

**JEFFERSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

REGULAR AGENDA REQUEST

TO: Board of County Commissioners
Mark McCauley, County Administrator

FROM: Heidi Eisenhour, Commissioner

DATE: June 24, 2024

SUBJECT: Dabob Bay Department of Natural Resources Natural Area Expansion
Hearing and Letter of Support

STATEMENT OF ISSUE: As part of the Dabob Bay Natural Area created in 1984, managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in South East Jefferson County, there have been two previous boundary expansions, most recently in 2016. Since that time DNR has been working towards set aside of DNR managed lands within the boundary as well as development of a third boundary expansion proposal.

Jefferson County has been an active supporter of past Dabob Bay Natural Area expansion efforts. Fundamentally, this and previous transactions – once productive timberland is purchased in Jefferson County to replace conserved areas – will make DNR Timber Trust lands more productive for beneficiaries in Jefferson County in the future.

The letter being proposed today is in response to DNR's public comment period for this proposal and reiterate the points we made in our earlier letter.

ANALYSIS:

Since our last letter of support in November, 2023, DNR staff delivered a presentation to the Board of Natural Resources (BNR) at the December 5, 2023 BNR meeting for a vote on the Dabob Bay Inter-Trust Exchange and Dabob Bay Trust Land Transfer (TLT) transfer for which they received support from the BNR.

A majority of the parcels being proposed for inclusion are encumbered under DNR's management practices and could not be harvested. Productive replacement lands will be sought for acquisition in the same (or similar) tax districts as the ones impacted by these encumbered parcels resulting in more revenue coming to tax districts than if we were to forego this expansion. As part of this outreach for expansion with stakeholders in Jefferson County, we received a detailed presentation from DNR on this proposal on November 6, 2023. After receiving that presentation, the BOCC sent a letter of support for this boundary expansion proposal.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss, amend if needed and send the included letter of support.

REVIEWED BY:


Mark McCauley, County Administrator

6/20/24
Date



Board of County Commissioners

1820 Jefferson Street

PO Box 1220

Port Townsend, WA 98368

Kate Dean, District 1 Heidi Eisenhour, District 2 Greg Brotherton, District 3

June 24, 2024

Jayana Marshall, Assistant Division Manager
Conservation and Recreation Division
Washington State Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 47014
Olympia, WA 98504-7014

Re: Support for DNR's Proposal to Expand the Dabob Bay Natural Area

Dear Ms. Marshall:

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Washington Department of Natural Resource (DNR) for its support for expanding the Dabob Bay Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA).

Once the boundary expansion is approved by the Commissioner of Public Lands, there will be additional steps necessary to formally add lands into the NRCA, such as the Trust Land Transfer program for state trust lands, and willing seller land acquisition for any private lands. As stated in our November 2023 letter, we support this proposal with one modification as detailed below.

As you know, Dabob Bay is one of the natural treasures of Hood Canal and Puget Sound and this proposal would provide more complete protection and improved long-term viability for the ecosystem as a whole, for the shellfish industry, and treaty reserved resources of four Tribes.

In 2020, a coalition of regional and statewide conservation groups, shellfish growers, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, and the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe urged DNR to expand the Dabob Bay Natural Area along the lines now proposed. We added our support in August 2023, after a statewide effort succeeded in revitalizing the Trust Land Transfer Program. In December of 2023, DNR announced that it had identified 671 acres of about 910 acres of older forest within the proposed boundary for protection with Climate Commitment Act (CCA) funding. This funding will allow the CCA forests to be protected as soon as DNR buys replacement lands for the timber trusts that will benefit the county's junior taxing districts.

We support the proposed NRCA boundary expansion as a practical way for DNR to steward these forests over the long term. We also understand that approval of the new boundary will make the remaining state trust lands eligible to be transferred into Natural Area management through future Trust Land Transfers or CCA funding opportunities that provide for replacement timber lands that will benefit trust beneficiaries over the long term.

Support for Additional Recommendation for Boundary Expansion (160 acres)

Finally, as we stated in our previous letter, we ask that DNR add the 160 acre “West Dabob” parcel to the boundary expansion proposal. This parcel was included in Jefferson County’s 2023 requested boundary proposal to DNR. Protection of this tract within the Dabob Bay Natural Area would do three things: 1) better ensure long-term conservation of the marbled murrelet site currently protected under the HCP, 2) protect forest connectivity and prevent future habitat fragmentation between the murrelet site and existing Natural Area, and 3) allow the Trust Land Transfer process to compensate the county and junior taxing districts for the currently encumbered murrelet habitat.

DNR’s conservation work at Dabob Bay over the past decade has been recognized at the state and national level and is a spark of hope in the larger effort to protect and restore Puget Sound. We greatly appreciate DNR’s effort to expand the Dabob Bay Natural Area to secure protection of this cherished landscape while also better positioning the timber trusts using the secured Climate Commitment Act funding and future Trust Land Transfers. We urge you to approve the proposed boundary expansion with the West Dabob addition proposed here.

Sincerely,

Kate Dean, Chair
District 1 Commissioner

Heidi Eisenhour
District 2 Commissioner

Greg Brotherton
District 3 Commissioner