

HISTORY OF BLANCHARD AGREEMENT

The Blanchard Strategies Group was formed in 2006 at the invitation of the Washington State Commissioner of Public Lands (at that time) Doug Sutherland. The group was tasked with coming up with a solution for the competing interests that were increasingly at odds on Blanchard Mountain. The DNR determined a community-based solution was needed. The issue was that Blanchard is a State Forest* that needs to provide revenue to Skagit County and its trust beneficiaries (schools, jails etc.) Logging is the traditional way to provide this funding – nothing else DNR or the group considered could come close to providing the same level of revenue. At the same time, due to Blanchard's many attributes for recreation and conservation – and the growing tourism-based economy locally- DNR was facing increased pressure (and even some litigation) to find alternatives to logging Blanchard's forests. Yet the timber industry was concerned that losing even more of its forestry base in this area would make it hard to maintain sustainable operations.

The people invited to grapple with this situation included timber industry representatives, conservation and recreational interests, Skagit County, and business and community interests. The group met for over 100 hours with high-level support from DNR and its Northwest Regional Manager at that time, Bill Wallace. The DNR made sure that the group had access to information and experts on every topic that touches Blanchard. The agreement the Blanchard Strategies Group arrived at in 2006 is called the Blanchard Strategies Agreement. The agreement seeks to “conserve” a 1600-acre forested core for recreation and older forest wildlife habitat. The rest of Blanchard was to remain a working forest providing revenue for Skagit County and its trust beneficiaries. Over a period of years, the Washington State legislature would provide funds for taking the 1600 acres out of forestry. The DNR would buy replacement lands with these funds, to be managed for Skagit County, continuing the flow of revenue to the trust beneficiaries (schools etc.). Because Blanchard is a state forest, it was (and is) an imperative that Skagit County receive the same amount of revenue as if logging the 1600 acres had occurred. However, the Blanchard Agreement is invalid after 2017. Which is why, if the legislature does not finish allocating the funds, DNR has no choice but to begin logging.

Since the Agreement was approved in 2006, all participants have been working with the legislature on funding that agreement. \$7.7 million dollars remains unfunded. Getting this funding is one of DNR's and Skagit County's top legislative priorities this year. The Agreement remains supported by the BE School District, all of the 40th legislative delegation and every member of the Blanchard Strategies Group. Should the Strategies Agreement be fully funded – as was the legislature's intent a decade ago - there will be no financial impact on Skagit County or our schools.

** Blanchard was acquired in the 1930s through a tax foreclosure. Like other State Forests, Skagit County deeded it to the state to manage as trust lands. In exchange, the county and the taxing districts in which the land is located are given most of the revenue from timber sales and other revenue-producing activities. In Skagit County, these taxing districts include schools, jails, hospitals and other public services.