PROPOSAL TO PROTECT THE RARE COASTAL RAINFORESTS OF STRIPED PEAK

SUMMARY

The Striped Peak landscape contains some of the Olympic Peninsula's remaining intact coastal forest ecosystems, with structurally complex forests, rare plant communities and lichens, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, and recreational opportunities. This proposal recommends a two-part strategy to protect these living forest ecosystems. The Washington State Legislature should appropriate $3.2 million in Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) funds in 2027 to permanently protect the approximately 166 acres of structurally complex forest currently threatened by the Bird's Eye View timber sale. In addition, the Washington Department of Natural Resources or WA state legislature should nominate the broader Striped Peak landscape as a Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA). The proposed natural area should focus on the most important remaining forests, habitats, and other lands that contribute to the ecological integrity and connectivity of the landscape. Together, these efforts would protect the most immediately threatened forests while creating a larger framework for conserving the ecological, cultural, scenic, and recreational values of Striped Peak.



BACKGROUND

The Striped Peak forests are on Washington State land managed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources. The Striped Peak forests are located in Clallam County, Washington, along the Salish Sea and near Olympic National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve. The Striped Peak area contains one of the Olympic Peninsula's last intact coastal forest ecosystems and represents an outstanding example of a rare coastal forest landscape, including the structurally complex Striped Peak forests with stands 300-400 years old. These are among the oldest forests on Wa supporting a diversity of native plant communities, lichens, and wildlife, including nesting bald eagles and migratory birds. Citizen observations of the diverse array of plants and animals are being documented on inaturalist. So far, 213 people have observed 454 species - *https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/striped-peak-state-managed-lands*. Just since the end of February there have been almost 1500 observations total. Furthermore, the area is culturally significant and has served as a place for tribal citizens to gather native and medicinal plants as well as cedar bark. It is home to an old Klallam village site known as q'wa?šəməm (Crescent Bay).

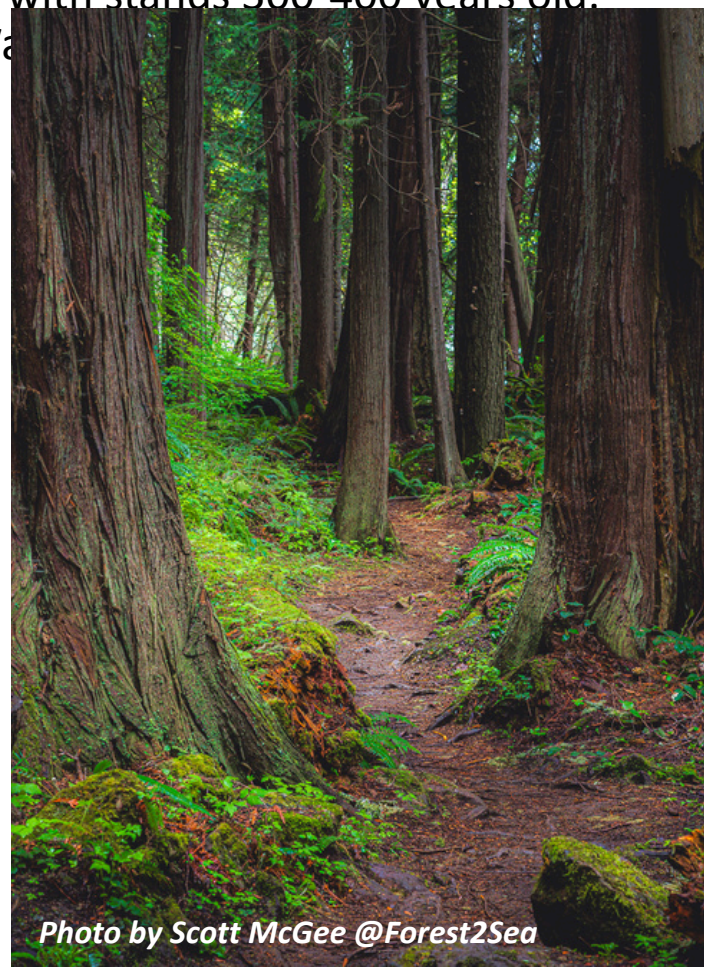


Photo by Scott McGee @Forest2Sea

Striped Peak is adjacent to the Salt Creek Recreation Area, managed by Clallam County Parks and one of Clallam County's most popular destinations for hiking and coastal recreation, with 20,000 visitors annually. To the east it is nearly adjacent to the Freshwater Bay Recreation Area, also managed by Clallam County Parks. Together these areas are sites of ecological complexity, education, recreation, and community.

BACKGROUND CONT.

Hundreds of community members filled out a recent Clallam County Parks survey, expressing a strong desire to see the area conserved. The popularity of the Striped Peak and Salt Creek trail systems highlights the importance of protecting these forests for recreation and conservation, rather than selling them for timber harvest areas. Striped Peak is also located adjacent to Tongue Point Marine Life Sanctuary, one of Washington's well known tidepool destinations and a site of marine conservation. There are significant kelp forests in the waters below Striped Peak. The area's coastal forests and marine habitats are ecologically connected and contribute to the region's biodiversity, scenic value, and recreational opportunities.



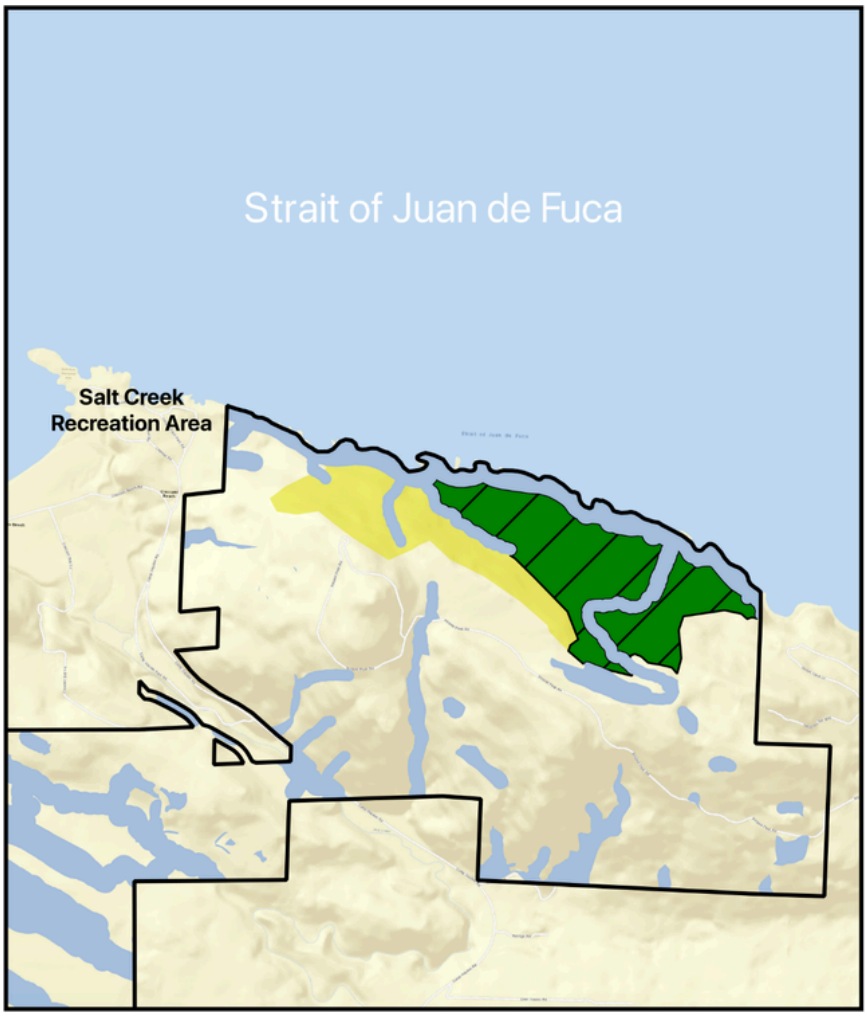
Photo by Scott McGee @Forest2Sea

The Washington State DNR currently manages the Striped Peak area, totalling 1,400 acres. **Approximately 300 acres are proposed for harvest through the Tiger Stripes and Bird's Eye View timber sales, which would affect large portions of the forest and cut through the trail system. Logging in the Tiger Stripes sale area and the south side of Striped Peak is underway. The timber harvest occurring on the southern side of the peak is expected to substantially reduce the remaining intact forest there. For this reason it is increasingly important to conserve the remaining north facing forests as part of the broader natural area.** Protecting these remaining coastal forest ecosystems would preserve a rare and ecologically connected landscape and its cultural and recreational values.

Given its ecological, cultural, and recreational significance, the Striped Peak landscape meets the core purposes of Washington's Natural Area and Conservation Area programs and should be considered for permanent conservation.

NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS FUNDS
2027 WA STATE LEGISLATURE

Under the Climate Commitment Act, the Washington state legislature appropriates funds for natural climate solutions. Structurally complex forests, such as those in Striped Peak, are natural climate solutions. In prior years, the legislature has allocated natural climate solutions money (or NCS funds) to protect structurally complex forests. $3.2 million of NCS funds would permanently protect the 166 acres of structurally complex forest on Striped Peak. These forests are currently at high risk because DNR has included them in the "Bird's Eye View" timber sale. NCS funds work by covering the timber value plus the cost of the replacement land. In this way, all those who receive money from timber sales (the beneficiaires) are fully compensated. We are asking the legislature to appropriate the necessary funds during the 2027 legislative session. Forests protected with NCS funds can become part of a larger natural area. Striped Peak has many characteristics of a natural area as discussed below.



Map showing the area that would be protected through the Natural Climate Solutions Funds.

CONSERVATION VALUES TO SUPPORT CREATION OF A NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION AREA

WA State DNR's Natural Areas Program provides a framework for conserving and restoring state-managed lands with significant ecological, cultural, scenic, and recreational values. The program includes two kinds of Natural Areas: Natural Area Preserves, which protect the most ecologically important and rare remaining plant and animal habitat, and Natural Resource Conservation Areas, which protect "outstanding examples of native ecosystems, habitat for endangered, threatened and sensitive plants and animals, and scenic landscapes" and significant geologic, cultural, historical, and archeological resources.

Under the Natural Resources Conservation Area Act - RCW 79.71.030, "conservation purposes" include, but are not limited to:

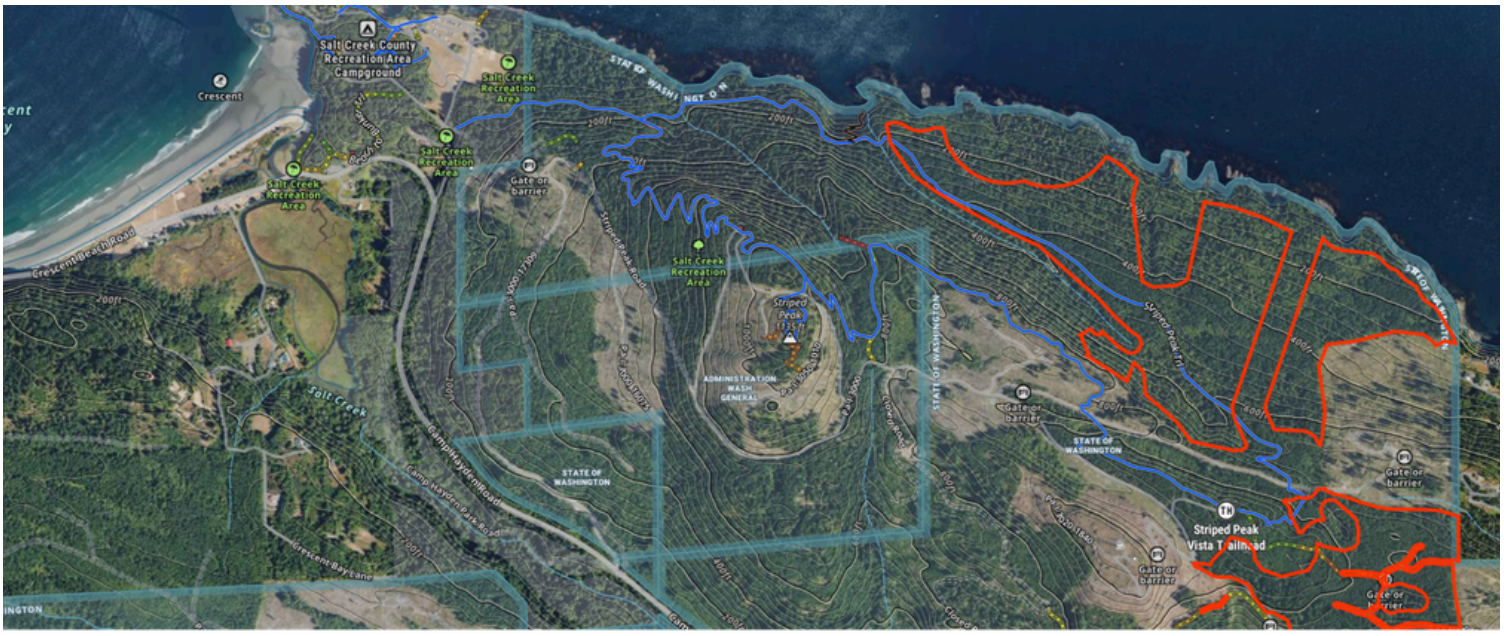
(1) Maintaining, enhancing, or restoring ecological systems, including but not limited to aquatic, coastal, riparian, montane, and geological systems, whether such systems be unique or typical to the state of Washington;

(2) maintaining exceptional scenic landscapes;

(3) maintaining habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species;

(4) enhancing sites for primitive recreational purposes; and

(5) outdoor environmental education.



Map showing the location of Salt Creek Recreation area adjacent to the Salish Sea/ the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Crescent Bay. Striped Peak recreation trails are shown in blue with the borders of the Birds Eye View and Tiger Stripes timber sale shown in red, cutting through the recreation area and hiking trail system.

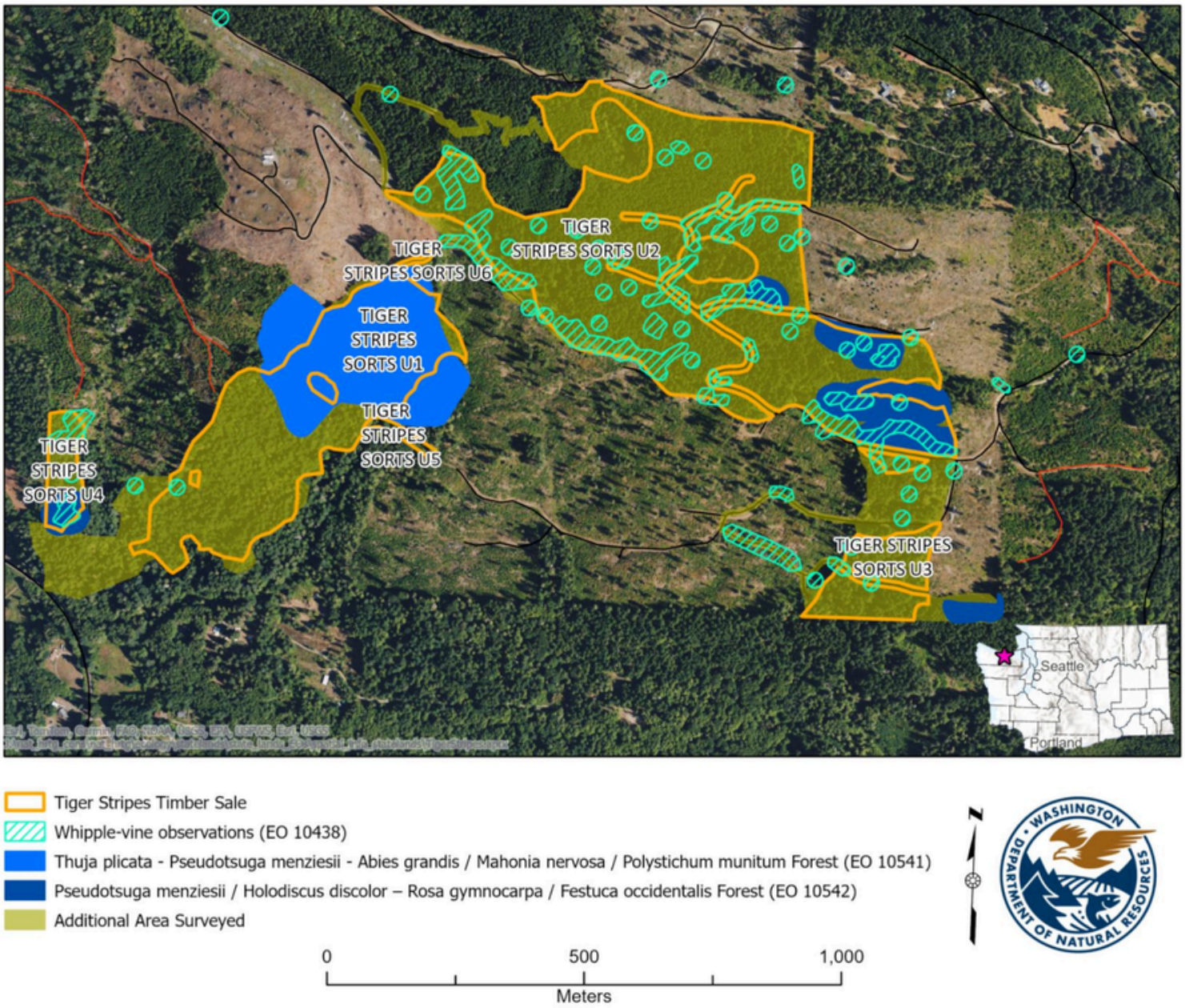
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STRIPED PEAK LEGACY FOREST ECOSYSTEM THAT SUPPORT CREATION OF A NATURAL AREA

MAP OF PROPOSED NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION AREA



RARE PLANT COMMUNITIES

The Striped Peak legacy forests contain rare plant communities. An area originally part of the "Tiger Stripes" timber sale, contains one state endangered ecosystem (G1/S1), two state threatened ecosystems (G2G3/S2 and G2/S2) and one state sensitive plant (G4/S2). Stands of Thuja plicata – Pseudotsuga menziesii – Abies grandis / Mahonia nervosa / Polystichum munitum Forest (G1/S1) and Pseudotsuga menziesii / Holodiscus discolor – Rosa gymnocarpa / Festuca occidentalis Forest (G2G3/S2) were found to have sufficient ecological integrity to represent new EOs. These ecosystem types represent mature coastal forests dominated by western redcedar, Douglas-fir, and grand fir, with diverse understory communities of Oregon grape, sword fern, oceanspray, baldhip rose, and native grasses.



Map showing rare plant communities (blue) and the state-sensitive Whipple-vine plant (turquoise) found within the Tiger Stripes timber sale area.



Tiger Stripes sale area, photo by Joshua Wright

In response to a comment from Legacy Forest Defense Coalition about the existence of these rare plant communities, DNR's Heritage program conducted a site survey, confirmed the existence of rare plant communities and modified the Tiger Stripes sale to remove 21 acres. DNR logged areas surrounding Tiger Stripes less than 10 years ago without conducting a rare plant communities survey, making it highly likely that the region has already suffered a loss of rare plant communities.

Legacy Forest Defense Coalition has similarly alerted DNR to the presence of rare plant communities in the "Bird's Eye View" timber sale area. The next step is for the Heritage Program to conduct a study to determine the quantity and quality of rare plant communities there.

RARE PLANTS AND LICHENS

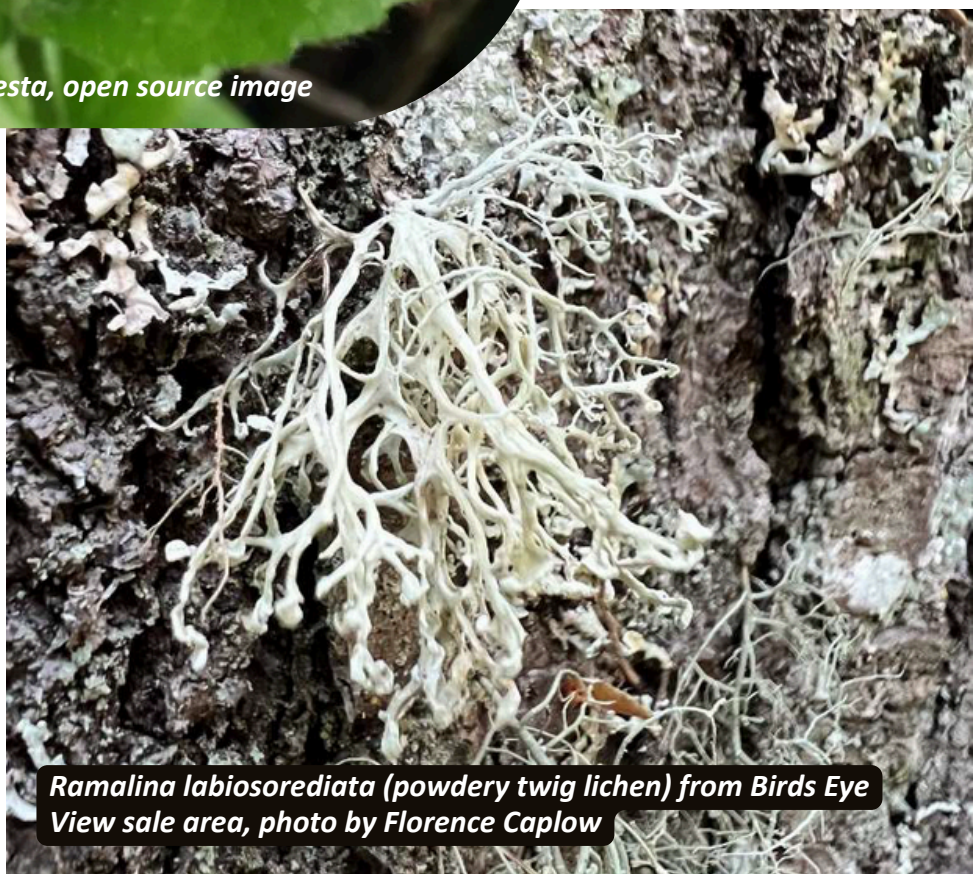
Botanical surveys within the Tiger Stripes timber sale documented the presence of yerba de selva (Whipplea modesta), a Washington state Sensitive plant species (G4/S2).

The Striped Peak landscape supports lichen habitat associated with mature coastal forest ecosystems. Two rare lichens, Ramalina labiosorediata, powdery twig lichen, a Washington state Sensitive species (G4/S2) and Usnea cavernosa, pitted beard lichen, a Washington state Sensitive species (G4/S2) were documented in 2026 at a number of locations throughout the coastal forest on the north facing slopes of Striped Peak, including within the boundaries of the proposed Bird's Eye View timber sale. An S2 rank indicates that both are Imperiled in the state. Lichenologists believe they are likely to be widespread in the canopy far above the forest floor. Intact coastal forests are significant habitats for lichens.

The occurrence of these rare plants and lichens, together with the area's diverse native flora and intact forest and near-shore aquatic conditions, showcases the conservation value of the Salt Creek and Striped Peak area landscape and its importance for protecting rare plant species and habitats on the Olympic Peninsula.



Whipple Modesta, open source image



Ramalina labiosorediata (powdery twig lichen) from Birds Eye View sale area, photo by Florence Caplow

More recently, a field survey conducted in October 2026 identified a potentially significant rare forest community within the Bird's Eye View timber sale. The survey found that portions of Unit 1 are consistent with the Thuja plicata – (Abies grandis) / Polystichum munitum Forest association (CEGL000468), a G1 critically imperiled forest type.

Western redcedar, Douglas-fir, and grand fir were clearly co-dominant throughout the surveyed area, while western swordfern (Polystichum munitum) had high cover at every survey plot, consistent with the community description. The surveyor has requested that the Washington State Natural Heritage Program evaluate the area to determine whether it represents an Element Occurrence.

MIGRATORY AND BIRDING HOTSPOT

The Salt Creek and Striped Peak area is a significant migratory corridor and birding hotspot along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Nearshore waters provide foraging habitat for seabirds, including marbled murrelet during seasonal movements. The area's proximity to other regional monitoring efforts, including the Rocky Point Bird Observatory across the Strait in Sooke, British Columbia, highlights its importance within a broader network of coastal bird migration and monitoring sites.



The Striped Peak landscape is particularly important because of the close relationship between its mature coastal forests and the nearshore waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Marbled murrelets use nearshore marine waters for foraging and mature and old-growth conifer forests for nesting. Protecting the remaining mature and structurally complex forests above the Strait would help maintain terrestrial habitat in proximity to marine foraging areas and preserve the ecological connection between these habitats.

COUGAR DENS AND OTHER WILDLIFE



Photo by John Gussman

The Striped Peak landscape provides high-quality habitat for wildlife species including cougars, which rely on large connected forest blocks for cover, hunting, and denning. The mosaic of mature forest, steep terrain, and low human disturbance creates suitable conditions for cougar movement and reproduction.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Striped Peak legacy forests are of profound cultural and spiritual significance to the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe and Klallam peoples. The forests have served and continue to be sites for gathering traditional foods, materials like cedar bark, as well as native and medicinal plants since time immemorial. There is an old village site in that exact area called q'wa?šemem (Crescent Bay).



Photo by Scott McGee @Forest2Sea

CREEKS AND FORESTED WETLANDS

The Striped Peak landscape contains headwater creeks and forested wetlands which are vital to the coastal ecosystem. They slow down runoff and filter out sediment and pollutants, ensuring cleaner water flows into the sensitive marine habitats of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Tongue Point. Beyond helping with flooding along steep coastal slopes and protecting water quality, creeks and forested wetlands provide essential, cool habitats for wildlife like amphibians, birds, and anadromous fish.

OLD GROWTH TREES

The Striped Peak area contains mature coastal forests with trees 300-400 years in age, including Douglas fir, western redcedar, and grand fir. These legacy stands exhibit characteristics such as large diameter trees, multi-layered canopies, snags, and coarse woody debris. These provide critical habitat for species including marbled murrelet and cavity-nesting birds. These old-forest structures also store significant carbon and maintain stable, moist microclimates essential for rare understory species.



Photo by Scott McGee @Forest2Sea

POPULAR RECREATION AREA ADJACENT TO SALT CREEK RECREATION AREA

The Striped Peak trail system and connected Salt Creek Recreation area are immensely popular recreational destinations, with 20,000 visitors annually. These recreation areas provide a wide range of public recreation opportunities including hiking, wildlife viewing, and coastal access.



Photo by Scott McGee @Forest2Sea


Photo by Scott McGee @Forest2Sea

The Striped Peak Vista Trail offers a 6.5 mile loop through mature Douglas-fir and western redcedar forest, with scenic viewpoints over the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Vancouver Island, and direct connections into Salt Creek Recreation Area. Salt Creek is one of the region's most visited coastal destinations, offering camping, beach access, tidepool exploration, and shoreline recreation within a broader network of trails and forest roads.

PROXIMITY TO DNR'S EELGRASS RESTORATION PROJECT

The Washington DNR is implementing a statewide Kelp and Eelgrass Health and Conservation Plan to conserve and restore at least 10,000 acres of kelp forest and eelgrass meadow habitat by 2040. See *https://dnr.wa.gov/aquatics/aquatic-science/nearshore-habitat-program/statewide-kelp-and-eelgrass-health-and-conservation-plan*. Eelgrass meadows are recognized as critical nearshore habitat for a wide array of marine life, including threatened and endangered species such as salmon, rockfish, and abalone, while also supporting carbon storage and shoreline stability. Because eelgrass is highly sensitive to environmental stressors, the plan explicitly addresses threats such as sedimentation, water quality degradation, and other land-sea interactions that affect habitat health. Logging and timber harvest on steep coastal slopes would increase sediment delivery into nearshore waters, affecting eelgrass growth and survival. Protecting intact forested watersheds above the Strait of Juan de Fuca therefore directly supports the success of DNR's eelgrass restoration and conservation investments.

CLALLAM COUNTY PARKS PLAN

The Clallam County Parks Department is updating the Clallam County Parks Master Plan. The Clallam County Parks Comprehensive Plan survey – see *https://www.clallamcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/27553/CPMP_SurveyHighlights-v2_web?bidId* – shows strong community support for protecting adjacent DNR forest and coastal lands and expanding Salt Creek Recreation Area (p8, Survey Highlights, 2026). Respondents expressed support for expanding Salt Creek, acquiring DNR forest lands, protecting viewsheds from clear-cuts, and protecting wildlife habitat (p12, Survey Highlights, 2026). This shows a strong interest in protecting the existing character of the forest lands adjacent to the county park known as the Salt Creek Recreation Area. Creation of a DNR natural area in the Striped Peak area is an effective way to achieve this goal as it would lead to transfer of the lands to a protected status and out of their existing management structure which treats them as timber for harvest. Protecting the remaining forest areas adjacent to Salt Creek would help ensure the ecological sanctity of these precious forests and disperse recreational use, easing concerns of overcrowding expressed in the Clallam County Parks Plan. Community members are overwhelmingly supportive of efforts to conserve and protect these forests for their ecological, cultural, and recreational values.

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Elwha Legacy Forests

