

Washington State Trust Lands Frequently Asked Questions



1. What is the Common School Trust?

The Common School Trust, about 1.8 million acres in size, was granted at statehood to help fund public schools in perpetuity. Sustainable timber harvests generate most of the revenue, but income also comes from orchards, vineyards, wheat, wind and solar power, and commercial properties. The revenue from these lands is placed in the School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP).

2. What is the State Forest Trust?

State Forest Trusts were created from land that was abandoned after logging in the 1920's and 30's. State Forests are managed for sustainable timber production for the benefit of counties and junior taxing districts, such as school districts, where the land is located. A school district must have a voted bond or levy to receive state forest timber revenue.

3. Why does this Trust revenue matter to K-12 education?

Common School Trust revenue helps fund school construction state-wide. State Forest revenues are used to maintain school facilities and help pay for operational costs that are not funded by basic education funding. These dollars help ensure that schools have the financial support to meet student needs.

4. Who oversees decisions regarding the management of trust lands?

The state Legislature is the trustee for all state trust lands. Management of trust lands is delegated to the Department of Natural Resources, led by the elected Commissioner of Public Lands. The Board of Natural Resources sets policy and approves timber sales and land transactions.

5. Who is impacted by the Common School Trust and State Forest revenue?

Students, teachers, and school districts are the primary beneficiaries. Students benefit from the additional funding that supports school programs and resources. Teachers and school staff rely on these funds to provide quality education. School districts, especially those in rural or forested areas, directly benefit from forest revenue, which supports education in areas with limited local property tax revenue.

6. Why should other districts care about the Common School Trust and State Forest revenue?

All districts can qualify for construction assistance through the SCAP formula. SCAP is funded in part by the Common School Trust. State Forest revenue goes primarily to rural school districts, increasing equitable funding for some of the poorest areas of the state. It's important to advocate for equitable funding across all districts to maintain the quality of education statewide.

7. How can WSSDA members get involved or advocate on these issues?

WSSDA members can advocate by engaging with legislators, attending public hearings, and raising awareness about the importance of trust revenue for education. They can also collaborate with other education organizations, track legislative actions, and communicate the impact of trust revenue on local schools. Supporting state efforts to manage the trust fund effectively is also crucial for long-term K-12 education sustainability. WSSDA's Trust Land Advisory Committee helps educate WSSDA members about school trust lands.