

World Renowned Elwha River Restoration Threatened by State Logging

Rally to Request Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz to Stop Logging Elwha Legacy Forests Draws Large Crowd

Contacts: Elizabeth Dunne, Esq., Director of Legal Advocacy, Earth Law Center (edunne@earthlaw.org, (808) 554-1409)

Brel Froebe, Interim Executive Director, Center for Responsible Forestry (brel@c4rf.org, (707) 272-1207)

(Photos available for publication by media with no cost license. Contact Scott McGee at scott@forest2sea.com or (760) 652-9010).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - March 6, 2023 — On March 5, 2023, over a hundred community members, largely from Port Angeles, lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Jamestown S’klallam Tribe, Lummi Nation, and surrounding areas in the Olympic Peninsula, joined together in a peaceful rally at the Elwha River Observation Area near an active timber harvest site called “Aldwell.”

Rally participants called on Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz to stop logging in the Elwha River Watershed. At least 50% of “Aldwell” – a structurally complex forest – with trees 100-150 years old and older – could still be saved if Commissioner Franz directed the harvest to stop.



Caption: Rally goes ask Public Lands Commission Hilary Franz to Stop Logging the Elwha

In defiance of the City of Port Angeles' request to pause "Aldwell" and other ecologically destructive logging in the Elwha River Watershed, WA State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been moving forward with plans to log hundreds of acres of Elwha legacy forests in the next year, including on lands adjacent to the old lower Elwha dam site, the Olympic Adventure Trail, the Colville MTB Trails, and Lake Sutherland.

Port Angeles City Councilmember and Jamestown S'klallam tribal member La Trisha Suggs addressed participants: "Trees, they are our sisters, they are our brothers, they are a part of us. These trees around us are a part of who we are. They're a part of our community. Those legacy forests and the creatures that need those are relying on those legacy forests. This is about legacy forests and this is not about stopping all timber harvests because we know timber families need the jobs. And we support those timber families."



Caption: Port Angeles City Councilmember LaTrisha Suggs (Jamestown S'klallam Tribe) addresses crowd

While organizers and speakers stressed that it was not an anti-logging rally and emphasized the need for collaboration to find solutions for investment in rural communities, members of the logging community arrived – many with the intent to disrupt the rally, by wielding chainsaws, revving engines, and attempting to position logging trucks to block rally access.

Freddie Lane, (Lhaq'temish) Enrolled Citizen of Lummi Nation, gave an opening and closing ceremony, and by inviting participants to connect with his prayer stick brought a sense of peace and unity saying "If you can't touch the pole, just hold your hands out, grasping prayers for everyone that's gathered here. Everyone, you're all a part of the human family."



Caption: Freddie Lane, (Lhaq'temish) Enrolled Citizen of the Lummi Indian Tribe brings peace and unity to the effort to protect Elwha legacy forests.

When asked about the importance of protecting the Elwha watershed from logging, Suzanne Simard, bestselling author of *Finding the Mother Tree*, said "the world is relying on us to protect the forests of the Pacific Rim because of their crucial role in stabilizing climate, supporting biodiversity and maintaining hydrologic integrity. Clearcutting the precious Elwha forests for short-term profits would be a massive blow to the health of current and future generations. We need birds singing, salmon spawning, and food growing more than money in the pockets of a few. The Elwha forests are worth more standing."

The group will soon be launching the website elwhalegacyforests.org to share information that in the meantime is hosted on adventurephotography.forest2sea.com under the blog section. Port Angeles' community members Scott and Carolita McGee made a short [video about "Aldwell"](#) and have even [captured the logging](#) in action.

Additional quotes

Honorable Paulette Jordan (Coeur d'Alene), Native American Politician and Business Woman, who served in Idaho House of Representatives and ran for Idaho Governor and US Senate

The Honorable Paulette Jordan shared: “As Indigenous Peoples - stewards of the lands and rivers here since time immemorial – we know that all life is interconnected. A river needs a healthy forest, and salmon need a healthy river. As *Wy-Kan-Ush-Pum* or “Salmon People”, we know that our own well-being is inseparable from healthy ecosystems. This is why you see First Nations in BC creating “salmon parks” to protect critical forests in watersheds. We need visionary leadership who will respect our knowledge and see that protecting our legacy forests is an investment that will sustain present and future generations mentally, physically, spiritually, and economically.”

Navarra Carr, Port Angeles City Councilmember

"The Aldwell legacy forest is a critical part of the tributaries on the Elwha River. Legacy forests, like Aldwell, not only provide biodiversity, recreation opportunities, and aid in reducing climate impacts in our community, but also protect the water supply for every resident and visitor in Port Angeles”, said Port Angeles City Councilmember Navarra Carr. “Our city's water supply is solely supplied by the Elwha, and negative impacts to the larger Elwha ecosystem affect our water citywide. We already experience drought conditions each year and logging these important forests will likely worsen the already existing challenges we are facing. Logging the Aldwell legacy forest will lead to the permanent destruction of a valuable forest on the Olympic Peninsula," Carr explained.

Lindsey Schromen-Wawrin, Port Angeles City Councilmember

“What we need for our economy is sustainable resource management, like not risking the City’s summer drinking water supply by reducing the watershed’s resilience. Forests have far more value for our communities when we manage them ecologically,” said Port Angeles City Councilmember Lindsey Schromen-Wawrin. “Plus, ecological forestry can produce a lot more jobs than a guy running a feller buncher. That feller buncher is the job killer, because we all know there are no jobs on a dead planet,” added Councilmember Schromen-Wawrin.

Nina Sarmiento, lead rally organizer and owner of Magic Forest Tours

“These popular hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding and rock-climbing spots for residents and tourists alike will dramatically change if we lose these forests,” said Nina Sarmiento, who gives hiking tours through her own small company, Magic Forest Tours. “I take people to the lower dam site on a trail from Colville MTB Trails where the DNR plans to harvest as early as this year. People love walking through the lush forest and learning about the history of the dams and restoration process. It’s hard to imagine walking through a landscape that is supposed to be in recovery, but has been dramatically altered through deforestation, to look for spawning salmon”, Sarmiento said.

Elizabeth Dunne, Esq., Director of Legal Advocacy, Earth Law Center

Earth Law Center has been working on solutions inspired by successful local community forest projects. “As the Elwha River comes back to life post-dam removal, it is a source of hope for many - not only in Washington, but around the world – that dismantling structures of colonization can lead to a more balanced relationship with Nature, rooted in reciprocity rather than resource extraction. People are shocked to learn that extractive logging continues in this beloved river valley”, said Elizabeth Dunne, Port Angeles resident and Director of Legal Advocacy at the Earth Law Center. “There are certainly pathways to replacing the revenue counties get from harvesting these forests. We need Commissioner Franz to step up and pause this logging while we work toward solutions.”

Brel Froebe, Interim Executive Director at the Center for Responsible Forestry

“If successful, measures currently before the state legislature would make a big difference for at least some of these forests in the Elwha River Watershed,” added Brel Froebe, Interim Executive Director at the Center for Responsible Forestry. According to Froebe, “a coalition of community organizations and groups across WA are calling on the legislature to use newly available funds from the Climate Commitment Act to protect legacy forests in western WA.” “These older forests are carbon workhorses: just by not logging them we can sequester and store enough carbon to meet over half of WA's 2030 emissions targets. There are only 77,000 acres left of unprotected legacy forests in western WA, that's just 3% of all the forestlands managed by DNR," said Froebe. "We can protect older forests and fund our schools and counties, it's a win-win, but once they're clearcut and turned into tree farms, they are gone forever."