

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL AGENDA BILL

NO. 2014-274

CLEARANCES	Initial	Date	Date Received in Council Office	Agenda Date	Assigned to:
Originator: Joshua Fleischmann	<i>JF</i>	7/14/2014		7/22/14	Natural Resources Committee
Division	<i>MAP</i>	7/14/2014			
Dept. Head:		7/14/2014			
Prosecutor					
Purchasing/Budget:					
Executive: Jack Louws					

TITLE OF DOCUMENT: Forestry Advisory Committee No net-loss of forest land memorandum to County Council.

ATTACHMENTS:
 1) Memo to Council
 2) No net-loss of forest land memo

SEPA review required? () Yes (X) NO	Should Clerk schedule a hearing? () Yes (X) NO Requested Date:
SEPA review completed? () Yes (X) NO	

SUMMARY STATEMENT OR LEGAL NOTICE LANGUAGE: (If this item is an ordinance or requires a public hearing, you must provide the language for use in the required public notice. Be specific and cite RCW or WCC as appropriate. Be clear in explaining the intent of the action.)

COMMITTEE ACTION:	COUNCIL ACTION:

Related County Contract #:	Related File Numbers:	Ordinance or Resolution Number:

Please Note: Once adopted and signed, ordinances and resolutions are available for viewing and printing on the County's website at: www.co.whatcom.wa.us/council.

WHATCOM COUNTY
Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097
360-676-6907, TTY 800-833-6384
360-738-2525 Fax



J.E. "Sam" Ryan
Director

Memorandum

TO: Whatcom County Council

FROM: Joshua Fleischmann, Planner *JF*

THROUGH: Mark Personius, Long Range Planning Manager *MP*

DATE: July 14, 2014

SUBJECT: No net-loss of forest land

The Forestry Advisory Committee (FAC) was formed by the County Council with the purpose of providing review and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council on issues that affect the forestry industry.

Of primary concern to the FAC is the loss of forest lands, specifically working forests. The attached memo from the FAC details the concern of the committee with regards to the loss of forest land, how much land has been removed from the forest land base and measures that can be taken to achieve no net-loss of working forests.

Members

*Gerry Millman
Herb Barker
Aubrey Stargell
Gordon Iverson
Rod Lofdahl
Greg Zender
Phil Cloward
Sharon Westergreen
Gary Jones
Max Perry
David Klingbiel*

**WHATCOM
COUNTY

FORESTRY
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE
(FAC)**

Making the Comprehensive Plan a reality by evaluating/addressing:

- ✓ *Land use conflicts*
- ✓ *Regulations*
- ✓ *Enforcement*
- ✓ *Short and long term forestry issues*

The FAC – Seeking to improve forestry management in Whatcom County

Memorandum

July 22, 2014

To: The Honorable Whatcom County Council
From: Gerry Millman, Forestry Advisory Committee Chair
Subject: No net-loss of forest land

The Forestry Advisory Committee (FAC) was formed by the County Council, pursuant to Ordinance # 2013-014, with the purpose of providing review and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council on issues that affect the forestry industry. The committee has been meeting since October 2013. At the first meeting, the committee had a discussion about the concerns of the forestry industry. A primary concern of the committee was the loss of forest lands, specifically working forests.

It is the desire of this committee to emphasize the difference between "forest land" and "working forests". The Growth Management Act defines forest lands as "land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, including Christmas trees subject to the excise tax imposed under RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, and that has long-term commercial significance". Forest lands, as defined by Whatcom County, are "land which is *capable of supporting a merchantable stand of timber* and is not being actively used for a use which is incompatible with timber growing" (emphasis added).

While the GMA definition touches on it, neither of the above definitions really explains the concept of “forest land” in a way that directly informs the forestry industry. The forestry industry relies on a working forest – that is, a forest which is actively managed to provide a *balance* of social, ecologic, and economic products and values.¹ A stand of trees does not make a working forest; it is the *use* of those trees that creates the working forest that is essential to the forestry industry.

For this reason, the County’s definition of forest land does not provide the Council with informative data about the health of one of the County’s key industries. This is apparent when looking at the actual numbers: by the County’s definition, there has been only minimal change in the private and public (National Forest, state forest land, and county park) forest land base in Whatcom County in the last 20 years. Why? Because there are still trees there. However, in reality, the working forest land base has been reduced by approximately 64 percent in the same time period².

The bulk of this loss resulted from the Northwest Forest Plan. However, the past two decades has seen further reduction in land available for timber harvesting due to many other statutory factors, including, but not limited to, the Endangered Species Act, zoning changes, changes in land use designations, and changes in forest and fish regulations. Also, many timber stands have become preserves in the last two decades and are removed from the working forest base. Even within the working forest, there is now some land that cannot be harvested due to the required buffers and the reality that the remaining ground is simply too steep for forestry activity. As a result of this shrinking land base, most of the available land in private ownership has been harvested and is in a period of regrowth, further reducing the available commercial timber within the County.

A viable forest resource economy is dependent upon the presence of forest related industries and activities, including, but not limited to, processors, equipment sales and repairs, supply stores, and trucking firms. Because

¹ Certainly forests can be managed for particular exclusive objectives, such as wildlife habitat, watershed protection, or lumber. A “working forest,” however, is managed for multiple benefits. For instance, a diverse, actively managed, working forest will inevitably result in a diverse, healthy wildlife population.

² Whatcom County zoned Rural Forestry and Commercial Forestry land constitutes roughly 223,500 acres, while National Forest land (excluding wilderness and recreation areas) constitutes roughly 208,000 acres in Whatcom County, for a total of roughly 431,500. Under the Northwest Forest Plan, the roughly 208,000 acres of National Forest land has not been available for harvest. An additional ~ 17,347 acres has essentially been removed from available forest land by zoning changes (~35 acres), reconveyance (~9,000 acres), ownership by conservation groups (~3,201), County Parks (~3,469), other County ownership (~63), State Parks (~665), State Department of Fish and Wildlife (~361), and the City of Bellingham (~553) resulting in a roughly 52% decrease in land available to support the timber industry. Industry representatives estimate an additional 25% of the remaining land (~51,538 acres) is removed from the available forest land due to buffers for streams, steep slopes, etc. If all of these factors are taken into account, they would cumulatively account for an approximate 64% reduction in the forest land base.

these activities and related industries depend on a stable forest product economy dependent on maintaining a stable forest land base, the Forestry Advisory Committee asks the Whatcom County Council to adopt a policy of No Net-Loss of working Forestry Resource Lands, similar to the policies in support of Agricultural Resource Lands.

Measures that can be taken to achieve no-net-loss of working forests may include:

- County Council decisions that consider the impacts to working forests
- Land use policies that encourage active management plans on Rural Forest lands
- Mitigation for loss of forest lands from productivity
- Land use policies that recognize the multiple values of working forests and respect the rights and responsibilities of private and public forest landowners
- Education programs that emphasize recognition that wood is a renewable natural resource
- Public and institutional education programs that promote the benefits of working forests
- Champion the implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan and completion of individual forest plans in order to re-balance the social, economic, and ecological benefits and products on a national forest specific basis
- Create a process to ensure that timber management plans submitted as part of the Open Space Timber Land Current Use tax program are implemented, or remove property from program
- Oppose downzoning of designated forest lands

The Forestry Advisory Committee appreciates your consideration.