



Firelands

Founding Report

Introduction	Fired up for a Green New Deal in Timber Country	5
	About the Survey	5
Rural Washington	Our context	6
	Wedges and hypotheses	8
Methodology	Survey Demographics	10
Survey Findings	What are the problems?	12
	Who's to blame?	15
	What are the solutions?	16
	A Green New Deal	19
Recommendations	Actions in 2020	20
A Green New Deal	The Green New Deal Platform for Rural Washington	24



With gratitude.

This report would not have been possible without the efforts and dedication of Firelands volunteers.

Listening Project Volunteers

Alexys, Ashok, April, Becca, Brad, Chris, Dave, Elana, Emil, Ike, James, Janel, Jenny, Jessica M., Jessica T., Jonathan, Julie, Kamal, Lauren, Luke, Marianna, Mitch, Patricia, Paulie, Rae, Rebecca, Roger, Scott, Soya, and Susan.

Firelands Founding Team

Stina Janssen, Hannah Jones, Sean O'Neill, Estefania Narváez, and Colette Cosner

Stina Janssen, Executive Director

stina@firelandswa.org

Hannah Jones, Lead Organizer

hannah@firelandswa.org



20 Volunteers



14 Small Towns



7 Counties



215 Deep-listening
Conversations



One state





Firelands

Working people fighting for rural and small town Washington

About us

Firelands builds multiracial working-class power in rural battleground counties in Washington State to fight for a just economy for people and planet through the vehicle of a Green New Deal. By supporting community members to unite in solidarity and to lead on strategic grassroots campaigns, we aim to win a future that is healthy and just for all of us.

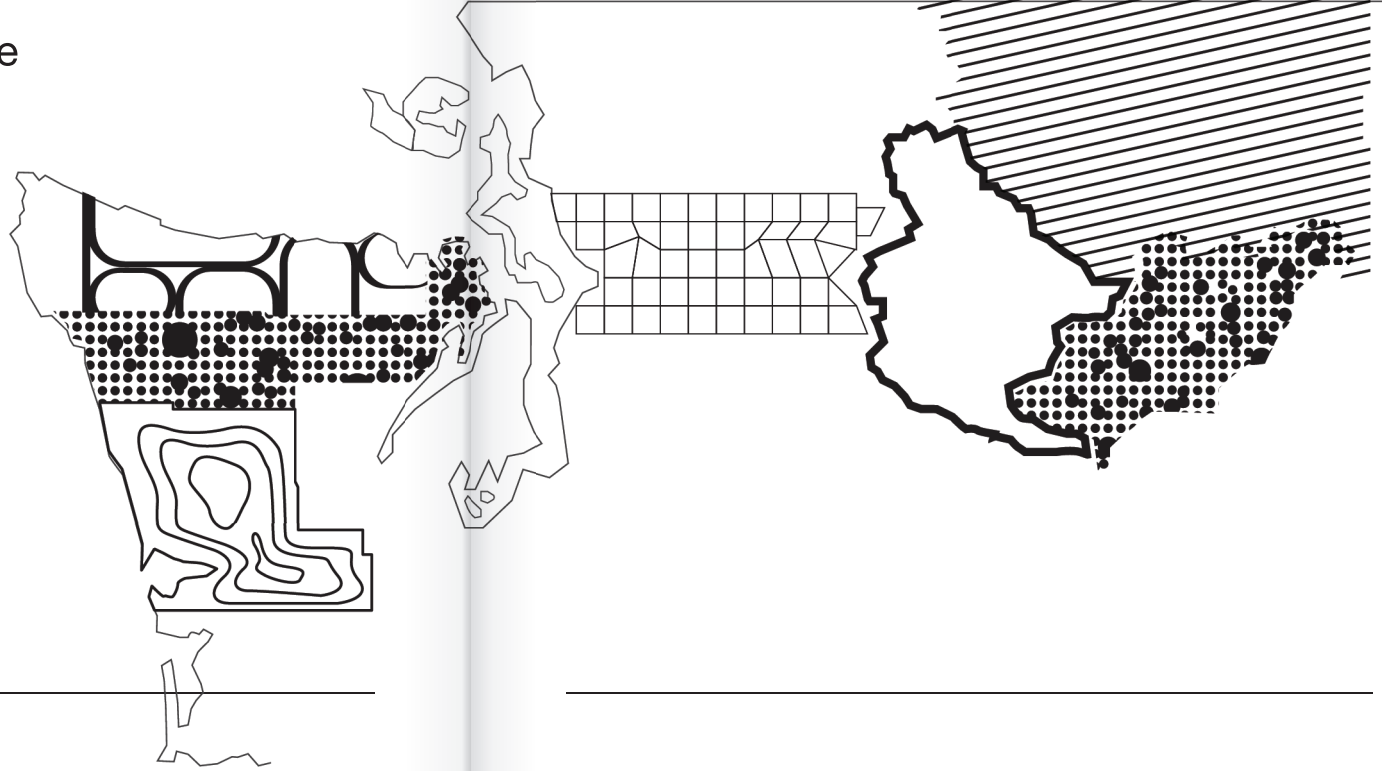
Firelands has an ambitious mandate: we are *all in* to build power over the next decade because we know that without an organized force participating from Washington's rural timber counties, we can't win transformational change on poverty, climate change, immigrant rights and more. And we know our communities are hungry and ready to become that force.

About this survey

From May to August 2019, 20 Firelands volunteers knocked on doors in 14 small towns in 7 counties and conducted 215 deep-listening conversations. In them, rural low-wage workers - farmworkers, home healthcare providers, cashiers, loggers and more - told us the costs of living had outstripped their ability to support their families. They also told us they were deeply concerned about disasters like wildfires, floods and droughts. In our conversations, a super-majority of people shared that they wanted what a just Green New Deal could offer, and were ready to come together across race to fight for it.

Rural Washington

Hungry for bold change



From farmland to timber country...

Rural communities across Washington State are facing the impacts of decades of disinvestment. Corporate “boom and bust” and colonial extraction, automation and globalization, and the exploitation of workers have led to high unemployment, low wages, housing shortages, health disparities, a skyrocketing opioid crisis, and crumbling infrastructure.

In the absence of progressive organizing and media, the corporate and white nationalist Right have stepped in to narrate these crises. They explain peoples’ pain with scapegoating “divide and conquer” racism that glorifies big business

and attacks people of color and immigrants, to the detriment of all rural working people, the land, and our collective future.

This perfect storm has produced tremendous suffering and dangerous politics, but we have found that behind the fear and pain is a hunger for something different.

To our people, the cracks in today’s economic system are increasingly obvious. We have found that across race, working people are ready to participate in creating a path to bold change - if only they are invited.

While globally we face a ticking clock to avert catastrophic climate change, a surge of energy, vision and debate is swelling around a Green New Deal, a plan that could usher in what our people desperately need while defying a stale story that pits jobs against a healthy environment, and worker against worker.

Nationally, Washington State is positioned at the forefront of transformative climate justice policy. Yet rural communities are often seen as an impediment rather than a driver of such change. We have seen important measures fail when rural communities are treated as an afterthought.

We know we can’t win what we need without working class rural people joining in step with other frontline groups across the country.

Firelands exists to fill this critical gap by organizing our communities too long left out of the equation to fight for a just, regenerative economy. We believe that through organizing around an abundant vision and running campaigns that build struggling peoples’ economic and political power, while explicitly connecting the root causes of poverty, pollution, and racism, we can challenge the Right as the dominant force in rural areas and advance critical gains on climate and economic justice statewide.

Methodology

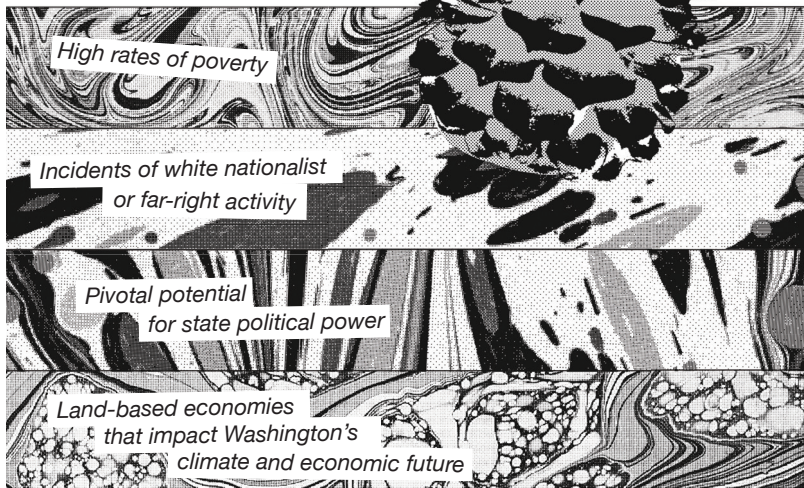
Setting out with purpose

Our lens

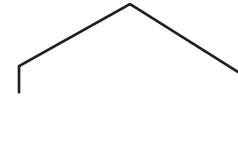
The road to a green economy in rural WA state will require deep listening, extensive training, strategy, and a ton of homegrown grit. We knew we needed to start by listening deeply to other struggling people in our communities. Our listening canvass brought 20 volunteers together for doorknocking and resulted in over 200 deep-listening conversations with low-wage workers, a majority people of color and women.

We asked rural Washingtonians what they struggle with, who is causing these problems, and what can be done to build an economy that truly works for all of us. Utilizing a survey as a conversation guide, Firelands asked about possible components of a Green New Deal for rural WA.

We prioritized rural battleground communities with...



We made an effort to identify...



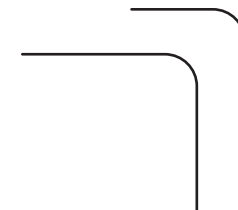
Needs

What do our communities need? Which daily concerns are most broadly-felt and which solutions proposed in the Green New Deal do people feel would be most helpful?



Narratives

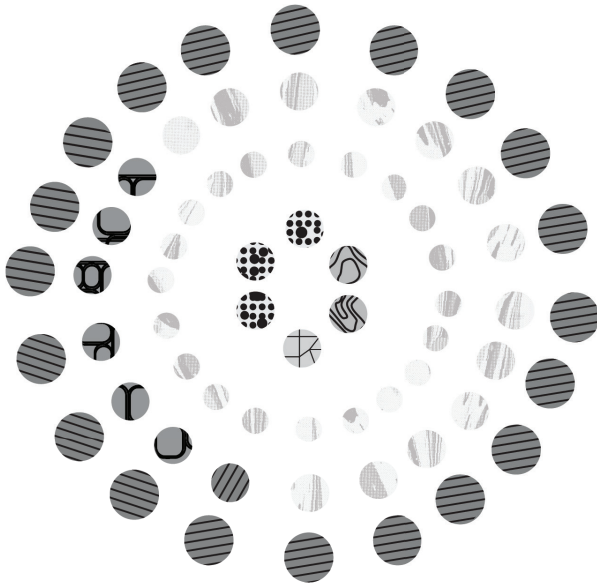
What language is clear and inspiring? What are the dominant narratives people are hearing? What contradictions do people have with these narratives and their experiences?



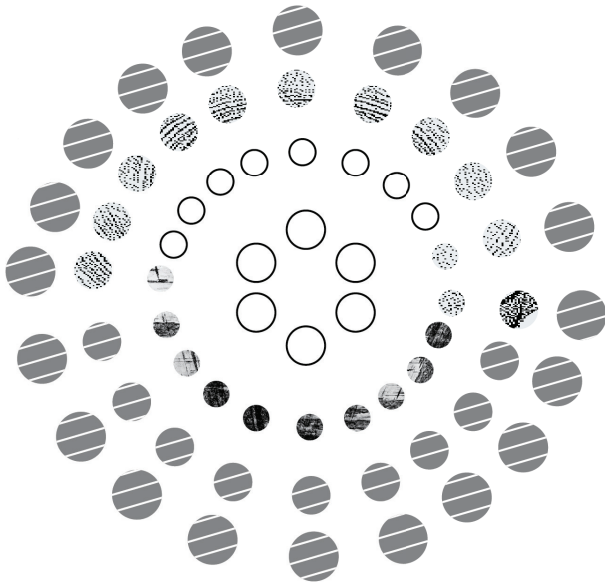
Nudges

Which methods best move people around racial and environmental wedges and invite people out of the frames the Right has pushed for decades, towards multiracial solidarity and action?

Racial Identity



Annual Income



Demographics

A snapshot of the people we talked with

Racial Identity

People of color who identified as Latino/a (36%), Indigenous (10.3%), Black (3.45%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1%), and/or multiracial (2%) made up a slight majority of our conversations, while those who identified as white accounted for just under half (47.3%).

Roughly one-third of conversations were conducted in Spanish, roughly two-thirds in English.



Annual Income

Most families shared a low annual income: 43% made under \$25,000, 20% made \$25,000-\$36,000, and 15% made \$36,000-\$58,000, with the remainder making higher.



Survey results

What issues concern you or your family on a regular basis?

What are the problems?

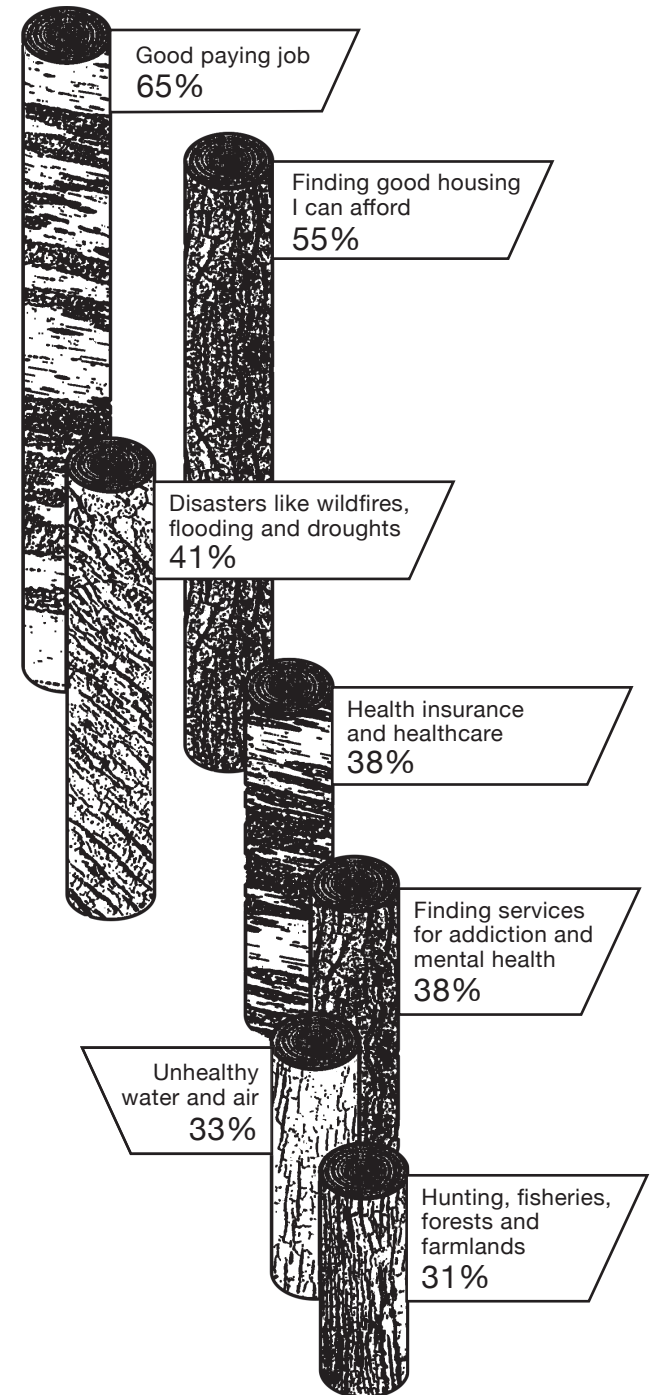
Our listening took us to trailer parks, laundromats, community yard sales, fairs, and many struggling neighborhoods in WA's timber and agricultural lands. We talked with mill workers who work 7 days a week just to put food on the table, moms who have to bring their babies to work in the orchards of Central WA, homecare providers, truckers, and school bus drivers.

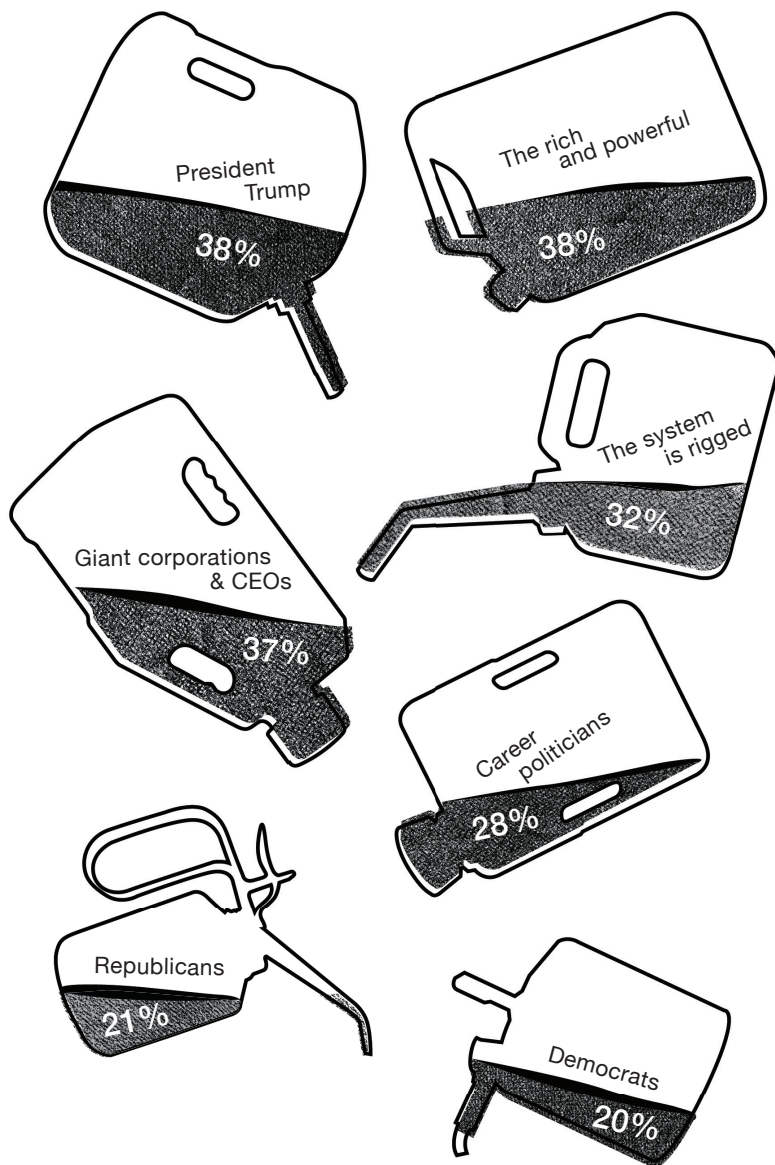
We heard story after story of the impossible choices our communities face. Most families are dealing with many crises all at once.

"I pay the same amount in childcare as I do in my mortgage"
— social worker and mom in Grays Harbor County

"Because they could pay immigrants shit wages in the orchards, everyone's wages went down"
— retired laborer in Okanogan County

"When the fires were coming through, they just had one cop car coming around to tell us to evacuate. No help getting out, nothing."
— veteran and mobile home owner, Okanogan County





Survey results

Who do you feel is responsible for causing these problems?

Who's to blame?

One logger summed it up: "It's our work that lines their pockets." Across race, language, neighborhood and work sector, participants described feeling fed up with business-as-usual corporate politics. While some were hesitant to assign blame, most blamed the deep crises our communities face on the rich and powerful, President Trump, giant corporations and CEOs, and/or said 'the system is rigged.'

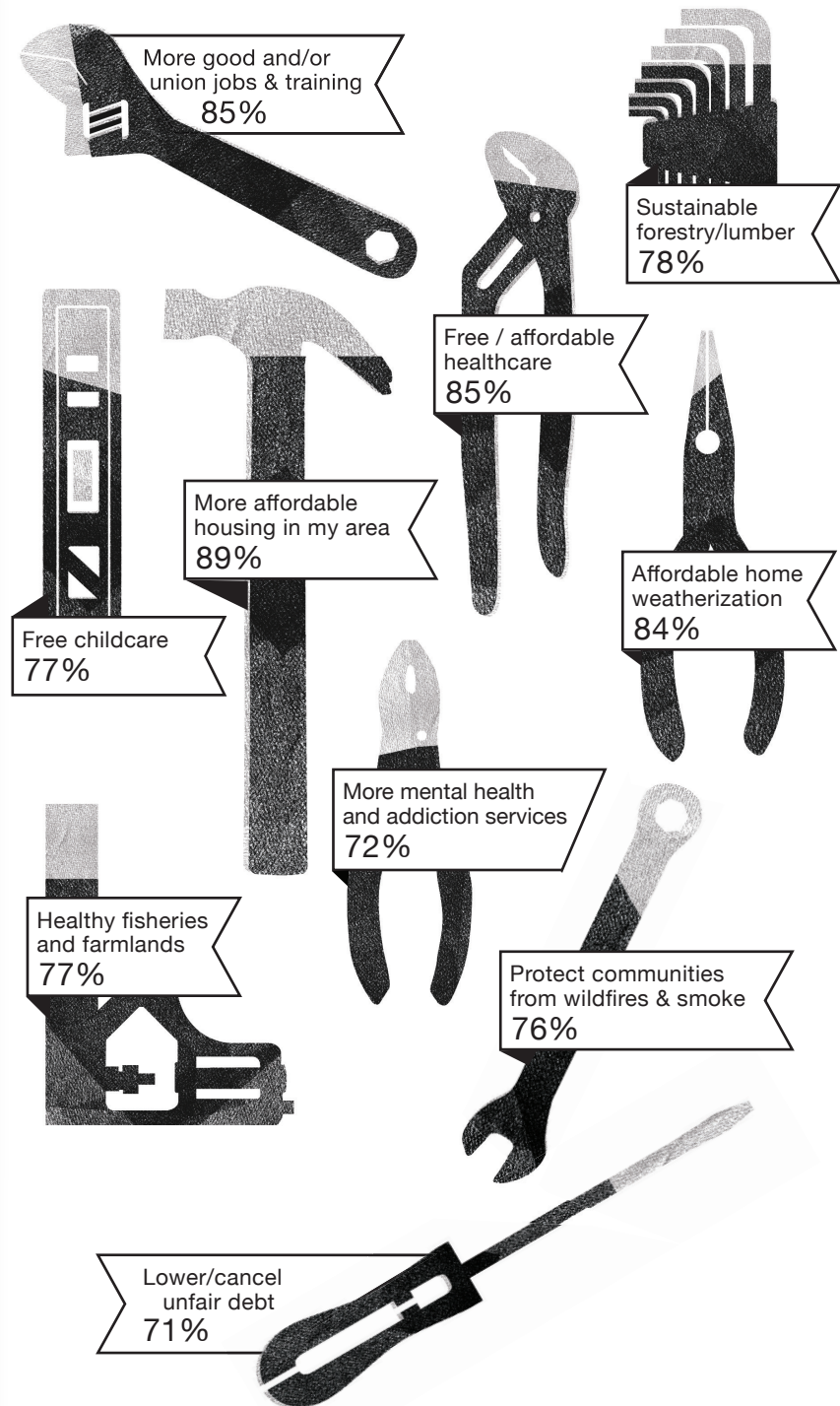
Survey results

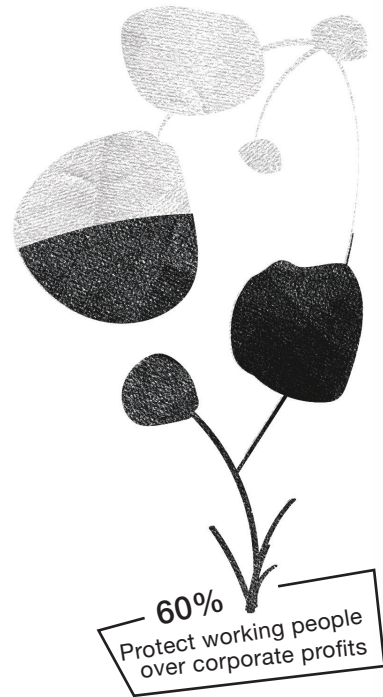
If we had a Green New Deal in WA, which parts would be helpful to you, your family and community?

What are the solutions?

“With a Green New Deal, I could go back to school without worrying about healthcare or debt” - bank teller in Grays Harbor County

We heard from people an overwhelming desire for big change. Only several participants had heard of the Green New Deal before we knocked on their door. When we explained the idea and asked which components would be helpful, we were blown away by the respondents’ support for Green New Deal programs.





Survey results

In order to accomplish these things, working people will have to fight for them. What should we do?

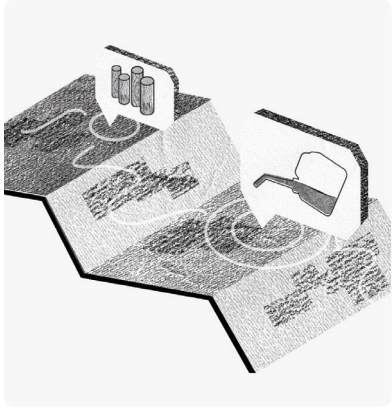
What are the solutions?

When we made the case for workers to come together to build power, a majority of participants were aligned on what must be done.

“They just try to bait us against each other, but I don’t fall for it”
— delivery driver in Okanogan County

Key Recommendations

We can and must win a Green New Deal, but it will take bold, strategic organizing grounded in the realities our communities face.



1 Organize with narrative

As we tried different ways to melt generations-old wedges, we found it important to speak to race and class directly. Because the Right actively scapegoats struggling people and communities of color, our survey was explicit about who really bears the blame for poverty and exploitation: the rich and powerful at the top. Through building empathy and connection and ending on a call to action – to unite with other workers to build power and organize for solutions – our survey also proposed a clear vision for transformational change.

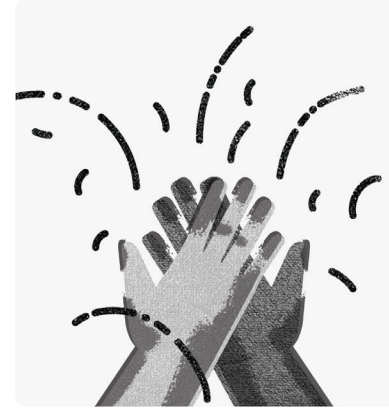


2 Go bold

We found rural working-class people are in favor of bold and visionary solutions that shoot straight at the heart of corporate greed and wealth inequality. We found our people don't want or need watered-down legislation to address climate and economic catastrophe: even in "deep red" counties and those that flipped to Trump, rural workers are in favor of bold solutions that deal directly with our daily and distant concerns.

Driving change

Our survey shows that young rural low-wage workers at the frontlines of economic, political, and climate crises can drive transformative change for a just Green New Deal, but it will take deep organizing and clear narrative strategy.



3 Win together

We found that race played a part in influencing participants' perspectives on the economy, incarceration, immigration, ecosystem health, and more.

However, across race, respondents shared concerns about instability, seasonality and poor pay in WA's timber and agricultural regions and largely agreed on solutions. We know a just, inclusive and compelling rural Green New Deal platform must include everyone and that we can only achieve our goals through organizing that is multiracial and that confronts racism head-on.



4 Demonstrate hope

Our people often feel the system is rigged, that it won't change, and that the burden to pay for social services will always fall to those at the bottom. The vast majority were not engaged in clubs, unions, churches or politics but most contacted after the survey leapt at the chance to attend Firelands' first Community Dinner. To combat cynicism and despair, we must demonstrate a plan to win, a sense of abundance in the face of scarcity, and campaign to make winning real for people through organizing together.

Strategy and Structure

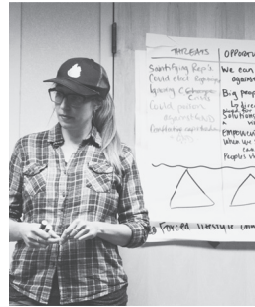
Firelands is rolling out a plan to win in rural Washington.

Toward a momentous 2020 and beyond

After completing our founding community listening, Firelands is scaling up with structure and strategy to build a powerful fighting base of rural working people. Our 2020 plan includes the following five priorities:

Rural Leadership

Launch the inaugural Rural Movement School, where a multiracial group of 30 working-class, rural, young adults will develop skills and experience as organizers, strategists, and leaders.



Home Teams

Set up chapters called Home Teams in Southwest and North Central WA with a skilled leadership of dues-paying members, who will engage in canvassing, hosting community dinners, grassroots advocacy, and campaign activities.



Base Building

Our goal by the end of 2020 is to have built an active multiracial working-class membership in two regions of the state for a total membership of 1,000 and a communications list of 2,000+ people.

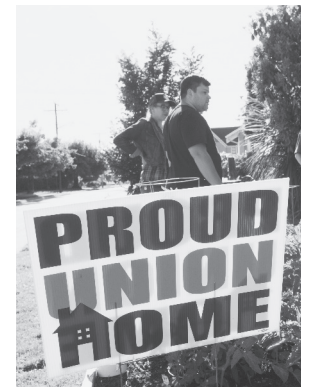


Green New Deal Platform for Rural WA

In 2020, Firelands leaders and members will develop a Green New Deal platform for Timber Country. The platform will be developed and sharpened via neighborhood canvassing, living room conversations, community dinners, partner relationships, and guidance from Movement School participants.

Campaign to Build Power

Firelands' membership will develop, launch and partner on campaigns to advance the Green New Deal locally, statewide and nationally. Firelands will win public endorsements from elected leaders and candidates to build mass momentum and bring our vision into the public eye. We will also wage local campaigns and conduct voter registration and education, garner media, and carry out creative actions.



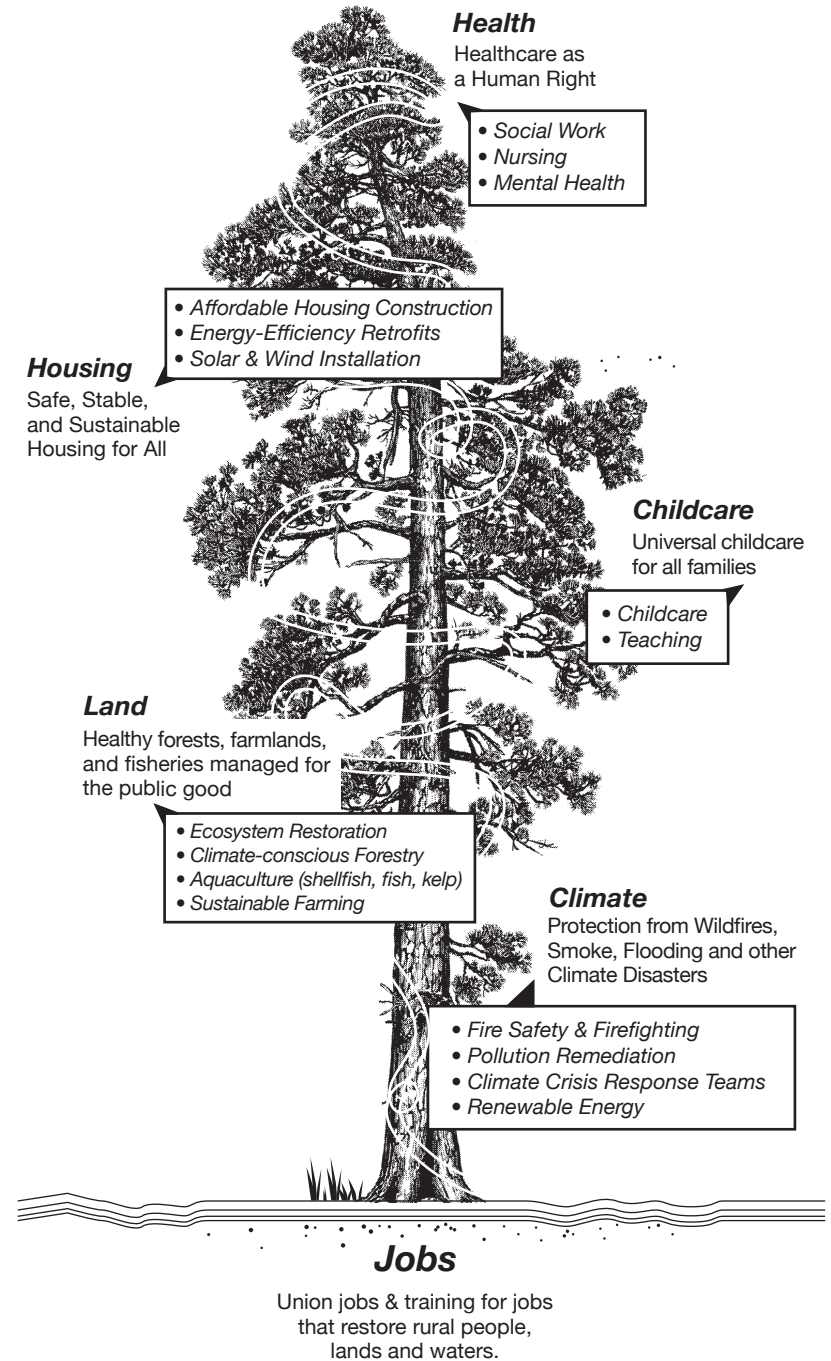
A Green New Deal

Firelands believes a Green New Deal for Rural WA can deeply benefit rural communities - the people, the land, the water, and the air.

A Green New Deal Platform for Rural, WA

Paralleling local and national calls for a Green New Deal, Firelands believes that ending climate pollution must center economic wellbeing, rural health, accessible and diverse participation, community control, and indigenous sovereignty.

As we plan to release a full Green New Deal Platform for Rural WA in 2020, here is a sample of what might be included.



A shared vision for rural communities must advance justice for all people and the land.



Honor Indigenous Sovereignty

Any Green New Deal for Rural WA must directly confront settler-colonialism by centering Indigenous sovereignty.



Opportunities for excluded workers

Benefits of a Green New Deal for Rural WA - from jobs and housing to healthcare and childcare - must be intentionally structured to benefit people facing forms of exclusion, including people who are or have been incarcerated and undocumented community members.



Stable Work with Dignity

All workers deserve excellent labor standards including good wages, pensions, safety standards, benefits, and more. Workers impacted by a transition to clean, renewable energy must be ensured stable, dignified livelihoods.



Shift Resources

A Green New Deal for Rural WA must shift resources from the corporate sector and the ultra-wealthy into community-based solutions and the public sector.

Support the Firelands

Support resourceful rural organizing for a healthy, green economy in WA.

Become a Firelands monthly sustainer.

Give online

www.firelandswa.org

Give by check

Make checks out to our fiscal sponsor, WA CAN ERF, with Firelands in the Memo line and mail to: Firelands at PO Box 2343 Olympia WA 98507

Our sponsorship

Firelands is fiscally sponsored by Washington Community Action Network Education and Research Fund, Washington State's largest grassroots organization.



Firelands

Founding Report

www.firelandswa.org

info@firelandswa.org

(360) 209-4116

PO Box 2343

Olympia WA 98507

Firelands is fiscally sponsored by Washington Community
Action Network Education and Research Fund, Washington
State's largest grassroots organization.