

Timber sales of concern in Pierce County

Upcoming Sales Containing Mature Structurally Complex Forests

Compiled by the Center for Responsible Forestry, November 2023



Mature “legacy” forests in Western Washington are rapidly disappearing, as the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) auctions them off on a monthly basis to the highest bidder. The Center for Responsible Forestry (CRF) advocates for the creation of a new mature forest conservation policy on lands managed by DNR. Pierce County has the opportunity to lead the way in this effort by calling for an immediate end to logging of mature forests on state lands in our County. This packet is a work in progress, and our goal in producing it is to inform the people of Pierce County about what is at stake so that we can protect the forests we love.

For more information, contact southsound@c4rf.org

Criteria for selecting mature, carbon dense forests using Natural Climate Solutions funding

Purpose

In its 2023 legislative session, the Washington Legislature allocated funds from the state's Climate Commitment Act (CCA) to protect 2,000 acres of "structurally complex, carbon dense" forestland owned by the state; however, the legislature did not provide additional details about how these acreages should be selected. To determine which forests are eligible for protection under the CCA proviso, we propose DNR uses the below criteria, which is based on DNR's "Maturation I" classification ([Guide to Identifying Mature & Old-Growth Forests, Van Pelt 2007](#)). Numerous scientific studies have documented the ecological, hydrologic, and carbon benefits that mature, structurally-complex forests provide. Conservation organizations believe this criteria provides a clear, science-based process for DNR to select which stands will be protected under the CCA proviso.

Criteria

- **Large trees**
 - Dominant cohort: ≥ 20 " DBH.
 - Some dominant trees ≥ 30 " DBH
 - Dominant cohort: $\geq 60\%$ of site potential tree height
- **Diversity in tree size**
 - Range of tree heights and tree diameters.
- **Establishment of understory**
 - Shade tolerant trees (e.g. hemlocks and cedars) naturally recruited in the understory.
- **Biodiversity**
 - Presence of three or more tree species.
 - Presence of various shrub species unevenly distributed throughout the stand

CRF has conducted surveys of the first six timber sales within this report. Our surveys concluded that four of these sales ("Dobbs Knob", "Jeckle", "Railroad Creek" and "Klister") contain stands of mature forest that meet the above criteria.

Prioritization

The first three of the sales listed, "Railroad Creek", "Jeckle", and "Klister," contain large areas of mature forest and are listed by priority for immediate conservation. Of these 3 sales, Railroad Creek is our highest priority because the surrounding forest land is older and is less fragmented by clearcuts as the other two sales. The next sale, "Dobbs Knob," isn't scheduled until 2026 but is a high priority for conservation. We strongly recommend a thorough old-growth assessment from DNR for this sale. The final sales ("Alderooca" and "Freckle") are most likely not NCS eligible based on the above criteria. Both are still areas of concern, as described below, and are included here to fully inform Pierce County residents about DNR's plans to clearcut. The final page of this document contains sales with varying amounts of mature forest that have yet to be surveyed, but are modeled to contain mostly mature forest and are therefore areas of high concern.

Here is a [spreadsheet](#) for a quick reference of our priorities.

Railroad Creek units 3 through 6

Decision date: 10/29/24

Trust beneficiaries: 71.35 acres Common School, **68.63 acres State Forest Transfer**

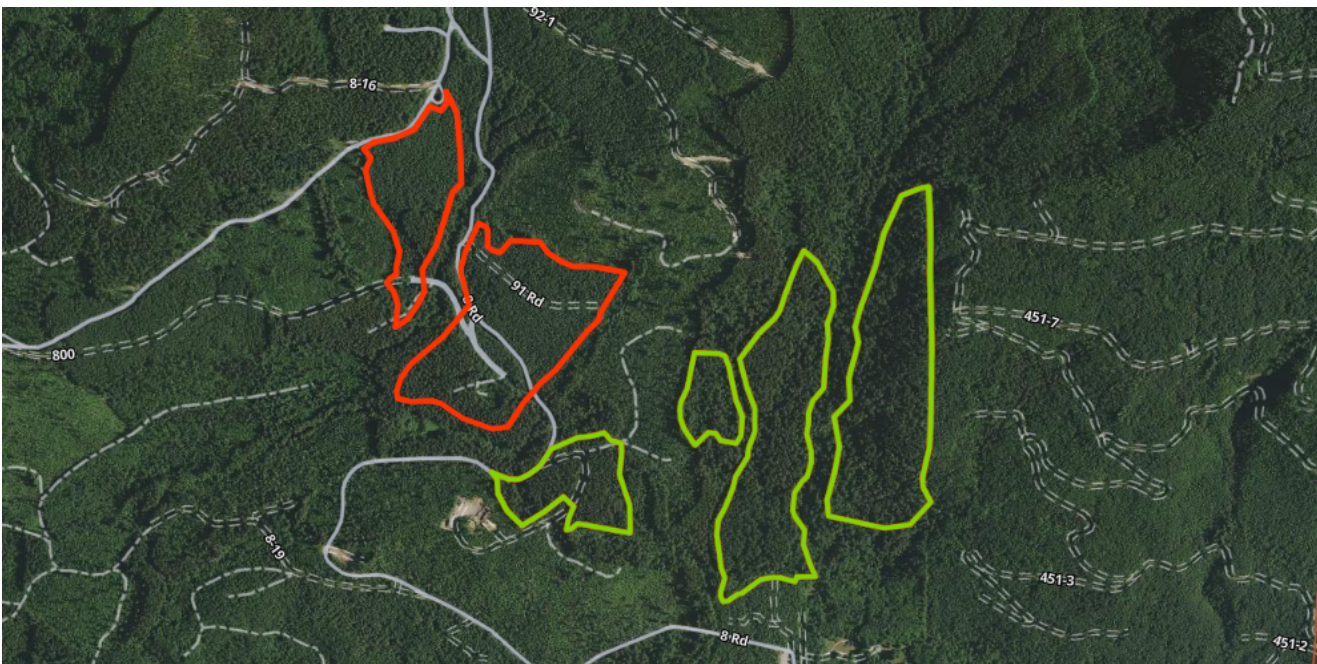
Size: 140 acres, all mature forest

This sale is located at the end of 278th Ave E, just north of the Frey Family Farm and the Mt. Rainier Lions Club. The sale contains the Elbe Hills Trailhead, and is just south of the Elbe Hills ORV Area Campground. Many trails run through this timber sale and this area is used daily by ORVs, dirt bikes, hikers, equestrians, and others. This is another combination clearcut/thinning sale. We are concerned about the four units of mature forest. The trees in these units are modeled by DNR to be between 89 and 100 years old. We found plenty of large trees in the eastern four units of this sale, including Douglas firs up to 57", Hemlocks up to 30", and red cedars up to 51". Unit 6 is very steep, with some south facing slopes above 40 degrees. Elk were seen in October in multiple units of this timber sale.

Examples of large trees within the "Railroad Creek" timber sale



Map of "Railroad Creek" timber sale, with mature units in green



Jeckle unit 1

Decision date: 8/27/24

Trust beneficiaries: 97.3 acres Common School, **4.77 acres State Forest Transfer**

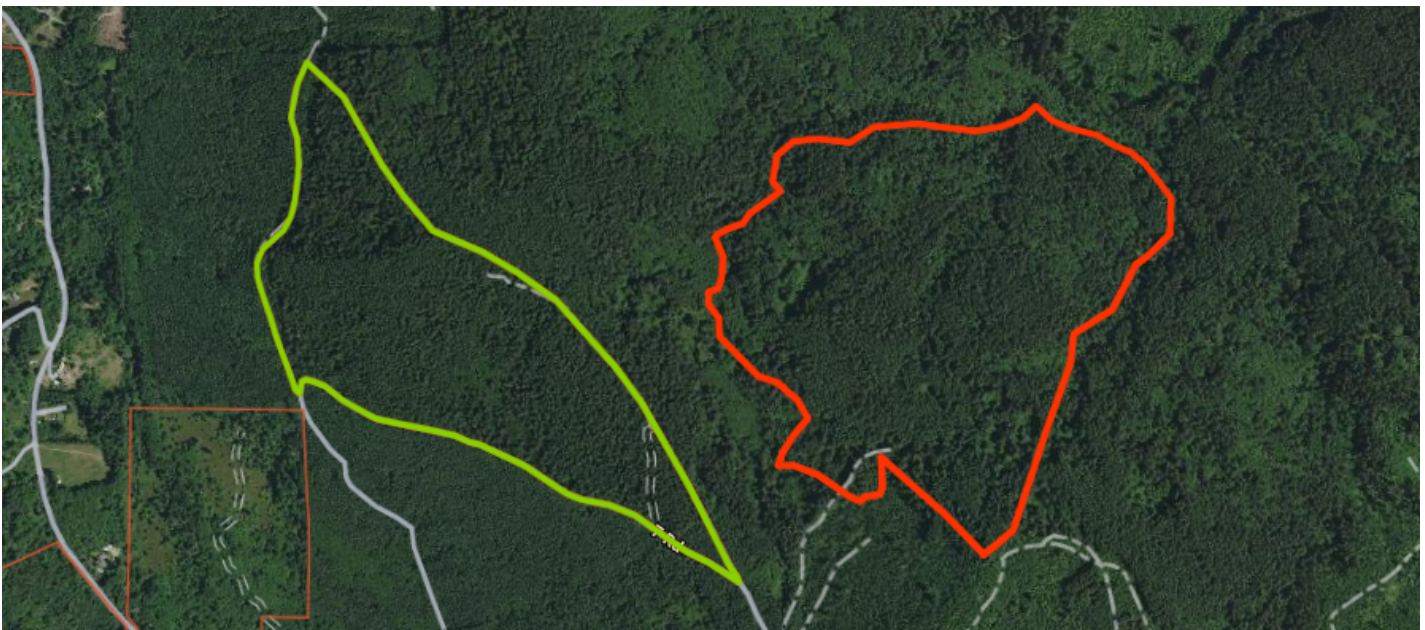
Size: 102.05 acres, 95 acres of mature forest

This sale is located on north- and west-facing slopes, east of a residential neighborhood near Alder Lake reservoir. The sale is a combination of VRH (clearcut) and VDT (commercial thinning). Unit 1, the proposed clearcut, is the one that we're concerned about because it contains valuable mature forest. The trees in this unit are modeled by DNR to be between 55 and 72 years old. We measured Douglas firs up to 50," red cedars up to 32," and hemlocks up to 40" in diameter.

Examples of large trees within the "Jeckle" timber sale



Map of "Jeckle" timber sale, with unit 1 in green



Klister unit 3

Decision date: 2/23/27

Trust beneficiaries: 66.78 acres Common School

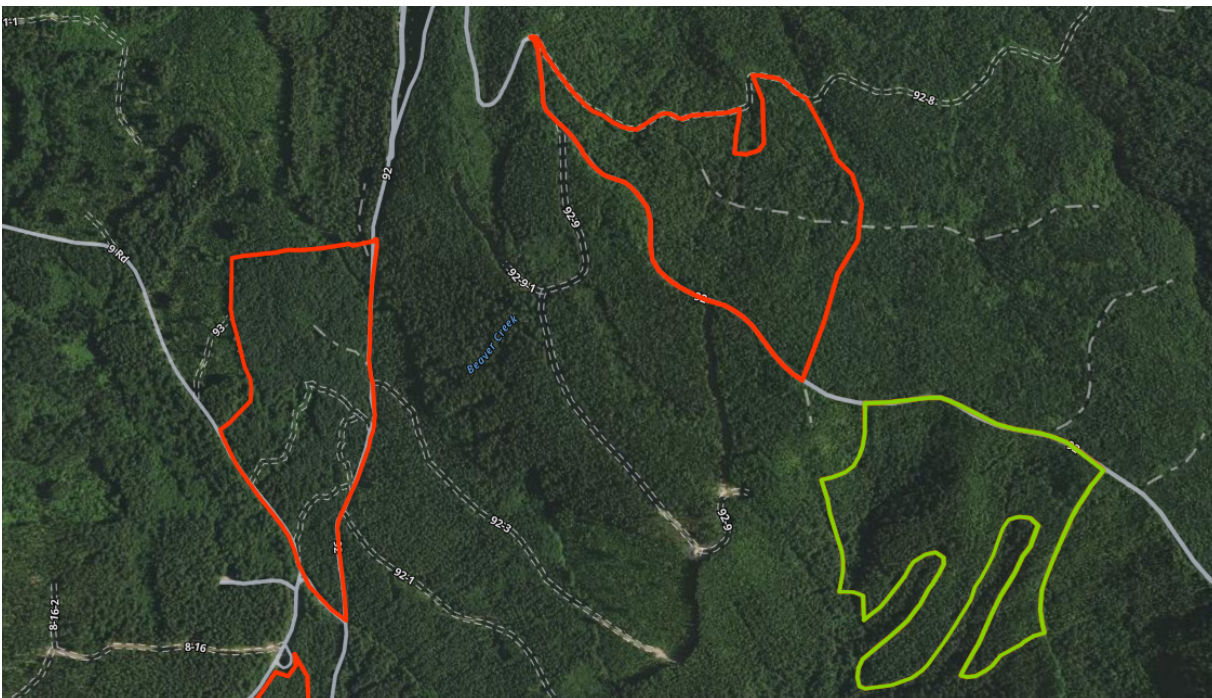
Size: 66.78 acres, 50.24 acres modeled mature forest

This timber sale is located just east of the Elbe Hills ORV Area Campground, and just south of Nisqually tribal land. Unlike much of the Elbe Hills area, the Klister sale is surrounded on almost all sides by contiguous forest, some young, some mature. There are almost no recent clearcuts directly adjacent to the units of this sale. There is a lot of recreational activity in this area, including a Sno-Park in unit 2. This is another combination clearcut/thinning sale. We are concerned about unit 3, which contains mature forest. The trees in this unit are modeled by DNR to be between 59 and 108 years old. Unit 3 contains Douglas firs up to 50", hemlocks up to 45" and red cedars up to 61" in diameter.

Examples of large trees within the "Klister" timber sale



Map of "Klister" timber sale, with unit 3 in green



Dobbs Knob

Decision date: 4/27/26

Trust beneficiaries: 175.35 acres Common School, **14.29 acres State Forest Transfer**

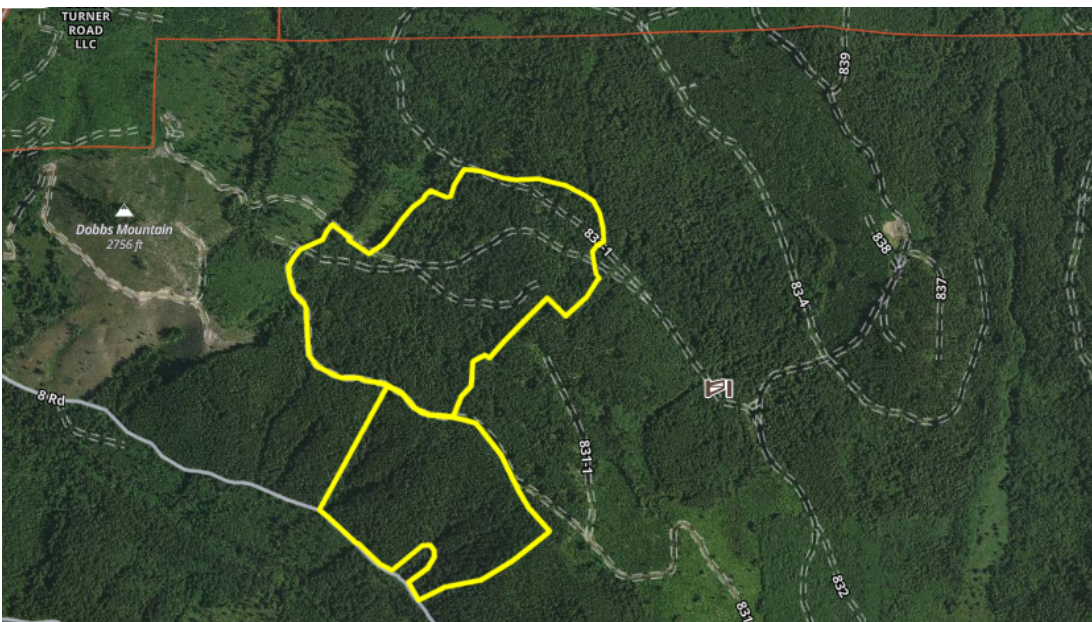
Size: 189.61 acres, all mature forest

This sale is located on north- and south-facing slopes on the eastern side of Dobbs mountain. The trees in this sale are modeled by DNR to be between 74 and 92 years old, but we saw plenty of residual old-growth trees and a lack of stumps across several acres, so it's quite possible that parts of this area have never been logged before. We measured Douglas firs up to 55," hemlocks up to 45", and red cedars up to 65" in diameter.

Examples of large trees in the "Dobbs Knob" timber sale



Map of "Dobbs Knob" timber sale



Alderoca (likely ineligible for CCA proviso but still worth advocating for)

Decision date: 2/25/25

Trust beneficiaries: 32.21 acres University Repayment

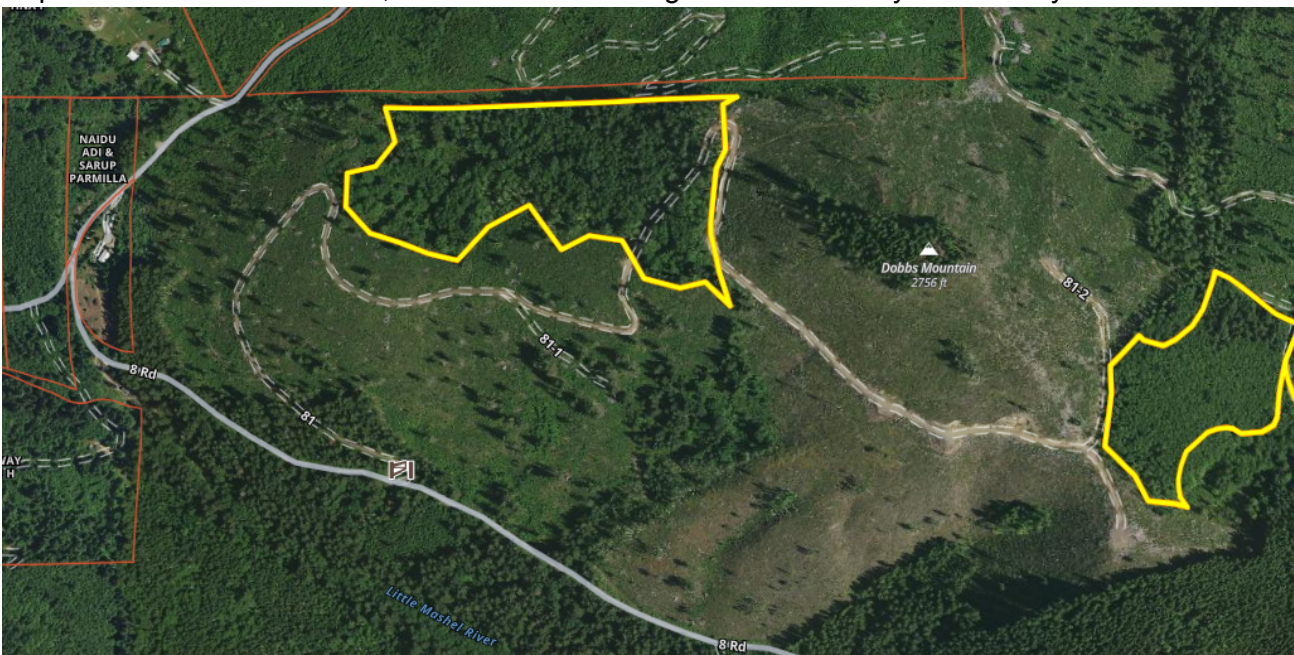
Size: 37.31 acres, all mature hardwood forest

This unconventional sale, which is almost entirely alder and cottonwood, is part of a pilot project by DNR to liquidate hardwoods in non-riparian areas and convert those areas into Douglas fir plantations. This project began in 2021 and DNR decided to continue it in 2023. This type of forest is increasingly rare in upland areas of Washington State. This sale, “Alderoca”, contains mostly alders 15-25” in diameter, a few (<10%) residual Douglas firs 25-40” in diameter, and the largest trees are cottonwoods 35-55” in diameter. Cottonwoods have high ecological value and little to no economic value. The branching structure and cavities that often result from heart rot in mature cottonwood stands provide nesting habitat for birds and cover for a variety of wildlife, including deer, elk, and beaver. Foliage also provides leaf litter to the stream that becomes food for aquatic invertebrates such as stoneflies, mayflies, and caddisflies. While this sale is not eligible for conservation under the NCS criteria outlined on page 2 of this report, we believe this entire DNR plan to clearcut hardwoods should be opposed across the region, especially in the Elbe hills.

Typical mature cottonwoods in the “Alderoca” timber sale



Map of “Alderoca” timber sale, note how surrounding area has already been totally clearcut



Freckle (likely ineligible for CCA proviso but still worth advocating for)

Decision date: 5/28/28

Trust beneficiaries: 132.65 acres State Forest Purchase, 52 acres State Forest Transfer, 20.4 acres University Repayment

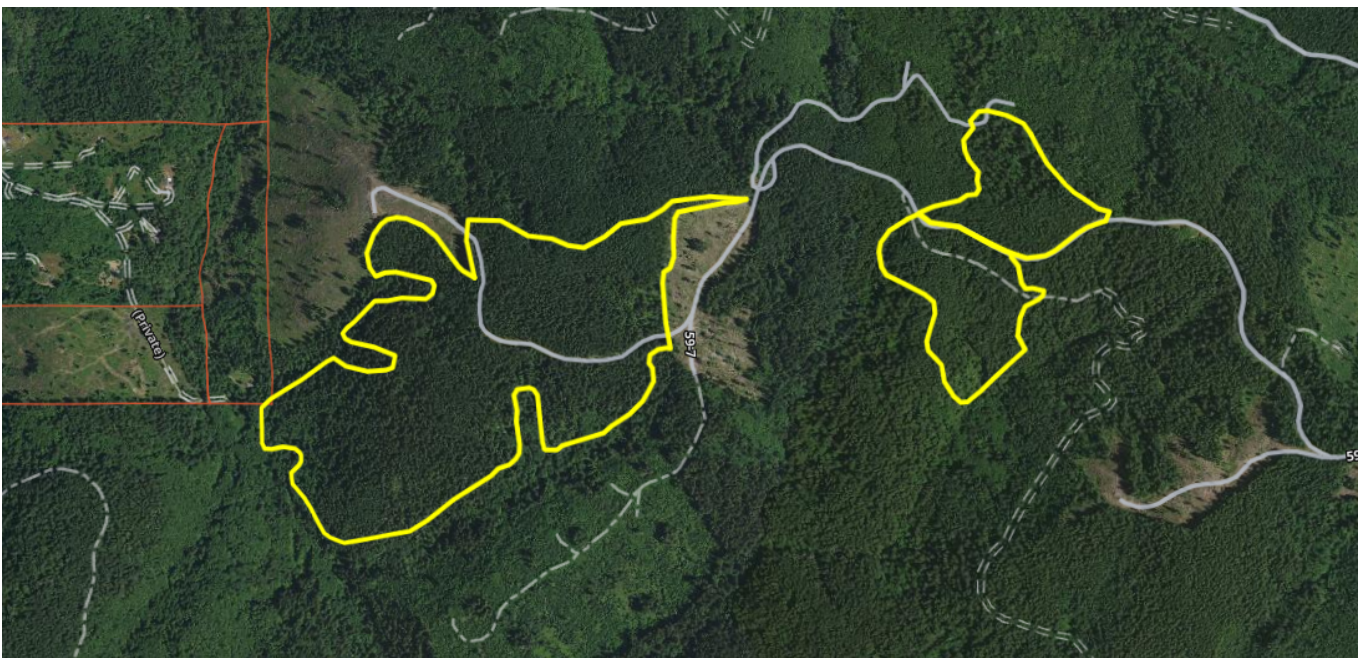
Size: 201.62 acres, 53.9 are modeled mature forest

This sale is located amidst multiple recent clearcuts, just east of a residential neighborhood. The trees in this sale are modeled by DNR to be between 45 and 75 years old. This sale contains a relatively marginal amount of mature forest in smaller pockets. We are including it here for informational purposes, although it is unlikely to meet the criteria for the CCA proviso. We found an abundance of epicormic branching in this sale, unusual for what was otherwise a relatively young forest. Units 2 and 3 of this sale are very steep, with slopes in excess of 50 degrees. Unit 2c contains the largest amount of mature forest, with Douglas firs up to 50", hemlocks up to 40" and grand firs up to 42" in diameter.

Examples of large trees within the "Freckle" timber sale



Map of "Freckle" timber sale



Other timber sales in Pierce County with modeled mature forest we are highly concerned about due to their modeled age and LiDAR imagery are:

Heckle

Decision date: 10/24/2028

Trust beneficiaries: **125.96 acres State Forest Transfer**, **84.93 acres State Forest Purchase**, 53.58 acres Capitol Grant, 50.43 acres University Repayment, 28.9 acres Common School

Size: 321.76 acres, 206.64 are modeled mature forest

Baptist - right next to the town of Ashford

Decision date: 6/25/2030

Trust beneficiaries: Common School

Size: 26.42 acres, 14.62 are modeled mature forest

T 3

Decision date: 6/25/2030

Trust beneficiaries: **125.96 acres State Forest Transfer**, 17.06 acres Capitol Grant

Size: 143 acres, 132.33 are modeled mature forest

Busy Beaver Helo

Decision date: 6/25/2030

Trust beneficiaries: **31.32 acres State Forest Transfer**, 1.92 acres Charitable etc.

Size: 33.15 acres, all modeled mature forest

FY Dump

Decision date: 6/26/2035

Trust beneficiaries: ALL

Size: 1513.45 acres, at least 57.8 are modeled mature forest