**BLANCHARD STRATEGIES AGREEMENT**

**Then and Now**

**May 2017**

A decade ago, at the bequest of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), a diverse came together and found a way to reach agreement on what was at the time one of our state’s most challenging natural resource issues - saving the core forests of Blanchard Mountain for conservation and recreation while also maintaining working forest and revenues on the Blanchard State forest.

**Today, Blanchard Forest has a critical need for legislative funding to fulfill our historic agreement and avoid a return to gridlock.** The delegation of the 40th Legislative District is firmly committed to this objective.

**Blanchard Forest is a landscape that has many shared interests**. Situated within the Chuckanut Range in Skagit County, north of Burlington and west of I-5, the area provides a combination of recreational opportunities, conservation values, and trust revenue generation unique to the Northwest region of Washington State. Over 100,000 Washingtonians visit Blanchard Mountain each year to hike and paraglide among beautiful vistas, mountain bike and horseback ride on the remarkable trails. Others come to experience the birds and wildlife habitat that includes older forest, wetlands, lakes and unusual geologic features. Many more enjoy its scenic attributes as part of the Scenic Byway, Chuckanut Drive. Blanchard’s benefits extend far beyond recreation and wildlife habitat. The forest is managed as Department of Natural Resources state trust land, generating revenue for the trust beneficiaries to provide essential funding and services to the county as well as the local communities, including a school district, state schools, emergency services, a hospital, roads, and a port.

In 2006 a collaborative stakeholder process was initiated by DNR to develop a management strategy that balances all of these benefits. Local business owners, conservation groups, industrial forestland managers, land trusts, recreational interest groups, neighbors, and the county came together to develop a vision for managing the forest that is supported by all. The stakeholder process was started in order to address years of community dissent and threatened legal action against DNR. Despite the huge challenges associated with the process, in 2008 the Blanchard Forest Strategy was finalized. The Strategy includes the critically important delineation of a 1,600-acre core zone that will be managed to emphasize recreation and conservation objectives. The core zone will no longer have timber harvest for the purposes of generating revenue which means the trust beneficiaries will have to forego trust revenue from these lands. The Strategy identifies the need to acquire replacement lands that will be used to generate long-term revenue

for the trust beneficiaries. This Strategy was a unanimous decision of the stakeholder group.

To date the legislature has graciously provided 6.5 million dollars to support the acquisition of lands to replace the core; however, **in 2017 there is an outstanding balance of 7.7 million dollars to complete the required acquisitions.**

The beneficiaries cannot forgo their trust revenue indefinitely. If the remaining 7.7 million dollars for the core replacement lands are not granted by the legislature, the Department of Natural Resources, as the trust manager, will have to comply with its fiduciary duty to the beneficiaries and harvest timber in the core. **A timber sale is being planned in the core zone for 2017.**

***May 2017 update*:** The Blanchard Advisory Committee and DNR made the $7.7 M ask to the legislature in the 2017 season. Representatives Morris and Lytton proposed a different approach which is to have Blanchard go through the Trust Land Transfer program. This costs more because both the land and trees must be replaced. The House proposed budget includes **$10 M for Blanchard** through the Trust Land Transfer Program. Despite Senator Ranker’s great efforts, the Senate did not put new money in their proposed budget for Blanchard. The House and Senate budgets are in the process of reconciliation.

Blanchard Forest can be a success story.The Strategy is widely supported by diverse constituents and highlights the richness, diversity, and partnerships associated with this unique Washington State Forest. **Legislative funding for Blanchard is the essential piece to making the Blanchard Forest Strategy a reality.**

**Visit www.skagitlandtrust.org and click *Get Involved* and then *Take Action*. This will give updates on who to write or call to help with this need.**

**Blanchard Citizens' Advisory Committee**

Roy Bever - Forest Manager, Bloedel

Molly Doran- Skagit Land Trust

Amber Forest - Larabee State Park

Mitch Friedman- Conservation Northwest

Jon Knetchtel -Northwest Trails Association

Harold Mead - Friends of Blanchard Mountain

Mike McGlenn –Back County Horseman

Tom Nelson – Sierra Pacific Industries

Bob Rose- Forest Consultant

Kendra Smith - Skagit County Beneficiaries