

## REGIONAL NEWS

# Community Forest on Cle Elum Ridge garners state funding

**CLE ELUM** – A proposed Community Forest on Cle Elum Ridge received \$3 million in state funding from the 2021 Capital Budget, passed by the Legislature on Saturday, April 26.

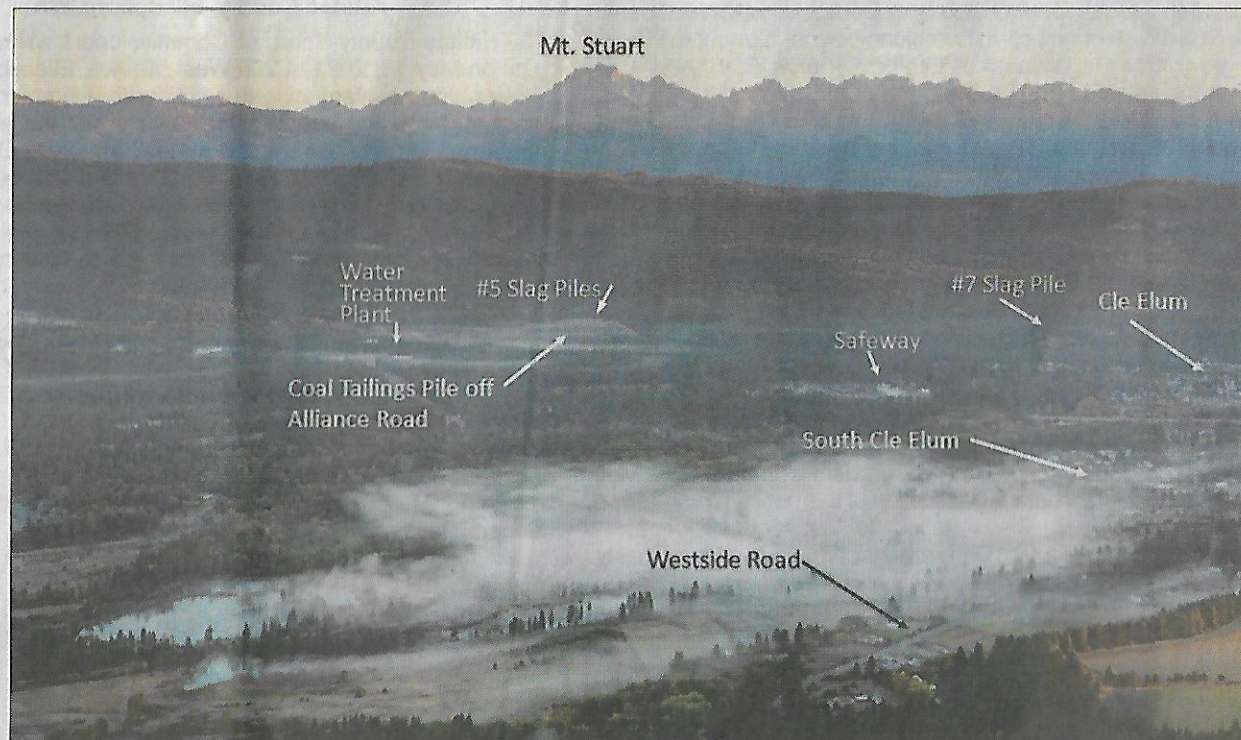
The community forest, championed by the locally led Checkerboard Partnership Planning Committee, is designed to ensure that these forests are managed sustainably to reflect community vision and values.

“The forests above Cle Elum, Roslyn and Ronald have been a resource for the people of Kittitas County for generations. People of all ages have used them to forage for berries and mushrooms, hunt meat to feed their families, collect timber and firewood,

and to recreate,” said Kittitas County Commissioner **Laura Osiadacz**, a member of the Checkerboard Partnership.

“Protecting and honoring the history of the county while celebrating our rural roots is extremely important to me. The money provided by the State of Washington for a community forest allows locals the ability to control the future of these lands. This is a very powerful act. The state is investing in us and has recognized that the future for the Cle Elum, Roslyn, and Ronald Ridge should be community-driven, empowering the people to decide what is best for their future.”

The funding comes from a new state program to fund Community Forests, admin-



**SHOWN HERE:** A drone photo of Cle Elum Ridge (above) and a color-coded map. The brownish color marks the land funding would likely purchase in the first phase of the project. The green color marks remaining land to be acquired with additional grant rounds.

Drone photo courtesy of Benjamin Drummond

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istered through the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office.

The \$3 million enables acquisition of 1,250 acres in the first of three phases to create a 9,400-acre community forest on Cle Elum Ridge between Cle Elum, Roslyn and the 55,000-acre Teanaway Community Forest.

The Cle Elum Ridge project is one of six funded out of 15 proposed.

"I'm so glad that the Capital Budget chair and ranking members saw fit to include this important allocation in the final Budget," said Sen. Judy Warnick and Senate Ways and Means Committee member.

"Being a community-driven and supported project made it all the more easier to advocate for this funding."

Said **Melissa Speeg**, facilitator of the Checkerboard Partnership, "This funding is a giant step forward for creating a community forest on Cle Elum Ridge, where sustainable forest management will benefit local communities, now and for future generations.

"We are so fortunate to have so many dedicated community members working hard to realize our vision of protecting these important lands in our backyard. We are all grateful for the leadership by **Senator Warnick, Rep. Tom Dent, and Rep. Alex Ybarra** in securing this funding for our community."

She said this community



forest will connect towns to hundreds of thousands of acres of forests and an expansive trails network, while curtailing residential development threatening the ridge.

The project will benefit local tourism and forestry economy sectors while supporting public access, cross-boundary management, environmental education, and traditional tribal resources.

The Checkerboard Partnership is planning to hold a virtual orientation in the next

month to provide information to new and interested community members.

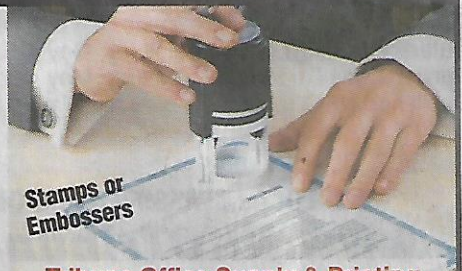
Contact Speeg at [mspeeg@kittitasconservationtrust.org](mailto:mspeeg@kittitasconservationtrust.org).

Learn more about the Checkerboard Partnership with at <https://www.checkerboardpartnership.com>.

Hear voices from the community in a segment called Why this forest, why now? With a visit to <https://www.checkerboardpartnership.com/media>.

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