

WHATCOM COUNTY
Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097
360-778-5900, TTY 800-833-6384
360-778-5901 Fax



Mark Personius, AICP
Director

Forestry Advisory Committee **Meeting**

LOCATION

**Hybrid Meeting: Zoom (details below) and
Northwest Annex Conference Room
Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226**

Date: January 16, 2023

Time: 4:00-6:00 P.M. Pacific Time PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Whatcom County PDS is inviting you to a scheduled in person or Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87506425912?pwd=SVhnb0FWNmF4bVNqR0c3M2I3VDRpdz09>

Meeting ID: 875 0642 5912

Passcode: 136628

Dial by your location

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87506425912?pwd=SVhnb0FWNmF4bVNqR0c3M2I3VDRpdz09>

WHATCOM COUNTY
Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097
360-778-5900, TTY 800-833-6384
360-778-5901 Fax



Mark Personius, AICP
Director

Forestry Advisory Committee **Meeting**

LOCATION

**Hybrid Meeting: Zoom (details below) and
Northwest Annex Conference Room
Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226**

Date: January 16, 2023

Time: 4:00-6:00 P.M. Pacific Time PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Whatcom County PDS is inviting you to a scheduled in person or Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87506425912?pwd=SVhnb0FWNmF4bVNqR0c3M2I3VDRpdz09>

Meeting ID: 875 0642 5912

Passcode: 136628

Dial by your location

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87506425912?pwd=SVhnb0FWNmF4bVNqR0c3M2I3VDRpdz09>



Forestry Advisory Committee
Meeting Agenda
for
January 16, 2024
4:00-6:00 P.M.

1. Roll call/Determination of Quorum
2. Agenda Review & Approval
3. Approval of Minutes from 12/5/2023
4. Open Public Session
5. Administration
 - Election of Officers
 - Review of Work Plan
6. Subcommittee Reports (10 minutes)
 - DNR/BNR
 - Whatcom Forestry Profile Subcommittee
 - Carbon Subcommittee Update
 - Legislative Update
 - Forest Resilience Task Force
7. Old Business
 - **Action item:** Discussion and recommendation to Council on 2,000-ac Climate Commitment Act (CCA) sites (Brokedown Palace & Anderson Creek) (45 min)
8. New Business
 - Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update – Introduction of Review of Forestry Policies in Chapter 8, Resource Lands (30 min)
9. Announcements
10. Adjournment

Attachments:

- Draft minutes from 12/5/2023
- 2023 Work Plan
- DNR CCA letter and maps
- CompPlan Review Materials

Individuals who require special assistance to participate in the meetings are asked to contact us at least 96 hours in advance. The staff contact at Whatcom County Planning and Development Services is Cliff Strong, cstrong@co.whatcom.wa.us, 360-778-5942.

Whatcom County Forestry Advisory Committee (FAC)
Meeting Summary
December 5, 2023

Start Time:	4:00 p.m.
Location:	Northwest Annex Central Conference Room/Zoom

Attendees – Members	Affiliation	Present
David New	Small forest landowner	√
Holly Koon	Small forest landowner	√
John Gold	Commercial forest landowner	√
David Janicki	Commercial forest landowner	√
Matt McGee	Harvester	√
Quentin Dills	Harvester	√
Jed Dawson	Citizen w/ forestry expertise	√
Tracy Petroske	Citizen w/ forestry expertise	√
Aubrey Stargell	Forest product manufacturer	√
Susan David	Forest product manufacturer	√
Cory McDonald	DNR	√
Quorum Present		
Staff		
Cliff Strong	W/C PDS	√
Chris Elder	W/C Parks	√
Public		
Ellyn Murphy	CIAC	√
Alan Chapman		√
Alex Harris	Re-Sources	√

Meeting Summary

Chair Gold opened the meeting at 4:00 PM, whereupon he acknowledged a new member, Tracy Petroski, who provided a brief summary of her background.

Additionally, Chair Gold noted a few administrative tasks for their January meeting:

- An election for chair and vice-chair will need to be held.
- He requested members communicate with him if they can't attend a meeting, since their business rules says that someone could be disqualified from membership if they have 4 consecutive unexcused absences. Cliff suggested that they might want to review and possibly modify the committee's business rules, with the chair suggesting members reflect on these rules over the next month and any proposed changes to be discussed at their next meeting. Cliff also mentioned that Steve Roberge is interested in standardizing all the advisory committees' business rules.

Roll Call and Determination of a Quorum

Roll was called and a quorum was present.

Agenda Review & Approval

The agenda was approved with 2 changes.

Approval of Minutes

The meeting summary of November 7th were approved.

Open Public Session

Two members of the public introduced themselves.

Guest Speaker(s)

Chris Elder gave an update on the [Stewart Mountain Community Forest Strategic Vision Framework](#). He discussed the progress and future plans for a project aimed at enhancing water quality and quantity. The project, currently in its first stage, involves acquiring lands and developing a forest management plan. The team is also discussing potential long-term owners for the project, with options including a community forest, co-ownership by the county and Western Washington, and a management board. The team also touched on the ecological forestry aspect of the project, which aims to produce higher quality timber over time. Finally, they discussed the potential for mountain biking and other recreational activities in the project area, and who would have final say on such matters.

Subcommittee Reports

DNR/BNR Update

Cory McDonald reported on the acquisition of CCA funds by DNR for a property auction. The transaction, which is still in progress, is expected to close in the fourth quarter. The legislature allocated about \$70M to different priorities within the DNR budget, with \$55M allocated towards replacing lands that were encumbered. The lands are intended to replace lost lands and are mostly for conservation purposes. The conversation also delved into the complexities of land transactions, with a focus on maintaining the original beneficiary's tax code. The possibility of purchasing replacement land in another county was also discussed, which would require approval from both counties.

Whatcom Forestry Profile Subcommittee

Rabble-rouser Koon reported on the Treasurer's department onboarding, with plans to reconcile accounts every two weeks and introduce a new record-keeping system for the next five years.

Carbon Subcommittee

Chair Gold and vice-chair David will present their work to the Climate Impact Advisory Committee at their 12/14 meeting.

Legislative Update

Jed provided an update on the legislature, including House Bill 1818, which could impact taxes on government-owned forest land. There was also a discussion about a bill to facilitate links with the California and Quebec programs.

Old Business

Forest Resilience Task Force – Appointment of FAC Representatives

The FAC discussed the structure of the Forest Resilience taskforce, detailing its composition and appointment process. The taskforce comprises 19 members, with 11 representing agencies, three from advisory committees, and eight appointed directly by the Council. Concerns were raised about the time commitment and the potential lack of opinion diversity in the task force. Possible representatives from the committee was considered, with nominations for John, and Susan, Tracy, Aubrey, and Cory. A structured voting system was proposed for the final decision. The discussion ended with an open forum on representation, with the speaker acknowledging the candidates and encouraging them to share their observations.

The participants discussed various voting methods, and a consensus was reached to use a points system where the first choice gets 1 point, second choice gets 2, and the third choice gets 3." Lowest score wins in this case. The participants were then asked to vote (secretly, on paper) for their top three choices.

The outcome of the voting was that Cory and Tracy were confirmed as the FAC representatives, with Aubrey as an alternate.

Brokedown Palace Sale Update

This discussion was tabled until their January meeting due to lack of new information.

New Business

None.

Announcements

The FAC decided to reschedule their 1/2/24 meeting due to an upcoming holiday and suggested holding a special meeting on the 16th, pending room availability.

Adjournment

Chair Gold adjourned the meeting at 5:45 PM. Next meeting is on January 16, 2024, 4-6pm; Zoom and Northwest Annex Conference Room.



HILARY S. FRANZ
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS

December 18, 2023

Councilmember Kaylee Galloway, District 1
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Councilmember Todd Donovan, District 2
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Councilmember Tyler Byrd, District 3
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Councilmember Kathy Kershner, District 4
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Councilmember Ben Elenbaas, District 5
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Councilmember Barry Buchanan, At-Large, Pos. A
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Councilmember Carole Frazey, At-Large, Pos. B
1311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

County Executive Satpal Singh Sidhu
311 Grand Ave., Suite 108
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Whatcom County Councilmembers and Executive Sidhu,

I am writing to inform you that Washington State Department of Natural Resources staff have completed the preliminary identification of the lands to be included in the 2,000 acres of structurally complex, carbon dense forestland to be set aside directed by the Legislature’s Natural Climate Solutions proviso.

In Whatcom County, 650 acres have been identified as candidates to be transferred out of trust status after replacement land has been identified. The trust breakdown is:

Anderson Creek		Brokedown Palace	
Trusts	Acres	Trusts	Acres
State Forest Transfer	190	State Forest Transfer	42
Scientific School	83	Common School	33
State Forest Purchase	64	Grand Total	75
Common School and Indemnity	233		
Agricultural School	4		
Capitol Grant	1		
Grand Total	575		

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER. DNR IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER.

In selecting areas for consideration, the department worked to meet multiple co-benefits. We sought to conserve areas adjacent to existing habitat, in areas to improve habitat connectivity, and to avoid isolated small fragments scattered across ownership. The Anderson Creek area (see attached maps) was selected because it creates a large, contiguous block of structurally complex forest within Lake Whatcom Watershed and is adjacent to already conserved marbled murrelet habitat. This site will allow for the creation of a larger contiguous Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA). The Anderson Creek parcel does contain one planned sale where most of the fieldwork was complete. This area is low in structural development and the department may evaluate that area for a variable density thinning to accelerate development of complex structure, but that has yet to be determined.

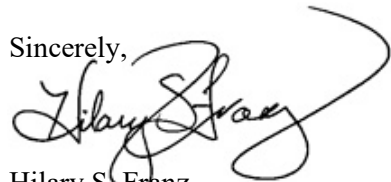
The Brokedown Palace site was selected based on county council input as well as its location adjacent to existing old growth reserves and relative proximity to the 2500-acre Middle Fork Special Habitat Area that was conserved in 2019 as part of the amendment to the department's Habitat Conservation Plan for greater Marbled Murrelet protections.

These parcels will be added to the list of initially identified acres and will be presented to the Board of Natural Resources during its January 3rd meeting. The purpose of this presentation is to cover details of the parcels and answer any questions that the Board may have.

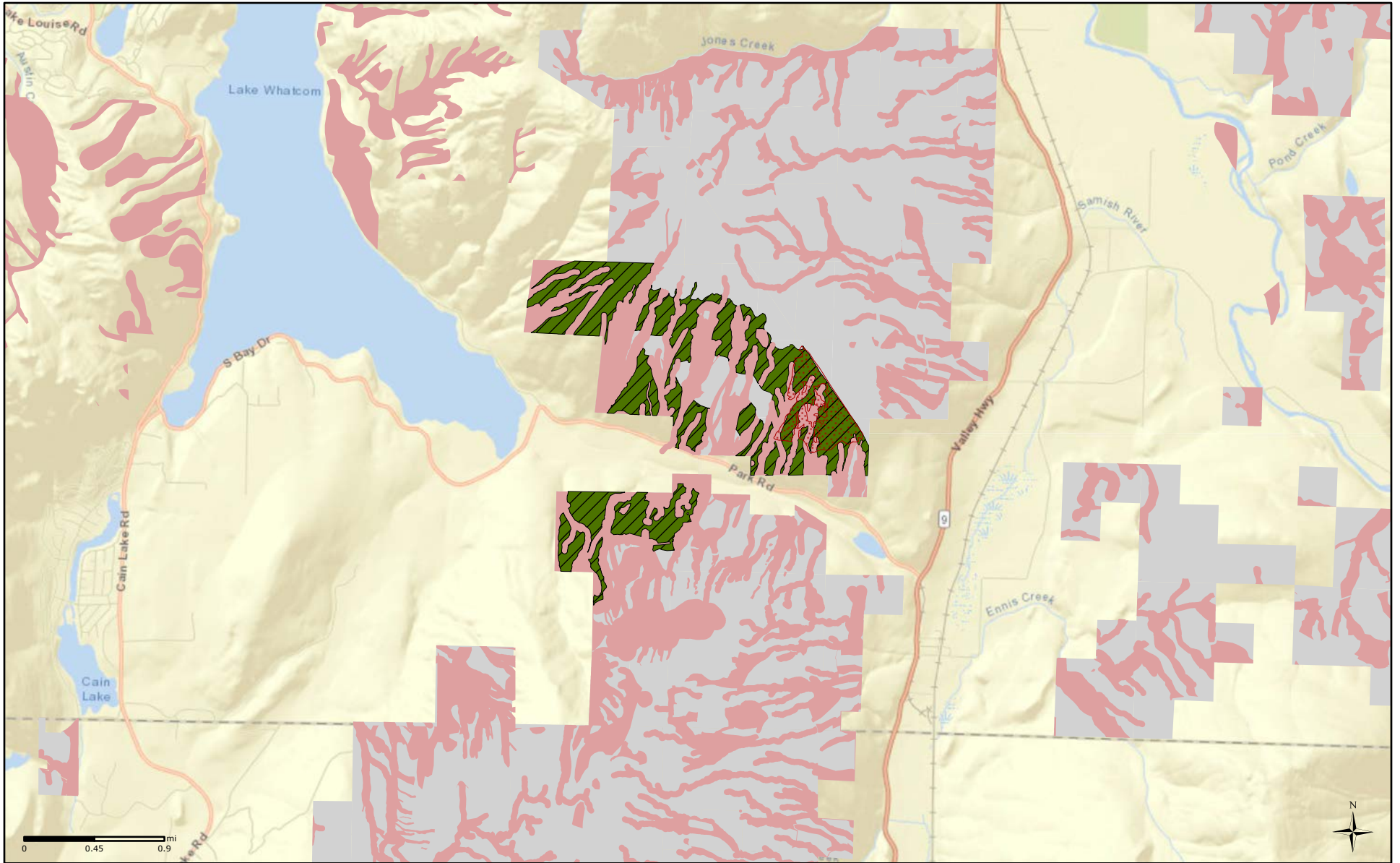
As the proviso states, DNR will need written concurrence on the parcels from "*the legislative authority of the county*" before they can be transferred. Ideally, that concurrence would occur before January 31, 2024, so the department can finalize parcels and work to acquire replacement lands, especially those that benefit the county and junior taxing districts.

We would be happy to meet with the Council to present on the parcels listed above and answer questions that you may have. Please contact Sarah Ogden, Trust Outreach Specialist, at sarah.ogden@dnr.wa.gov and she can coordinate a discussion.

Sincerely,



Hilary S. Franz
Commissioner of Public Lands

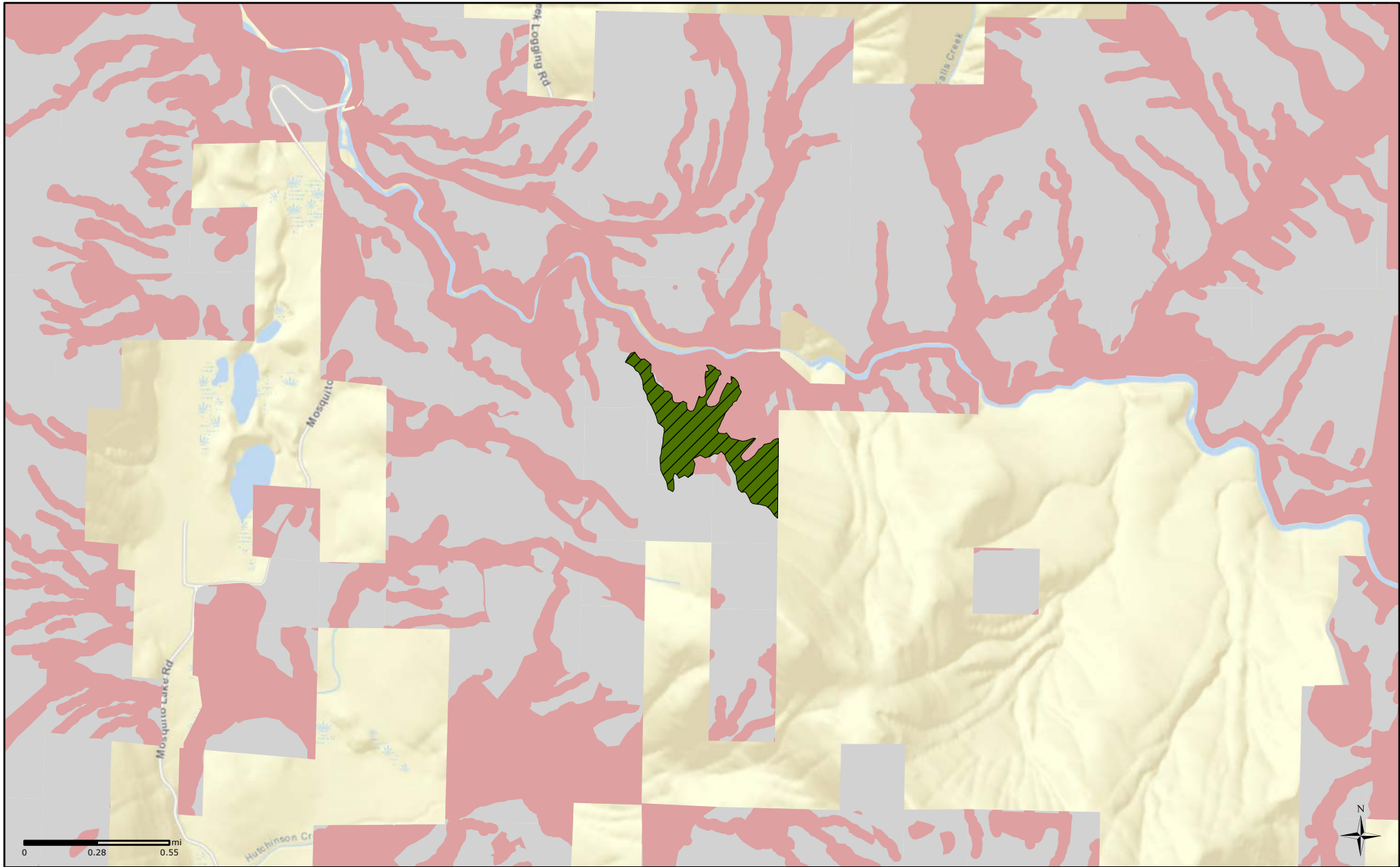


Potential 2000 Acres Sites
Anderson Creek

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Proposed Sites | VRH-deferred |
| Planned VRH/LUC (through FY26) | DNR-Managed Lands |

All data are draft and subject to change.





Potential 2000 Acres Sites
Brokedown Palace

Proposed Sites



Planned VRH/LUC (through FY26)



VRH-deferred



DNR-Managed Lands



All data are draft and subject to change.

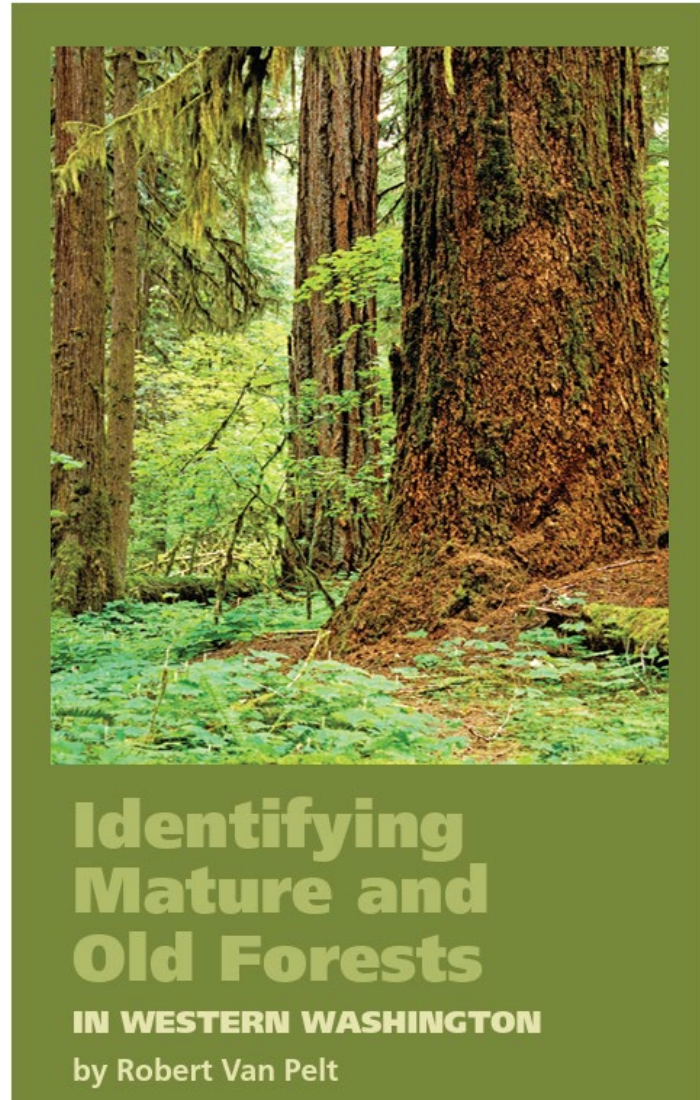


Identification of 2000 Acres

Status

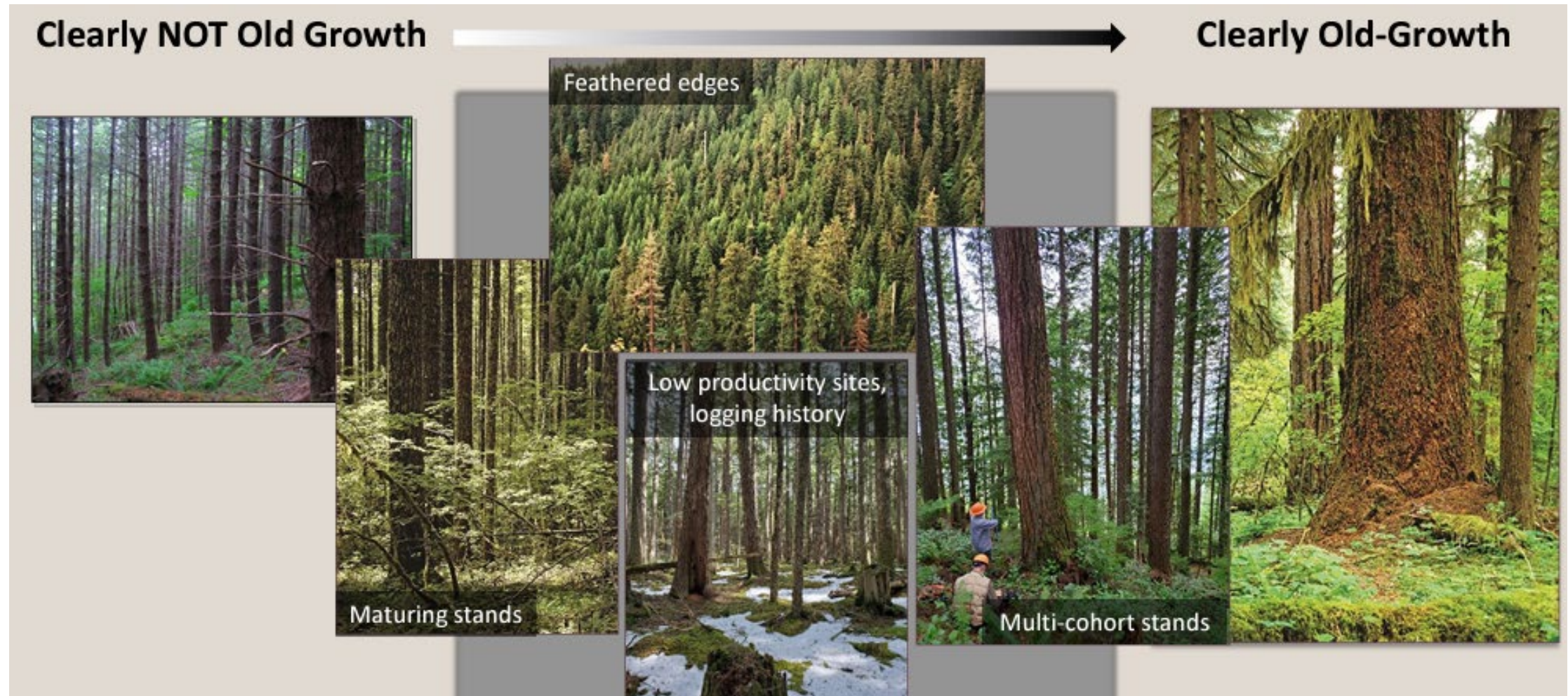
- Identification of 2000 acres
 - Utilizing Van Pelt's guide definitions of Maturation 1 and Maturation 2 to help identify "carbon dense, structurally complex" forests.
 - Seeking to conserve areas adjacent to existing habitat, in areas to improve connectivity, and to avoid isolated small fragments scattered across ownership.
- County Concurrence

Discussing the process of identification, land transaction process, and nature of federal and state forest transfer trusts with counties



Funding for Land Acquisitions

Selections based on science to ensure durable carbon storage over time



Identification of 2000 Acres

Methodology

A stand must have at least 60 metric tons per acre of live carbon and meet one or more of the following criteria:

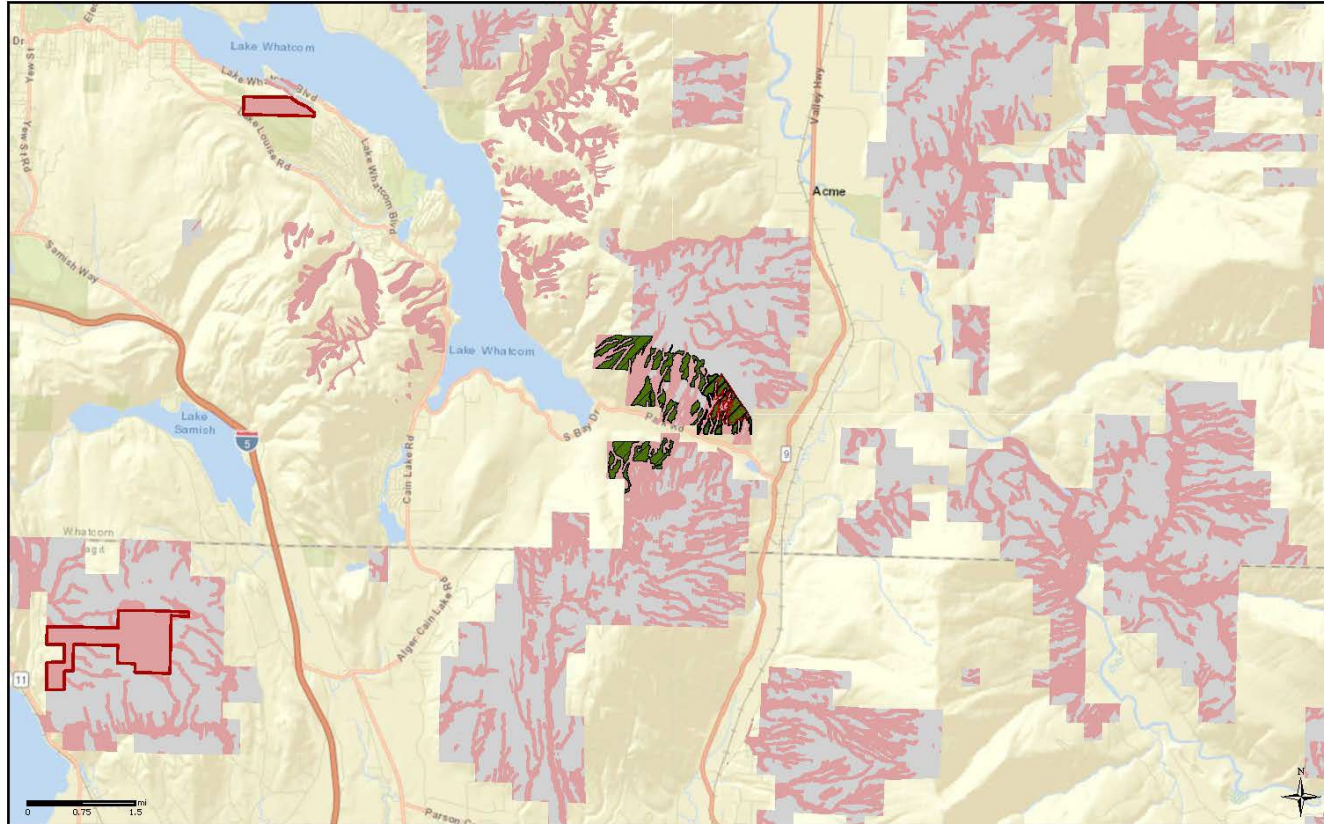
- At least 1.8 modeled canopy layers
- A Quadratic Mean Diameter* of at least 17 inches for the largest 100 trees
- At least 12 trees per acre that are in the 30 inch diameter class or larger

*The quadratic mean gives greater weight to larger trees and is equal to or greater than the arithmetic mean.

In stands with small diameters and a narrow range of diameters, the differences are slight. In stands with large diameters and a wide range of diameters present or with strongly skewed diameter distributions, the differences between arithmetic mean and quadratic mean diameters can be substantial.



Whatcom County



Potential 2000 Acres Sites
Anderson Creek

- Proposed Sites
- Approved Natural Area Boundaries
- Planned VRH/LUC (through FY26)
- VRH-deferred
- DNR-Managed Lands

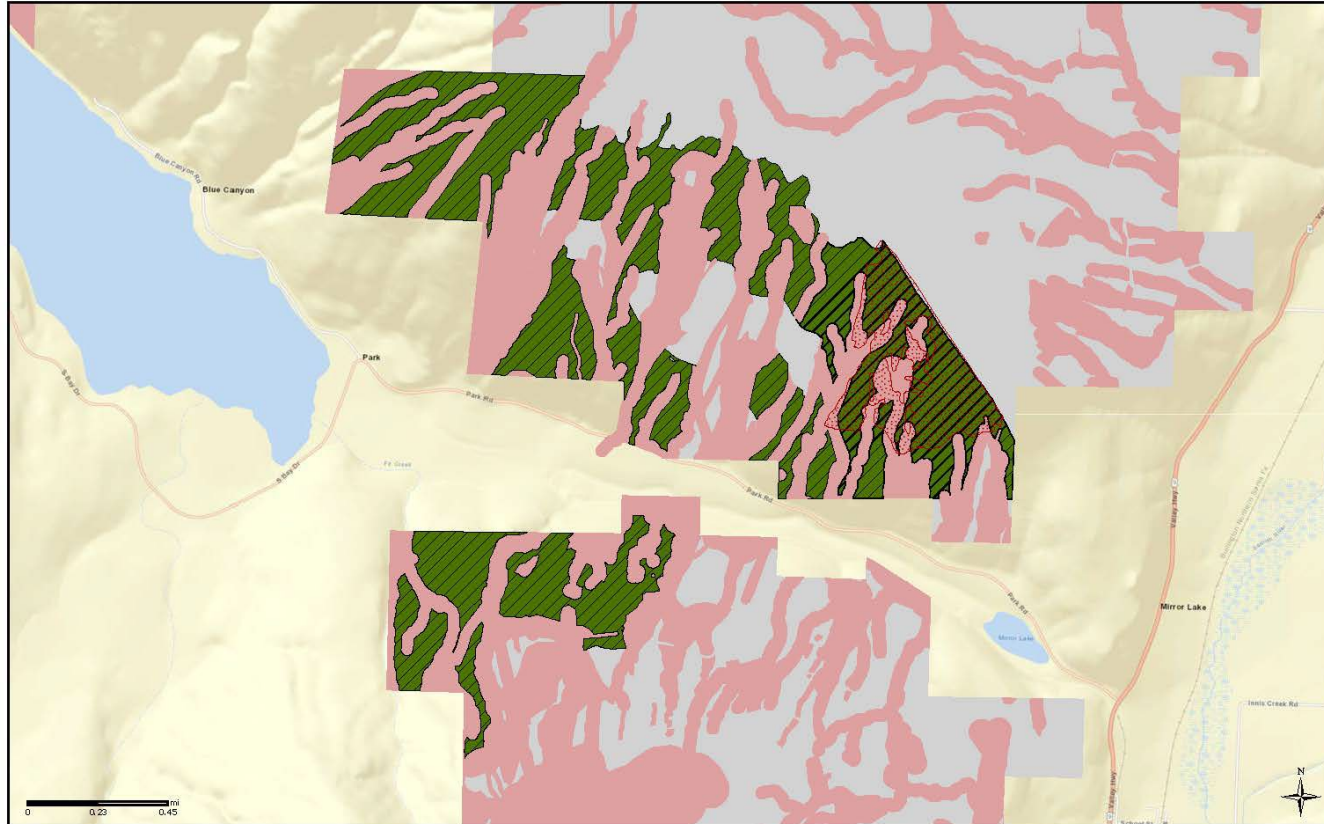
All data are draft and subject to change.



Anderson Creek

Trusts	Acres
State Forest Transfer	190
Scientific School	83
State Forest Purchase	64
Common School and Indemnity	233
Agricultural School	4
Capitol Grant	1
Grand Total	575

Whatcom County



Potential 2000 Acres Sites
Anderson Creek

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Proposed Sites | VRH-deferred |
| Planned VRH/LUC (through FY26) | DNR-Managed Lands |

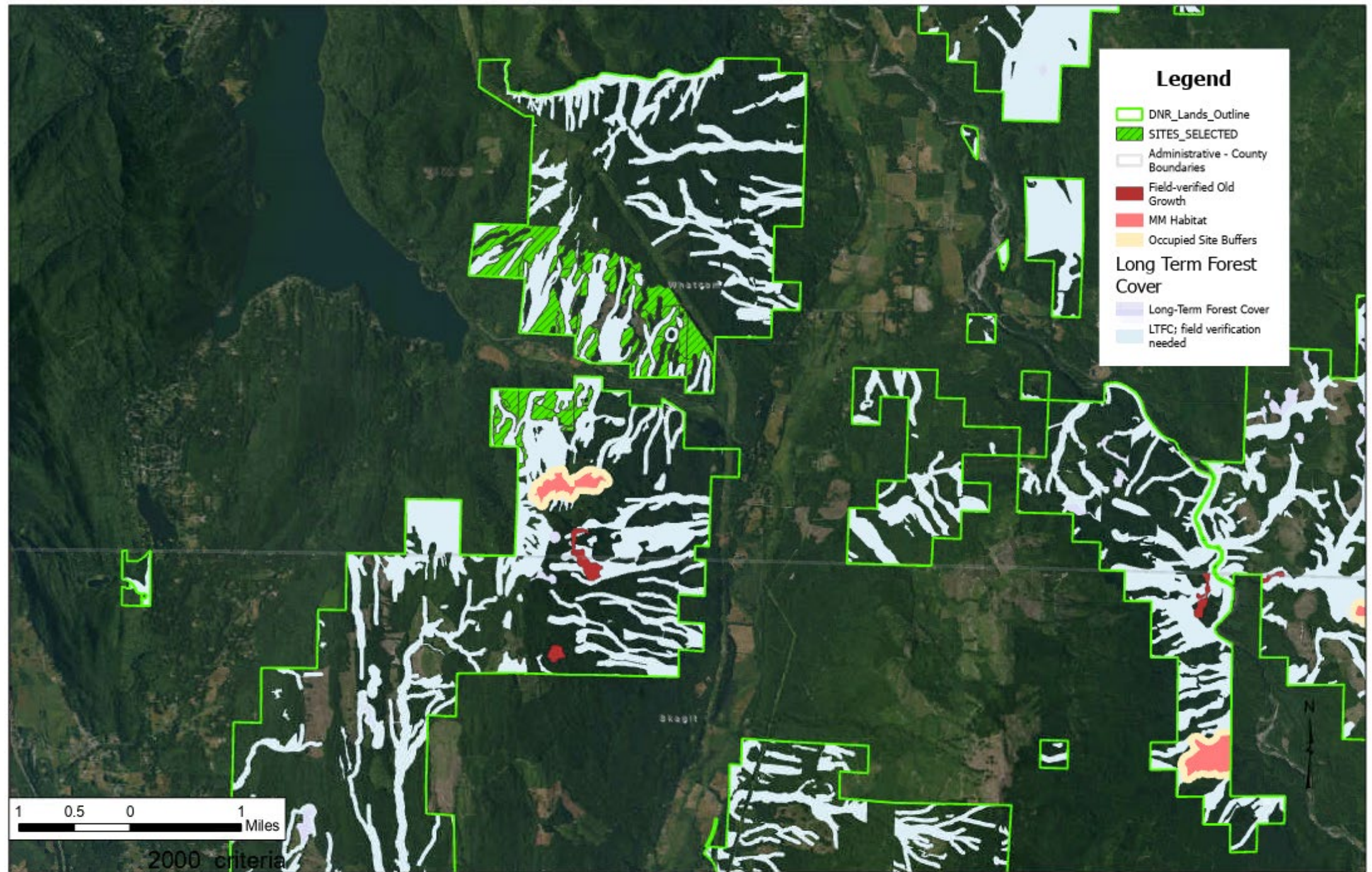
All data are draft and subject to change.



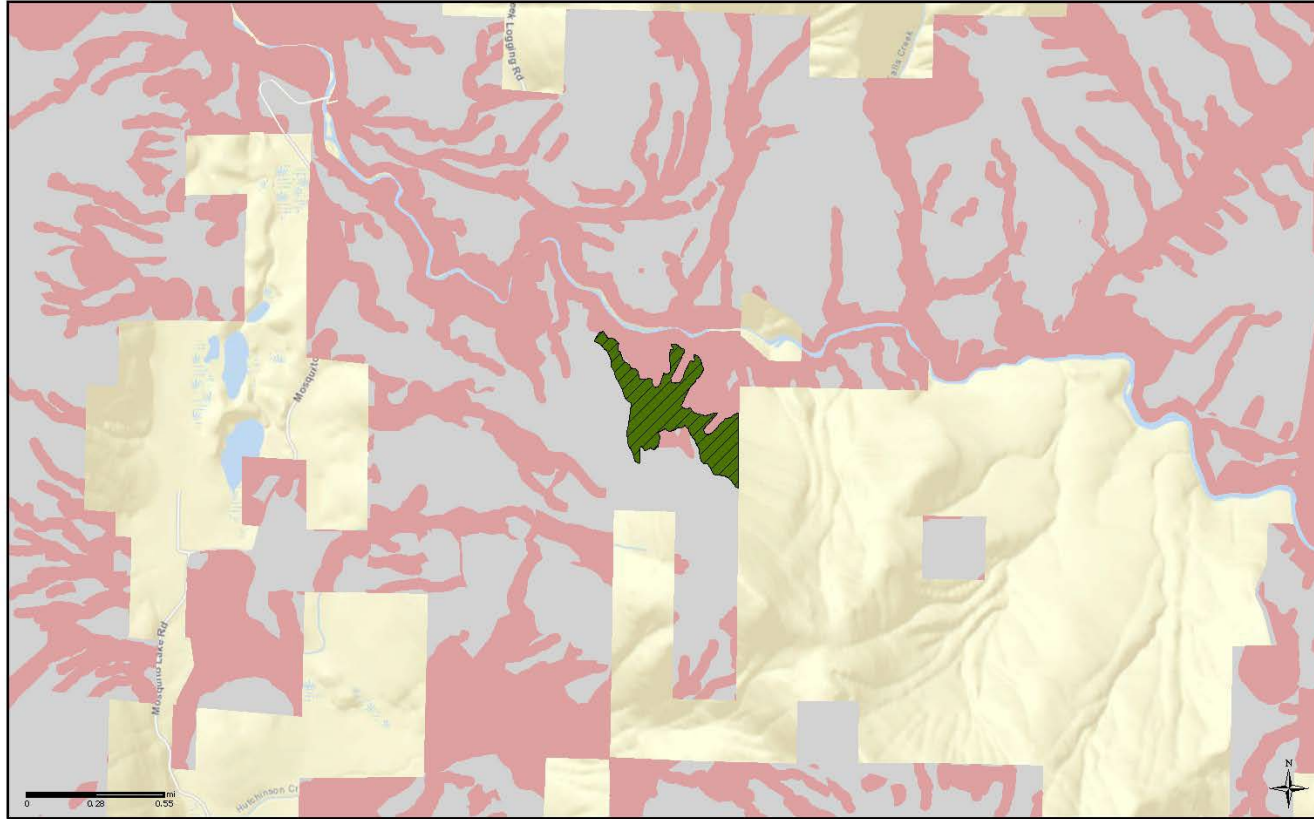
Co-benefits

Large contiguous block of structurally complex forest within Lake Whatcom Watershed and adjacent to habitat

Allows for creation of a larger contiguous Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA)



Whatcom County



Potential 2000 Acres Sites
Brokedown Palace

- Proposed Sites
- Planned VRH/LUC (through FY26)
- VRH-deferred
- DNR-Managed Lands

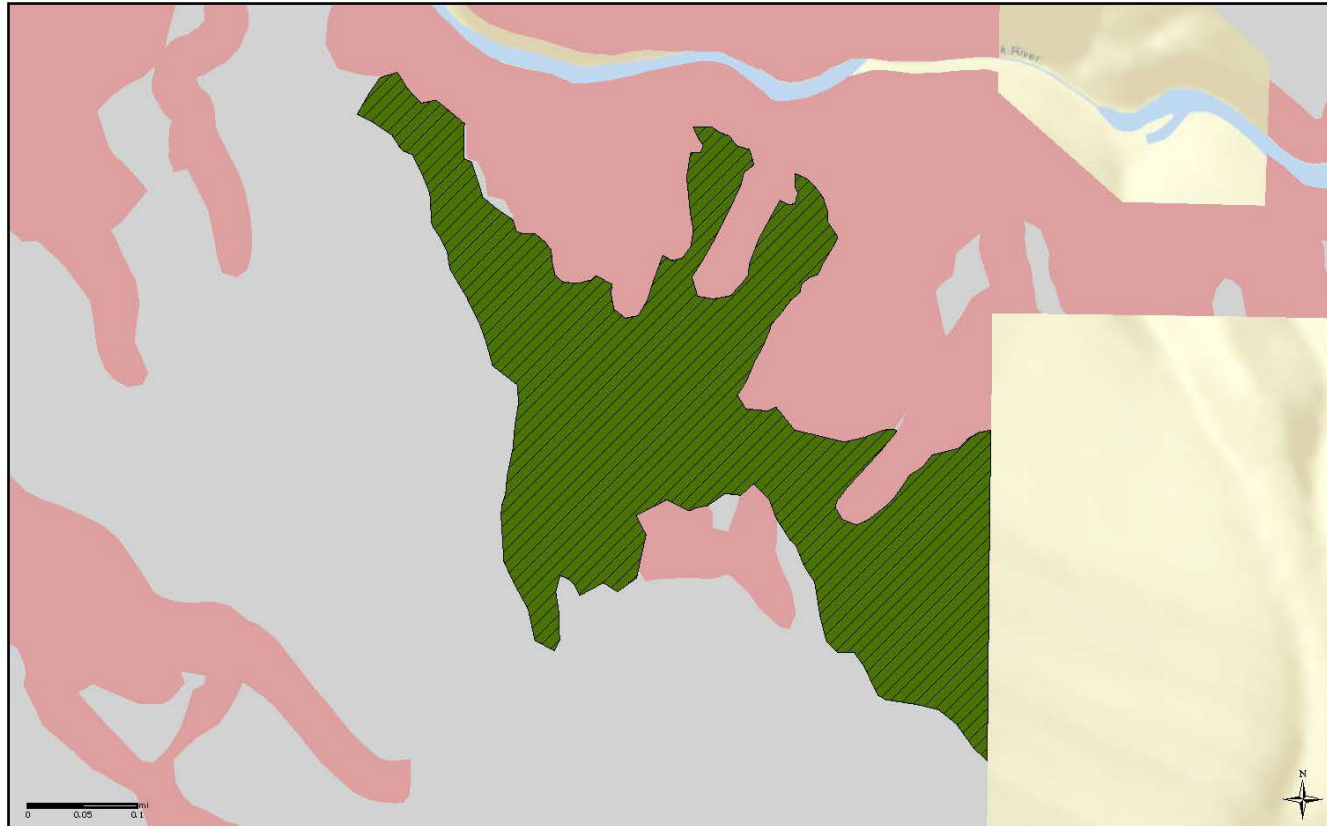
All data are draft and subject to change.



Brokedown Palace

Trusts	Acres
State Forest Transfer	42
Common School	33
Grand Total	75

Whatcom County



Co-benefits

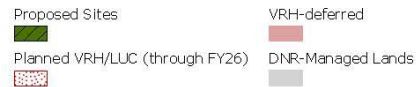
Provides connectivity between larger blocks of conservation

Adjacent to field verified old growth

Increases buffer on Nooksack River

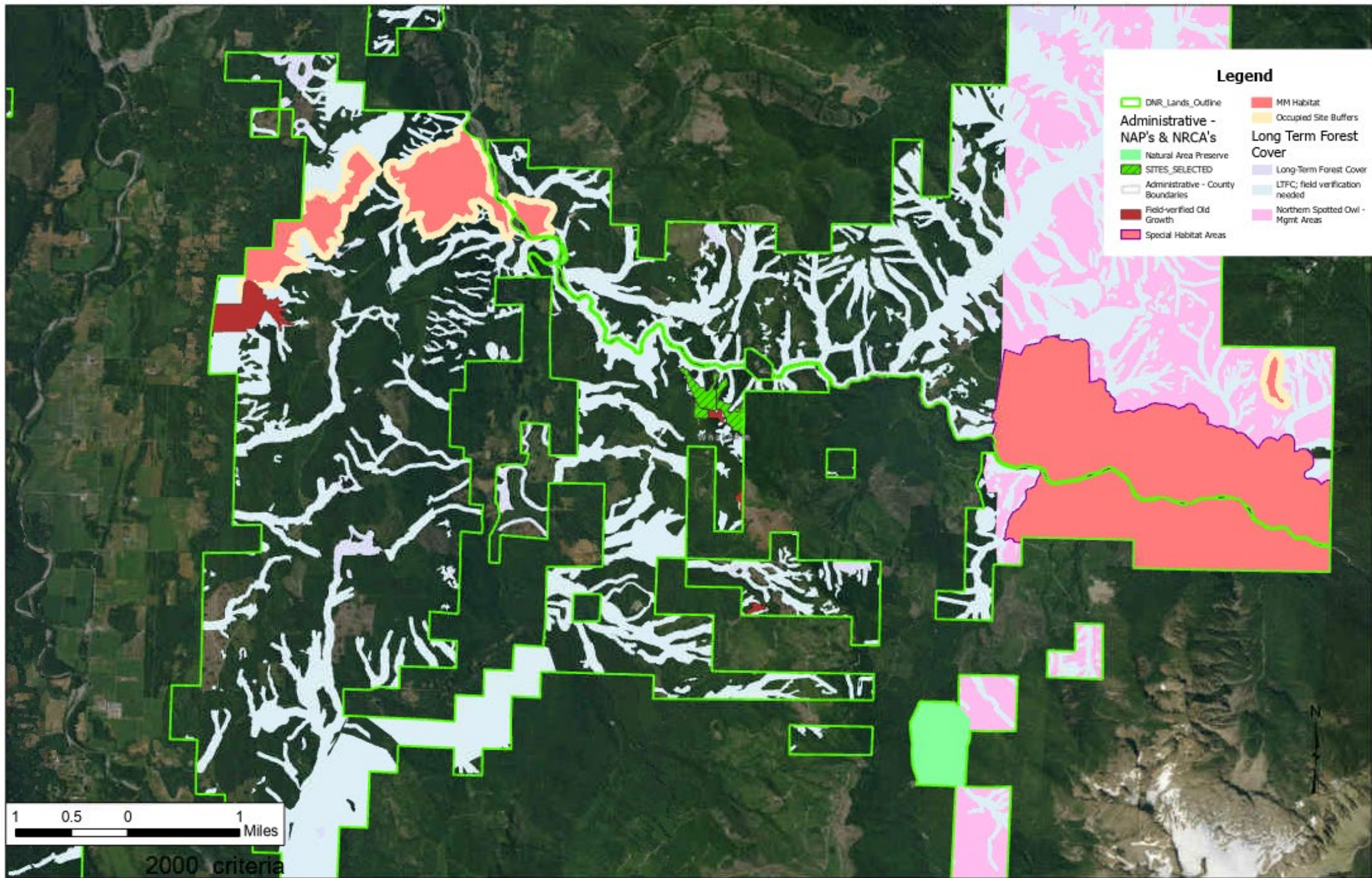


Potential 2000 Acres Sites
Brokedown Palace



All data are draft and subject to change.





Legend

- ▬ DNR_Lands_Outline
- MM Habitat
- Occupied Site Buffers
- Administrative -**
- Natural Area Preserve
- Long Term Forest Cover
- SITES_SELECTED
- Long-Term Forest Cover
- ▬ Administrative - County Boundaries
- LTFC; field verification needed
- Field-verified Old Growth
- Northern Spotted Owl - Mgmt Areas
- Special Habitat Areas

1 0.5 0 1 Miles

2000 criteria

Next Steps

County Concurrence

Letters have been sent to each county with a request for concurrence by January 31st

Land Transfers

Land transfers will occur as lands are acquired for each trust.

Transfers must be appraised for full fair market value.

Acquisitions and transfers will each be presented to the board for approval





WHATCOM COUNTY
Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097
360-778-5900, TTY 800-833-6384
360-778-5901 Fax



Mark Personius, AICP
Director

Memorandum

TO: Forestry Advisory Committee
FROM: Cliff Strong, Senior Planner
DATE: December 14, 2023
SUBJECT: 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update

Whatcom County is commencing its 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and Planning and Development Services staff would like to solicit recommendations from the Forestry Advisory Committee on what amendments should be considered in the Forest Lands section of Chapter 8, Resource Lands. To this end staff will be leading discussions with the Committee in January and February to obtain the Committee's thoughts on what major concepts need to be addressed. Our consultant will then use these suggestions in developing text, adding new policies, or editing existing ones. PDS staff will then come back later in the year (July – October) to present what the consultant has developed and solicit feedback on their work, including specific edits to goals and policies.

Attached to this memo are four documents for your review:

- Letter from County Executive Sidhu asking the Committee to participate.
- County Council Resolution 2022-036 establishing the Council's priorities for the update.
- Advisory Committee Review Guidelines (gleaned from the Exec's letter and Resolution 2022-036).
- Forest Lands section of Chapter 8, Resource Lands

We have a tight schedule for meeting the June 30, 2025, adoption deadline, so I ask that committee members be prepared to discuss your ideas at your 1/16/24 & 2/6/24 meetings.



Satpal Singh Sidhu
Whatcom County Executive



To: Advisory Committees
From: Satpal Singh Sidhu, County Executive
Date: November 28, 2023
Subject: 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to update our Comprehensive Plan by June 30, 2025. Whatcom County has various advisory committees that provide both technical expertise and citizen perspectives on important issues. I value the work and recommendations from these committees.

Updating the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan will be a large, complex, and important effort. We have two priorities for the update:

1. *GMA Compliance* – The GMA is a state law and we must ensure our Comprehensive Plan meets the requirements of this law. This is necessary to address the critical issues of our day. It is also needed to ensure Whatcom County continues to be eligible to receive grant funding from the State.
2. *Council Priorities* – The Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2022-036](#) (also attached to this email) in August 2022 setting priorities for the update. Some of these priorities overlap with GMA requirements, but some are unique to our update.

County Planning and Development Services staff will identify Comprehensive Plan topics or chapters that each advisory committee will review. The process will proceed as follows:

- December 2023, SCJ Alliance (the consultant for the project) will contact and meet with committee chairs and lead staff to discuss the Comp Plan update.
- January – February, staff will bring relevant Comp Plan provisions to the advisory committees for review. The committees will review the applicable Comp Plan provisions and make general recommendations on how to meet the GMA requirements and Council priorities.
- February – June 2024, the County’s consultant will develop preliminary draft wording changes to the various Comp Plan chapters to address GMA compliance and Council priorities, with consideration of the advisory committee’s general recommendations.
- July 2024 – October 2024, the advisory committees will review the consultant’s wording changes and make recommendations on these changes.

Public participation is an important component of the GMA. Therefore, I am requesting that each advisory committee set aside time at your meetings to receive and consider public comment. Additionally, because of the state deadline for GMA compliance, I am asking each committee to focus on the two priorities set forth above: GMA compliance and Council priorities. There may be other issues that come up in your discussions, but we need to be focused on the large and important tasks at hand. Each committee can create a list of other issues that may be considered after the 2025 Comp Plan update process is completed.

Thank you for the time, effort, local knowledge, and expertise that you provide! Your work makes Whatcom County a better place. We look forward to engaging with you on the Comp Plan update process. Staff will reach out to you soon to start the review process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Satpal Singh Sidhu". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive

RESOLUTION NO. 2022-036

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR WHATCOM COUNTY'S 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

WHEREAS, the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to develop a Comprehensive Plan for managing population growth and development, which was adopted in May of 1997; and

WHEREAS, the GMA requires Whatcom County to review urban growth areas (UGAs) under RCW 36.70A.130(3) to be able to accommodate population and employment growth projected for the 20-year planning period; and

WHEREAS, the GMA requires Whatcom County to periodically review and revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations under RCW 36.70A.130(1); and

WHEREAS, on August 9, 2016, Whatcom County adopted Ordinance 2016-034 updating the Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County should conduct an evaluation of the current Comprehensive Plan outlining progress made towards achieving goals and policies, and identify remaining areas of opportunity for improvement; and

WHEREAS, the GMA requires Whatcom County to review, and if needed, revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations on or before June 30, 2025, and every ten years thereafter; and

WHEREAS, the current Comprehensive Plan contains chapters on many intersectional issues impacted by climate change, equity, and economic security including Land Use, Housing, Capital Facilities, Utilities, Transportation, Economics, Resource Lands, Recreation, and Environment; and

WHEREAS, on November 9, 2021, the Whatcom County Council passed Resolution 2021-049, adopting the 2021 Whatcom County Climate Action Plan, which develops goals, strategies, and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilience related to buildings, energy, industry, transportation, waste, land use, water, fisheries, agriculture, forestry, and ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County has experienced increasingly severe and frequent effects of climate change including wildfires, smoke, heat dome, drought, and floods; and

WHEREAS, recent scientific reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change point out that time is running short for communities everywhere to mitigate and adapt to the worst effects of climate change; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan needs to more clearly integrate climate change, equity, and economic security throughout; and

WHEREAS, over the last several years, the Washington State Legislature considered several bills that address GMA and comprehensive planning including, but not limited to, HB 1099 (2021-22) and HB 1117 (2021-22); and

WHEREAS, legislation failing to pass during previous legislative sessions does not preclude Whatcom County from proactively and voluntarily incorporating these policy frameworks into the updated Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, in addition to climate change, Whatcom County has experienced significant socio-economic impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, as early as 2019, the lack of affordable housing is recognized as an impediment to economic growth within Whatcom County by many in the community including the Business and Commerce Advisory Committee; and

WHEREAS, housing affordability continues to decline under unprecedented levels of national inflation; and

WHEREAS, historic growth trends may not accurately predict future needs and new methodologies may need to be introduced; and

WHEREAS, cities within Whatcom County have expressed concern that the traditional use of Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), and their associated restrictions, may incentivize development within unincorporated Whatcom County rather than targeted growth areas; and

WHEREAS, preservation of the Whatcom County's farmlands and agricultural industries is a common goal; and

WHEREAS, public input is a critical component to identifying priorities of the Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, The Whatcom County Council believes the updated Comprehensive Plan should reflect our shared values and address the current and future needs of Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Council acknowledges that Whatcom County is a diverse landscape, home to a broad spectrum of cultures, and serving a wide variety of industries, and therefore recognizes that the solutions to the priorities identified here may take various forms throughout the County; and

WHEREAS, The Whatcom County Council looks forward to working collaboratively with the Executive, county staff, relevant Whatcom County boards, commissions, and advisory committees, seven cities, Native Nations, and stakeholders to adopt an updated Comprehensive Plan;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Whatcom County Council that the following priorities be considered for incorporation into the updated Comprehensive Plan due on or before June 30, 2025:

1. Equity, environmental justice, and economic security should be guiding principles throughout all chapters of the Comprehensive Plan and associated planning and regulatory documents.
2. Engage government-to-government with Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe in the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, and work to ensure tribal treaty rights and sovereignty are considered and upheld in all aspects.

3. Incorporate climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction throughout the Comprehensive Plan.
4. Promote the protection and restoration of healthy habitats for fish and wildlife throughout the Comprehensive Plan.
5. Collaboratively work towards economic security and affordable housing without sacrificing environmental health and public safety.
6. Support a thriving local agriculture and food system economy and food security, considering the impacts of climate change on agriculture as well as equity and housing needs of farmworkers.
7. Build resilience to climate change in forests that enables both a thriving timber economy and healthy sustainable forest ecosystems for wildlife, carbon sequestration and storage, production and storage of cool, clean water, and environmentally safe recreation.
8. More thoroughly consider impacts of climate change, equity, and economic security in relation to natural hazards mitigation and emergency response.
9. More thoroughly consider how growth patterns may have been altered from historic patterns in light of socioeconomic changes, climate change, and housing affordability challenges and what impact this should have on future planning.
10. Analyze the use of, and restrictions to, municipal Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) within the County to avoid unintended incentives to build outside of UGAs.
11. Maximize the environmental benefits of wetland mitigation and consider opportunities to increase development yield in urban areas by establishing off-site wetland mitigations with rigorous monitoring and adaptive management requirements in areas outside of cities.
12. Consider equitable contribution from development within unincorporated Whatcom County toward public and park infrastructure with the implementation of an impact fee program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Whatcom County Council that the attached Exhibit A be considered as possible implementation strategies and actions that could help accomplish the priorities listed in this resolution.

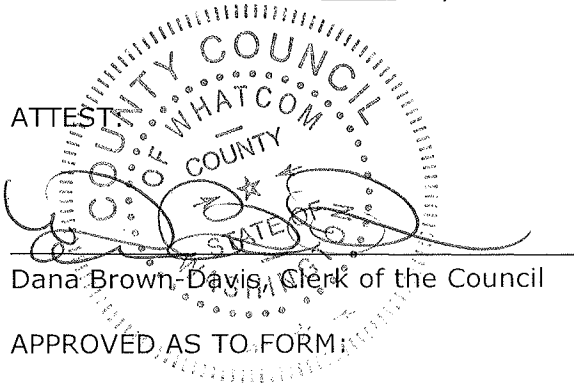
BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Whatcom County Council recognizes the importance of coordinating and collaborating throughout the planning process with the following governments and stakeholders:

- Whatcom County departments including the Planning & Development Services, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Health Department, Finance Department, and the Emergency Management Division of the Sheriff's Office.
- Whatcom County boards, commissions, and advisory committees including, but not limited to, the Planning Commission, Climate Impact Advisory Committee, Flood Advisory Committee, Marine Resources Committee, Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Racial Equity Commission, Forest Advisory Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Food System Committee, Child and Family Wellbeing Taskforce, Business and Commerce Advisory Committee, Housing Advisory Committee, and WRIA 1 Planning Unit.

- Native Nations including Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe.
- The seven incorporated cities of Whatcom County: Bellingham, Blaine, Ferndale, Lynden, Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack.
- The Port of Bellingham.
- The Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County.
- Whatcom Conservation District.
- State government including local legislators, Governor, the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Ecology, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, and other relevant agencies.
- Federal government including local Congressional delegation, U.S. Forest Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Interior, National Parks Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other relevant agencies.
- Whatcom County residents, business owners, farmers, farmworkers, community interest groups, and nonprofits.

APPROVED this 9th day of August, 2022.

ATTEST



Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

/s/ Karen Frakes (via e-mail 8/10/22) / JL
 Karen Frakes, Civil Deputy Prosecutor

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
 WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Todd Donovan, Council Chair

EXHIBIT A:
SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

<p>1. Equity, environmental justice, and economic security should be guiding principles throughout all chapters of the Comprehensive Plan and associated planning and regulatory documents.</p>
<p>Strengthen the "Diverse Cultural Composition" section of the Land Use chapter to include both equity and sovereignty.</p>
<p>Incorporate relevant components from SB 5141 (2021-22) the Healthy Environment for all (HEAL) Act and the Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map.</p>
<p>Incorporate the Whatcom County "Healthy Planning" approach established by resolution 2015-038.</p>
<p>Consult with the Whatcom County Health Department, Racial Equity Commission, Child and Family-Wellbeing Taskforce, and organizations representing farm workers, farmers, low-income families and children, and other groups disproportionately impacted by climate change, environmental injustices, and economic insecurity.</p>
<p>Prioritize actions in overburdened communities that equitably enhance climate resilience and avoid or substantially reduce the adverse impacts of climate change in people, property, and ecological systems using best available science and climate projections.</p>
<p>Consider impacts to economic security and incorporate into relevant chapters.</p>
<p>2. Engage government-to-government with Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe in the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, and work to ensure tribal treaty rights and sovereignty are considered and upheld in all aspects.</p>
<p>Follow the framework established in HB 1717 (2021-22), concerning tribal participation in planning under the growth management act.</p>
<p>3. Incorporate climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction throughout the Comprehensive Plan.</p>

Mitigate and adapt to climate change, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and build climate resilience by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan .
Change the title of the Environment chapter to "Environment and Climate Resilience"
Add goals of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and include measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change on people, property, infrastructure, and ecological systems.
Consider and plan for how population growth and development impacts climate projections and associated risks and adverse events, and vice versa.
Add language to encourage a natural climate solutions approach to climate mitigation and resilience.
Use the best available science associated with climate change and biodiversity.
Transportation Chapter
Incorporate measures aimed at reducing transportation related emissions, including adding a goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by enhancing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, encouraging the use of public transportation, and improving coordination between development and transportation systems.
Enhance access to safe active and alternative transportation modes by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan , the Regional Trails Plan, and Route Map proposed by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee.
Accelerate the transition to a low- or zero-emission transportation system (bicycles, cars, trucks, buses, and ferry) and associated infrastructure, per Resolution 2022-033 . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a plan to transition the county fleet, including passenger vehicles, ferry, and other equipment, to electric, hydrogen, biofuels or other low- or zero-emission technologies.
Identify areas throughout the County, including the small cities, which may be feasible locations for transit-oriented development.

Capital Facilities Chapter
<p>Assess and analyze the climate impact of existing County facilities, outline specific actions and secure funding to improve energy efficiency, health, and safety while reducing GHG emissions and harm to people and the environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and replace outdated County facilities, such as the current jail, that become noncompliant with State Building Code standards, and present other health and safety concerns; ensure county facilities are a safe and dignified space for staff and all residents. • Retrofit County buildings where feasible to increase energy efficiency and install electric heat pumps. • Increase renewable energy generation and storage in County facilities.
<p>Consider climate change impacts to critical infrastructure and Whatcom County facilities.</p>
<p>Evaluate the climate vulnerability and risk of existing infrastructure in Whatcom County.</p>
<p>.</p>
<p>.</p>
<p>Facilitate the construction of publicly accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure at County facilities such as buildings, parks, and other community spaces like schools, libraries, and senior centers.</p>
<p>Ease existing barriers by updating relevant development regulations and land use and building codes such as updating parking requirements to require or incentivize parking spots to be EV-ready on all new industrial, commercial, and residential multi-family construction.</p>
<p>Design and build new county facilities in a sustainable way including net zero energy use, increasing energy resilience, utilizing local, sustainably sourced building materials, enhancing microgrid capabilities, and developing at locations that increase accessibility to public and alternative transportation modes.</p>
<p>Conduct an economic analysis for current county infrastructure, buildings, and transportation that factors in externalities of climate change to inform replacement prioritization and timeline.</p>
Utilities Chapter

Work with public and private utilities to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase renewable energy resources, and modernize the energy grid to build community and climate resilience.

Support the evaluation of Whatcom Public Utilities District #1 to expand renewable energy production, water, and broadband throughout the County.

Support Universal Broadband Access as a foundation for energy transition and digital equity.

- Establish a goal to achieve symmetrical gigabit broadband throughout the County.
- Support efforts to establish and increase municipal/public broadband.
- Incorporate a coordination, or "Dig Once", policy for all new road construction projects, utility installations, and in planning for new residential, commercial, and industrial development.

Enhance goals to reduce fossil fuel consumption and increase access to renewable energy resources.

- Review, and consider repealing, the moratorium and other restrictions on new wind energy systems, and updating any relevant wind energy code.
- Evaluate potential for geothermal and hydrogen energy in Whatcom County.
- Assess opportunities to modernize the energy grid and other technologies and infrastructure necessary to deploy renewable energy and increase efficiency and energy security.
- Work with privately or investor-owned utilities to support their transition to more renewable energy.
- Incentivize a methodical transition away from natural gas and other fossil fuels while supporting a transition to electrification or other zero-emission alternatives.

Set goals to further improve water quality and quantity.

- Fully implement the outcomes of the Nooksack Adjudication and "Solutions Table" process to ensure legal use of water that supports water use efficiency, salmon recovery, agriculture, and drinking water for all residents.
- Update policies and take action to further protect Lake Whatcom watershed.
- Explore water infrastructure and technology solutions that can help store, conserve, improve efficiency, and alleviate the high demand during times of limited supply.
- Incorporate recommendations and priorities from the Whatcom County Drought Contingency Plan.
- Ensure the Coordinated Water System Plan is consistent with the comprehensive plan and development regulations, confirming current water supply and water systems can support future growth.

Quantify and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from waste management and septic systems in the county.

- Implement the strategies in the Comprehensive Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and incentivize composting (food and yard waste) and the recycling of building materials.
4. Promote the protection and restoration of healthy habitats for fish and wildlife throughout the Comprehensive Plan
Add a salmon recovery goal.
Implement the actions outlined in the Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 1 <u>Salmon Recovery Program</u> and <u>Salmonid Recovery Plan</u> .
Incorporate recommendations and priorities from the <u>WRIA 1 Watershed Management Plan</u> .
Identify and update regulations that protect wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity, protect, preserve, and restore healthy habitat and biodiversity, and protect fish and wildlife populations from human activities and structures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and map wildlife corridors and connectivity throughout the county. Evaluate what lands are best for wildlife corridors and habitat restoration based on a cost-benefit analysis. Develop and expand voluntary programs that work with and compensates participating landowners.
Land Use Chapter
Work with the State to evaluate a framework and strategy for achieving net ecological gain of salmon and other aquatic species habitat for all public projects and a voluntary incentive driven framework and strategy for private projects.
Coordinate land use policy with water supply goals.
Transportation Chapter
Include an updated culvert inventory and prioritized list and proposed schedule for the elimination of identified fish passage barriers in coordination with the Tribes, State, Cities, and private landowners.
5. Collaboratively work towards economic security and affordable housing without sacrificing environmental health and public safety.
Housing Chapter

Outline specific goals and policies to ensure housing development meets current and future housing, equity, climate, and economic needs.
<p>Ensure adequate housing and services for seniors and people with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services to include housing support, assistance with daily living, transportation, recreation, accessing healthcare and assistance at a person-centered level. • Comprehensive Plan must include zoning allowances for residences, compliance with ADA, and transportation component appropriate to this population.
Add a goal that everyone, at every income level, has access to affordable housing, as defined by a household spending 30% or less of its income on housing costs.
Provide permanently affordable housing and home ownership opportunities in all neighborhoods for individuals earning between 50% to 120% of AMI.
Provide a full range of affordable housing types ranging from multifamily apartments, condos, and duplexes to detached single family homes, ADU's, and tiny homes.
Target an average rental vacancy of 5%, and available housing supply of 4-6 months, for all income levels.
Update, strengthen, and streamline land use codes, housing regulations, and permitting processes that further encourage, and where appropriate, require more affordable, dense, sustainable, low impact, and energy efficient development.
<p>Support building and energy codes that incentivize a strategic transition to all-electric new residential construction, ensuring that our communities are sustainable, affordable, equitable, and healthy now and in the future, while addressing resiliency and vulnerabilities to climate change disproportionately impacting rural and low-income communities in Whatcom County. To help facilitate a strategic transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize and assist residents still dependent upon access to wood, natural gas, diesel, and other fossils fuels for backup energy when homes have limited, or no access, caused by such things as power outages, severe weather, or location. • prepare for emergencies and build community resilience and self-sufficiency by working with our state and federal partners on energy grid modernization, investing in underground utilities, and access to affordable and reliable electricity for all communities.

Support incentive programs that promote solar panels, electric heat pumps for space and water heating, and weatherization for existing residential and commercial buildings.
Consider permitting and land use policies that increase affordable housing such as sustainable development incentives, expedited permitting and fee reductions, form-based building codes, transit-oriented development, infill development, density bonuses, clustering subdivisions, urban villages, and farmland trusts.
.
Consider County acquisition of land for permanently affordable housing development such as a community land trust or land bank model.
Expand availability and development of housing, especially mixed and middle housing options, near transit and employment opportunities to reduce travel needs and vehicle miles travelled.
Invest in wetland mitigation throughout Whatcom County and explore off-site wetland mitigation as a strategy to increase development capacity.
In development regulations, protect critical areas by strengthening mitigation requirements including requiring net gain in pervious surface area and tree canopy cover.
Economic Chapter
Promote a more diverse, equitable, sustainable, and climate resilient future economy.
Support living wage job creation in green industry, commerce, forestry, and agriculture.
Support a just clean energy transition for workers and communities.
Invest in robust economic and workforce development at all levels, including in climate-resilient and green energy related fields.
Support supply chain resiliency.
Increase access to quality and affordable childcare by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Child and

Family Well-Being Action Plan.
Work with the Port of Bellingham and Whatcom PUD to increase access to quality and affordable high-speed broadband.
As Whatcom County continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, assess the impact the Comprehensive Plan had/has on supporting the local economy, business models (such as streets turned into outdoor dining for restaurants to reopen), the working population, the basic necessities and logistics for our community, and incorporating lessons learned.
6. Support a thriving local agriculture and food system economy and food security, considering the impacts of climate change on agriculture as well as equity and housing needs of farmworkers.
Resource Lands Chapter
Consider the impacts of climate change, water resources, and flood control on agriculture and agricultural workers such as rising temperatures, more severe and unpredictable weather events, flooding, air quality, water quality and quantity, and soil health.
Work to provide secure and legal access to water for farmers all farmers with an end goal of water use efficiency to drive profitability for a diverse agriculture economy, recognizing that the “use it or lose it doctrine” of water rights does not promote water use efficiency. employing water conservation and water use efficiency principles.
Integrate water supply planning and land use planning to support Whatcom County’s goal of maintaining a minimum of 100,000 acres of agricultural land.
Promote opportunities to increase sustainability and climate resilience in agriculture and processing.
Enhance local food security and food sovereignty by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom Community Food Assessment .
Improve wages, housing, and working conditions for food chain workers.
Ensure safe and affordable on-farm housing, transportation, and healthcare for farmers and farmworkers.
Increase demand for local food products and expand support networks for local agriculture product development.

- Increase capacity for local food producers to connect with local food enthusiasts by allowing processing and packaging infrastructure on-farm and elsewhere, in the size, scale, use and intensity of agriculture in Whatcom County.

Encourage research and development of drought- and heat- tolerant crops, and agriculture technologies that will reduce emissions, improve soil health, and increase efficient use of water.

Enhance flood control and drainage vitally important to protecting people, farm families, and infrastructure.

- If agriculture land is utilized for “overflow areas”, the county should also plan to facilitate drainage to enable the ability of the land to be productively farmed.
- Manage drainage areas, including wildlife control, to protect land intended to produce food and fiber, except where they have been placed in the conservation programs.

Encourage climate smart farming practices that protect and regenerate soil, water, land, and carbon sequestration.

Preserve productive agricultural lands across Whatcom County by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan and the 2019 Rural Land Study, considering rezoning opportunities (such as R5 to Ag 20 or similar), and increasing funding and staff capacity for the Conservation Easement Program in order to protect more agricultural lands from development pressure.

Expand allowable agricultural land uses to include non-traditional farming models.

7. Build resilience to climate change in forests that enables both a thriving timber economy and healthy sustainable forest ecosystems for wildlife, carbon sequestration and storage, production and storage of cool, clean water, and environmentally safe recreation.

Support a thriving local forest products industry and sustainable local resource economy including living wage jobs.

Encourage and incentivize working forest management practices that enhance ecosystem services such as healthy fish and wildlife habitats, forest and watershed health, clean water, climate resilience, carbon sequestration and storage, open green space, and sustainability.

- Develop Forest Management Plans for Lake Whatcom Park, Canyon Lake Community Forest, and Stewart Mountain

Community Forest with these values in mind.
Encourage research and development and the use of best available science in the evaluation and mitigation of potential adverse impacts from timber harvesting to peak flows, low summer stream flows, water quality, wildlife, slope stability and wildfire risk.
Engage and collaborate with forest management experts, practitioners, professionals and researchers to obtain well informed and broad understanding of issues in order to facilitate prudent decisions and formulate positions on forestry issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples include the Cooperative Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research (CMER) Committee (Forest Practices Board), DNR's Olympic Experimental Research Forest scientists and its research partners, and the Whatcom County Forest Advisory Committee.
Recognize the ability for sustainable forest practices to produce a wide variety of benefits, and identify opportunities to optimize the wood production and carbon storage capacity of forestlands in Whatcom County through the application of extended harvest rotations.
Consider opportunities to protect old and mature forests while also exploring ways to maintain harvestable forest land base, such as actively managing County owned lands and working with the federal government on harvest potential of federal lands.
Provide feedback into Environmental Impact Statements or State Environmental Policy Act on regulatory or policy changes to forest management during planning level analyses in order to influence and encourage climate considerations in decision making while providing certainty to industry and other proponents.
Encourage uneven-aged forest management practices through selective harvest and variable density thinning to enhance structural complexity, biodiversity, drought-tolerance, fire resilience, hydrologic function, and protection of fish-bearing and non-fish-bearing streams.
Expand carbon market opportunities that reward landowners who actively manage their forests to increase carbon storage and sequestration and enhance ecosystem services.
Evaluate the net loss or gain in carbon emissions and ecological function when rezoning forest lands for other uses.
Encourage reforestation, or afforestation, of previously cleared riparian and upland areas through providing funding, seedlings, expertise, and outreach.
Consider development pressures on working lands and work with partners on the possibility of establishing a Whatcom County

goal of maintaining a minimum number of working forest land that is required to sustain local forestry infrastructure.
Work with private landowners to support their investment in the environment and infrastructure, including road improvements, removal of fish passage barriers, and installation of fish-friendly culverts and bridges.
Increase funding and staff capacity for the Conservation Easement Program in order to protect more forest lands from development, particularly as a strategy to protect forest lands in the Lake Whatcom watershed.
Promote development of Whatcom Grown timber products that support climate resilience, the local timber economy, timber and forestry jobs, and reduce transportation-related emissions.
Support the forest industries and workers as they transition to more climate resilient forest harvest techniques, including any support needed to increase wages, benefits, and safety of workplace conditions.
Support environmentally safe recreation on working forests by adequately funding Whatcom County Parks and Recreation to actively manage recreation, mitigate any negative impacts, and develop and maintain existing county owned lands and infrastructure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with all levels of government and other landowners in planning, development, maintenance, and habitat restoration as well as enforcement support. • Provide funding to support other landowners in managing public use impacts in recognition of the benefits forest recreation provides to the county and its residents.
Determine countywide reforestation opportunities in the built environment and expand and strengthen tree canopy requirements and retention in existing and newly developed areas of all sizes to enhance carbon storage, reduce ambient air temperatures, mitigate urban heat island effect, and lower the future cooling costs of residential and commercial buildings.
8. More thoroughly consider impacts of climate change, equity, and economic security in relation to natural hazards mitigation and emergency response.
Incorporate climate change into the Whatcom County <u>Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan</u> , and synchronize with <u>FEMA hazard mitigation planning</u> best practices and the comprehensive plan.
Incorporate climate change impact assessments and vulnerability and risk assessments to inform future development and preservation efforts.

Consider the impacts of flooding, increasing temperatures, heat domes, droughts, wildfire, and smoke to human health, the environment, natural resources, resource lands, and economic security.

Land Use and/or Environment Chapter

Enhance flood sections to help recover and mitigate against increased intensity and frequency of flood events.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the systems, plans, policies, and current codes that must be changed or updated to better prepare for the next flood (such as UGA's in floodplains/floodways), and incorporate improvements based on lessons learned.
- Reduce flooding risk by fully supporting the implementation of recommendations and priorities from the most current and ongoing Whatcom County Flood Integrated Plans, including the Lower Nooksack River Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan.
- Factor flood-related displacement of people and property into growth projections and urban growth areas.
- Restore, where possible, the environmental functions of rivers and streams.
- Improve flood plain water storage and infiltration capacities.
- Consider levee setbacks where appropriate.
- Better prepare for floods and consider the disproportionate impacts of flooding on rural and vulnerable communities.
- Support buybacks in designated floodways.
- Consider water storage options that do not include dams.

Build resilience to climate change while reducing flood risks by supporting efforts to increase tree canopy cover (particularly in riparian areas) and reducing impervious surfaces.

Enhance land use planning in the wildland urban interface (WUI) to reduce and mitigate the risk to people and property posed by wildfires.

- Reduce residential development pressure in the wildland urban interface area.
- Create open space buffers between human development and wildfire-prone landscapes.
- Protect existing residential development through community wildfire preparedness and fire adaptation measures.

Environment and/or Shoreline Chapter

More thoroughly incorporate coastal resilience to plan, prepare, build resilience to climate impacts, and reduce vulnerabilities and risks. Ensure consistent language is included in associated codes as well, including the Critical Areas Ordinance, Shoreline Management Program, and relevant sections of Title 20 zoning.

Plan for sea level rise, changing ocean conditions, storm surges, and floods, and its impacts on coastal residential communities, declining marine fisheries, shellfish beds, coastal infrastructure, and recreation areas.
Reduce development in current and projected future shoreline areas.
Capital Facilities Chapter
Consider establishing and maintaining County Resilience Centers during emergencies or disasters. These facilities could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide controlled temperature shelter as well as food, water, and cots for disasters or power outages. • Prioritize under-served communities more vulnerable to disasters such as floods, wildfires, and prolonged heat/cold spells.
10. Analyze the use of, and restrictions to, municipal Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) within the County to avoid unintended incentives to build outside of UGAs.
Update policies on UGAs in light of current environmental regulation such as critical areas, shorelines, and stormwater regulations.
Update policies using current best practices for agricultural and protected watersheds.
Consider provisions for flexibility of municipal UGA boundaries to yield greater development densities, fewer environmental impacts, and more affordable housing outcomes.
11. Maximize the environmental benefits of wetland mitigation and consider opportunities to increase development yield in urban areas by establishing off-site wetland mitigation areas outside of cities.
Develop cooperative policies that preserve and grow natural areas outside of cities by allowing off-site mitigation in the County.
Update policies on wetland mitigation to allow lower quality wetlands with little to no habitat value to be mitigated off-site.
Increase capacity to steward and conserve natural resources on private property, including considering a mechanism by which rural, private property owners are able to derive monetary benefit from wetland mitigation initiatives or other environmentally beneficial activities.

2025 CompPlan Update – Advisory Committee Review Guidelines

Timeline/Process

1. County Planning and Development Services staff will identify Comprehensive Plan topics or chapters that each advisory committee will review.
2. December 2023: SCJ Alliance (the consultant for the project) met with committee chairs and lead staff to discuss the CompPlan update.
3. January – February: Staff will bring relevant CompPlan sections to the advisory committees for review. The committees will review unedited (existing) versions of applicable CompPlan elements identified by staff in #1 above. Each committee will make general recommendations, in the form of a memo, on how to meet the GMA requirements and Council priorities. The Committees will not make specific wording changes at this point in the process.
4. February – June 2024: SCJ Alliance will develop preliminary draft wording changes to the various CompPlan elements to address GMA compliance and Council priorities, with consideration of the advisory committee’s general recommendations.
5. July 2024 – October 2024: The advisory committees will review the consultant’s wording changes and make recommendations on them.
6. Public participation is an important component of the GMA. Therefore, each advisory committee will need to set aside time at meetings to receive and consider public comment.
7. Because of the state deadline for GMA compliance, each committee will focus on:
 - GMA compliance;
 - Council priorities (Resolution 2022-036);
 - Necessary grammatical changes; and
 - Modifying/updating outdated/incorrect information.

Priority Criteria for Making Changes

Updating the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan will be a large, complex, and important effort. Additionally, there is a June 30, 2025, deadline for completing the project. Therefore, amendments will be limited to the following:

1. *GMA Compliance* – The GMA is a state law and we must ensure our Comprehensive Plan meets the requirements of this law, including amendments made since our last update. This is necessary to address the critical issues of our day. It is also needed to ensure Whatcom County continues to be eligible to receive grant funding from the State.
2. *Council Priorities* – The Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2022-036](#) in August 2022 setting their priorities for the update. Some of these priorities overlap with GMA requirements, but some are unique to our update.
3. Changes to grammar that improve clarity.
4. Changes or updates to outdated or incorrect information.

There may be other issues that come up in the review process. A list of other issues may be developed for consideration after the 2025 CompPlan update process is completed.

Chapter Eight Resource Lands

Introduction

The growth and harvest of farm products, re-generation and harvesting of timber, use of marine resource lands for shellfish harvest, and excavation of minerals all shape Whatcom County's landscape and strongly influence the economy. Resource lands, which include agriculture, forestry, fisheries (RCW 36.70A.020), and mineral resource lands, also largely represent Whatcom County's cultural heritage. These natural resource activities have been major industries since European settlement began in the area, and the use of marine lands by our indigenous citizens far predates European settlement.

Chapter Organization

This chapter is divided into four sections: Agricultural Lands, Forest Resource Lands, Marine Resource Lands, and Mineral Resources.

Purpose

This chapter contains goals and policies designed to identify and protect the important natural resource lands found in Whatcom County as defined by RCW 36.70A. The development of these goals and policies is necessary to ensure the provision of land suitable for long-term farming, forestry, and mineral extraction so the production of food, fiber, wood products, and minerals can be maintained as an important part of our economic base through the planning period. Without protection of these resource lands, some of the lands could be inappropriately or prematurely converted into land uses incompatible with long-term resource production. The premature conversion of resource lands into incompatible uses places additional constraints on remaining resource lands and can lead to further erosion of the resource land base.

Process

Each section of this chapter includes a description of the process followed in creating that section.

GMA Goals and Countywide Planning Policies

The following goals and policies in this chapter have been developed:

- to be consistent with and help achieve the statewide GMA goals to "maintain and enhance" natural resource based industries
- to implement Countywide Planning Policies that express the desire for the county to become a government of rural lands and sustainable resource based industries
- to fulfill the citizens' vision of Whatcom County where resource based industries are widely practiced and encouraged

The Agricultural Lands, Forest Resource Lands, Marine Resource Lands, and Mineral Resources sections of this chapter address Goal 8 of the GMA, which reads:

"Natural Resource Industries. Maintain and enhance natural resource based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses." (RCW 36.70A.020)

The goals, policies, and action plans of this chapter support the achievement of this goal by identifying, designating, and protecting productive resource lands from incompatible uses, thereby helping to maintain the county's important natural resource based industries.

Identifying and designating productive resource lands also helps implement the Countywide Planning Policies directed towards agriculture, forestry, mineral resources, marine industries, and other natural resources. In addition, land use policies that encourage best management practices are included within this chapter to support and maintain a broad based economy of productive timber, agriculture, mineral and aquatic industries in a sustainable manner. (CWPP I-9)

Forest Resource Lands

Introduction

Purpose

This section contains policies to guide Whatcom County in conservation of forest resources land of long-term commercial significance, and to implement the provisions of the Growth Management Act and the adopted Countywide Planning Policies.

GMA Requirements

Designation and conservation of forest resource lands of long-term commercial significance is required under the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.060). The Growth Management Act [RCW 36.70A.030 (8)] defines forest lands as follows:

"Forest land" means land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, including Christmas trees subject to the excise tax imposed under RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, and that has long-term commercial significance. In determining whether forest land is primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economical and practically managed for such production, the following factors shall be considered: (a) the proximity of the land to urban, suburban, and rural settlements; (b) surrounding parcel size and the compatibility and intensity of adjacent and nearby land uses; (c) long-term local economic conditions that affect the ability to manage for timber production; and (d) the availability of public facilities and services conducive to conversion of forest land to other uses.

Long-term commercial significance is defined by RCW 36.70A.030 (10) as including:

The growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long-term commercial production, in consideration with the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land.

Map 8-3 shows lands designated as forest resource lands of long-term commercial significance.

Process

Whatcom County has implemented zoning regulations for forest land since the 1970s. With the passage of the Growth Management Act, the county began to review the zoning classifications.

In 1991 a Forest Resource Lands Citizens' Advisory Committee composed of forest landowners, representatives of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, forestry consultants, and private citizens was formed. The purpose of the committee was to provide review and recommendations on the draft designation of forest resource lands and the Rural Forestry and Commercial Forestry zones and land use code. The draft forest land designations were developed under the original GMA definition utilizing a set of locally derived criteria for more refined definition of forest lands. These criteria included average parcel size, parcel tax status, type of road access to each parcel, ownership status, presence of public services, and environmental constraints. In 1992, the committee's recommendations were forwarded to the Planning Commission and on to the County Council before adoption in 1993, with minor changes along the way. The draft forest resource land designations fulfilled the Growth Management Act's interim designation and conservation requirements for resource lands. These interim designations were eventually adopted as part of the Final 1997 Comprehensive Plan, in which over 35,000 acres were designated as Rural Forestry and over 186,000 acres were designated as Commercial Forestry.

In March 1994, the Forest Resource Lands Citizens' Advisory Committee was reconvened to develop and recommend goals and policies for the comprehensive land use plan. The goals and policies are a compilation of the previously existing county goals regarding forest lands, statements from the Visioning Committee's work, and statements generated by the committee. These goals and policies reflect a broad consensus of the community for the conservation and use of the forest resources of Whatcom County.

Background Summary

The forest resources of Whatcom County have historically been one of the most important natural resources in the region. Lands in the lower foothills that were initially harvested between 1900 and 1950 now support commercially mature stands of timber. In addition, a few areas of original forest still remain.

The majority of the county's non-federal forest resource lands (about 268,597 acres) are located in the foothills of western Whatcom County. Most of this land (223,613 acres) is zoned for forest production uses, and is owned and managed by a few large institutions, including natural resource based corporations, insurance companies, the

State of Washington, and small private forest management companies. These landowners manage their lands primarily for the production of timber resources.

A smaller portion of the land zoned for forest production is owned and managed by individual woodlot owners and farm/foresters, some of whom reside on their properties.

Traditionally, forest land use has been seen as a lower economic value compared to agriculture, rural, suburban, urban, commercial, or industrial uses. As a result, some forest landowners have held forest land in reserve at low cost (current use tax status) while managing for forest products and waiting for the growth of more intense land uses in the vicinity of their property. Many landowners in Whatcom County have taken advantage of the current use taxation programs in order to make forest management on their land more economical. These programs greatly benefit community interests by helping forest landowners keep land in open space and forest use.

With a growing population, there is a genuine need to promote conservation of productive forest land and associated public resources through a balanced combination of regulatory protection as mandated by the Growth Management Act, and the provision of incentives for maintaining lands in long-term commercial timber production. It is state and county policy to provide forest landowners with long-term land use predictability, for both productive forest lands and adjacent non-forest use lands. Premature conversion of those productive forest lands to other land uses that are incompatible with the management of forest resources is recognized as a threat to the forest industry. Such conversions include changing the use of forest land from commercial timber production to incompatible residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural land uses, or parks and preserves that exclude forest production management. Once forest land has been converted and roads, utilities and other infrastructure have been constructed, the land is not as useful for long-term commercial forest production. In addition, the encroachment of land uses such as non-forestry related residential into areas devoted to forest production can create conflicts between residents and forest landowners.

Issues, Goals, and Policies

The following goals and policies apply to both Rural and Commercial Forest lands and address the issues of conserving productive forest land and meeting the goals of the Growth Management Act.

Forest Land Base

The working forest land base in Washington State and in Whatcom County has been steadily decreasing over time. Most of the forest land base change has been attributed to conversion of forest land to parks, preserves, and set-asides, or environmental regulations. A minor amount of land has been converted to rights-of-way and urban and suburban uses. With the additional population growth forecast for Whatcom County, there will be continued pressure to convert all types of lands to residential uses. The greatest pressure to convert forest land will likely occur along the margins of traditional forest land where a spectrum of possible land uses may exist, in areas near infrastructure, and on forest sites with commanding views.

Complicating the issue of maintaining and protecting the forest land base from conversion is the existing diverse character of forest resource ownerships and forest management goals among Whatcom County's timber landowners. While the larger forest landowners manage their lands primarily for timber production, the smaller forest landowners tend to have diverse forest management goals. Zoning and land use regulations to conserve forest land in Whatcom County need to recognize the range of diverse ownership goals and provide for a range of allowed land uses to ensure the viability of both large and small scale forest management goals while achieving the broader comprehensive goal of conserving the forest land base of the county.

Goal 8G: Support increasing Whatcom County's working forest land base and support policies that do not adversely impact the commercial forest land base.

Policy 8G-1: Recognize that rural woodlot owners, farm/foresters, small private timber companies as well as large natural resource corporations, the Federal Government, and the State of Washington constitute the ownership of the forest resource land base of Whatcom County.

Policy 8G-2: Provide appropriate land use regulation for the diverse forest resource lands within the county through the designation of Rural Forestry and Commercial Forestry zones.

Policy 8G-3: Apply the following general criteria for Rural and Commercial Forestry comprehensive plan designations and zones:

Rural Forestry: Lands mostly devoted to growing trees for commercial timber production, usually located within public service districts such as fire or water districts, accessed by private roads built to Whatcom County development standards or public roads, with low density residential development. Land parcels are generally 20 acres or greater in size.

Commercial Forestry: Lands primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production, located outside of public service districts such as fire and water districts, and accessed by private or state forest roads. Land parcels are generally 40 acres or greater in size.

Policy 8G-4: Support conservation of productive forest land by requiring the use of best management practices such as proper road construction and maintenance, prompt re-planting of harvested areas, and protection of forest soils.

Policy 8G-5: Support conservation of the working forest land base through cooperation between landowners, private organizations and public agencies, and through incentives such as the current use tax assessment provisions of RCW 84.33, and RCW 84.34.

Policy 8G-6: Encourage and support the use of the Small Forest Landowner Forestry Riparian Easement Program to help small landowner's

- economic viability and willingness to keep the land in forestry use (WAC 222-21-005).
- Policy 8G-7: Establish flexibility in land use plans and regulations to encourage maintenance of the productive forest land base.
- Policy 8G-8: Review Title 20.42 (Rural Forestry) and 20.43 (Commercial Forestry) for opportunities to provide compatible non-forest uses that encourage forest landowners to keep their land in productive forest uses.
- Policy 8G-9: Discourage inappropriate conversion of designated forest land to incompatible non-forest uses. It is the intent of this policy not to allow conversion of GMA designated forest lands of long-term commercial significance outside the Lake Whatcom Watershed Overlay District if the proposed use is incompatible with the maintenance of long-term forest management. Incompatible uses include those that:
- create fire or safety hazards to adjacent forest land;
 - permanently alter or remove a significant portion of a parcel from production of forest products. A significant portion would be greater than 20% of the lot;
 - create significant financial hardships for adjacent forest landowners; or
 - can lead to land use conflicts with adjacent forest landowners.
- Policy 8G-10: Special districts should review their boundaries (e.g. fire districts, water districts) for conformance with forestry designations and consider making appropriate adjustments.
- Policy 8G-11: Recognize the difference between designated (mapped) forest lands and working forests. Designated forest lands may include public or private forest lands not actively managed for timber production, such as for parks, open space or habitat preservation purposes. Working forests are actively managed for timber production and to provide a balance of social, economic, and ecological benefits, products, and values.
- Policy 8G-12: Maintain a working forest land base by considering the impacts of working forests as part of the legislative decision making process. Measures that can be taken to support working forests may include:
- Land use policies that encourage active management plans on Rural Forest lands;
 - Track acres of forest lands lost from productivity due to conversion, development or policy implementation such as critical areas ordinance, and work with the forestry advisory committee to identify economically viable mitigation strategies that can be implemented to offset the acres lost;

- Land use policies that recognize the multiple values of working forests and respect the rights and responsibilities of private and public forest landowners;
- Education programs that emphasize recognition that wood is a renewable natural resources;
- Public and institutional education programs that promote the benefits of working forests;
- Championing the implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan and completion of individual forest plans in order to re-balance the social, economic, and ecological benefits and products on a national forest specific basis;
- Ensuring that timber management plans submitted as part of the Designated Forest Land Current Use Tax program are implemented, or remove the property from the program; and
- Discouraging conversion of designated forest lands to non-forest uses.

Forest Products Industry

Investment in forest land is complicated by the long time it takes to realize any financial return from growing trees. Once a forest is harvested and a new forest plantation is established, it can take from 40 to 60 years at a minimum before another harvest can occur. Due to the fact that investments in forest land and timber growing are long term in nature, it is necessary to provide forest landowners with assurance that their investments will be realized.

Forest resource lands make an important contribution to the local economy in Whatcom County. Resource based employment continues to provide some of the better paying jobs in our local area. Several major employers operate primary and secondary forest product processing facilities. Furthermore, Whatcom County has a long history of involvement in the forest industry, with many families and communities involved in forest management.

Goal 8H: Support increasing the viability of Whatcom County's forest products industry.

Policy 8H-1: Support improving the efficiency and flexibility of state and local environmental regulations affecting the forest products industry, in order to assure environmental protection and improve predictability for the forest products industry while minimizing the regulatory costs to forest landowners.

Policy 8H-2: Develop a range of non-regulatory programs, options, and incentives that forest landowners can employ to meet or exceed county environmental goals.

Policy 8H-3: Support the efforts of the forest landowners and managers in Whatcom County to operate in a long-term, sustainable manner as part of a stable, broad based economy.

- Policy 8H-4: Work cooperatively with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources to ensure the most productive and appropriate use of State Forest lands within Whatcom County.
- Policy 8H-5: Consider surface mining, along with rock crushing, washing, and sorting, when done as part of conducting forest practices within the forestry zones, as compatible uses.
- Policy 8H-6: Support forest product production facilities through appropriate planning, zoning, and land use regulations.
- Policy 8H-7: Encourage the United States Forest Service and the Department of Natural Resources to implement harvest practices that maximize the use of forest lands while allowing appropriate multiple uses.

Land Use Conflicts

One of the most significant impacts for timber landowners in Washington State is the growing number of conflicts between forest landowners and their neighbors. These conflicts are the result of expansion into the margins of commercial forest land base by people seeking residential land and recreational tracts, and who bring with them conflicting values concerning resource extraction, such as logging.

Goal 8H: Reduce land use conflicts between Whatcom County's forest and non-forest landowners.

- Policy 8I-1: Refine the Rural and Commercial Forestry zoning regulations to conserve productive forest lands of long-term commercial significance from conversion to non-compatible uses. This zoning recognizes the diversity of Forest Resource landowners and forestry land uses. This zoning should include provisions for compatible, non-forestry uses that encourage all forest landowners to maintain the productive forest land base while conserving them from conflicting uses.
- Policy 8I-2: Affirm Whatcom County Code Chapter 14.04, the Right-To-Practice-Forestry ordinance, which requires notification of property owners in the vicinity of forestry zones of the types of normal forest management operations likely to be conducted on forest land.
- Policy 8I-3: Prior to issuing a development permit or receiving approval for a rezone, every attempt should be made to annex all development into local fire district boundaries. Before a development permit or a rezone is approved, it should be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the County that adequate fire prevention measures will be in place for the resident and adjacent properties.
- Policy 8I-4: Support and encourage improved communication and understanding between forest landowners and the public through such mechanisms as voluntary forest management plans, community forest forums, and educational programs.

Policy 8I-5: Work cooperatively with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, forest landowners, and the general public to address community concerns and land use conflicts that may arise as a result of forest practices.

Fish and Wildlife

Use of forestlands can impact habitat, including riparian areas, stream flows, channel habitat structure, and water quality.

Goal 8J: Support the Department of Natural Resources to ensure forest practices avoid adverse impacts to the habitat of threatened and endangered fish and wildlife species and to marine waters that support shellfish resources.

Policy 8J-1: Ensure that adequate riparian buffers, based on best available science, are maintained along rivers and streams.

Policy 8J-2: Minimize sedimentation to rivers and streams, to the greatest extent possible, using BMPs.

Policy 8J-3: Ensure that riparian and stream functions are protected when forestlands are converted to non-forestry uses.