



EARTH SANCTUARY®

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Earth Sanctuary's Cutting-Edge Forest Management Plan is Designed to Speed Old-Growth

Earth Sanctuary (www.earthsanctuary.org), a nature reserve located south of Freeland, Washington on Whidbey Island, has developed and is implementing a forest management plan with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. The purpose of the forest management plan is to speed the creation of old-growth forest.

Old-growth forests are the epitome of habitat for plants and animals and contribute to cooling of the environment, clean water, as well as many other important environmental benefits. "I love the immensity and beauty of old-growth trees," explains Chuck Pettis, Earth Sanctuary founder and owner. "My goal is to provide an exemplary example of ecological restoration and forest management, while creating a nature reserve with maximum diversity of species."

"Earth Sanctuary and Chuck Pettis is the only organization and individual I am aware of in the world who is proactively working to recover old-growth forest," said Dr. Dean Rae Berg, Earth Sanctuary's forest engineer and Silviculturist, and an expert and author on restoring old-growth forests.

Most forest management programs focus on timber cutting to maximize revenues, either immediately or in a time span measured by mere decades. Earth Sanctuary is operating on a 500-year timeline where the "return on investment" won't come for 20 generations. "Bottom-line, in Chuck Pettis' lifetime, forest management will most probably result in a net financial loss to him," says Dr. Dean Berg. "Chuck Pettis is investing in long-term future value, aesthetics, forest function and maximum diversity of plants, animals, and birds."

"I'm not getting any younger," observes Pettis. "In this lifetime, I want to-use all the known state-of-the-art and best forest management practices to optimize the benefits of Earth Sanctuary's forest and habitat values for future generations,"

Planned forest management activities at Earth Sanctuary include:

- Removing invasive plant species, such as Himalayan blackberry.
- Thinning and restocking the forest that was "hard" logged by previous owners and not restocked with new trees. To improve the forest's health and accelerate the growth of the larger conifers, Earth Sanctuary will thin a portion of the mature

red alder stands to open up growing space for new trees. Also thinned will be small and diseased hemlocks, with a special focus on removing parasitic mistletoe-infected hemlocks. “We are not thinning trees for current or future revenues from tree harvesting,” Pettis said. “We are thinning trees for the future ecological benefits and to accelerate the growth of both existing forest stands and new tree plantings.” This concept is called variable retention. Rather than focusing on what is “taken” from the forest in terms of tree revenue, Earth Sanctuary is focusing on “leaving behind” a more complex, nonuniform mix of tree species, standing dead trees (snags), and trees lying on the ground (nurse logs), as well as an intact forest floor and understory vegetation.”

- Creating the roads necessary to access existing invasive plants (i.e., acres of blackberries), diseased hemlock trees, and the unrehabilitated clear-cut.
- After thinning and removal of invasive plants, the entire forest management area will be rehabilitated and replanted with more than 2,000 trees, predominately western red cedar. “In areas outside of the wetlands and wetland buffers, we plan on planting species that will do well both now as well as in a warmer climate due to global warming over the next 500 years,” says Chuck Pettis. “On an experimental basis, we are considering planting groves of trees from the East side of Washington, as well as date palm trees, coconut trees, and banana trees that do well in hot dry climates.”
- In areas outside of the regulated wetlands and streams including their associated buffers, we plan on constructing one or more fire protection and irrigation ponds.

Earth Sanctuary (www.earthsanctuary.org) is a nature reserve and retreat center located near Freeland, Washington on Whidbey Island. Earth Sanctuary is open to visitors every day of the year during daylight hours (\$7/visitor fee). Earth Sanctuary’s three ponds are recognized as a habitat of importance by both Audubon and Island County. Chuck Pettis can be reached at 360-331-6667 or at cpettis@earthsanctuary.org.

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