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**WHIDBEY CAMANO LAND TRUST LAUNCHES
AMBITIOUS CAMPAIGN TO SAVE LARGEST PARCEL
OF FOREST LAND ON WHIDBEY ISLAND**



FREELAND, WA – They say bold moves make history. After a 25-year legacy of successfully pioneering the protection of natural places, working farmlands, and other significant lands, the Whidbey Camano Land Trust is about to make history once more.

The Land Trust recently purchased an option to buy the largest parcel of forest land under single ownership on Whidbey Island. The group has until June 10, 2010, to raise the \$4.2 million required to purchase and permanently protect the 664 acres and has launched a community-wide effort to raise the money. Local organizations and individuals are joining the cause and announcing their support daily as they race to raise enough money in time.

After the property has been purchased, it will be open for use as a community natural area, with the Land Trust holding a conservation easement. A management plan will then be developed that allows reasonable recreation, such as hiking, biking and equestrian use, while taking into account the needs of the forest's flora and fauna.

"Protecting the 664 acres will allow it to return to a healthy forest that provides wildlife habitat, public recreational opportunities, and a place where current and future generations can experience nature," says Pat Powell, executive director of the Land Trust.

The forest, often referred to as the Trillium property, has a dramatic and sometimes emotional history. Located on the south end of Whidbey Island, between Freeland and Greenbank, the forest was owned and periodically logged by timber companies for decades, much to the distress of many islanders. Most recently, the property was subdivided into approximately 124 housing lots and soon after fell into foreclosure.

"This is the last chance to save this remarkable property. If our efforts to raise the money fail, individual lots will be sold and developed over time," says Powell. "If that happens, our opportunity to protect it will be lost forever. We are looking for key individuals with the financial means to join the community in helping save the forest now."

When forest land is converted to residential use, much of the wildlife habitat disappears and never returns. Roads create barriers to wildlife movement and homeowners replace trees and native understory with buildings, lawns, and driveways. Water is then directed to culverts and ditches rather than slowly seeping back into the aquifer.

The property is particularly important because of its size. The larger the tract, the better able it is to provide habitat for species that need large areas. If the area is broken into smaller pieces and houses are built, habitat will be fragmented and will support less wildlife. This ecological disruption is

irreversible. If the property is developed, Whidbey Island will lose a large wildlife habitat and corridor with a rich diversity of species.

The forest includes parts of three watersheds. The largest watershed flows into Mutiny Bay. Two smaller watersheds drain to the west, one at Bush Point and one that flows through South Whidbey State Park. There are wetlands and small streams distributed throughout the more than one square mile of land, all critical to support the many wildlife species found there.

“It’s important to plan for smart growth,” says Powell. “Whidbey Island will continue to develop, but we need to focus development in the right places, where infrastructure like roads and utilities are already in place, not in one of the last, best, large, forested properties on the island.”

The site can sustain both human recreation and habitat for wildlife. Narrow trails and quiet recreational use do not disturb small birds and other wildlife in the same way that roads, cars, houses, and lawnmowers do. There is already a limited network of established roads and trails within the boundaries of the property. These can serve as the primary system for trails.

According to local realtors, South Whidbey Island currently has more than four-and-a-half years’ worth of vacant (undeveloped) land on the market. To add up to 124 more lots into this depressed real estate market could drive the prices of the existing lots down even further and is unlikely to result in new construction jobs.

Is the Land Trust worried it might be difficult to raise so much money so quickly, especially during this current economic climate?

“We are actually encouraged by the positive response we’re already getting. People love this place. One reason we all live here is because we still have forests like this one, surrounded by water and mountains. Besides, miracles happen every day, especially on Whidbey Island,” says Powell.

To contribute or to learn more about how to get involved in the campaign, call (360) 222-3310 or visit www.savetheforestnow.org. You may send your donation to the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, Attention: Save the Forest Now, 765 Wonn Road, Barn C-201, Greenbank, WA 98253.

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