

Dear Satpaul Sidhu and Whatcom County Council Members,

We, the senators and executive board of Western Washington University, are writing this letter to request restoration of public vehicle access to Canyon Lake Community Forest. As Western Students we pay tuition to the university and **deserve access to this space**.

The forest is co-owned by Western Washington University and Whatcom County and is located in the Mt Baker Foothills (near Deming, WA). Established 20 years ago, the forest is roughly 2,300 acres, including over 700 acres of ancient old-growth forest. Hikers are given an epic view of Mt Baker, the Twin Sisters, and the Puget Sound on the ridge trail, as well the option of a scenic trail around the lake.

Opening this forest is critical to the community because we currently have a lack of research in this geographic area. Access to the forest allows us to effectively study the area. These studies can contribute to the overarching fight against the climate crisis in various ways including analysis of old growth ecosystems, forest health and water monitoring. Access to green spaces is very important to us as Western students. Around 200 Western students have signed the petition we made requesting access to the community forest.

Public access to the community forest has been restricted after a storm washed out the culvert on Canyon Lake Road in 2007. Repairing this road is one option to restore access, it would involve a substantial rework of the area, and a large bridge. The other access point lies along Racehorse Creek Road which connects with Canyon Lake Road. The two roads merge after a gated segment of the road that is under the control of Sierra Pacific Industries Logging.

Through communication with Mike McFarland at the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation department, we learned that after much deliberation an easement agreement has been submitted to Sierra Pacific Industries. We hope that Sierra Pacific approves this easement and approves the county's purchase of the road segment that connects to Canyon Lake Road.

We as Western students are in full support of whatever measures are necessary to restore vehicular access to Canyon Lake. We understand that the condemnation process is on the table if Sierra Pacific is unable to reach an agreement with the County on the easement. We support condemnation if it proves to be necessary.

We also support activating the forest advisory committee that is described in the documents that established Canyon Lake Community Forest. This committee should include two representatives from Whatcom County, two from Western Washington University and one from Whatcom Land Trust. The committee could help in making decisions for the management and maintenance of the forest and the trails.

Thank you for all that you do for Whatcom County, we really appreciate you taking the time to read this.

Best,
Western Washington University Senate and Executive Board



