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## **Northwest Environmental Forum** **Pre-Proposal Concept**

The College of Forest Resources envisions a new facility at the Center for Urban Horticulture that will provide a forum for collaborative problem solving related to a wide variety of environmental and natural resource issues.

The Northwest Environmental Forum will serve a wide range of user groups involved in the restoration, enhancement and sustainable use of our natural and environmental resources. The Forum will be designed to facilitate collaborative decision-making, critical examination, exploration and resolution of natural resource and environmental issues and the development of new policies and paradigms to foster the sustainable use of our natural resources.

Designed to meet green building standards, the facility will exemplify the responsible and sustainable use of natural resources. It will contain high tech multi-media and state-of-the-art computer equipment for the presentation, analysis and visualization of relevant information groups need to discuss, analyze and resolve complex natural resource issues. Management information and decision support systems will be provided to allow policy options to be analyzed and discussed in a real-time environment with options for simultaneous broadcast to remote sites.

The facility will provide the following features: approximately 6,000 gross sq. ft. composed of a main meeting room seating 75-100 people with 3-5 smaller breakout rooms capable of seating 15-25 people. The main room will be arranged in an elliptical pattern with state of the art computer connections and multi-media projection equipment available to all participants. Some participants will be seated behind those directly seated at the central elliptical table. In addition to the breakout rooms, 2-3 staff technician offices, a lavatory and small kitchen facilities will be included.

Built with private funding, the facility will be constructed as an addition to Merrill Hall that is under reconstruction following a devastating arson attack in May 2001. The exact cost of the Northwest Environmental Forum is not yet known but likely will be in the range of \$2-3 million. Given the high level of interest in such a facility, we believe we can raise these funds once our concept is widely embraced.

The College of Forest Resources believes that our environmental and natural resource systems must be managed sustainably by seeking the appropriate balance between ecological, economical and social factors. Finding such a balance is a complex task involving the analysis of tradeoffs across the “triple bottom line.” The nature of the decision environment coupled with the presence of multiple stakeholders and objectives, simultaneously operating across a variety of spatial and temporal scales, adds to the complexity of many contemporary natural resource and environmental issues. Resolving conflicts in this decision environment is a daunting task. And, all indications are that this is the manner by which such issues will be analyzed and resolved in the coming years. The Northwest Environmental Forum will provide a problem-solving environment that encourages various groups to utilize the best science to help resolve their issues.

Many University units involved with environmental and natural resource issues spanning urban, suburban and wild lands will utilize the facility and its services. Such a facility located at the University of Washington will further enhance and promote application of the best science, whether it be horticulture, forestry, ecology, fisheries, geology, landscape design, etc., as it is applied to a variety of natural resource issues so prevalent in the PNW. As information is collated and analyzed, collaborative research, public and professional outreach and adaptive management strategies will likely evolve among the University and the parties concerned.