Building the
CLIMATE SMART WOOD ECONOMY
in Pierce County

WASHINGTON CONSERVATION ACTION
Protecting People & Nature as One

Summary

In 2023, Washington Conservation Action (WCA) and six partners were awarded a $25 million USDA Climate Smart Commodities grant to develop a climate smart wood economy in the Pacific Northwest. This project supports two pressing needs: a growing demand for climate-smart wood from the architecture, engineering, and construction community, as well as the increased recognition of climate-smart forestry as a powerful tool to mitigate climate change. Together with Mason Conservation District (MCD), WCA is addressing these issues specifically in Pierce County by supporting the growth of a countywide climate-smart wood supply chain.

Our project will connect climate-smart wood producers in Pierce County, namely small forest landowners (SFLOs), Tribal Nations, and community forest managers, with local mills, wood manufacturers, and downstream buyers who seek climate-smart wood products. In doing so, we intend to bring new economic opportunities to Pierce County while improving local forest health, climate resilience, and carbon storage.

Core Elements

- **Climate-smart forest management incentive program:** WCA and MCD will develop a cost-share program for landowners to defray the upfront costs of adopting climate-smart forestry management practices compared to business as usual. This program will disperse $1 million in incentive payments to SFLOs, Tribes, and community forest owners to support a transition to climate-friendly practices. Additional support such as technical assistance will also be available to producers.

- **Market development for climate-smart wood supply chains:** We will disperse $500,000 in incentive payments and price premiums to participating mills and manufacturers. These payments will support traceability in the supply chain and promote the purchase an d sale of climate smart wood.

- **Measurement of impacts:** Though this project will not generate carbon credits, it is still important to understand the climate impacts of our work. We will measure carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions reductions using a standardized methodology across all wood producers enrolled in this project.

- **Coordination with local stakeholders and governments:** We will pursue opportunities to align climate smart wood efforts with local initiatives and welcome collaboration with local partners.

Goals

- Increase market access and recognition for wood products from forests owned and managed by families, communities, and Tribal Nations

- Generate new economic opportunities for local producers and mills who can distinguish themselves as climate-smart

- Create a county-level model for developing climate-smart wood supply chains that could be replicated elsewhere

- Develop systems to enhance timber traceability and help climate-smart timber producers quantify the positive impacts of their management

Project Highlights

$1 million in incentive payments to landowners

$500,000 in incentive payments to sawmills and wood manufacturers

Engagement goals:

2–3 mills

35–45 Landowners

Tribal Engagement

The future that we imagine of a post-carbon economy looks different than what we are in now, and we must build new, innovative systems in order to get there. Shifting from a largely exploitative industry to one of sustainability means strengthening our state's climate resilience and that of our community health and resilience too.

In this effort, we seek to partner with local Tribes, as leaders in environmental stewardship and sustainability, to build an economy that makes returns on community wellbeing. A climate-smart economy must include Tribes. Understanding that not all Tribal Nations in Pierce County retain forestland, we strive for collaboration and input from Tribes on the structure of the project, with hopes of increasing opportunities for participation.

Climate Smart Forestry

Definition:

Climate-smart forestry increases forest resilience in the face of climate change and sequesters and stores more carbon over time compared to conventional practices. Climate-smart forestry also addresses issues of equity and climate justice, improving community well-being and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Eligible practices:

Though there are no universal criteria that define climate-smart forestry, we support many practices for this project, including the following:

- Reducing the average size of harvest openings, increasing live-tree retention, and lengthening harvest rotations.
- Managing for a diversity of tree sizes, ages, and native species that make up multiple forest conditions and habitats.
- Thinning unnaturally dense and fire-prone forest stands, and restoring the capacity to withstand natural disturbances using prescribed fire and other means.
- Protecting water quality and aquatic habitat with ecologically appropriate buffers along streams and around wetlands.
- Tribal First Foods habitat management including restoration of rare and declining natural plant communities.

Interested in learning more?

To learn more about our larger project, please visit the project overview page from our partners at Sustainable Northwest.

To learn more about our project in Pierce County and find ways to get involved, please contact us!

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MASON CONSERVATION DISTRICT