



## Media Release

### **Issaquah Alps Trails Club is Working with Local Residents to Prevent a Potential Clearcut of Land Adjoining King County's Cougar Squak Mountain Corridor**

**January 2013**

The Issaquah Alps Trails Club (IATC) has learned from local residents that a Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forest Practices permit may soon be filed; allowing a logging company to potentially clearcut much of 216 acres of prime forest and wildlife habitat on Squak Mountain in unincorporated Issaquah. Residents whose properties adjoin the proposed clearing have reported seeing bright pink tape on trees along thousands of feet of border with the property. Flagging using "Harvest Boundary" tape is a step required by DNR to mark areas to be logged.

The proposed area adjoins the Cougar-Squak Mountain corridor connecting approximately 5,000 acres of public parks and open spaces used for hiking, equestrian and other outdoor recreational activities on the two mountains as well as wildlife habitat and travel corridors. It provides a critical access to the south side of Squak Mountain State Park. It includes a headwater fork of May Creek. May Creek has been plagued for decades with increasing flooding caused by greater flows during storm events compounded by increased silt filling in the creek channel.

The logger is in the process of securing a state DNR permit for the logging. Over the last few weeks, numerous residents and interested citizens have contacted King County to request their help in acquiring this key property connecting Cougar and Squak mountains. They are very pleased with this statement just released by the county:

**King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks is in the process of determining its land acquisition priorities for grant funding that would be available in late 2013/early 2014. The property recently purchased by Kurt Erickson in the Cougar Squak area is one of the properties being evaluated for possible purchase. This property meets many of the County's general park acquisition ranking criteria. Part of the County's evaluation will be to assess possible strategies to purchase the property with or without it being logged, exploring the potential of restructuring forest management plans prior to selling and consideration of a phased acquisition.**

**King County staff has already initiated discussions with Kurt Erickson and will be conducting a site visit with him in the near future to further assess the site to inform recommendations about a potential acquisition strategy. Final decision about the County's acquisition priorities for this year will be made in early to mid-March.**

In communications with IATC and concerned neighbors, the logger has indicated his first preference would be to sell the land to King County unlogged. However since it may take time for the county to raise funds for acquisition, he has indicated willingness to discuss phasing acquisitions and/or modifying logging plans if he and the county are working on a longer-term acquisition plan. IATC believes that key areas of this acreage have not been logged since the 1920s. While the dense forests and wilderness on this acreage make the land attractive for timber sales, preserving this land for public use in the Cougar-Squak Mountain corridor is aligned with King County's ongoing efforts to connect public trails and preserve dense forests and wilderness habitats and migration corridors for numerous native birds, fish and other wildlife. The close proximity to major urban populations also increases the recreational value of this property as does the recreational opportunities it would provide year round.

Based on conversations with the Department of Natural Resources, area residents reviewing DNR's permit process for forest practices have learned that the protection of sensitive environmental areas required by King County regulations will not be required under the State DNR permit. It is also less likely that a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review would be required due to DNR's lesser regulations for land use under a State forest practices permit. The SEPA review looks at environmental impacts of projects and requires the submission of detailed mitigation plans prior to permit approval. Without the requirement for a SEPA review, however, there will be no public notification required and the State will approve the permit within 30 days of submission without any formal process for hearing public comment. Timber harvesting could then begin immediately.

The IATC has heard from numerous concerned area residents who worry not only about the aesthetics, noise, and road use concerns related to logging this portion of Squak Mountain's pristine forest, but the after effects to natural plant and animal habitats which will be displaced or destroyed. Concerns have been widely raised about the likelihood of increased flooding on May Valley properties due to increased water flow and soil erosion following deforestation. Environmental concerns include the possibility of devastating effects to delicate salmon and fish habitats now under a King County restoration project in the May Creek Basin. May Creek is a tributary to Lake Washington, draining the area to the north of Cedar River and west of Issaquah Creek, including parts of the cities of Renton and Newcastle and it supports salmon runs.

With this in mind, the IATC has been leading an effort to encourage all concerned individuals and entities to immediately contact public officials and conservation groups to highlight the urgent need for the public acquisition of this land. Many contacts have been made with all levels of county government and we are very pleased with the response the county has shown.

The IATC has encouraged the Mountains to Sound Greenway, Trust for Public Lands and Forterra (formerly Cascade Land Conservancy) to evaluate this land for acquisition and work with King County, adjoining property owners and the logger to help develop an acquisition plan that supports their analysis of the public value this land provides the region.

#### **About Issaquah Alps Trails Club**

**The Issaquah Alps Trails Club (IATC) formed in 1979, is an Issaquah-based not-for-profit recreation and conservation group devoted to hiking, establishing and improving trails, and advocacy for open space protection in central King County. The original focus of IATC was directed towards Cougar, Squak and Tiger Mountains, also known as the "Issaquah Alps." In 1990, the Issaquah Alps Trails Club organized the first 'Mountains to Sound March', a hike from Snoqualmie Pass to Elliott Bay in Seattle, to publicize the need to preserve a scenic greenbelt connecting Seattle to the Cascade Mountains. Following this march, the [Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust](#) was founded by regional leaders. IATC leads over a hundred hikes a year in the Greenway and works on acquisitions and planning throughout the Greenway. However, the focus of IATC's efforts remains directed towards conservation and the establishment of hiking trails in the "Issaquah Alps."**

The community has established a website with additional information: [SaveSquak.com](http://SaveSquak.com)

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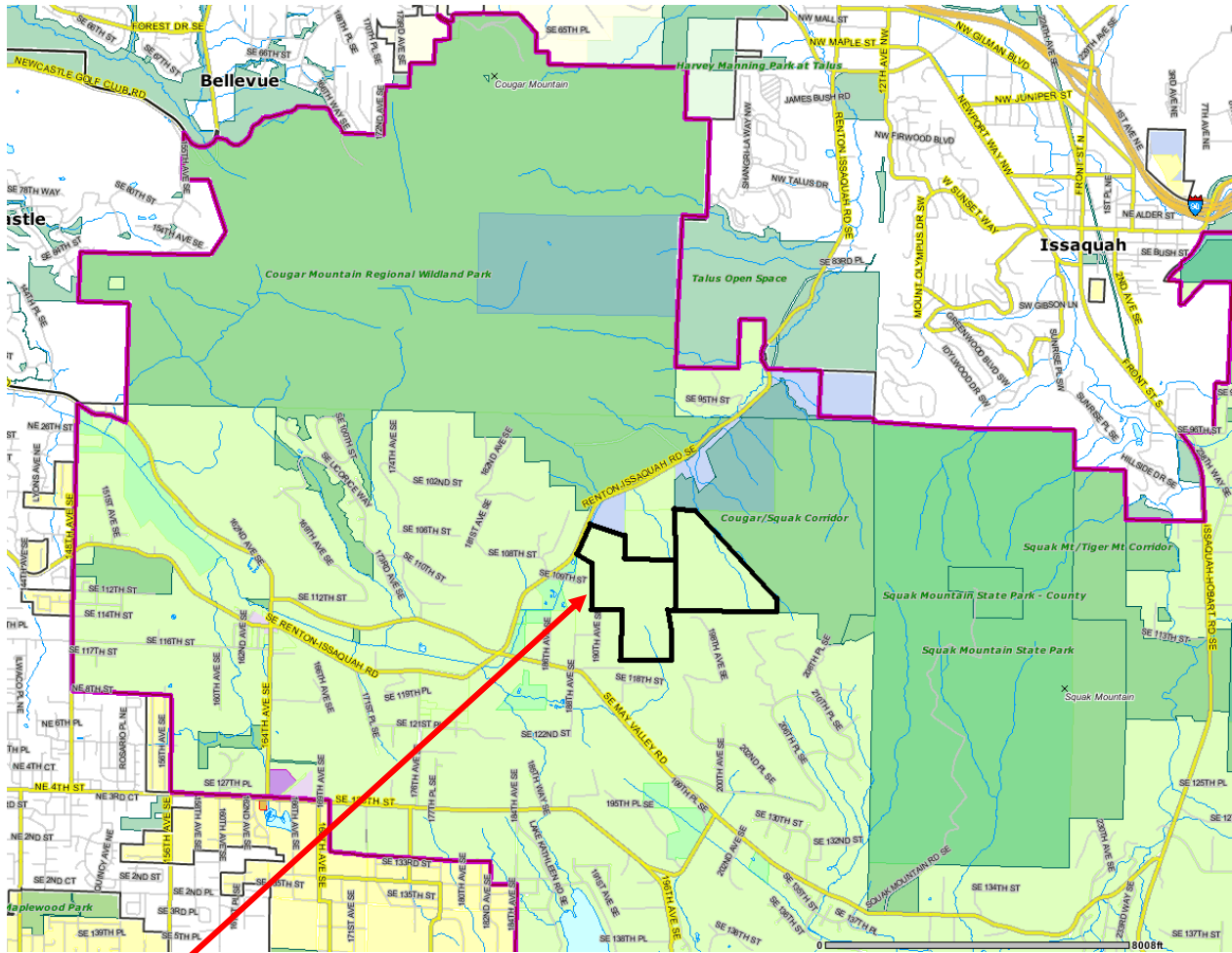
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# The 'Issaquah Alps' King County's Cougar Squak Tiger Mountain Corridor



**SUBJECT 216 ACRES PROPOSED FOR CLEARING**