



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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May 18, 2021

Lewis County Board of County Commissioners
351 NW North Street
Chehalis, WA 98532

Thurston County Board of County Commissioners
Thurston County Courthouse, Building One, Room 269
2000 Lakeridge Drive SW
Olympia, WA 98502-1045

Dear Commissioners:

In November 2020, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) notified the Lewis and Thurston County Boards of County Commissioners of our interest in potentially creating a new wildlife area in southwest Washington. The proposal would be possible largely because TransAlta, owners of the Centralia Mine property, is considering a 6,500-acre land donation to WDFW. If WDFW received the donation from TransAlta, the department would then need to pursue grant funding to acquire an additional 3,100 acres of the Centralia Mine property in the future. We are writing this letter to clarify our approach regarding this process. We want to clarify that we are not actively working to move this acquisition forward currently.

The outreach to the Counties and the public was intended to solicit feedback and start a conversation about the proposal as part of our internal process to determine whether the property is a good fit for WDFW ownership. We then went through the public comment portion of our internal Lands 20/20 process before determining whether this is something we would pursue further. The public comments received during Lands 20/20 included substantial local support as well as opposition, including notable letters of opposition from Lewis County Commissioners and a group of Lewis County mayors.

We heard concerns from the Lewis County Commissioners regarding loss of property tax revenue, as well as concerns that neighboring commercial or industrial operations could be negatively impacted if WDFW introduced Endangered Species Act-listed species on the landscape. We respect these concerns related to creation of a wildlife area and fully expect, as part of our process, robust engagement with local communities and citizens around these questions.

It is also clear that Lewis County has concerns about economic impacts and rezoning of the mine property. Those questions are outside of WDFW's scope and are better addressed by TransAlta and Lewis County. Our hope is that the local communities and TransAlta can continue conversations and come to some shared understanding, at which point WDFW hopes the county commissioners will contact us directly. We are interested in developing robust community engagement about this donation and opportunity, which we anticipate would be a years-long process.

The land management requirements of the Office of Surface Mining for the Reclamation Plan are critical to the future habitat value of the currently unreclaimed portion of the TransAlta lands. For this reason, our staff will remain available to provide technical information and answer questions about habitat and species as per our normal engagement.

From our perspective and consistent with our agency mission, the conservation and recreation potential of this landscape would benefit local communities as well as all Washingtonians, and we welcome discussions of approaches that encompass these and other community values.

If you have questions or would like to discuss this further, please reach out to us directly.

Sincerely,



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