



Proposed Boundary Expansion of Morning Star NRCA

TO BE FUNDED THROUGH THE
TRUST LAND TRANSFER PROGRAM

The Natural Areas Program of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is proposing to expand the boundary of the Morning Star Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) in Snohomish County.

The site is located in the vicinity of Spada Lake, about 20 miles east of Everett.



If the Commissioner of Public Lands approves the boundary expansion, the land within the boundary—when acquired—may become a part of the natural resources conservation area.

The ecological importance of Morning Star NRCA

In 2007, three natural resources conservation areas were unified under the name Morning Star NRCA in Snohomish County. Before the consolidation, the original 10,003-acre Morning Star NRCA was comprised mainly of extremely steep and rugged terrain, numerous small alpine lakes and glaciers with elevations from 1,600 feet to the 6,610 foot Del Campo Peak. Alaska harebell and Cooley's buttercup exist in rock crevices and cliff ledges—both state sensitive plant species. The area within the former Mount Pilchuck NRCA was added to Morning Star. This 9,606-acre area within an hour's drive of Everett is home to diverse ecological communities, from low-elevation to alpine forests and meadows. Some forest stands are about 300 years old. Now a part of Morning Star also is the former 6,700-acre Greider Ridge NRCA that features spectacular, mid-to high- elevation subalpine areas with many exposed rocks and cliffs. Silver fir and mountain hemlock forests give way to low growing huckleberry parklands. Hiking, and some camping are part of the public access opportunities.

The proposed boundary addition to Morning Star is remnant older forests immediately adjacent to the NRCA, which will add to the conservation values, including nesting, roosting and foraging habitat for the at-risk species—the northern spotted owl. The lands inside this proposed 'boundary' will not be a part of the natural area until they are acquired for the NRCA. Currently almost all of the additional lands within the proposed boundary are state trust lands. DNR anticipates finalizing a Trust Land Transfer of a few small parcels into the NRCA. The rest of the area within the proposed boundary would be acquired at a later time.

The trust land transfer process

Washington State DNR manages three million acres of state trust land for specific named beneficiaries. About 1.8 million acres are Common School Trust land, managed to earn revenue to build kindergarten through 12th grade public schools statewide. Not all of these lands are best suited for income production. Some have higher values for ecological or recreational qualities important to the entire state. The Trust Land Transfer Program presents an opportunity to retain these special lands in public ownership while maintaining and improving economic returns to trust beneficiaries.

Based on a list of site recommendations provided by DNR, the Washington State Legislature considers, approves and funds the transfer of parcels. The parcels are then appraised for their timber and land values and the cash value of the un-harvested timber is deposited into the Common School construction fund. The value of the land is deposited into a land replacement account, which is used to buy replacement trust land with higher long-term income potential.

Potential Impacts to private landowners

Because the proposed boundary expansion applies only to DNR-managed trust lands, it imposes no land use changes or zoning restrictions on private property within or adjacent to the natural area. The boundary expansion facilitates the transfer of trust lands into natural area management status.

Public participation in the site expansion process

Public comments will be received at the boundary hearing. Written comments will be accepted throughout the public review process. All public comments become part of the record in the department's development of a recommendation for a boundary expansion and natural areas designation for the site.

DNR's natural areas

Conserving Washington's native species and ecosystems, today and for future generations

DNR manages 54 natural area preserves (NAPs) and 31 NRCAs on more than 143,000 acres statewide. NAPs protect high-quality examples of native ecosystems and rare plant and animal species. NAPs serve as genetic reserves for Washington's native species and as reference sites for comparing natural and altered environments. NRCAs protect lands having high conservation values for ecological systems, scenic qualities, wildlife habitat and low-impact recreational opportunities. Environmental education and approved research projects occur on both NAPs and NRCAs.