



## **WASHINGTON'S PACIFIC MOUNTAIN REGION**

### **An Inventory of Business Support Organizations: Regional Assets and Gaps**

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## An Inventory of Business Support Organizations: Regional Assets and Gaps

Since it began operations, the Pacific Mountain Alliance for Innovation (PMAI) has served as a leading advocate for regional development in the South Puget Sound area. PMAI unites community and business leaders from our five counties---Grays Harbor, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, and Thurston---around a shared goal of building a region that will prosper and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

PMAI's work has been accelerated thanks to an initial \$5 million investment from the US Department of Labor's WIRED (Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development) program. PMAI is one of thirty-nine similar experiments now underway across the US. All of the WIRED projects are designed to help strengthen regional institutions and to build closer connections between workforce and economic development efforts.

The PMAI WIRED effort seeks to attract business to the Pacific Mountain Region, strengthen established and emerging businesses in our communities, and expand workforce skills. This collaboration unites partners from industry, labor, economic development, education, and workforce development. High wage, high demand jobs are the focus in the targeted sectors of manufacturing, construction, innovation and entrepreneurship, and energy technology. WIRED projects will highlight science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills (STEM) occupations; will produce a demonstrable economic impact; will offer innovative models that can be implemented across the country; and will create new and ecologically sustainable ways to do business.

The various groups and individuals participating in the PMAI initiative share a common perspective on the challenges facing our regional economy. To succeed and prosper, our region must become more innovative and more focused on developing high value-added ideas, products, services and technologies. We also believe in a grow-from-within strategy that builds upon local assets and competitive strengths. In other words, we cannot

rely on others to build our economy. We must do it ourselves, by investing in local people, by nurturing local businesses, and by enhancing our quality of life.

This report helps us assess our capacities to achieve these objectives as they relate to nurturing innovation. It is an asset map that identifies local strengths and areas of competitive advantage. It also identifies gaps in our region---critical areas where we lack capacities, skills or resources that are needed in an innovation-based economy. Our purpose is to drive action: to spur new investments and new activity in areas of competitive strength and to devise solutions in areas where gaps or weaknesses exist.

Because of our unique focus at PMAI, this asset map emphasizes regional innovation assets. It does not assess all aspects of the region's economic foundations, and thus does not cite many of the region's most important assets, such as its scenic beauty, its diverse natural landscape, or its abundant water resources. Thus, our analysis is not a comprehensive regional assessment--it is focused on key regional institutions that support economic and workforce development. It focuses generally on business development and support, with some specific emphases on three key industries that are targeted by PMAI: construction, energy, and manufacturing.

## ***Why Innovation?***

PMAI's focus on innovation is based on a bottom-line concern about how best to generate new sources of regional wealth and prosperity. It is no longer sufficient for the region to rely on a strong work ethic and abundant natural resources. Working harder is not enough; the region must work smarter. And, working smarter requires a commitment to encouraging and nurturing innovation.

The vast majority of new jobs and new prosperity in the American economy result from innovation—"the process by which new ideas enter the economy and change what is produced, how it is produced, and the way production itself is organized."<sup>i</sup> As this definition suggests, innovation does not equal invention. Innovation is a process that involves multiple activities from idea generation to product development and manufacturing.

Supporting these new innovators requires new approaches to economic and workforce development. Smart regions seek to become innovation hubs by building strong regional environments where new ideas, technologies, products and services can be incubated, developed, and commercialized. These multi-faceted challenges require multi-faceted solutions. Local education systems must help local residents develop critical skills and competencies. Local businesses need support to grow and succeed in the global marketplace. When all of these components fall into place, a strong regional innovation ecosystem emerges.

### ***What Makes an Innovative and Competitive Region? Key Asset Categories***

A strong, innovative, and prosperous region is a complex mix of many ingredients—some that result from historical legacies, some that link back to natural competitive advantages, and some that were consciously created and constructed. As the Council on Competitiveness has noted, a region's innovation environment emerges from the interplay of three factors: culture, networks, and assets.<sup>ii</sup> Culture refers to a region's attitudes toward business and the views of business leaders about collaboration and community support. Do regional leaders work to support local businesses and assist them in their growth and expansion?

Are local businesses willing to collaborate with one another and "give back" to the community?

Networks refer to the connective role of leading organizations and informal groups that help link people and businesses across regions, sectors, and backgrounds. Is it easy for people to find needed resources? Do different kinds of organizations—businesses, non-profits, government, and education—work well together?

Finally, assets are the various regional characteristics, programs, people, and organizations that help support innovative people and businesses. The region's asset base is composed of the various ingredients that help drive a local economy, such as human capital and financial capital. When it comes to regional innovation, analysts focus on four key categories of assets:

- **Human Capital:** The skills, knowledge, and talent of a region's residents and workforce, along with the institutions that support them.
- **Research and Development:** A region's capacity to generate new ideas, products, and services.
- **Financial Capital:** A region's capacity to generate and invest resources in new, existing, and growing ventures.
- **Connective/Networking Structures:** A region's infrastructure of organizations that support business and build collaborations among individuals, businesses, and communities.

### **Human Capital**

In today's economy, human capital—the skills, knowledge and talents of a region's residents and workforce—is the central factor driving regional prosperity. Regions that are talent magnets, i.e. those that nurture, attract, and retain skilled workers, managers, and entrepreneurs, are likely to be more successful and more prosperous.

How does a region become a talent magnet? Many contributing factors lie outside of our control. For example, fast-growing companies often serve this function. People will move to where the jobs are, although encouraging them to stay often requires

more than just a high paying job. For example, beautiful scenery and a desirable quality of life are increasingly important “attraction” factors for skilled workers.

In addition to these factors, other important contributors relate to the local support systems for human capital. Does the region have good schools? Can workers easily upgrade their skills and talents? Are lifelong learning opportunities available?

As we will see below, the Pacific Mountain region performs quite well in most of these areas. Most local schools are high-quality, and a number of higher education institutions are located nearby. At the same time, quality training for incumbent workers and for new workers is also readily available.

Our review of regional human capital resources assesses six categories of local institutions:

- K-12 Primary and Secondary Schools
- Community Colleges
- Four Year Colleges and Universities
- Apprenticeship Programs
- Workforce Training Resources

### **Kindergarten-12 Systems**

Like most regions of the US, the Pacific Mountain WIRED region is home to a multitude of local school districts. In fact, the five-county area hosts 48 different school districts that can range in size from North Thurston’s 13,601 students to small districts like Satsop (51 students) or Evaline (31 students) that operate a single elementary school.

Within these districts, many schools operate innovative and effective programs and facilities that help groom future generations of local “talent.” Several outstanding examples stand out. The New Market Vocational Skills Center, located in Tumwater, is one of only ten Skills Centers in Washington, operating via a partnership with ten regional school districts. It is designed to assist drop outs and those at risk of dropping out, identify barriers, and help students overcome those barriers. In addition, it aids students in the exploration of careers. The Center, which now serves nearly 1500 students each year, provides unique training opportunities in many technical and vocational fields like alternative energy,

construction, culinary arts, computer sciences, and emergency response. The Center benefits from its close connections with local employers, so student trainees are trained in jobs where strong local demand is present. It also operates a career center that helps New Market students earn college credit and thus ease the transition into local community college enrollment.

Several high schools in the region operate economics education or other related programs that improve student career preparedness. For example, Olympia High School and Shelton High School sponsor chapters of DECA, a global business education organization, and the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA).

### **Community Colleges**

The five county region is home to three community colleges: Centralia, Grays Harbor, and South Puget Sound. Each has developed a strong regional, statewide and national reputation.

Each of the schools operates several initiatives that are of special relevance to the sectors targeted via the WIRED initiative. Centralia College’s Center of Excellence in Energy Technology is the best-known example of these programs. The Center serves as Washington’s primary source for innovative training efforts in the energy and utility sectors. It has built a local, state, and national reputation as a leader in the field.

Local manufacturers can also tap into strong training resources. For example, all three colleges operate welding programs that have enabled numerous local students enter into high-paying jobs in manufacturing, construction, and other fields. More specialized targeted training is also available in manufacturing-related fields such as yacht finish carpentry (Grays Harbor), diesel equipment (Centralia), and Computer-Aided Drafting Technology (SPSCC).

While all of the schools operate programs relevant to the three sectors targeted in WIRED, none has placed a special emphasis on entrepreneurship education—the fourth WIRED target area. Each of the schools offers an introduction to small business, but none have a comprehensive entrepreneurship program in place. In addition, it appears that only Centralia sponsors a club for business students. These outside clubs often play

an important role in stimulating student interest in business issues and careers.

In addition to the three colleges headquartered in the region, Olympic College operates a campus based in Shelton. Olympic offers a host of programs and services at this facility. Included are a number of business management courses, and a new set of Tech Prep programs sponsored by the West Sound Education Consortium (<http://www.olympic.edu/Students/WorkforceDevelopment/TechPrep/>). These promising initiatives engage local high school students in hands-on learning, while also preparing them for careers in a variety of fields. Olympic College also operates a direct entry apprenticeship program in collaboration with the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, located in Bremerton.

### **Four-Year Higher Education Schools**

Two four-year colleges: The Evergreen State College and St. Martin's, are located in our region. Both of these schools can serve as important magnets for talented young people who may relocate to the region.

Opened in 1971, The Evergreen State College now enrolls approximately 4,000 students. Most students are full-time, but the school also offers evening and weekend programs as well as special programs in cooperation with local tribes. Evergreen has developed a strong national reputation as a center of new thinking and programs related to environmental sustainability. Its presence in the region should help bolster local efforts to develop a strong cluster of green businesses.

St. Martin's University, which opened in 1895, has a strong liberal arts focus. In addition to its main campus in Lacey, St. Martin's offer programs at a number of other locations, such as Centralia Community College, McChord Air Force and Fort Lewis Army bases.

### **Apprenticeship**

Washington is especially strong when it comes to sponsoring and supporting apprenticeship programs. A recent PMAI assessment identified a tremendous array of apprenticeship opportunities in the state. Seventy-four separate programs<sup>iii</sup> serve the construction industry, while the energy

sector (8 programs) and manufacturing (9 programs) are also quite strong.

All of these programs are available to local residents. However, most are located outside of the region and require participants to travel to training sites. Three programs presently operate within the five county-area: the Western Washington Sheet Metal Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (Olympia), the Southwest Washington Pipe Trades (Lacey), and the Northwest Laborers program operating at Satsop Park. The Pipe Trades and Sheet Metal programs operate state-of-the-art training facilities in Thurston County. In addition to apprenticeship program Related Supplemental Instruction (RSI) classes, the Laborers also operate a "hands on boot camp" to pre-screen potential candidates prior to acceptance into the program as registered apprentices. A number of community colleges partner with the skilled trades to offer the necessary classroom work and pre-apprenticeship training necessary for success of apprenticeship programs. <http://www.wabuildingtrades.org/>

### **Workforce System**

Because the Pacific Mountain Workforce Council has served the five county region for many years, it has developed a strong and cohesive regional service delivery network. The consortium provides a variety of services to area youth, local employers, and job seekers. For employers, the Council assists firms with job skills training, labor market information, and support in accessing a host of public assistance programs. Job seekers can access the region's six WorkSource centers to identify new employment opportunities, access training, or receive other forms of assistance.

Under the auspices of the WIRED initiative, and in partnership with Association of WA Business the Council initiated a new Work Readiness Credential to address a primary concern of local employers: finding job candidates who are "ready to work," i.e. with the necessary skills and temperament to successfully transition to full-time employment. <http://www.awbinstitute.org/workerreadiness/> Working with local industry, the Council has also developed training programs for workers seeking careers in manufacturing and construction.

## **Research and Development**

Many observers wrongly assume that innovation always requires a heavy dose of technology and R&D money. According to this view, if you are not home to a major research university or a major private research facility, your region has limited potential to become a region known for innovation and entrepreneurship.

This perspective overstates the case. It helps to have major research institutions nearby, but their presence alone is not sufficient to spur regional innovation. For every Stanford and Silicon Valley, there are dozens of major research institutions that have little impact on their surrounding economies. At the same time, countless communities have become prosperous without hosting a major research center.

Without these large institutional players, where do local innovation inputs—in the form of R&D spending, new patents, and new technology businesses—come from? In addition to individual entrepreneurs and inventors, three other categories of institutions play a role here. Private, public, and non-profit research centers are an important contributor. In addition, business incubators help nurture new businesses, especially technology firms. Finally, research parks can help build up economies of scale so that multiple businesses are located in nearby locations.

Unfortunately, the Pacific Mountain region suffers from significant gaps in all of these key areas. Our region is home to several smaller research centers, both public and private, but lacks any substantial set of institutions, systems, or programs that help “stoke the fires” of regional innovation by creating new technologies, products, or services.

### **Research Centers**

The region is not home to any sizable academic research centers that serve to attract research dollars or research personnel into local communities. Local Centers of Excellence, such as Centralia’s Energy Center of Excellence, are focused on critical workforce development issues as opposed to attracting local R&D investments. In addition, state universities do not have a major research presence in the region.

Washington State University (WSU) does operate two large programs that are based in Olympia. Both programs provide excellent support to local businesses and other stakeholders, but they are not major employers or recipients of outside research funding. The WSU Energy Office serves as the university’s energy extension arm, providing consulting, training and other supports related to energy efficiency and conservation. The WSU Social and Economic Sciences Research Center provides critical survey and data analysis services, such as their recent assessment of K-12 education in the Puget Sound region.

While publicly supported research centers play a limited direct role in the region, potential sources of privately-backed innovation have the potential to fill this gap. The Grays Harbor IPZ has developed an interesting strategy that is already paying dividends in terms of supporting a sustainable energy cluster in the port area.

### **Business Incubators**

The region at present contains only one formal business incubation program—a shared office facility—that is presently operated by the Thurston County Chamber of Commerce. The Columbia-Pacific Resource and Conservation District (RC&D) has also examined the feasibility of a virtual incubator within its service area, but no program is currently operating.

In general, the region and Washington state itself is underserved in terms of the presence of business incubation facilities. There are many disputes about the number of incubators now operating in Washington, as estimates range from 24 to 53 incubators located across the state.<sup>iv</sup>

While business incubation can generate numerous economic development benefits,<sup>v</sup> they are no panacea for building a stronger local economy. In fact, many rural regions construct business incubators that may be underutilized and costly to operate. The key challenges revolve around the construction of strong local business support networks, not around the construction of a new facility. Thus, the region’s leaders should carefully assess local demand for new business incubators, and also review various options which might range from an independent incubator facility to a “virtual incubator” that provides targeted business services without a dedicated facility, to a more limited operations that focuses on a given business sector

or cluster. For example, the region could benefit from a shared use kitchen facility, co-working facilities, or some special targeting of green businesses.

### **Research Parks**

At present, the five county region is home to one research park based at the Satsop Development Park. This facility represents a tremendous asset for the region with its central location, state of the art facilities, and committed leadership team. The Park is now home to more than 20 tenants who have created 350 new jobs in the region. More recently, Satsop has been designated as a Regional Education and Training Center to provide critical training support to the region's employers and workers.

### **Financial Capital**

In general, the region's business owners have access to a wide range of local financing options. This diversity of capital sources is a critical ingredient in any region's development, and thus represents a real competitive advantage for the Pacific Mountain region. While current credit markets are extremely tight, financing options will hopefully improve as market conditions become less negative. Below, we detail the variety of capital sources available for local business start-up, growth, expansion, and regular operations.

### **Banks**

Banks continue to serve as a primary source of funding for new and existing businesses. In fact, owner equity and bank financing are the primary vehicles for financing new firms in the US.<sup>vi</sup> Nonetheless, many new business owners in our region and across the US complain that local banks are not open to lending to new businesses.

While this perception of local banks contains an element of truth, the region is home to numerous banks that have a reputation of being relatively more friendly to local entrepreneurs. US Small Business Administration figures<sup>vii</sup> show that the following local banks are among the state's top lenders to small businesses (in amounts below \$1 million): Bank of the Pacific, South Sound Bank, Heritage Bank, and Washington Business Bank. In terms of lending to microenterprise (loans under \$100,000), top local performers include

South Sound Bank, Bank of the Pacific, and Heritage Bank.

### **Angel and Venture Capital Investors**

The Pacific Mountain region is not home to any locally based angel investor groups or to any local venture capital partnerships. Nonetheless, the region is well positioned to tap into strong local investor networks operating in Seattle, Portland, and even Tacoma. In fact, Seattle is now considered one of the fastest growing centers for venture capital in the US,<sup>viii</sup> and Washington is one of the nation's leading locations for venture capital investment. Oregon has also seen a massive increase in local venture capital investing. Total state annual venture capital investments doubled between 2006 and 2007, and have now reached \$302 million.

Some of the US' largest angel networks are located in our wider region as well. The Tacoma Angel Network, the closest local network, screens investments on a regular basis. Other large angel networks in the region include the Puget Sound Venture Club (Bellevue), Seattle's Seraph Angel Fund (targeting women-owned ventures), the Oregon Angel Fund, and Seattle's Alliance of Angels.

While these sources of equity capital do not exist directly in our region, they are within close traveling distance—a key criterion for venture investors who often prefer to invest close to home. Thus, venture-ready firms in our region can and should be able to tap into these capital sources when needed. What is missing, however, is a systematic process to introduce top quality local firms to regional venture or angel investors. These introductions do occur, but there is no clearly delineated process for them. Local bankers and support groups, such as EDCs, should strive to build closer connections with leading venture investors in the Pacific Northwest. Local economic development leaders might also consider efforts to convene a local angel investor network to invest in promising local entrepreneurs.

### **Government-Backed Sources**

#### ***Federal***

Federal government agencies sponsor or invest in a number of programs that are based in or operate in the Pacific Mountain region. Certainly, the

various loan programs of the US Small Business Administration—especially the 7(a) and 504 lending programs—are the most frequently used Federal support vehicles. Most local banks, especially those with aggressive small business lending portfolios, participate in the 7(a) loan guarantee program. SBA’s 504 lending program operates through certified development companies, with our region served by the Evergreen Business Capital and several others.

Evergreen Business Capital Development Corporation also serves as the local provider of two other Federally backed programs: the New Markets Tax Credit program and the US Department of Agriculture’s Rural Loan Fund. The Rural Loan Fund can back projects throughout the region with the exception of the City of Olympia. With a limit of \$250,000, the program can be used for land or building purchases, construction, or the purchase of equipment or inventory. Evergreen has also partnered with the Community Development Fund to provide New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC) loans. These loans operate much like SBA 504 loans in that they help reduce risks and lower interest rates. Both of these programs are frequently used for gap financing purposes.

Since Evergreen began operations in 1980, it has made more than 1600 loans via the SBA 504, USDA, and NMTC programs valued at more than \$725 million. While Evergreen CDC maintains a strong presence in our region, it serves a huge area that encompasses all of Washington, along with Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon. Thus, while it has built an impressive track record, the vast number of these deals are occurring outside of the Pacific Mountain region.

Two other SBA 504 lenders are also authorized to provide financing to local firms. The Northwest Business Development Association ([www.nwbusiness.org](http://www.nwbusiness.org)), with offices in Spokane and Renton, can provide financing for any firms located in Washington. Similarly, Seattle’s Ameritrust CDC ([www.ameritrustcdc.com](http://www.ameritrustcdc.com)) is also authorized to invest in the region.

The Lending Network, based at the Lewis County EDC, is another Federally supported source of business finance. This revolving loan fund (RLF) was originally seeded in 1997 with a \$100,000 grant from the US Economic Development Administration (EDA).<sup>ix</sup> The Lending Network

(Lewis County) serves three counties (Cowlitz, Lewis, and Thurston). In its first eight years of operation, the network has invested more than \$4.6 million in forty loans. Like the programs operated by Evergreen CDC, the Lending Network also targets companies seeking gap financing in the range of \$25,000 to \$250,000.

### ***State-Supported***

Washington’s Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development offers a host of financing programs that can be used by local businesses.<sup>x</sup> These include, among others:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Float Loans
- Coastal Loan Fund
- Forest Products Revolving Loan Fund
- Rural Washington Loan Fund

Most of these listed programs place special emphasis on businesses located in rural areas or in areas affected by downturns in the forest products industry. As such, they may be well-suited to the needs of many local firms.

### **Non-Profits/Foundations**

#### **Shorebank Enterprise Cascadia**

The Pacific Mountain region is fortunate to serve as the home base for one of the US’ most innovative non-profit investors: Shorebank Enterprise Cascadia. Shorebank Enterprise Cascadia began operations in 1995, and is now the largest community development corporation in the Pacific Northwest. Shorebank provides business consulting services as well as several targeted programs that assist local Tribes and the Hispanic community, but loans are its primary business line. It offers a wide variety of products that include both business and non-profit loans, and loans for special uses such as green buildings, septic systems, or child care facilities. Loans from Shorebank Cascadia range in size from \$5,000 to \$1.5 million. Since 1995, Shorebank Cascadia has provided more than \$60 million in financial support to 400 businesses located in Washington and Oregon.

#### **Other Non-Profit Players**

Shorebank Enterprise Cascadia is the major player in our region, but other statewide programs can and do make some investments in our area. For example, Seattle's Community Development Capital program can provide funding, including SBA-backed microloans, in Lewis and Thurston counties. Similarly, the Pierce County Community Investment Corporation is authorized to back investments in Thurston County. Finally, Olympia's Enterprise for Equity maintains a small loan fund that is available to graduates of its training programs.

### **Community Foundations**

The five county region is also home to several foundations that make important investments in supporting local social service and workforce agencies. For example, two small foundations—the Irving A. Lassen Foundation and the Bush Family Charitable Foundation—have made a number of investments to support local community organizations.

Larger investments are facilitated by the Grays Harbor Community Foundation and the Community Foundation of South Puget Sound. The Grays Harbor Community Foundation operates a variety of funds. Its Fund for Grays Harbor supports community organizations with small grants. It also sponsors separate funds that support youth development, and arts and culture-related investments.

The Community Foundation of South Puget Sound invests in Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties. In 2008, it had assets exceeding \$4 million, and provided community grants and scholarships that exceeded \$800,000 in value. It invests in a wide variety of areas, with a particular emphasis on social service organizations and youth development.

### **Connective/Networking Organizations**

When it comes to building an innovative and entrepreneurial region, it's not enough to simply identify the various ingredients in the "recipe." Someone has to bring them together, and that's where networking or connective organizations come in. These organizations, which can exist in the private, public, or non-profit sectors, play a critical, and often under-appreciated role in

building a prosperous region. They publicize support initiatives, identify customers for such efforts, and ensure that local businesses operate in a supportive environment.

The Pacific Mountain region is blessed with a wide array of these networking organizations. Our region is particularly strong in terms of government-supported connective groups, such as local Economic Development Councils (EDCs), and traditional business groups, such as the various Chambers of Commerce. Less prominent in our region are informal networking groups, such as local Entrepreneur Networks that focus exclusively on business-to-business networking. Many of these groups, such as the Northwest Entrepreneur Network or the Oregon Entrepreneur Network, exist nearby, but none presently operate in our region.

### **County Economic Development Organizations**

Each of the five counties in our region is represented by a county-wide Economic Development Council. Each EDC has a slightly different focus depending on local circumstances. For example, the Thurston EDC operates a Business Resource Center to assist new and prospective businesses. In addition, it is home to South Puget Sound Community College's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) that also provides assistance to established businesses. The Lewis County EDC hosts the Lending Network (the region's leading Rural Loan Fund-RLF), and the SBDC serving Lewis County. Despite these differences, most of the EDCs focus on building a supportive business climate, attracting new investment, and supporting major development projects.

### **Economic Development Districts**

In addition to county-wide EDCs, the region is also home to two economic development districts (EDDs): the Cowlitz-Lewis EDD and the Columbia-Pacific Resource Conservation and Development District serves five counties, three of which (Lewis, Mason, and Pacific) are located in the Pacific Mountain region.

EDDs represent one of the earliest Federal efforts to promote regionalism. Begun in the 1960s, EDDs are funded to serve as prime drivers of comprehensive regional development strategies.

Among other things, EDDs are responsible for producing a regular Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report. In addition to providing essential strategic guidance, the CEDS report is a prerequisite for receiving funds from many Federal programs. Both of the local EDDs produce regular updates to their regional economic development strategies with the latest versions published in 2005 (Columbia-Pacific) and 2008 (Cowlitz-Lewis).<sup>xi</sup>

## **Tribes**

Our region is home to numerous tribal entities that are engaged in promoting economic development. At present, five tribal organizations are located in the Pacific Mountain region: the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis, Nisqually, Quinault, Shoalwater, Skokomish, and Squaxin. In addition to the tribal governments, most tribes also operate a community or economic development arm. These entities serve a variety of functions. Many focus on affordable housing, and several are involved in local gaming activities. Others assume a more comprehensive role. For example, the Squaxin Island Tribe has an aggressive economic development program that includes the Little Creek Casino, a handful of tribally-owned firms, a business development center, and a new loan program to support small businesses.

## **Chambers of Commerce**

Chambers of Commerce have traditionally served as leading networks for business-to-business connections. At present, the Pacific Mountain region is home to 21 individual Chambers of Commerce. Many of these Chambers are quite small and limit themselves to sponsoring regular networking meetings. The larger Chambers operate a variety of programs. For example, the Thurston/Olympia Chamber runs an incubator, provides access to health plans for member companies, and actively advocates for business at both the state and local levels. It has recently begun a Thurston Green Business initiative in cooperation with the City of Olympia. The Grays Harbor Chamber offers a similar array of programs including sponsorship of high school business education programs, management of the local Visitor's Center, and management of the region's leadership programs.

## **Ports**

The Pacific Mountain region is blessed with some of the world's best seaports, and the various Port Districts are major players in local economic development. Our five county area is home to thirteen port districts. Ports obviously play a key role in terms of serving as local logistics hubs, but they also support local business development in other ways. For instance, the Port of Olympia is the lead player in redevelopment of Olympia's East Bay district. It is also the site of a Foreign Trade Zone. The Port of Shelton, historically used in the processing of timber logs is positioned to consider other commercial/recreational uses for the facility.

The Port of Grays Harbor, the only natural deep water port on Washington's West Coast, is also an aggressive advocate for local development. The Port was recently designated as a State Innovation Partnership Zone (IPZ) for Sustainable Industries Innovation. The IPZ designation allowed the zone to obtain an initial funding to work on the building of a research and development chemistry lab to serve a variety of clients. The primary tenants would be Imperium Renewables for their biodiesel chemical studies and Paneltech for their development of new lines in overlays and saturated media. Other businesses in the area could benefit as well should they need a state-of-the-art chemistry research lab space. Grays Harbor College might find the labs an asset for academic programs, or as a place to house college interns in the sciences. In addition, this lab could help attract other businesses to the area, especially if it housed a regional certified testing laboratory.

The IPZ's future work will be directed toward extending the impact of business partnerships in Grays Harbor County. Possible future projects include an innovation campus or new business incubators. Parties of interest are being brought together to discuss what could be done to provide the most benefits for the zone.

## **Other Organizations**

This final category of other organizations lists a mix of different groups that play a role in business support and economic development. Some of these organizations have a formal focus on regional development. For example, the Satsop Development Authority is a major player in regional programs, and its facility is one of the region's only sizable research parks.

In addition, a number of specialized industry-specific business networks operate here. These range from groups like the Northwest Manufacturer's Alliance, that have a formal charter and membership structure, to more informal networks like Thurston County's "Green Drinks" network that informally links local residents and businesses with an interest in sustainability.

## **Business Service Providers**

The Pacific Mountain region is home to a number of business service providers that provide counseling and technical assistance to new and existing business owners. A number of these programs are affiliated with the US Small Business Administration; with the state's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Network assuming a lead role. SBDC offices currently operate at South Puget Sound Community College, Grays Harbor College, and the Lewis County EDC. At present, three SBDC counselors serve the five county area. Because of long distances across the region and strong local demand, SBDC counselors may often be limited in their capacity to serve existing customer demand. Additional support for their work is needed.

In Thurston County, the Thurston EDC's Business Resource Center provides a host of services for small business owners. The EDC also hosts the SPSCC SBDC office and the local Procurement Technical Assistance Center. Other services include a business resource library, a regular series of business information seminars, and access to a trained pool of SCORE counselors. At present, this team represents the only set of SCORE counselors in the region, with the closest SCORE offices located in Tacoma or Vancouver. Businesses in Thurston County can access the resources of the Tacoma-based South Sound Women's Business Center.

(<http://www.seattleccd.com/wbcmain/sswbc.htm>)

The Center does not presently offer services in the other four counties of the Pacific Mountain region.

In construction, the area is home to a strong local chapter of the Northwest Eco Building Guild ([http://ecobuilding.org/chapters/south\\_puget\\_southeast/welcome](http://ecobuilding.org/chapters/south_puget_southeast/welcome)), a local coalition of ecobuilders and green materials suppliers. These strong local networks, along with other support efforts (such as the Thurston Green Business program), create a

potential competitive advantage for the region in terms of benefiting from the emerging green economy. In fact, researchers and students at Portland State University contend that the wider region, Cascadia, enjoys a promising future as an "Ecolopolis," i.e. a test bed for new ideas and technologies related to sustainability.<sup>xii</sup>

Enterprise for Equity is the lead local organization that targets microenterprises, with a special focus on low-income entrepreneurs. It provides a regular array of training classes and other supports to aspiring business owners. Current training programs are available in both Mason and Thurston counties, and the program's service area may soon expand to other parts of the region.

The Northwest Manufacturer Alliance [www.nwma-wa.com](http://www.nwma-wa.com) is emerging as a place of resource and connection for local manufacturing operations. Their sponsorship of training, support for K-12 pipeline programs, and development of resources for this important industry is gaining them attention and membership. Washington Manufacturing Services (WMS) is provider of technical assistance to the manufacturing firms across the state. Part of the Federal Manufacturing Extension Partnership program, WMS sponsors seminars and training events. It also supports a team of consultants who can advise manufacturers on many aspects of the business, including human resources, business development, and compliance with regulations.

Association of WA Business Institute <http://www.awbinstitute.org/home/> has begun aggressive planning and implementation of workforce development strategies aligned with their membership's needs. Headquartered in Olympia the AWB-Institute is an emerging resource for business and those seeking to partner with business.

## **Assessment of Gaps/Strengths**

This brief assessment of critical regional assets presents a picture of an incomplete and fractured Pacific Mountain innovation ecosystem. Many excellent initiatives and programs are in place and doing good work. Yet, they operate in isolation, often struggling to serve existing customers and enjoying few opportunities to build stronger partnerships across the region. Meanwhile, local

businesses can access many needed support services, such as contract training or consulting support, but they are poorly linked with wider statewide or national networks that could assist them in achieving faster or more sustainable business growth.

The region has many advantages as a place to do business. In fact, *Forbes* magazine recently ranked Thurston County as one of the US's top ten places to do business. This ranking recognized the region for its low cost of doing business, highly educated workforce, and strong recent economic performance. These framework conditions are an important foundation for efforts to build a stronger knowledge economy in the wider five county Pacific Mountain region.

In terms of institutional foundations, effective education and training resources are in place. Strong community college, apprenticeship, and workforce training initiatives are operating in the region. Thanks to Centralia's Center of Excellence in Energy Technology and training programs operating at Satsop Development Park, support for energy and utility industry training is an area of strong competitive advantage.

While an effective basic workforce system is in place, the region could expand its efforts to attract and retain knowledge workers. Other PMAI research shows that, when compared to the US average, our region is home to a smaller proportion of college-educated workers—an essential building block of more knowledge-intensive industries.<sup>xiii</sup> Several interesting initiatives are underway to help develop a stronger base of local talent. For example, the three local community colleges have aggressive programs to promote transfer degrees that help students gain entrance into four-year colleges.

In addition to these projects, the region could also target retention efforts for students attending college at Evergreen or St. Martin's. Many communities across the US are embracing efforts to attract, engage and retain college students, and similar efforts could work well in Olympia. For example, Philadelphia has enjoyed great success with its One Big Campus initiative ([www.onebigcampus.com](http://www.onebigcampus.com)), but smaller communities, such as Lancaster, PA

([www.campuscentral.org](http://www.campuscentral.org)), have also successfully promoted programs that seek to build closer college-community connections.

While workforce systems are in place, other key parts of the regional innovation ecosystem are less healthy. The region, with the possible exception of Thurston County, does not have a strong base of business support programs. For the four rural counties, businesses seeking assistance must rely on the local EDC staff, or access to three SBDC business advisors who serve the entire five county area. Access to peer learning networks is limited to local Chambers of Commerce, who often provide excellent supports but have limited resources for hands-on help to business owners.

In reality, there is no regional *system* for business support in the Pacific Mountain area. Unlike the field of workforce development, economic developers and business support professionals have never operated on a regional basis. As a result, efforts to build regional business networks remain in the early design phase. The new Northwest Manufacturer's Alliance is the first such effort to build a five-county business network.

While the region lacks comprehensive business networks, many of the needed business support tools and programs are in place. For example, a wide range of business financing options seems to be in place in the wider region bordered by Seattle and Portland. However, the region's economic development organizations should do a better job of promoting them.

Finally, the region suffers from the absence of major research institutions that can help generate new products and services or promote commercialization opportunities. Over the short term, the region is unlikely to be able to develop new local capacity from scratch. As such, it needs to consider a variety of strategies that link local firms to other state and national resources, that link the region to other innovation centers in the Pacific Northwest, and that build upon promising local initiatives such as those underway at Satsop and the Grays Harbor IPZ. These efforts should be part of a broader effort to link the region's innovation assets to those already in place in the Seattle and Portland metro areas.

## Action Recommendations

Based on the assets and gaps identified in our analysis, we recommend the following action items for consideration by PMAI:

### a) Expand Regional Workforce Training Efforts

The WIRED project should continue its work to develop and expand the Regional Education and Training Center now in place at Satsop Development Park. The Center will serve as the region's hub for technical training services and will be an important addition to the region's innovation infrastructure.

#### **a) EpiCenter, St. Petersburg College, FL** (<http://www.spcollege.edu/epicenter/index.htm>)

*St. Petersburg College's (SPC) EpiCenter serves as a key local hub for corporate training and other business support services in the City of St. Petersburg. The Center was first opened in 2007 as a joint collaboration between the college and the Pinellas County Government. In addition to housing college offices and programs, it is also home to many key economic development partners, such as the local Small Business Development Center, WorkNet Pinellas, and the Convention and Visitor's Bureau.*

*Training forms the real heart of the EpiCenter, which houses SPC's corporate training programs. SPC offers programs in a wide variety of disciplines, including professional development, degree programs, and various business and technology disciplines. The EpiCenter also includes an innovative Collaborative Labs facility. Collaborative Labs contains the latest in interactive technologies to promote and support group collaborations. Businesses and other organizations use the facility to incubate creative ideas, design innovative business strategies or simply brainstorm about new ways to do business. The facility can be customized to serve groups as large as 150 people.*

### b) Expand Regional Efforts to Attract, Retain, and Engage Knowledge Workers

The region should continue to support ongoing programs that provide a bridge between community college and four-year college degree completion. In addition, it should consider introducing new programs that create closer linkages between local colleges and the surrounding community. For example, these efforts could involve expanded outreach to The Evergreen State College and St. Martin's University students by moving some classes into the downtown area of Olympia as well as by creating internship and employment opportunities with local firms.

#### **b) Campus Central, Lancaster, PA** ([www.campuscentral.org](http://www.campuscentral.org))

*Pennsylvania's Franklin and Marshall College regularly ranks among the top liberal arts colleges in the US. But the college had never been much of a local economic development force. Most students came to F&M, got their degrees, and departed. And the college's small size and liberal arts focus did not attract a lot of outside research funding or generate much new business activity.*

*Beginning in 2001, the College sought to integrate the college and other local schools more closely to both the City of Lancaster and Lancaster County. The local Campus Central program seeks to enhance the college experience of students at the county's eight colleges by sponsoring events and sharing ideas on fun local activities. But Campus Central is not just about fun. The project also encourages college students to stay in the region by linking them to local job opportunities.*

*F&M is stimulating economic development via its sponsorship of the James Street Improvement District. The District, including other key local partners, is helping revitalize a previously distressed neighborhood surrounding the campus. Today, it is home to condos, shops, hotels, and a minor league baseball stadium.*

**c) Introduce Youth Entrepreneurship Education to the Region at both High School and Community College Level**

Few local schools offer access to entrepreneurship training for students. The WIRED project should seek to introduce this training in local high schools and community colleges.

Several options could be pursued. At the most expansive level, the project team could work with local schools to introduce entrepreneurship as a formal part of the high school curriculum. While this path presents the most desirable outcome, youth entrepreneurship advocates often face major challenges when trying to introduce additional offerings into an already crowded school curriculum.

If formal curriculum changes are not feasible, other “second best” solutions are available. Many communities opt to create after school programs or summer camps for aspiring youth entrepreneurs. In addition, the creation of a local youth business plan competition offers another tool to help spur interest in entrepreneurship.

Many similar approaches should be considered at the community college level. For example, local schools could participate in a region-wide business plan competition. In addition, local college administrators and faculty should consider more active involvement in national entrepreneurship-related initiatives such as the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE).

All of these efforts are designed to send a message to the region’s young people: you can be successful in starting your own business, and provide an opportunity for you and your family to remain in the region.

**d) Seed Regional Cluster Networks**

Thanks to the Northwest Manufacturer’s Alliance, a nascent regional network for small manufacturers is in place. Similar networks should be developed for other leading industry clusters, especially in the WIRED target sectors of energy and construction.

The region’s emerging green industry cluster also presents an important target of opportunity. The PMAI team should build the capacity to seed yet other support networks and industry panels that support local innovation in these sectors.

**C) Springfield Technical Community College, Springfield, MA ([www.stcc.edu](http://www.stcc.edu))**

*Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) has long been a national leader in the field of community college entrepreneurship education. In fact, leaders at STCC were the primary founders of NACCE. The STCC team opted to found a national counterpart because their own local investments in entrepreneurship education have proven to be so effective.*

*STCC’s entrepreneurship education offerings go far beyond simply exposing current students to the field. In addition to offering numerous courses and majors in entrepreneurship, STCC operates a local business incubator that is open to local residents and students. The incubator houses leading business support programs, like the Small Business Development Center, and also contains space for corporate training. In addition, the Center is home to Springfield’s Entrepreneur Hall of Fame, which recognizes current entrepreneurs and historical business leaders from the region’s industrial history.*

*STCC’s real innovations are in its community outreach programs. Its Entrepreneurial Institute provides training for high school students across the region, and also manages specialized programs for at risk youth. It even touches Springfield’s elementary school students through the city-wide Entrepreneur for a Day program, where local kids visit STCC for a one-day immersion in the world of entrepreneurship.*

**National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) ([www.nfte.com](http://www.nfte.com))**

*NFTE is one of the United State’s largest providers of entrepreneurship education for K-12 students. Created in New York City, NFTE now operates across the country and overseas. NFTE provides teacher training and curriculum so that schools can introduce entrepreneurship education into their curriculum, often in cooperation with existing business classes. NFTE relies heavily on local business volunteers who mentor students and provide critical role models. Since its founding in 1987, NFTE has trained more than 230,000 youth from across the US.*

**d) Northern Colorado Clean Energy Cluster, Ft. Collins, CO (<http://www.nccleanenergy.com>)**

*Northern Colorado is emerging as a leading national center for research and innovation in the field of clean energy. The region has been able to capitalize on some strong natural advantages, such as proximity to Colorado State University (CSU). But, it has also emerged thanks to conscious work by leading community stakeholders. The Clean Energy Cluster, launched in 2006, grew out of demands from local entrepreneurs and leading economic development organizations for a means to help grow this emerging sector.*

*Today, the Cluster hosts regular networking sessions as well as training and education opportunities for local business owners. More importantly, the group has banded together to tackle projects such as FortZED, a city-wide strategy to create a zero-energy district in Ft. Collins. In addition, cluster members were successful in securing major Federal investments for research on smart grid integration at CSU.*

**ACENET, Athens, OH ([www.acenetworks.org](http://www.acenetworks.org))**

*The Appalachian Center for Economic Networks has been a global leader in developing strategies to nurture rural clusters. ACENET's greatest success has come in supporting local food producers and artisans, promoting what ACENET calls a unique and distinctive "regional flavor." The effort began many years ago with creation of a simple kitchen incubator. As more businesses began to use the facility, ACENET expanded its technical assistance efforts to help support marketing and other business growth strategies. In the process, a strong local food-based network that links producers, restaurants, and retailers emerged.*

*A similar strategy targets local arts and crafts cluster. The group developed a strong local brand around the concept of the "Art of Ohio," which includes a website and an on-line marketplace where local crafts people can sell their wares. Today, more than 200 local artisans and food producers participate in the broader local network. More than 100 producers utilized the on-line marketplace, generating significant increases in sales. The project generated more than 50 media stories, producing brand recognition*

*Finally, the region has also been aggressive in its support and promotion of local fairs and festivals as a means to promote tourism and generate business opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Recent local events include the Ohio Brew Week that showcases the region's micro-breweries, the Ohio Chili Pepper Festival, and the annual Paw Paw Festival.*

**e) Build a Regional Entrepreneurship Support Network**

The region's existing business support providers should expand their current collaborations to develop a Pacific Mountain Entrepreneurs Network. This Alliance would be composed of two separate initiatives:

- 1) A regional entrepreneurs network to facilitate peer-to-peer learning among existing and aspiring entrepreneurs, and
- 2) A business support provider network where existing support organizations coordinate and jointly market training, consulting, and other business technical assistance efforts.

A related set of activities could seek to address the region's limited support for business incubation. PMAI and related partners could undertake initial feasibility analyses related to the creation of new business incubation services for local entrepreneurs. These services could be co-located with the proposed Regional Education and Training Center at Satsop Park.

**e) Wisconsin Entrepreneur Network ([www.wenportal.org](http://www.wenportal.org))**

*With the support of the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and the University of Wisconsin system, the Wisconsin Entrepreneur Network (WEN) was created in 2003. WEN manages and sponsors both statewide and regional networks of organizations and individuals who provide support, coaching, and technical assistance to entrepreneurs.*

*WEN operates through its partner organizations, but it also utilizes four regional directors and a minority business specialist who have special expertise in high impact business development. In addition to coordinating statewide services, WEN provides discounted training opportunities and access to state grants for entrepreneurs.*

*WEN's primary tool is the statewide Resource Connection and related referral systems. Thanks to this network, any business owner or aspiring entrepreneur can be easily referred—via a web tool or a "1-800" customer service line—to reputable and appropriate business support providers who can answer question and provide needed services. WEN also invests in Inventor and Entrepreneur Clubs across Wisconsin. These clubs, which meet monthly, provide a regular local networking opportunity where new business owners can meet and learn from their peers.*

**e) JumpStart Inc., Northeast Ohio ([www.jumpstart.org](http://www.jumpstart.org))**

*JumpStart exists to accelerate the growth of new ventures in the region surrounding Cleveland, Ohio. It views itself as a “venture accelerator,” with the goal of building high impact companies that will create lots of new jobs and local prosperity. It operates three primary programs: a venture fund that invests in promising enterprises; JumpStart Inclusion Advisors, that mentor women and minority entrepreneurs; and JumpStart TechLift Advisors, who offer coaching for technology-based businesses.*

*Since beginning operations in 2005, JumpStart has had a big local impact. It has invested \$14 million in local firms, who have in turn raised an additional \$70 million in outside capital. Its total economic impact in Northeast Ohio has been estimated to include \$76 million in new investments and more than 500 new jobs.*

**f) Golden Capital Network, Chico, CA ([www.goldencapital.net](http://www.goldencapital.net))**

*Despite its recent economic troubles, California is known worldwide as a global center of technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship. However, these centers of innovation are highly concentrated. Only a few areas of California—the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego—are real hotspots for innovation. Other regions of the state are seeking to capitalize on their proximity to these global technology centers. In Chico, the Golden Capital Network seeks to link local entrepreneurs to investors, expertise, and other resources located across the state.*

*Golden Capital Network began operations in 1999. Since that time, it has helped more than 1,000 companies raise more than \$1.3 billion in outside capital. The network operates through several primary sets of activities. Golden Capital sponsors a regular series of events and other programs that showcase promising local businesses and connects them with potential investors. Coming up in November, it will sponsor “California Business Ascent” a statewide business plan competition.*

*([www.businessascent.com](http://www.businessascent.com)),*

*In addition, Golden Capital operates a Venture Communities program that provides support and consulting services to other communities that seek to replicate its model. The Venture Communities program also manages a statewide network for other communities operating similar entrepreneur support initiatives.*

**f) Link Local Firms to Outside Innovation Resources**

Local businesses need assistance in finding partners and funders that have special expertise in supporting the development of knowledge-intensive industries. Because of the region’s relatively small size, many of these resource providers will be located elsewhere—especially in the Seattle and Portland metro areas. Regional business organizations should build more formal linkages to these outside networks. Examples of potential partners could include the Washington Technology Center, the Washington Technology Industry Association, and the Northwest Entrepreneur Network.

In addition, the WIRED initiative could help provide more systematic support to the region’s small firms through training in key areas; like how to access angel investments, how to use the Small Business Innovation Research program, and other issues.

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- <sup>i</sup> National Governors Association, *A Call to Action: Why America Must Innovate*, (Washington, DC: NGA, 2007), p. 3.
- <sup>ii</sup> Council on Competitiveness, *Asset Mapping Roadmap: A Guide to Assessing Regional Development Resources*. Report Prepared for US Department of Labor, October 2006.
- <sup>iii</sup> This list includes 22 Oregon-based programs that are authorized to serve Washington residents.
- <sup>iv</sup> See John Woolley Small Business Incubators: State Policy, Funding and Performance. Proposed Final Report. Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, August 23, 2007. Presentation Available at: [www.leg.wa.gov/reports/presentations/Small%20Business%20Incubators%20Proposed%20Final.ppt](http://www.leg.wa.gov/reports/presentations/Small%20Business%20Incubators%20Proposed%20Final.ppt)
- <sup>v</sup> A recent study completed for the US Economic Development Administration finds that business incubator investments generate significant job impacts. See Grant Thornton and ASR Analytics, *Construction Grants Program Impact Assessment Report*, (Washington DC: US Economic Development Administration, 2008).
- <sup>vi</sup> Alicia M. Robb and David T. Robinson, *The Capital Structure Decisions of New Firms*. Kansas City: Kauffman Foundation, November 2008.
- <sup>vii</sup> Small Business and Micro Business Lending in the United States for Data Years 2006-2007 [http://www.sba.gov/ADVO/research/bk\\_07twa.pdf](http://www.sba.gov/ADVO/research/bk_07twa.pdf) and [http://www.sba.gov/advo/research/sbl\\_07study.pdf](http://www.sba.gov/advo/research/sbl_07study.pdf)
- <sup>viii</sup> [http://www.nvca.org/pdf/Fast\\_Growing\\_07Q4.pdf](http://www.nvca.org/pdf/Fast_Growing_07Q4.pdf)
- <sup>ix</sup> For background, see Robert W. Burchell, William R. Dolphin, and Catherine C. Galley, *The Impact of Planning on EDA RLF Performance*, Report Prepared for US Economic Development Administration, 2002, pp. 147-150.
- <sup>x</sup> Washington Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development, *Guide for Small Business in Washington State, 2008-2009*. Available at: <http://www.cted.wa.gov/DesktopModules/CTEDPublications/CTEDPublicationsView.aspx?tabID=0&ItemID=6332&Mid=877&wversion=Staging> The CDBG Float Loans and the Rural Washington Loan Fund are not available to businesses located in the City of Olympia.
- <sup>xi</sup> See Cowlitz-Lewis Economic Development District, *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2008*. Available at <http://www.cwcog.org/cledd/index.htm>; Columbia Pacific Resource Conservation and Development District, *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Columbia-Pacific Region, 2005*. Available at: [http://www.colpac.org/assets/noncritical/files/CEDS\\_2005.pdf](http://www.colpac.org/assets/noncritical/files/CEDS_2005.pdf)
- <sup>xii</sup> See Portland State University, *Ecolopolis 3.0: Infrastructure and Sustainability in Cascadia, 2008*. Available at: <http://www.america2050.org/cascadia.html>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Thurston County is a strong exception to this pattern, where the proportion of the workforce composed of college graduates and those with graduate degrees greatly exceeds national and state averages.

For more information about this publication or other initiatives to transform talent in the Pacific Mountain Region, visit [www.pacificmountainalliance.org](http://www.pacificmountainalliance.org) or call 360.570.4238

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