

Future of Forests in the Mountains to Sound Greenway

The Mountains to Sound Greenway sprang from an appreciation of the value forests provide. Through almost 20 years of dedicated work and collaboration throughout the Greenway much of the original vision has been realized. As Jim Ellis stated during changing of the guard, we (the 'old guard') have assured that the forests and open spaces are there. It is now up to the 'new guard' to determine what those lands will be and do.

That includes the hard choices of where trails are placed, how they are maintained, what recreational uses occur in various areas and how sensitive features are protected. But even more importantly the health and viability of the forests and the whole landscape must be assured. With almost all forests being impacted by human choices, (invasive species, decreased diversity, changing climate, parcelization leading to smaller ownership...) our forests will not remain sustainable unless we invest in managing – maintaining them.

When the Greenway began working resource lands were valued and the large landowners were active participants. The reality is that *all* of our forestlands are 'working'; they are working to provide cool clean water, clean the air, mitigate flooding, provide habitat and give us wonderful recreational opportunity. Our forests are an invaluable infrastructure providing all of these services in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. Just as storm water and waste water facilities require investment in construction and maintenance, our forests require investment in maintenance for forest health. Without it our forests will not be sustainable.



Historically the capital for maintenance of forests was derived from timber sales proceeds. Ownership structure has changed and the timber economy has slumped. Add to that the 3,300 landowners of forests of between 2 to 20 acres totaling around 110,000 acres in King County alone, landowners who may not even consider their land as forest or understand what it takes to have a healthy forest. Those owners of small forests are not deriving any income from their forests which they can then use to maintain or restore the forest. At the same time traditional forest service providers have moved on. The economy of scale is no longer there. And rules and regulations are increasingly more complex and costly to navigate.

If we consider our forests as the invaluable infrastructure they are, we can begin to think of managing them for new and very different end products as well as supporting use of local wood. We can manage them for the ecosystem services they provide. To accomplish this we need to develop new ways to think about our forests; ways to capture those values and create revenue streams with which forest maintenance and restoration can occur. Please share with me your thoughts on the following two questions.

1. How can our region be more forest **and** forestry friendly, support private forest owners and **fund** active management
2. How can forest oriented entities best support the Greenway and others in their mission to retain healthy open space within the Greenway and communicate forest priorities and needs?

Thank you so much for your time and for your valuable ideas!

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Professor Fairfax believes we've been addressing conservation far too narrowly: "Conservationists have focused on the wildlands. We've gotten this idea that the world is divided into the 'sacred' lands and the 'profane' lands- the urban areas. Conservationists must do a much better job of educating the public about the relationships among the cities in which they live, the water they drink, the environment beyond their communities and the quality of their lives. Resource managers must find a way to connect with these emerging, largely urban populations."