On Tuesday, July 7th, the bimonthly meeting for the Washington State Board of Natural Resources began like every other. After a few formalities, Dave Upthegrove, State Commissioner of Public Lands, announced that a 60-minute comment period was about to begin. He carefully laid out the guidelines, inviting comments "in an orderly manner", emphasizing that each public comment was only allotted two minutes, and threatening, "you will be muted" if the two minutes were exceeded. A variety of people utilized the public comment section to speak about the long-term impact of the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR)[1] logging and clear-cutting, and to challenge the DNR's narrative that selling mature forests is the only way the state can fund schools, hospitals, and other vital public resources.

When the Board tried to formally close the public comment section and move on to other business, the public simply had more to say, refusing to be contained in neat, 2-minute soundbytes. A handful of meeting attendees rose together and began shouting, "Your legacy will be the destruction of these legacy forests![2]" "These forests are essential for the salamanders, the salmon!" "Fuck you, Dave Cut-the-Grove!" The Board scrambled to maintain their fragile shreds of control, telling the disrupters, "we have a process for that!" Yet the activists knew this process only ever upholds the authority that the DNR relies on to continue selling Washington's old-growth and legacy forests.

These meeting disrupters are part of a long line of concerned community members, local tribes, conservation agencies, and forest lovers of all kinds that have been using every tool at their disposal to interrupt the DNR as it relentlessly auctions off old growth and legacy forests. According to the Legacy Forest Defense Coalition, over 20,800 acres are scheduled for commercial logging in Washington in the next five years alone.

The next piece of public land the DNR has scheduled to auction on July 30 is the More Gooder Timber Sale in the Upper Chahalis Watershed in southwestern Washington. Logging this area would destroy one of the most ecologically rich and biodiverse legacy forests in Lewis County. This forest's complex understory and stream network offers crucial habitat for bigleaf maples, 130-year-old Douglas firs over five feet in diameter, and the Columbia torrent salamander, a globally imperiled species. There has been significant public opposition to this timber sale, including from local Cowlitz and Chehalis tribes.

To increase the profitability of the lands it continues to sell to logging companies, this spring the DNR released plans to aerially spray 2,257 acres of southwestern Washington with carcinogenic chemicals including glyphosate, imazapyr, sulfometuron methyl and metsulfuron methyl. The DNR's stated goals are to eliminate the competing vegetation (alder, bigleaf maple, sword ferns, and vine maple) of the conifer trees ideal for timber plantations. Aerially applied herbicides have been doumented to drift up to 8 miles from a target area via wind and fog, and when combined with the dissemination of these chemicals through waterways, they pose serious risks to the neighboring aquatic species and could significantly reduce the biodiversity and resiliency of these forests. On top of this, the World Health Organization has classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans", and a variety

of research shows long-term exposure to glyphosate can cause liver and kidney damage, and interferes with human gut bacteria, which can exacerbate a cascade of other health problems, from food intolerances to heart diseases to infertility.

In February 2026, Washington courts ruled for the third consecutive time that the DNR has been violating the State Environmental Policy Act by refusing to consider alternatives to auctioning off legacy forests for timber sales. If considered, these alternatives could protect the biodiversity of these rare habitats and retain the forests as carbon reserves. Yet, since this ruling, the DNR has continued to pursue imminent sale and destruction of these lands.

In this era when President Trump is rapidly rescinding forest and environmental protections and ramping up the most aggressive logging policies the Pacific Northwest has seen in decades, we cannot rely on routine 60-minute comment periods and hard-fought legal rulings to save the forests on their own. This is a time for new action. Our only effective defense will be as diverse and wild as the forests we are fighting for.

During the disrupted meeting, lacking the power to maintain their "orderly manner", the Board called for a temporary adjournment. The activists paraded their voices out of the board room and into the lobby of the DNR building, while roughly 40 others entered the lobby from the street to reinforce their message. Demonstrating their coordination and prowess, the group quickly erected a 20ft-tall tripod, a three-legged structure that is sturdy enough for someone to be hoisted up into it, while creating a vulnerable perch that cannot be disturbed without risking the safety of the person suspended from it (this kind of tripod has historically been used to prevent logging equipment or other threats from accessing endangered land). There in the DNR lobby, in the midst of a cacophony of cheers, hollers, whistles, and footfalls, one activist ascended into the tripod, and atop it placed a sculpture constructed from cardboard and ferns and sticks that read, "The Forest Fights Back." As the climber returned to the ground, a sort of whimsical chaos ensued – overlapping rhythms were stomped and beat as stringed instruments tried to keep up with the fast-paced galloping and whirling. Various decorations and items were scavenged from throughout the building and piled under the tripod as a sort of forest effigy. Elevators and escalators were blocked. Activists skidded and tumbled and crashed around the floor in games and jubilee. Voices lifted up through the din, singing of love for the forests and rivers and committing to their defense. Outside the lobby, an additional 20 or more people were gathered with colorful salmon puppets, honky horns, and makeshift percussion instruments, capering about.

This whimsical chaos contrasted sharply with the highly controlled board meeting that was ultimately moved to zoom as the activists continued their celebration. Through their loud and colorful opposition to the More Gooder Timber Sale and Aerial Herbicide Spraying, the activists' redecoration of the DNR lobby left a message long after their shouts stopped echoing beneath the high ceilings: the forest will not be controlled, mutilated, and devastated.

And we will not be muted in our defense of the forest.

According to a spokesperson from the Washington State Patrol, troopers remained outside the building, out of sight, helpless to intervene due to the large number of activists. When the entire group of activists decided to leave the building together on their own accord, law enforcement was still waiting on the Rapid Deployment Teams, which they had summoned to help them quell the protest. As the activists paraded down the streets as one, they shouted, "We love the forests! We love the trees! You don't know when, but we'll be back!"

Resources for Continued Learning and Action

- Guidance on submitting a comment to the DNR, protesting the More Gooder Timber Sale: https://docs.google.com/document/d/12sfsqPsORSUlp6Fct4m2bGwK7_5kpi252AYkZ-TqtZA/edit?tab=t.0
- Guidance on contacting WA representatives about aerial spraying: https://www.wlfdc.org/post/dnr-plans-aerial-spray-of-carcinogenic-chemicals-across-2-200-acres-in-southwestern-washington
- DNR meeting minutes, recordings, and the upcoming schedule: https://dnr.wa.gov/dnr-boards-and-commissions/board-natural-resources
- A recent documentary about aerial spraying in the PNW: https://www.oldgrovefilms.com/screenings
- Apply to the Pesticide Sensitivity List (run by Washington State Department of Agriculture) to receive alerts of pesticide use in your area: https://agr.wa.gov/departments/pesticides-and-fertilizers/pesticides/compliance/sensitivity-registry

Footnotes:

1. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) of Washington is a state agency that was created to manage state trust land in Washington, with the dual (and conflicting) purposes of preserving it and using it to generate revenue for the state to invest in education and other public institutions.
2. Legacy forests are forests that were last logged before World War II and have not been replanted, so they retain genetic legacies that, if left undisturbed, can become old growth forests once again.