

# The Stories of Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest

## The Stewardship Story

The idea for Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest was developed in 1993 when an exceptional grove of old growth forest was identified in the watershed and efforts were undertaken by dedicated volunteers from Whatcom Land Trust to protect and preserve this unique forest. Field studies discovered one of the oldest and largest old growth forests of its kind left in the Pacific Northwest. Several Alaska yellow-cedar trees in this grove are 800-1000 years old with some Pacific silver fir and mountain hemlock trees a youthful 700+ years old.

The Land Trust began a campaign to purchase the grove from its owner, Crown Pacific Limited Partnership, to insure greater protection and to plan for future connections to adjacent old growth forest patches. Through the generosity of the Paul G. Allen Forest Protection Foundation, an anonymous donor, Whatcom County Conservation Futures Fund and other



community donations, \$3.7 million dollars were raised to purchase this important piece of land.

The establishment of Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest brought together three partners (Whatcom Land Trust, Whatcom County and Western Washington University) to manage, protect and steward this special place. Whatcom County and

Western Washington University are co-owners of the property with a conservation easement owned by Whatcom Land Trust.

## The Ecosystem Story

The Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest is a complex, high elevation, north-facing watershed located in central Whatcom County. In addition to the 700-acre rare old growth forest grove, the conservation site includes 45-acre Canyon Lake, 1550 acres of second growth forest and 105 acres of formerly clear-cut forest lands quickly growing towards restoration.



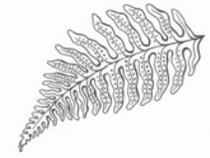
Geologists think that Canyon Lake was formed from an earthquake-induced landslide. The lake still contains the trees that were rooted on the banks of the former Canyon Creek. These western redcedar trees, standing askew in all directions in the lake water, harbor unique plant communities on their tops and edges.

Although cut at least once for wood products, the lower elevations of the Community Forest contain some trees up to 45 years old. With proper stewardship, this forest will grow and evolve to provide an ecological connection to the old growth forest at higher elevations.

Upon entering this upper elevation ancient grove of trees several miles from the parking lot, one is struck by the diversity of sizes and microhabitats. It is not a uniform forest but one of variety – tall, thick old trees with trunks carpeted in lichen but also

patches of sunlight, small shrubs and open spaces. Surprisingly, the oldest trees in the grove are not the largest trees. The Alaska yellow-cedar and mountain hemlock trees grow very slowly.

By studying these unique forests, we may discover how they are able to sustain themselves for over a millennium and, consequently, learn how to better manage all kinds of forests.



## The Human Story

Native people of the area, bands of the Nooksack Indian Tribe, lived along the river valleys in the vicinity of Canyon Creek. Native peoples could have hunted for mountain goats and traveled through the higher elevations on the upper edge of the Community Forest.

In the mid-1800's, gold miners entered the area and prospected along river valley bottoms. Explorers probed into the foothills and mountains from their arrival ports along the coast. In the 1880's, European settlers began to carve out homesteads and cut down the large valley-bottom forests. Railroad logging of the lower Canyon Lake Creek area removed all the old growth in that vicinity. By the 1930's truck roads reached to Canyon Lake. Forests to the south of the old growth grove were logged in the early 1950's and most of the upper watershed was penetrated with roads by 1960-70. Forests to the north, west and east were harvested from 1970-90.

## Hiking the Trails

### Lake Trail

*Distance: 2.0 miles round trip*

*Elevation Gain: minimal*

*Time: 1-1.5 hours*

From the parking lot, head to the south towards Canyon Lake Creek and cross the wooden footbridge. Follow the trail along the lakeshore. Experience forest, wetland and scree (rock) habitats and peek-a-boo views of the lake. The trail can be muddy in sections with creek or seep crossings. Continue across the eastern Canyon Lake Creek footbridge at the head of the lake to complete the loop and join the Old Growth Trail. Turn left and descend back down to the parking lot.

### Old Growth Trail

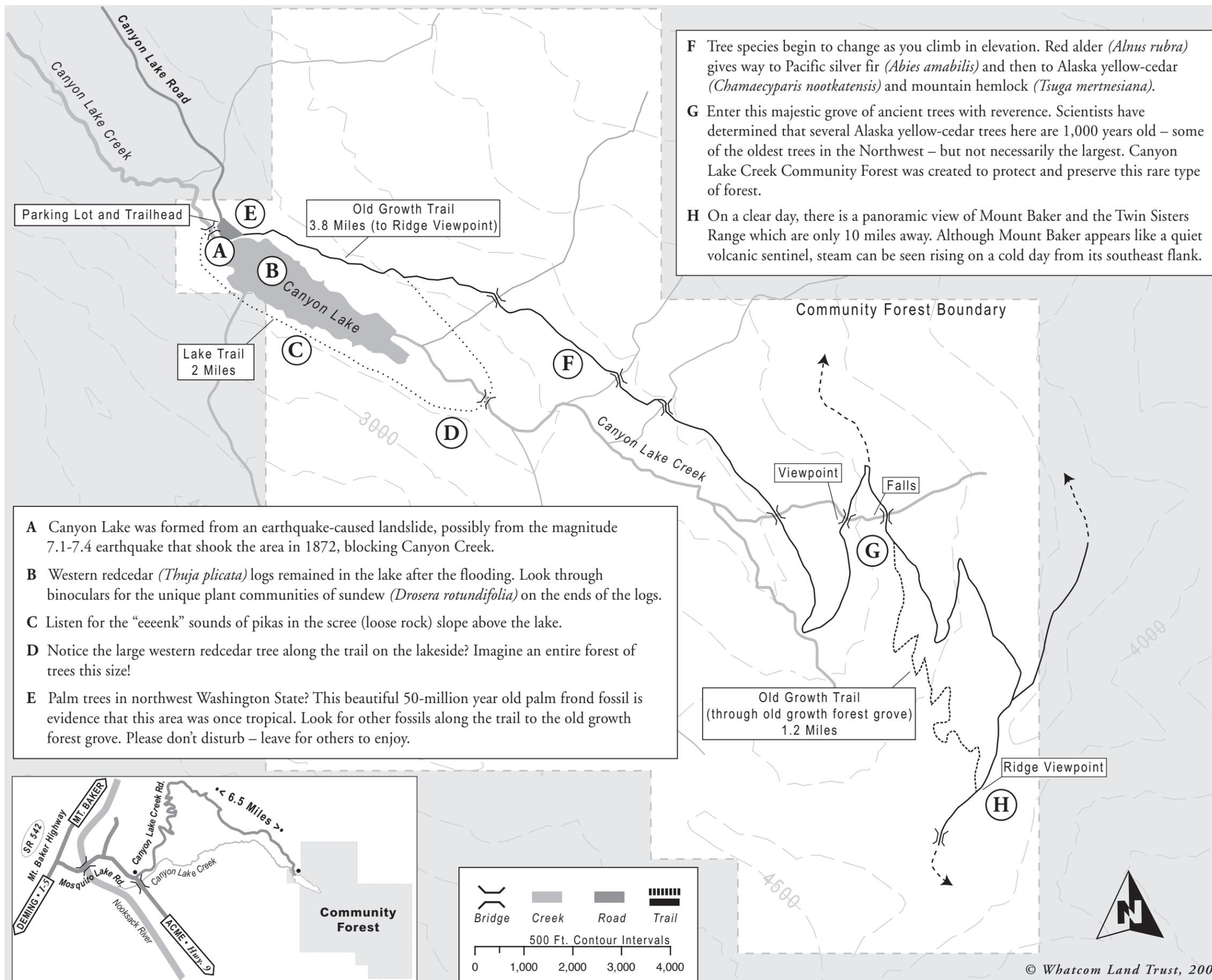
*to old growth forest and ridge*

*Distance: 2.6 miles to the beginning of the 1.2-mile section through the old growth forest; or 3.7 miles to the ridge viewpoint via the main trail/retired road*

*Elevation Gain: 2,150 feet*

*Time: 5-6 hours*

Head uphill from the parking lot and follow the wide trail (retired logging road) to the start of the old growth forest 2.6 miles up the trail. Along the way, the trail switchbacks and brings you expansive views of Canyon Lake and the valley below, the Nooksack River valley and Van Zandt Dike to the west. Once above the lake, the trail climbs through mostly clearcut areas. When approaching the first grove of large trees ahead, look to the right and find the trail marker to the old growth forest. (The main trail/retired road will return you to this spot.) Wind your way through this rare grove of ancient trees. The path will eventually break out of the trees into an old clearcut and onto the ridge. On a clear day, enjoy the close-up views of Mt. Baker, the Black Buttes and the Twin Sisters Range. Head left on the trail (retired road) and stay left at the fork to begin the descent to where the trail through the old growth forest began. Continue down the 2.6 miles you originally climbed enjoying views from a different perspective.



## Driving Directions

I-5 - Exit 255. Head east on Hwy. 542 (Mount Baker Highway) to milepost 16.8 and turn right on Mosquito Lake Road. Follow for 1.7 miles and turn left on graveled Canyon Lake Road, following the sign for Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest. Continue for 6.7 miles – following signs and green arrows – to the road-end parking lot. The parking lot elevation is 2350 feet.

Road conditions will vary depending on season and weather. Dust or mud can create hazardous driving conditions. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Drive with caution at a prudent speed because the road is narrow and winding. Please respect private property along Canyon Lake Road.

## You Can Help

Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest is a treasured place. Please help us keep it this way by following these rules:

- Day use only – sunrise to sunset
- Hiking only – no bikes, horses or motorbikes
- Non-motorized watercraft only on Canyon Lake; fishing permitted with license
- No camping, fires, alcohol, collecting, hunting or pets

For more information on Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest contact:



*Providing recreational opportunities and managing public lands for the residents of Whatcom County*

Phone: 360-733-2900

E-Mail: [parks@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:parks@co.whatcom.wa.us)

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*Preserving and protecting unique natural, scenic, agricultural and open space land in Whatcom County*

Phone: 360-650-9470

E-Mail: [info@whatcomlandtrust.org](mailto:info@whatcomlandtrust.org)

Web: [www.whatcomlandtrust.org](http://www.whatcomlandtrust.org)

Contributions for supporting the management of this forest can be made to WLT - marked CLCCF



*Partners in excellence*

Phone: 360-650-3000

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## CANYON LAKE CREEK COMMUNITY FOREST

*restoring a legacy for the future*