

This is Casey Dolan with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, December 20, 2023 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has announced in a press release that Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz revealed the locations of 2,000 acres of structurally complex state forestland proposed to be set aside for conservation as funded by the Climate Commitment Act. The land will join the more than 900,000 acres of forestland that the Washington State Department of Natural Resources already manages for conservation in western Washington. The parcels are spread across five state counties including Jefferson and Clallam. The decision to protect these parcels was determined by what was judged to be most valuable to protecting fish and wildlife habitat and natural and cultural values. These parcels are adjacent to existing conserved high-value habitat areas, improving fish and wildlife habitat connectivity and avoiding isolated small fragments of fish and wildlife conservation.

In Clallam County, a 69-acre tract within the Elwha River watershed west of Port Angeles will be preserved. This tract is formerly part of the Power Plant timber sale, which has been canceled and KPTZ had previously reported on the protests to block that timber sale. The site is currently managed to benefit local services in Clallam County.

And in Jefferson County, approximately 950 acres will be preserved in two sites. The biggest portion included in the proposal is approximately 670 acres around Dabob Bay, as reported on KPTZ news last month. The lands are adjacent to the boundary of the Dabob Bay Natural Area managed by the DNR, creating enhanced fish and wildlife habitat connectivity. The other approximately 280 acres to be protected are near Mount Walker and Notch Pass, both adjacent to existing long-term conservation areas.

DNR will need concurrence on the parcels from county leadership before they can be transferred. Upon receiving concurrence, the Department will present the finalized list to the Board of Natural Resources.

Last week, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources passed the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Scenic Rivers Act (Senate Bill 1254). A press release from the office of U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell explained that the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would designate approximately 126,554 acres of land in the Olympic National Forest as wilderness and an additional 5,346 acres as potential wilderness; designate approximately 464 miles of rivers within Olympic National Park and on nearby national forest and state lands as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; create 19 new Wild and Scenic Rivers plus their tributaries; protect and grow existing recreational access on the Olympic National Forest; protect vital river and streams throughout the Olympic National Forest with no impact to timber jobs; and protect rivers and streams vital to the future of Washington's shellfish industry.

The Jefferson County Auditor's Office is looking for individuals to serve on both "For" and "Against" committees to write statements supporting and opposing ballot measures that will appear on the February 13, 2024 Special Election Ballot. The written statements will appear in the Jefferson County Local Voters' Pamphlet and the Auditor believes it is in the voters' best interest to have both sides represented. Persons interested in participating should contact County Auditor Brenda Huntingford at 360-385-9358 as soon as possible. Statements must be submitted by this Friday, December 22, 2023.

There have been a number of cougar sightings lately, most likely the same cougar in different locations. The last spotting was above the Discovery Bay Golf Course yesterday. A Kala Point resident managed to capture the beast on video a day earlier and post it online (https://nextdoor.com/p/xwK-qh9XTDGs?utm_source=share&extras=NTQwNTA0MzM%3D&utm_campaign=1703088304550). Please be vigilant and exercise caution.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Casey Dolan and I thank you for listening.