



Arch Cape community forest, rainforest preserve move forward to fundraising

Forestry tour highlights 5,000 acres of land behind Arch Cape

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Phil Chick, manager of Arch Cape Water and Sanitary District, talks about how blown-down trees affect water quality in the stream the town uses for its water supply.

About \$1 million has been raised through private donations and grants to transform forested land behind Arch Cape into a rainforest preserve and protected watershed.

After committing in November 2016 to purchase 3,500 acres of rainforest above Oswald West State Park for conservation, the \$1 million mark sets the North Coast Land Conservancy on track in a five-year fundraising campaign to raise \$10 million to buy the land from Ecotrust Forest Management, which is managing the property until that goal is met.

Arch Cape also hopes to turn another 2,100 acres of this land into a community forest, a project born out of the desire to protect the town's watershed.

Dozens of people representing the forestry industry, parks service, U.S. Forest Service and environmental advocacy groups toured this terrain last week as a part of the regional Community Forest Forum. The tour is one of many to come as the land trust works to drum up public interest to raise funds.

The goal is to protect what is considered a culturally and ecologically unique environment for generations, said Katie Voelke, the conservancy's executive director. Because of the way the land was formed millions of years ago, there are some species of wildlife that are unique to just a few peaks along this coastal range.

"In a way it's like the Galapagos island of Oregon," Voelke said.

It will also be the first place in Oregon, and one of few places in the world, where an entire coastal watershed is permanently conserved, from the headwaters to the ocean. The land trust hopes to have \$3 million more in donations and pledges by year's end.

"When this is successful, it will make a model for other small communities to protect their water. It sounds impossible — raise \$10 million, buy the land, manage the land," Voelke said. "But we know it's possible because anyone we tell this story to always talks about how much they want it to happen."

Discussion of creating the Arch Cape community forest intensified about three years ago after coastal communities with industrial timber operations in their watershed areas started to notice water quality issues, Oregon Coast Alliance President Mike Manzulli said in November.

In Arch Cape, the water district is working with the conservancy and the environmental group Sustainable Northwest to raise enough money to buy their portion of the land, with a fundraising goal that fluctuates with timber prices.

The idea behind a community-owned forest is that residents can make different management decisions, like require larger buffers that would prevent stream contamination, ban pesticides and select-cut trees for revenue that goes straight to the community.

But acquiring a community forest has been a slow, methodical process. Arch Cape Water District is still in the running for a \$4.5 million grant from the U.S. Forest Service to purchase the land, and recently secured about \$33,000 from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to finance an outreach coordinator to organize public outreach for the project.

But one of the biggest roadblocks to transitioning the community forest concept from an idea into reality is finding enough donations to close the gap between public grant dollars and the matches they usually require, said Ben Dair, senior manager of conservation finance at Sustainable Northwest. Getting community donations is critical to help fund associated costs with projects like these, including writing forest management plans, legal fees and hiring forestry crews to do timber inventories.

Community forest models are common in other parts of the country, but fairly uncommon in the Pacific Northwest. A strategic plan outlining a larger financing strategy will be released later this summer.

“This is a long tradition in the Northeast, and we’re just starting to have a movement on the West Coast,” Dair said. “We’re really eager to share lessons learned.”

Tours are an important tool to help the community feel engaged with the project firsthand, Dair said.

“Often when we’re down below we don’t see (this unique geology), and it really helps develop the story of this place and helps people develop a personal relationship with the land,” Dair said. “We may be neighbors, but until you walk around the watershed with the trees up close, it’s abstract. So we’re trying to make it real for people.”

