steering Committee members would help with getting turn-out. Initial meetings are proposed for:

- The Peshastin/Cashmere/Dryden area
- Entiat area

The County is also interested in meetings specifically focused around Coulter and Chumstick

- The County wants to be part of the discussion about future uses and future owners.
- Could Coulter be an extension of the Nason Ridge Community Forest?
- It would be nice to map existing motorized uses (formal or user-created) and how they intersect with surrounding lands and connector trails. Mike will explore this further.

Other Updates and Announcements

July 19 - Nason Ridge Recreation Planning - Coulter Block Assessment
Aug 7 – UWCLP Community Meeting (Mission/Peshastin & Camas blocks), Dryden Fire Hall
Aug 8 – UWCLP Community Meeting (Entiat River Watershed blocks), Entiat Fire Hall
Aug 11 – Coulter Block Site Visit
Aug 16 – Nason Ridge Recreation Planning - Coulter Block Assessment
Sep 8 – Chelan County Lands Dialogue
Dec 8 – Chelan County Lands Dialogue

Next steps

- We will send you a ready-to-forward invite to the August Community Meetings for your help with turn-out
- We intend to reconvene the Steering Committee in 3-4 months to share the results of the community meetings and other outreach and to discuss next steps