



**DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES**

**OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
OF PUBLIC LANDS**

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May 18, 2018

Dear Friend,

Thank you for contacting my agency, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), about an application to log private property near Cougar Mountain (Forest Practices Application 2420111).

I am writing to you directly because I want you to know that I take your concerns seriously. As our population continues to grow, especially in this region, our working forests, parks, and natural areas are more and more turned to as buffers from urbanization and places to recreate and explore.

I share your vision to, when possible, preserve and protect forestland around urban areas. When it comes to our state-managed forestland, one strategy we have employed is to reconvey land back to counties so that they can add it to their parks, working landscapes, and natural habitat areas that they manage. We have also sold forestland to conservation groups, which allows us to purchase working forestland in less populated areas.

I have sought to increase and expand recreation activities in our working forests. Tomorrow, for example, DNR will open 17 miles of mountain bike trail in the Raging River State Forest. This trail will coexist with sustainable timber harvesting, which generates funding for schools, libraries, hospitals, and other critical public services.

In regards to the property near Cougar Mountain, however, the role of DNR is much more constrained. That property is private – not public – forestland.

As a result, DNR's role is to evaluate the proposal to ensure it meets the requirements of the state forest practices act and associated rules. If the proposal meets those requirements, my agency is required to approve the application.

In its regulatory role, DNR's Forest Practices Program thoroughly reviewed the proposal. The review included two recent field review meetings of professional experts, one of which included county and municipal representatives:

- On May 3, a DNR forest practices engineering geologist and forester visited the site to examine the area for signs of potential slope instability and erosion hazard. That review concluded that the proposal includes no unstable landforms that would, under forest practices rules, require Class IV-Special classification and review under the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA).

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- To ensure that conclusion was correct, an interdisciplinary team (IDT), convened by DNR, also visited the site on May 7. The purpose of the IDT visit was to help DNR determine if the proposal meets the standard for approval under state law. This team included representatives of the landowner, DNR Forest Practices, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, King County, and the City of Newcastle. The team reviewed issues such as slope stability, erosion potential, road construction, wetlands, and stream buffers. During the onsite meeting, no issues were identified that would require Class IV-Special classification of the FPA.

In light of the above – and because the property owner met all legal requirements – DNR has approved the application.

The parcel at issue is currently enrolled as designated forestland, and the landowner has committed to continue to manage the property as forest for at least ten years. Both of these factors reduce the likelihood that this parcel will soon be developed or converted to other uses.

I encourage you to consider partnering with King County and interested municipalities to see if it is possible to purchase the property and conserve it as a natural area. I have seen effective outreach lead to this positive outcome in similar situations. If funding can be identified, this might prove to be a win-win outcome for the property owner and local communities who value this natural forestland.

If my agency can be helpful in these efforts, we stand ready to lend our assistance.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hilary Franz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish that extends to the right and loops back under the name.

Hilary Franz
Commissioner of Public Lands