



The checkerboard gains another square



By **Bob Woods**, PCTA Regional Representative

Two forest parcels that include the Pacific Crest Trail in Washington are now permanently protected thanks to royalties from the offshore oil and gas industry.

Yes, you read correctly.

On Sept. 3, 1964, Congress had the foresight to create the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which reinvests a small fraction of the leasing receipts from offshore oil and gas extraction into publicly owned land. The act states that land purchased using the LWCF is to remain forever available for “public outdoor recreation use.”

It is like a type of nationwide mitigation program. While we are allowing some public resources to be extracted in some areas, we are rewarded with permanently protected public lands in other areas. The LWCF is a great match for filling in some of the gaps of privately owned lands along the PCT.

The LWCF has done more than any other federal program to expand the systems of local parks, recreational green spaces and public open space enjoyed by hundreds of millions of Americans.

These investments ensure access to public lands for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation while supporting economic vitality and jobs in communities. Active outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion to America’s economy every year and supports 6.5 million jobs.

Using the LWCF, the **U.S. Forest Service** has acquired two more parcels from the Plum Creek Timber Company on land east of Seattle, which contains about 1-1/2 miles of the PCT. **The Trust for Public Land** held options to purchase the parcels and the Forest Service eventually bought them once funding was approved.

Historically, this area was heavily logged, which is evident by the familiar checkerboard pattern seen on maps, from the air and on foot. The pattern is a result of the Pacific Railway Acts of 1862 to 1871, which promoted the construction of railroads through federal land grants. The grants were typically every other section of land along a railroad corridor and acted as a subsidy for the railroad companies expanding westward. At that time, the government thought

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The PCT winds along a ridge through the Intake Creek parcel. Photo by Bob Woods.

that the value of the remaining public land with close railroad access would double and essentially pay for the land grants. That didn't happen, and a lot of the remaining public land was later given away through the Homestead Act.

Burlington Northern was the parent company to the Plum Creek Timber Company. Harvesting timber has been a part of the history and culture of the Pacific Northwest for generations. We are very fortunate that the climate and ecosystem here is perfect for growing big, tall trees. Over time, the trees will replenish themselves, and the land will be managed to create a healthy sustainable forest.

Intake Creek is the larger parcel, containing 640 acres, and was purchased for \$886,000. The other parcel, aptly named Missing Link, is 168 acres and was purchased for \$244,000. This is a partial "square" on the east side of the crest divide that includes the PCT.

This means the American people will now have an additional 808 acres of public land on which to enjoy outdoor recreation. The Okanagan/Wenatchee National Forest will manage 682 new acres, and 126 acres will be added to the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

The parcels are located about 35 trail miles south of Washington's Snoqualmie Pass. A narrow easement allowed the PCT to pass through the privately owned forest lands for years, but the trail was never truly protected. For the past decade, the U.S. Forest Service has been acquiring similar parcels from Plum Creek and other timber companies in order to protect the trail corridor. To date, 18 parcels have been acquired to protect the PCT, returning more than 8,500 acres of land to its original owners, the American public.

Today, Plum Creek is the largest private landowner in the country with approximately 6.6 million acres. **Jerry Sorenson** and **Kari Blanton** represented the Plum Creek Timber Company as it navigated through the process.

It is truly a partnership effort with The Trust for Public Land playing a lead role in the purchase of this newly protected segment of the PCT. The land conservation organization has always been a strong advocate for the LWCF on a national level. **Ann Welz**, a TPL employee in Seattle, was the project manager. The purchase options safeguarded the properties until the federal funding was finalized. TPL also received a nice assist from **Charlie Raines**, a forest conservation director at **Forterra** (formerly Cascade Land Conservancy).

TPL holds a time-sensitive option to purchase the final parcel in the area needed to protect the tread of the PCT. The Forest Service has until September 2013 to secure the needed funding before the option expires. Some adjacent parcels will still be needed to protect the scenic views from the PCT, but the trail tread will soon be on publicly owned and federally protected land in this area.

The Forest Service team accomplishing the acquisitions included four people. **Scott Lynn** is the Northern Washington Land Zone Team Leader who coordinated the project. **Gianna Vaccaro** is the Realty Specialist who managed the site inspections and a lot of the paperwork. **Debra Okholm** is the LWCF Program Manager for the region who played a crucial role work-

ing with the Washington D.C. Forest Service office to secure funding for the project. The PCT Manager, **Beth Boyst**, nominated the project and supported Forest Service staff throughout the entire process. PCTA staff has been working closely with the Forest Service to identify potential land acquisitions and prioritize their level of importance.

The **Backcountry Horsemen of Washington** has been clearing the downed trees from this section of the PCT for more than a decade. The **North 350 Blades**, a new PCTA-affiliated volunteer trail group, has been taking on more of the annual maintenance in this area. The open canopy of a recently harvested forest promotes fast-growing underbrush that can clog the trail. The morning dew dripping from the encroaching brush keeps boots and pant legs soaked while passing through. The North 350 Blades have done a tremendous amount of work to cut back a lot of the brush using power brush saws.

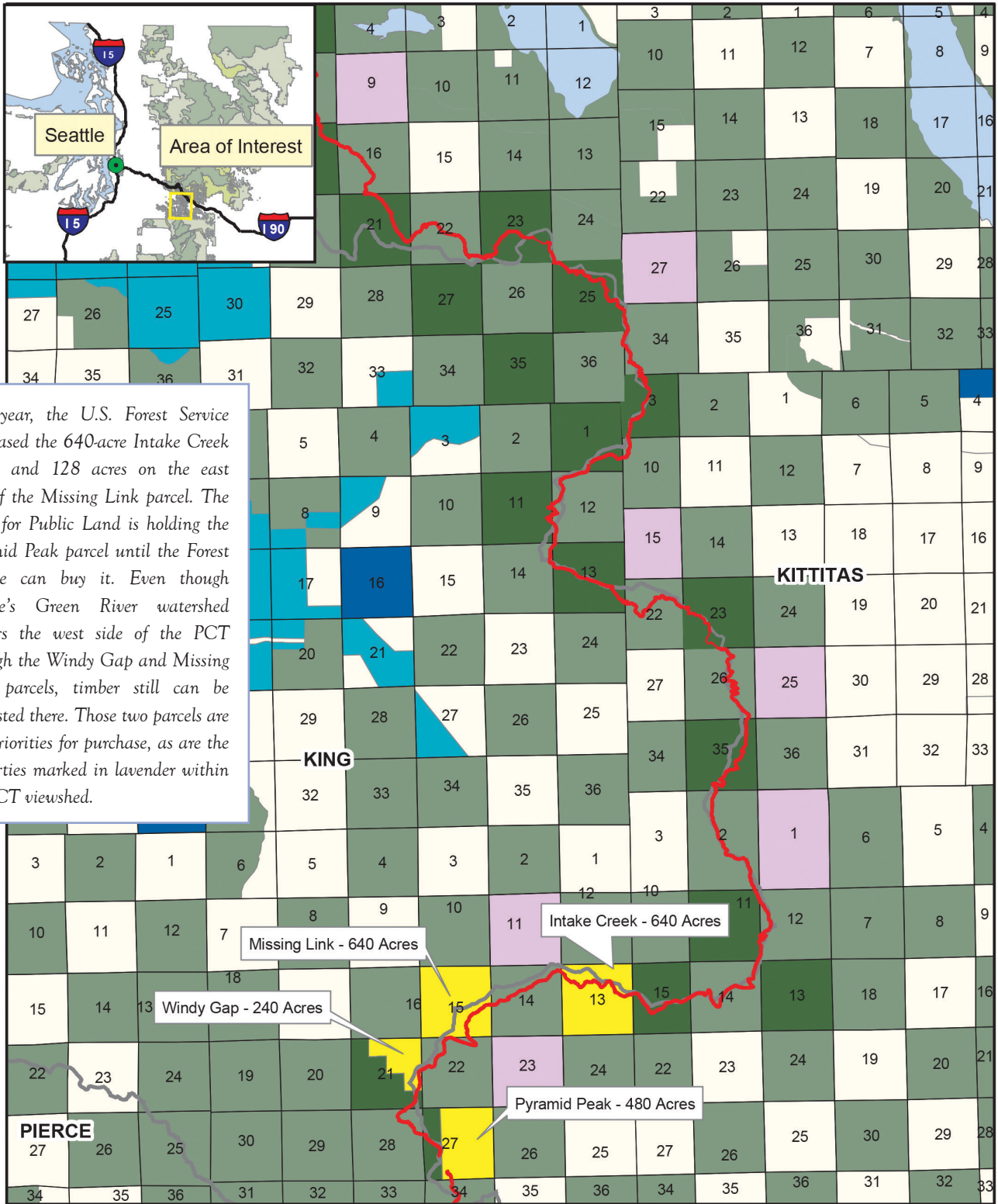
Volunteers from the **Washington Trails Association** have also reconstructed a lot of tread in this area. All of the hard work is beginning to show, and the trail is in great shape. More needs to be done, and you can help. To learn more about the North 350 Blades, join their mailing list by sending an email to north350blades@gmail.com or find them on Facebook. 🐦

The Pyramid Peak property that is shown on the map, being held in trust for the USFS by the Trust for Public Land.





Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
 Plum Creek Timberlands Parcel Acquisition Update
 Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie & Wenatchee National Forests



This year, the U.S. Forest Service purchased the 640-acre Intake Creek parcel and 128 acres on the east side of the Missing Link parcel. The Trust for Public Land is holding the Pyramid Peak parcel until the Forest Service can buy it. Even though Seattle's Green River watershed borders the west side of the PCT through the Windy Gap and Missing Link parcels, timber still can be harvested there. Those two parcels are still priorities for purchase, as are the properties marked in lavender within the PCT viewshed.

- Pacific Crest Trail - Existing
- Trail Corridor -- Private Priority 1 Parcels
- Trail Corridor -- Private Priority 2 Parcels

- US Forest Service Acquisitions
- US Forest Service
- Private

- State Government
- Local Government

