

## Washington Supreme Court grants case arguing state forests must be managed for “all the people”

Conservation Northwest, Washington Environmental Council and Olympic Forest Coalition are pleased that on March 3, 2021 the Washington Supreme Court [granted direct review](#) in *Conservation NW, et al. v. Commissioner of Public Lands et al.*, No.; 99183-9. This historic case asks the Court to interpret the plain terms of the Washington State Constitution providing that state forests are held in trust “for all the people.”

The organizations are urging the Court to hold that the plain terms “for all the people” and Washington’s unique federal land grant history authorize and require the State to **manage these five million acres of state public lands not just for income maximization but also to consider factors like climate change (carbon sequestration), tribal treaty rights, clean water, habitat for threatened and endangered species, and other public benefits.** At the same time as advancing this historic appeal, the organizations are also genuinely committed to working with the specific economic beneficiaries to ensure any reforms in how Washington’s state forests are managed will be sustainable, equitable, and fair to the communities who have been historically-dependent on the state forests.

“Today we move a big step closer to clear legal determination of whether Washington’s state public lands may be managed in the best interests of *all the people*,” said **Mitch Friedman, Executive Director of Conservation Northwest.** “These lands are a gift that should not have to be squeezed for every dollar when they already benefit us in so many ways, from storing carbon to providing clean water, wildlife habitat and healthy recreation access,” said Friedman. “After over twenty years of believing the law says one thing while watching our resources sacrificed under a strained and biased interpretation, I can’t wait for the State Supreme Court to speak on the matter.”

"We are beginning to see unprecedented changes in our state forests, habitats, and watersheds from the climate crisis," said **Connie Gallant, President of the Olympic Forest Coalition.** "The revenues for school construction and essential services are important now more than ever because of pandemic deficits. We can no longer afford to sacrifice our forests for short term revenues. We have to balance the interests of all the people, with the ecological and economic imperatives we face. This case will hopefully resolve the legal issues and that will leave us a clear path to resolve the policy differences, balance our interests and find a path forward."

“Washington’s forests are among our state’s greatest assets, providing innumerable cultural, economic, and environmental benefits, said **Lisa Remlinger, Chief Policy Officer, Washington Environmental Council.** “The Washington State Supreme Court’s decision to grant direct review of this case brings us closer to recognizing the full value and potential of our public lands—an especially important ambition at a time when our climate and communities are in crisis. We stand ready to help develop solutions for management of our public lands that meet the challenges of today, and can weather the inevitable changes to Washington’s climate, population, and economy. By truly managing state lands to benefit all the people, we have an opportunity to support both resilience and economic well-being for rural communities, and a healthy environment for all Washingtonians for generations to come.”

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*“Keeping the Northwest wild” since 1989, Conservation Northwest is a regional non-profit organization that protects, connects and restores wildlands and wildlife from the Washington Coast to the British Columbia Rockies. Staff operate in local communities and rural areas around Washington and into southern B.C., using dialogue to find common ground and collaborative solutions for challenging issues including habitat corridors, wilderness conservation, forest restoration and endangered species recovery.*

*The Olympic Forest Coalition (OFCO) promotes the protection, conservation and restoration of natural forest ecosystems and their processes on the Olympic Peninsula. This mission includes monitoring and caring for the public forests, watersheds and bays of the Peninsula. OFCO’s approach integrates science-based solutions that protect and restore natural ecosystems, threatened and endangered species, and healthy rural communities. OFCO incorporates the climate crisis and mitigating its impacts on the Olympic Peninsula as foundational for all of its work.*

*Washington Environmental Council is a nonprofit, statewide advocacy organization that has been driving positive change to solve Washington’s most critical environmental challenges since 1967. Our mission is to protect, restore, and sustain Washington’s environment for all.*

**MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE IN [THIS JANUARY 2020 STATEMENT](#) AND IN [THIS BLOG FROM MITCH FRIEDMAN](#), CONSERVATION NORTHWEST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.**