

Views from Above: Old Trees, New Perspectives

A National Geographic Conservation Trust Project



This summer, people from diverse walks of life will be coming together to participate in an unprecedented project to explore and describe the forest canopy. The National Geographic Society (NGS) has funded an innovative effort to bring a variety of people to the who will document the ecological, economic, aesthetic, and spiritual values of the forest canopy in pristine and human-managed habitats.

This effort is part of the International Canopy Network (ICAN), a non-profit organization dedicated to forest canopy research, conservation, and education. The NGS awarded us a grant from their Conservation Trust program to bring people to a field site in Washington State to see and communicate about the canopy in new ways. We will train them in tree-climbing, and then they will spend time on small canopy platforms. Participants will record their experiences in whatever medium they choose, including writing, speaking into a tape recorder, classical and rap music, drawing, or sculpture.

The participants come from many different backgrounds. The idea is to bring new perspectives to understanding forest canopies. We have invited artists who will provide material that highlight aesthetic values of primary and secondary forest canopies. We have included economists and loggers to provide input on the economic aspects of the treetops. We are also bringing in people who have had little or no direct experiences with trees and forests to investigate the canopy with new eyes. Confirmed for the project are Inuit people from the Nunavut territory of Canada who live in a completely treeless environment, urban youth from Seattle, and blind people.

The project will take place at Ellsworth Creek, a multi-aged forested area partially owned by The Nature Conservancy near Naselle, Washington. As part of the Willapa Bay watershed, the site is composed of cedars and maples, and provides habitat for chum salmon. Participants will spend 2-7 days at the site, camping out and sharing impressions with each other in the evening. Two sessions are planned: July 13-20 and August 20-27.

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