

# Community Vision for Skyline Forest



DESCHUTES  
LAND  
TRUST

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## **Introduction**

Save Skyline Forest! For nearly 20 years that has been the rallying cry at the Land Trust in our long-term effort to permanently conserve the 33,000 acres of forest land that runs along the base of the Cascades from Bend to Sisters.

The history of Skyline Forest, also known as Bull Springs Tree Farm, is a complex one. The property has changed hands nearly a half dozen times, weathered two major wildfires and a historic economic recession, and seen an explosion of recreation use resulting from a global pandemic.

In 2022 we embarked on an effort to bring our community together to develop a shared vision for Skyline Forest. We sat down for dozens of cups of coffee with community leaders, organizations, and residents. What we heard was a need to bring our community together to identify our shared values for the future of this special place. In June 2022, we convened more than 50 stakeholders for a facilitated conversation to define our community's values regarding Skyline Forest. Volunteers signed up to further discuss these values and how we can uphold them. This document is the result of that process.

This vision will be a key tool for the Land Trust when acquisition of Skyline Forest becomes possible. Through facilitated conversations with key stakeholders and broad community input, we have developed a vision that will inform our future strategies for acquiring, conserving, and managing Skyline Forest.

As an accredited Land Trust serving Central Oregon for more than 25 years, we know that private land conservation moves at the pace of private landowners. Building trust, positive working relationships, and a reputation for excellence in land stewardship are the core strategies that have helped us conserve more than 18,742 acres throughout our region. We know that, in time, we'll add Skyline Forest's 33,000 acres to that count.

## **Partners and Participants**

The following groups and individuals contributed to the creation of this document:

Deschutes Land Trust, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Central Oregon Landwatch, Deschutes Soil and Water Conservation District, Shanda LLC, Central Oregon OHV Alliance, Oregon Equestrian Trails, Bend Parks and Recreation District, Central Oregon Trail Alliance, Oregon Department of Forestry, Sisters County Chamber of Commerce, Oregon Hunters Association, Vámonos Outside, United States Forest Service—Deschutes National Forest, Deschutes County, Visit Bend, Dirty Freehub, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Central Oregon Community College, Children's Forest of Central Oregon, Deschutes Trails Coalition, Anthony Broadman—Bend City Council, Jason Knopf—Oregon State Representative, Laird Norton Family Foundation, Nancy Englehard, Phil Chang—Deschutes County Commissioner.

# Values

## Equitable Access

Definition: We value the opportunity for community members to enjoy the benefits of access to recreation in nature, with attention to communities whose access has been historically restricted.

### How Can We Uphold This Value?

- Focus on creation and inclusion of universally accessible recreation infrastructure.
  - Build trails and trail infrastructure that is welcoming and accessible to people of all abilities, and is sensitive to seasonal migratory movements of wildlife in the area.
  - Consider transportation limitations for people with disabilities and those dependent on public transit.
- Develop interpretive infrastructure that includes voices and perspectives from marginalized communities.
- Explore connections with community organizations focused on outdoor access for historically underserved groups.

## Indigenous & Cultural Heritage

Definition: We value the cultural importance of historic, sacred, and indigenous lands, and we prioritize opportunities to restore these lands to their historic conditions.

### How Can We Uphold This Value?

- Work with Tribal partners to implement acquisition and management strategies which allow for greatest recognition of treaty hunting, fishing, and gathering rights.
- Design interpretive materials in partnership with Tribal partners with a focus on pre-European history of the property.
- Explore management and stewardship planning with the inclusion of Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- Work with local history organizations to interpret and share recent history of Skyline Forest.

## Wildlife and Habitat Conservation

Definition: We value the protection of plant and animal species and their natural habitats.

### How Can We Uphold This Value?

- Protect Tumalo mule deer winter range by restoring habitat and minimizing disturbance.
  - Maintain voluntary December - March closure to motorized vehicles.
  - Improve forage through habitat restoration and weed management.
  - Reduce road density to de-segment habitat.
  - Design winter trails to maintain core habitat areas.
  - Conduct public education related to responsible recreation.
    - Responsible dog access

- Certified Weed Free areas
- Protect birds and small mammals by restoring habitat and minimizing disturbance.
  - Maintain and enhance habitat variety including snags, understory, and rimrock areas.
  - Reduce recreation impacts to priority habitats and reduce disturbance during nesting and denning periods.
  - Manage for prey species (rabbit/porcupine/rock chuck) to maintain healthy predator populations (fox/bobcat/cougar).
- Plants/Insects
  - Manage for protection of Peck's milkvetch, named rare and threatened plant.
  - Maintain healthy populations of bitterbrush/rabbitbrush/wax currant/other leafy shrub species/mountain mahogany to provide key habitat and forage.
  - Manage for protection of aspen stands to reduce regional stand loss and provide key habitat and forage.
  - Integrate Skyline Forest restoration with Land Trust monarch and pollinator conservation efforts.
  - Include milkweed and other native pollinator plants in restoration plantings where appropriate.

## Recreation and Exploration

Definition: We value a diversity of recreation experiences and the ability to pursue our preferred activities in both developed and wild settings.

### How Can We Uphold This Value?

- Maximize the diversity of recreation types allowed on Skyline Forest.
- Create management plans that simultaneously enable multi-use recreation, mitigate user conflict, and limit negative ecological impact.
- Limit recreation infrastructure to maintain wild areas and opportunities for solitude in recreation.
- Pursue common sense connections, fill gaps, and add value to existing and neighboring infrastructure.
- If possible, maximize benefits of flexibility provided by private land status.
- Promote responsible recreation.

## Thriving Local Economy

Definition: We value the management of renewable and sustainable resources to contribute to our community's economic vitality.

### How Can We Uphold this Value?

- Manage for Skyline Forest's contribution to Central Oregon's quality of life (viewshed, recreation opportunities, green space).
- Consider sustainable timber harvests with a focus on education around sustainable forestry and align near-term sustainable timber harvesting with fire mitigation strategies.

- Manage for tourism-based recreational use with an eye on economic imprint of user groups.
- Include consideration for commercial permitting (e.g. outfitters, special uses, campgrounds, concessions).
- Consideration of residential development should prioritize thoughtful, sustainable, and clustered models and should avoid partitioning.

## Water Protection

Definition: We value the protection of groundwater and springs that provide ecological and climate benefits for people and nature.

### How Can We Uphold This Value?

- Work with local colleges and researchers to learn more about water resources on Skyline Forest.
- Protect existing springs and creeks by limiting recreation disturbance of banks and riparian areas.
- Conserve existing creeks and streams for the benefit of aspen stands.
- Work with partners to monitor existing springs.

## Climate Resiliency

Definition: We value climate-smart management practices which mitigate the impacts of climate change and which set the stage for resilience for future climate conditions.

### How Can We Uphold This Value?

- Preserve habitat diversity to the greatest degree possible.
- Practice active management to promote resilient forests and restore natural conditions.
  - Promote diversity of species composition and enhance stand vigor.
  - Limit/prevent the spread of invasive species/disease.
  - Enhance snowpack retention through restoration of natural canopy density.
  - Pursue restoration of fire scars and opportunities for reforestation.
- Maximize carbon sequestration opportunities.
- Maximize the ways in which conservation of Skyline Forest can reduce human exposure and vulnerability to climate hazards (e.g. wildfire, extreme heat, water shortages).

## Wildfire Risk Mitigation

Definition: We live in a fire-adapted ecosystem and we value a community wide approach to wildfire mitigation, prevention, and response.

### How Can We Uphold This Value?

- Minimize Wildland Urban interface through limiting or avoiding residential development.
- Practice restoration through active management to promote resilient forests and restore natural conditions.

- Promote diversity of species composition and enhance stand vigor.
  - Limit/prevent the spread of invasive species/disease.
- Raise community awareness about wildfire.
  - Consider Skyline Forest as demonstration area to build community understanding and support for Rx fire and other treatments.
- Encourage wildfire prevention through responsible recreation.
  - Manage recreational use to minimize wildfire risk.
  - Align fire-related restrictions with neighboring public lands.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this shared visioning process bring to light the community's passion and commitment to finding a permanent conservation solution for Skyline Forest. We don't know at this point how each of the values expressed here will show up in the future acquisition and management of Skyline Forest, but we do know that, whatever the outcome, this shared vision will be an invaluable tool.

We owe tremendous thanks to all of the individuals and organizations who contributed to this process. Their time and expertise were invaluable and the collaboration and relationship building that resulted from our work together will no doubt be long lasting.

Going forward, Deschutes Land Trust and our many partners will not only endeavor to uphold these community values, but will continue to refine them, add new voices, and approach our conservation efforts with integrity, transparency, and collaboration.