

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mount St. Helens: Prime Bull Trout Habitat Purchased For Conservation

May 09, 2013

VANCOUVER, WA—Columbia Land Trust today announced that it has purchased 2,330 acres of contiguous forestlands and critical riparian habitat on the southern flanks of Mount St. Helens. The purchase permanently conserves some nine miles of Pine Creek and its major tributary. A clear, cold-water mountain stream, Pine Creek is prime habitat for bull trout, a threatened species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Columbia Land Trust acquired the land from Pope Resources, a publicly traded timberland company based in Poulsbo, Washington. The purchase was made with a grant from the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act), the federal program that provides funding to states for species and habitat conservation on non-federal lands. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources administered the grant.

Dubbed Pine Creek East, the conserved property covers nearly four square miles and is the single-largest purchase ever made by Columbia Land Trust in its 23-year history for land that will remain under its ownership and management. The purchase also represents several years of coordinated efforts by Columbia Land Trust, Pope Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Skamania County to map an intelligent future for Mount St. Helens forestlands that balances the needs of Pacific Northwest people and communities with the habitat needs of Pacific Northwest wildlife.

“This project brings together loggers, hunters, fishers, wildlife enthusiasts as well as federal, state, and local governments to prove conservation is a powerful force in the Northwest that can benefit people and nature,” says Columbia Land Trust Executive Director Glenn Lamb.

The Pine Creek East parcel is part of a much larger Mount St. Helens Forest Conservation Project spearheaded by Columbia Land Trust to protect from development 20,000 acres of working forest and critical wildlife habitat around the Swift Reservoir on the Lewis River. Privately owned forests in the area had started to sprout high-end housing developments that boasted sweeping views of the mountain and lake. Controversy over unchecked and uncoordinated development around the reservoir reached fever pitch in 2006. That’s when Columbia Land Trust, Pope Resources (the area’s largest landowner), and Skamania County began to work together to craft a private solution to a complex set of problems.

“It is extraordinary that a timber company, a rural county and a conservation group found a way to a successful collaboration,” says Columbia Land Trust Forestry Initiative Manager Cherie Kearney. “The relations started out a little rocky, but we found common ground and common respect and a solution that conserves critical habitat, maintains ongoing timber harvests and identifies a sensible place for planned development. This type of cooperation becomes more and more important nationally, as population and development pressures come to bear on remote critical habitat areas.”

The first of the four parcels in the Mount St. Helens Forest Conservation Project was conserved in 2010. With a Forest Legacy grant procured by Columbia Land Trust, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources was able to buy a conservation easement from Pope Resources. The easement permanently keeps development off of 6,886 acres of forestlands south of the reservoir while allowing for continued timber production.

“We are pleased to see the second phase of this groundbreaking project move forward, and we are very optimistic

about another state grant that will help us conserve an additional 3,074 acres under a conservation easement,” said Jon Rose, president of Olympic Property Group, Pope Resources’ real estate subsidiary.

A rural county with a population of just over 10,000, Skamania County leaders played a key role in finding planning solutions that will help ensure an economically viable future while conserving the most sensitive habitat. Some 88 percent of the project area will remain in active forestry, providing much-needed tax revenue to the county. Future development will be contained within a limited area in less sensitive habitat.

“My job is to responsibly steward resources and empower communities of Southwest Washington, so I was happy to step in and assist with a project that will protect forest land for future public use,” said Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler. “It’s great when the community can come together around a solution that balances wildlife protection with active forest management and recreational opportunities.”

Portland-based US Forest Capital, which works with buyers and seller of conservation lands, greatly assisted Columbia Land Trust in originating the project. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) also provided strong support for the Mount St Helens project.

The Pine Creek watershed is the most ecologically important parcel within the Mount St. Helens Forest Conservation Project area, because it provides habitat for federally protected species bull trout and Northern spotted owls, as well as game species such as elk. Pine Creek is a tributary of the Lewis River and supports one of only three remaining spawning populations for bull trout in the Lewis River system.

Bull trout once were found in about 60 percent of the Columbia River Basin, but today they occur in less than half of their historic range. The Pine Creek population of bull trout is one of the most threatened because of the increased development pressures and the growing population of people in the watershed.

The Land Trust already has its sights set on conserving an additional 3,074 acres of land on the west side of Pine Creek, which includes additional tributaries as well as upland areas. Columbia Land Trust’s goal west of the creek is to purchase a conservation easement from Pope Resources that will permanently protect this portion of the watershed from development. “Once conserved, the entire Pine Creek watershed will be protected,” says Kearney.

Conserving the area west of Pine Creek has been identified as a high-priority Riparian Protection project by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. Funded bi-annually by the legislature, this state grant program aims to preserve working farms, create new local and state parks, and protect wildlife habitat. This portion of the Pine Creek project is pending legislative action.

###