

## **Natural Resources Board Approves Purchase, Amends Marbled Murrelet Plan**

### **Local News**

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - At its regular monthly meeting Tuesday, the Board of Natural Resources approved the purchase of 3,359 acres of irrigated agricultural land in Benton County from a private company. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will manage the acquired parcel as a source of long-term revenue to support public school construction statewide. The purchased property, which adjoins other trust lands managed by DNR, includes water rights and irrigation systems. Once fully developed for row crops, orchards and vineyards, the \$11.3 million purchase is expected to produce between \$1.2 million and \$1.5 million in new revenue annually to support public school construction statewide. The seller of the property is Sandpiper Tree Farm, LLC. Funds for the acquisition will come from a land replacement account that DNR uses to acquire working forests and other natural resource lands. The account is funded by the sales of trust lands that are less productive or less likely to provide long-term revenue to the public school beneficiaries.

In another decision regarding Common School trust lands, the Board approved the purchase of two parcels – totaling approximately 160 acres – of working forestland near Conconully in Okanogan County from a private party. Acquiring the parcels will allow expansion of the Loup Loup State Forest, which DNR manages for revenue for public school construction statewide, wildlife habitat, clean water and recreation. In addition to obtaining more than 400,000 board feet of marketable timber, the purchase removes a private in-holding within the forest and enhances DNR’s ability to sustainably manage the broader working forest in the area.

**State Lands Habitat Conservation Plan amended for marbled murrelet strategy planning**

The board also approved a minor amendment to the State Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) marbled murrelet interim strategy. When the HCP was signed in 1997, there was not enough scientific knowledge about the elusive bird to develop a long-term conservation strategy for the marbled murrelet. Since then, DNR has engaged in science studies as part of a multi-step process to develop a long-term conservation strategy. The amendment approved today shifts the focus of DNR’s interim protection for murrelet habitat into areas identified by recent science as potentially important for a long-term conservation strategy. The amendment is the result of extensive dialogue between DNR and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the best way to maintain options while the long-term strategy is developed. In an April 17 letter to DNR, the USFWS expressed support for the minor amendment, stating that the shift in the focus of protection “is better for marbled murrelet conservation.”

**DNR manages state trust lands**

Administered by Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark, DNR manages more than 5.6 million acres of state-owned forest, range, commercial, agricultural, conservation, and aquatic lands. Of these, more than half are held in trust to produce income to support public schools, universities, prisons, and other state institutions. In addition to revenue, DNR manages these lands for outdoor recreation, habitat for native fish and wildlife, watersheds for clean water and other public benefits. The Board of Natural Resources represents the beneficiaries of state trust lands.