Community Forum
Stewart Mountain Community Forest

Summary Report

Van Zandt Community Hall
Thursday, August 25th, 2022
5:30 pm – 8:00 pm

1. Welcome and Purpose

Val Lloyd, member of the Interim Community Advisory Team and resident of the South Fork Nooksack River Watershed, welcomed everyone and asked members of Interim Community Advisory Committee who were in attendance this evening, to stand and introduce themselves:

Matt Grund – representing forestry interests
Alex Harris – representing habitat interests
Cameron Kolk – representing education interests
Holly Koon – representing educational interests
Mike McGlenn – representing recreation interests
Tom Smith – representing forestry interests

Val then spoke to the history of this place, and the purpose of this initiative. A complete copy of her introductory comments included at the end of this document.

Appreciations were offered for Julie Fonseca de Borges of National Park Service River Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, who has been providing technical assistance for the project.

A view of Stewart Mountain Community Forest – photo by Val Lloyd on 8.25.22

2. What is a Community Forest?

Nicky Pasi from Mountains to Sound Greenway offered shared the story of how the community in Kittitas county has been working to establish the 9600-acre Checkerboard Community Forest, located adjacent to the Teanaway Community Forest. Nicky spoke of the various challenges and successes in the process of establishing the community forest. She also emphasized the importance of working closely with the community both to seek input and to leverage local knowledge and expertise. View PowerPoint presentation at http://www.stewartmountaincf.org.

3. Overview of Stewart Mountain Community Forest (SMCF)

The Core Planning Team for the SMCF presented an overview of the history and concept for the project. View PowerPoint presentation at http://www.stewartmountaincf.org.

- Holly O'Neil of the Evergreen Land Trust (ELT) provided a history of the project, starting back in 1995 when the residents of Hillside Road ("Hill-slide Road") started mobilizing to protect their homes from increased risks of landslides and debris flows due to logging activities.

- Maggie Taylor, Water Resources Specialist - Nooksack Indian Tribe Natural Resources Department, was unable to attend due to illness. Holly presented on Maggie's behalf. The Tribe initiated a Watershed Restoration Planning process in 2014, to address water quality issues and salmon decline. Extensive community involvement. Restoration of the upland hydrology was identified as a key strategy to create climate resilience and recover water resources.

- Alex Jeffers, Conservation Director of Whatcom Land Trust (WLT), described WLT's role in the project, how the current landowner approached WLT, and how WLT worked with other members of the planning tea. Alex then described some of the other Community Forests, how we don't need to re-invent the wheel, and how it will be important to make sure the Stewart Mountain Community Forest is tailored to our local and unique needs and values. He emphasized that there are a lot of big decisions ahead of us.

- Chris Elder, Senior Watershed Management Planner with Whatcom County Public Works, explained how the County is involved, provided an overview of the structure of the Water Resources Inventory Area 1 (Greater Nooksack River Basin) Watershed Management Board and described how upland forest management has been identified as high priority to support water resource and watershed recovery. Chris described next steps in the process:

4. Small Group Discussion:

Forum participants gathered in groups of 2-5 people, including an I-CAT (or) Core Planning Team representative in each small group, to discuss the following questions:

- *What questions are coming up for you?*
- *What are your biggest concerns?*
- *From what you understand about the project, what feels most interesting or important to you? What are your hopes?*

Small Groups Report Back:
Group 1: - Project is more than 20-year project – people need to understand it will not happen tomorrow. - Wonder if the term "community" being overused - More local involvement. How do you define the South Fork Valley locality? - Funding possibility - LID (Local Improvement District) - Build up the community – not just an elite "god squad" that makes all the decisions - Important that the people who have authority need to listen and be responsive - Pride, water storage at 50% if you don't log – why log? - Who will own? Who will manage?
Group 2: - Balancing access and uses with long term sustainability of our natural resources and wildlife - Avoid garbage and over-use.

Group 3:

- What does the logging community think?
- How do we balance all the different priorities?
- Salmon survival is a critical element
- Young people are here!
- Long term management plan with staying power – across different generations of leaders
- Can we build infrastructure here locally?
- Hope that this will spark a broader recreational planning effort, more youth involvement overall, and engage the logging community to be able to make a change
- Hope for continued success

Group 4:

- What potential obstacles could we foresee?
- Does the amount of product we have to make and still be able to protect water, etc.
- How will we measure success?
- How to manage in a way that accommodates for climate change and population growth
- Local voice
- Risk of loss of production from forestland base
- Hope for prototype for others
- Actively managed for timber
- Passing both lumber and salmon onto our kids

Group 5:

- Dead end of Hillside, Dead end of Turkington – that is the 500 acres
- Selective logging and benefits to hydrology and watershed health
- Selective thinning already happening in Whatcom County
- Logging revenue paired with carbon revenue
- Devil is in the details – what kind of logging and when
- Who gets to decide (at all levels)
- Need to look at other models rather than re-invent the wheel (e.g. ecological forest management)
- Table at Deming Log Show ☺ - talk about different models of silvaculture
- Recreation – thread the needle – balance

Group 6:

- Hopes that this will be a galvanizing thing that will bring all the parts of our community together
- Hop that we will beat the ticking clock on salmon recovery
- More youth in the outdoors

- How do we get more diversity in the community? We could have more conservative neighbors here tonight - Tax impact – does that affect our project like it does in Checkerboard? - Balancing the ideal of practicality and ideals, how can they co-exist - Protect ecosystem integrity and old trees for future generations
Group 7: - Outreach for private donors - Entities – explain more about what they do and what they offer - Why log at all? - Why log now? - All the information from Checkerboard was fascinating - Wonderful how many people showed up - Interesting how many people have ties to the River Farm and Hillside Road - Speed of the process – How we can accelerate the project. - I am experiencing new and different – and I have wanted that for a long time. It is dawning on me how great that is this evening. - Long term – 100 years – expand our thinking on this – carbon sink, water - Fully funded recreation access
Group 8: - What is the hands-on management going to look like - Revenue? Will the profit stay in the community? Cost? Who will pay? - Recreation – what kind will be allowed? - How will existing roads be maintained? New road building? - To show how ecological forestry can work and show how we can increase water quantity and quality and manage for salmon and wildlife in the watershed. - If Phase One is a proof of concept, how will that extrapolate how Phase 2 will be managed? - Hopes – how this can be an example of how we can scale up this model.

5. Wrap up, Next Steps, Survey reminder

Val thanked everyone for attending and shared her enthusiasm for the potential of the Community Forest Initiative. Everyone who is here tonight is part of making this happen. Our next step (for all of us) is to reach out to our neighbors and encourage them to take the Community Survey.

For more information or to get involved please visit: https://stewartmountaincf.org/.

Forum Attendance

In-person: 39 (including I-CAT members)
Zoom: 19

Val Lloyd's opening remarks

Welcome to the Stewart Mountain Community Forest community forum.

I'm Valerie Lloyd and I live on Saxon Road a couple miles south of Acme. My view to the west is filled with Stewart Mountain. If you look at this photo I took this morning, you can imagine the town of Acme right there beyond these trees. I thought it would be good for us all to have a clear idea of the area we're talking about.

I'm here as a member of the Stewart Mt Com. Forest I-CAT (Interim Community Advisory Team). We're a group of people helping the Core Planning Team and Tech Team with this forum and the project in general as we move forward, however we move forward. That's where you come in.

This evening is filled with opportunities to find common ground, share perspectives, and learn new things. When I was offered the chance to host, I decided I'd take proscetic license (kind of like poetic license) and tell a story as an opening rather than try to fool you with more knowledge than I've actually acquired. So, without further ado:

Once upon a time, glaciers covered this land, the watershed that exists south of Mt Baker Hwy, east of Stewart Mountain, west of the Dike and north of Wickersham. Eventually the ice melted and people made their way here. Let's take a moment to think that as we move upon this land in cars or by foot or bike or boat, we are moving where countless others have gone before us and each of them have a myriad of tales about this place like we do.

As the centuries passed and people made use of and changes to this land, effects have happened that allow us to both enjoy the way of life we experience and, sometimes suffer the consequences of our actions. If you read or hear stories of the history of the South Fork Valley you know that people have gathered together often over the years to face challenges. Many of us in recent history have worked together to educate ourselves, build understandings, and make plans that make sense to us all.

In 2017 a timber company from New Hampshire bought the forestland on Stewart Mountain. This company contacted, as part of its business model, the Whatcom Land Trust, to see if there was interest in the acquisition of about 5,500 acres of the total holdings.

The Land Trust, along with a core group of partners, started the process to create what eventually may become a formal community forest. As we are gathered here this evening about 500 of those acres are about to be purchased and you will learn more about this shortly.

The Stewart Mountain Community Forest is not yet a community forest. Yes, some of the land has been purchased and, as in all things, timing is everything. The opportunity to at least start the purchasing process presented itself and it makes sense that the core group pounced. Now, though, the opportunity has broadened, and we are here this evening to begin to work together to truly, over the next few months and probably years, develop a vision and reality that becomes the Stewart Mountain Community Forest. An area of land within our reach that we are connected to, that we know about, that we can sustain collectively. An important area that potentially can contribute to the overall health of the South Fork Valley in general.

So this is not a happy ending... it's a happy continuance of the Story of the South Fork Nooksack Watershed and Valley.

Thank you in advance for sharing and showing respect as the forum unfolds. We are here to work together. There are many challenges currently in our valley. We can't address them all this evening. If you have questions and thoughts about issues that seem to exist beyond the scope of this evening's topics, they'll be noted and we will help you find responses elsewhere.

Thank you for being here.