

NWI seeks to add forestland, store carbon

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The Northwest Watershed Institute is raising money to conserve a native older forest in the Tarboo Creeks watershed. (Northwest Watershed Institute)

QUILCENE — The Northwest Watershed Institute is raising money to conserve a 21-acre forest in the Tarboo Creek watershed as an addition to the Tarboo Wildlife Preserve near Quilcene.

At a time when climate change is increasing alarm worldwide, the nonprofit's campaign offers a local, on-the-ground way to offset carbon emissions and protect wildlife

habitat at the same time, according to Peter Bahls, executive director of the Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI).

Bahls said the native older forest has excellent wildlife habitat and also is storing tons of carbon in the trees and soil.

“Every acre of this mature forest is storing the rough equivalent of seven years of carbon emissions by an average American,” Bahls said.

”In general, forests of the Pacific Northwest can store more carbon per acre than most other types of forests in the world and can play a key role in fighting climate change.”

Forests absorb carbon dioxide — one of the greenhouse gases scientists say promotes global warming and climate change — during photosynthesis and store carbon above- and below-ground as they produce oxygen.

NWI is hosting short walking tours of the property for potential donors in June and July from 10 a.m. to noon. Dates are Thursday, Friday, June 20-21, June 27-28, and July 9.

NWI purchased the forest parcel in November 2018 with loans to prevent it from being clear-cut and developed.

“We were able to buy the property thanks to loans from conservation investors,” Bahls said.

“Generous individuals stepped forward in the nick of time with low-interest loans for the \$225,000 purchase. These people wanted to invest in a healthier planet.”

NWI is now seeking the last portion of funding needed to pay back the loans and allow for permanent protection of the property as part of the organization’s 400-acre Tarboo Wildlife Preserve in the Tarboo Creek valley, Bahls said.

“With grant funding in the works from several sources, we still need to raise \$40,000 in donations,” Bahls said.

“The purchase has bought us some time, but if we can’t raise the remaining funding by August, we will be forced to put the property back on the market to pay off the loans.”

According to Bahls, a \$2,000 donation will protect about 1 acre of forest.

“At whatever level people can contribute, we know that along with making every effort to reducing our carbon pollution as individuals and as a community, conserving this forest will store carbon and offset emissions as we attempt to wean ourselves from fossil fuels,” he said.

Once the funding is secured, NWI officials plan to permanently conserve the parcel under a conservation easement with the Jefferson Land Trust to protect wildlife habitat, store carbon, and sustain selective harvest of forest products.

“The easement will protect the timber volume that is on the property now and will allow selective harvest of some of the additional growth that will occur in the decades ahead” Bahls said.

The forest acquisition is part of a nearly 20-year effort by NWI and partnering organizations and landowners to preserve and restore the Tarboo-Dabob Bay watershed, from the headwaters of Tarboo Creek to Dabob Bay.

To date, more than 600 acres along Tarboo Creek, and over 4,000 acres within the Dabob Bay Natural Area, have been protected.

Those interested in joining a field tour or donating to the project are invited to contact Bahls at Northwest Watershed Institute at www.nwwatershed.org.