



# Conservation & Extended Rotation Forestry as Complementary Strategies

The needs and values of Washington state are best met through **ecological forestry**, which manages forests as ecological systems rather than as an agricultural crop while still achieving environmental, economic, and cultural goals.

**Forest management should support many ecosystem and community benefits and uses.**

Two strategies often discussed in ecologically-based management of forests are: **1. Protection of [high conservation value areas](#)**, such as old, unique and/or structurally complex forests or rare plant communities; and **2. Extended harvest rotations** that grow trees for longer before harvest than business-as-usual industrial forestry.

- **Benefits of preserving high conservation value areas, like older, natural forests, include:** forests achieving their full ecological potential, more carbon stored on landscape, support of natural ecosystem processes, habitat to support biodiversity, social and cultural fulfillment, and more.
- **Benefits of extended rotations on harvested lands include:** more carbon stored on the landscape, greater ecological integrity and ecosystem service provision, more timber volume produced over time, higher quality wood products, more revenue from harvest over time.

These strategies are neither interchangeable nor mutually exclusive in a forest management plan. Each has different purposes and outcomes and should be evaluated with specific landscape and management goals in mind.

## Key Considerations:

- Extended rotations and conservation of high value areas are **not** mutually exclusive strategies.
- Extended rotations should be used **only** on lands that are **already actively managed for timber**.
- High conservation value areas, like uniquely old or complex forests, should be managed for enhanced ecological value, **not** for timber production.
- Extended rotations are **one piece** of ecological and climate-smart forest management. Others include "uneven-aged" management rather than clearcuts, and leaving more trees behind.
- It's **not** just about maximizing carbon. There are other important benefits of keeping forests standing longer that should be considered.
- **The ecological and social value of trees and forests increase far beyond the age of harvest, even under an extended rotation scenario.** Even a "long" harvest rotation (e.g. 80 years) is significantly reducing the up-to 1,000-year natural lifespan of these trees and their ecological contributions.
- **Natural forest ecosystems and the benefits they provide can't be replicated** easily, naturally, or quickly after an area is harvested.
- Shifting to longer rotations from a business-as-usual short rotation approach **should avoid and mitigate potential job losses, support rural economies, and bridge the short-term transition period** of the timing of revenue and lumber supply.
- **It is vital to retain older forest stands on actively harvested lands** to provide ecological and social benefits during a transition to extended rotations.