CHAPTER 2
COMMUNITY PROFILE

REGIONAL LOCATION

As shown below, in Figure 2.1, Skagit County is located in the northwestern part of Washington, stretching from Puget Sound to the crest of the Cascade Mountains. It is bordered by Whatcom County to the north, Okanogan and Chelan Counties to the east, and Snohomish County to the south. Rectangular in shape, the County covers about 1,735 square miles and measures about 24 miles from north to south, and 95 miles from east to west. The City of Mount Vernon serves as its County Seat.

Figure 2.1 Regional Location

Interstate 5 travels north and south, through the County, providing direct and easy linkage to Vancouver, BC in the north, and the Seattle metropolitan area in the south. State Highway 20 (the North Cascades Highway) provides west and east linkage through most of the larger communities in the County. It also serves as a major tourist route from Interstate 5 to Anacortes (west) and North Cascades National Park (east) and beyond. The east-west dimension of the County is unusually long, with driving distance from Deception Pass (southwest edge of County) to the eastern border being about 115 miles. Driving distances from Mount Vernon to various areas are listed in table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Distances from Mount Vernon

City	Distance
Anacortes, WA	21 miles
Marblemount, WA	46 miles
Seattle, WA	60 miles
Vancouver B.C.	75 miles
Tacoma, WA	92 miles
Winthrop, WA	132 miles
Yakima, WA	193 miles
Portland, OR	225 miles
Spokane, WA	311 miles

Burlington-Northern Railroad has several active spurs within Skagit County. Typical shipments along these routes include logs, and lumber. The port of Anacortes is a deep-water port accommodating sea-going ships, as well as tugs, barges, and tankers used for local transport. The Port Authority also operates the Anacortes Airport, a small, one-runway facility. The Skagit Regional Airport contains three runways and is located in Burlington. Despite this airport's ability to handle jet airliners, most county residents still travel to Sea-Tac or Vancouver for their major air travel.

NATURAL FEATURES

Moving from west to east in Skagit County, one encounters the leeward islands of the San Juan Archipelago, the broad delta and floodplain of the Skagit River, a broad valley punctuated by intermittent hills, rolling foothills on up to the glaciated peaks of the North Cascade Mountains. Elevations range from sea level along the County's tidal border, to just over 9,000 feet at the peak of Mount Logan in North Cascades National Park.

The Skagit River is the largest river in the County, and the second-largest in the State. Originating high in the Cascades, it flows about 90 miles through the County to its outlet at Fir Island, just south of Mount Vernon. Major tributaries to the Skagit River include the Cascade, Sauk, Suiattle, and Baker Rivers. Approximately 160 miles (almost 35,000 acres) of the Skagit, Sauk, Cascade and Suiattle Rivers are included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Other notable rivers in the County include portions of the Samish and Nooksack. Major lakes include Shannon, Cavanaugh, Big, Clear, McMurray, Campbell, and Erie. There are also numerous sloughs throughout the valley, including Wiley and Swinomish. Numerous wetlands adorn the county, along with the waters of Puget Sound.
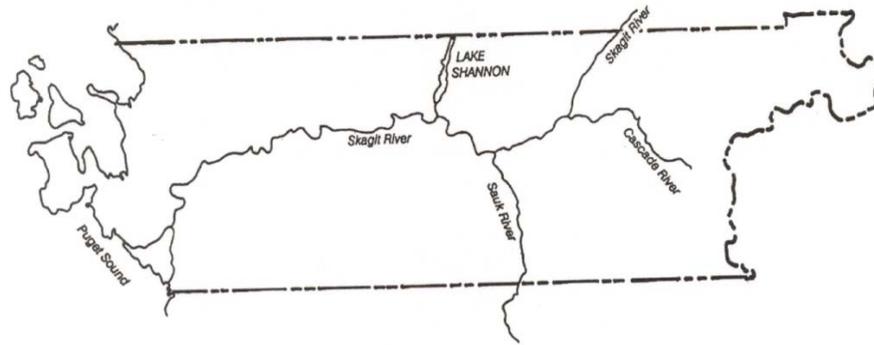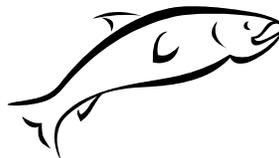
Figure 2.2 Major Physical Features

Though diking, logging, and other land conversions have altered Skagit County's landscape, it is still host to a wide variety of wildlife, including deer, elk, bear, mountain goats, cougar, and numerous birds and small mammals. Species of interest in the County include the Bald Eagle, Heron, Trumpeter Swan, and Orca Whale. Grizzly bear and Gray Wolf also inhabit portions of the County. Anadromous fish species include Chinook, Coho, and Chum Salmon, as well as Shad and Steelhead. Resident fish species include several trout species, bass, perch, crappie, sturgeon, catfish, and whitefish.

Western Skagit County's climate is typical of the Puget Sound Trough. Located in the rain shadows of the Olympic Mountains, the county receives a rainfall average of 32 inches per year, less than most other western Washington counties. The average annual minimum temperature is slightly over 40 degrees; the average maximum is about 60 degrees. Summer temperatures typically average 65 to 75 degrees. Marine air moderates temperature extremes in the west portion of the county, with the effect decreasing to the east. Precipitation generally increases with greater distance inland.

HISTORY

Prior to historical settlement, eleven Native American groups inhabited the area now known as Skagit County. These groups included the Chobahabish, Kikialius, Nooquachamish, Mesekwiguilse, Sbaleoch, Misskaiwhwa, Sahkumehhu, Noowhatah, Squinahmish, Swinomish, and Samish. The area making up Skagit County was formerly a part of Whatcom County. Skagit became its own county in 1883, named after the local Native American Tribe.

The first non-native intruders to the area built a small number of cabins on Fidalgo Island in 1858. Settlement spread to the head of Fidalgo Bay, with diking opening the tidal flats to farming. The first trading post was established in the LaConner area in 1867. By 1870, the lower Skagit Valley was seeing the beginnings of full-scale settlement. Travel was limited to boats. Beginning in 1874, monthly steamboat services began between Seattle and "Skagit City".

In 1890, there was speculation that the Fidalgo Island town of Anacortes would become a terminus for a transcontinental railroad. The conjecture generated a growth boom which increased the town's population from 200 on January 1st to 2000 by mid-March. Although Anacortes never became a terminus, it nevertheless was soon bustling with shingle mills, fish plants, lumber mills, and a box factory. By 1903, there were four shingle mills, and three sawmills. Sloans Shipyard on Guemes Island built ships during World War I and employed 600 people in the spring of 1917.

Settlement of the area near and above what we know now as Mount Vernon was limited due to two large log jams on the Skagit River. In 1874, dismantling of the log jams began, opening up portions of the channel to navigation. Ten years later, the channel was fully cleared. Soon the City of Mount Vernon was founded and supported by the local timber industry. By 1889, steamboat service had expanded to no less than 15 boats, which ran between Seattle and Mount Vernon. In 1891, the Great Northern Railway was extended to Mount Vernon.

With navigation of the upper Skagit River possible, timber harvest and mining increased, and settlement expanded into the upriver area. The towns of Sedro (a Spanish reference to the large cedars in the area) and Woolley (named after the founder of a lumber mill) merged to form the city of Sedro-Woolley. By this time, the old growth fir and cedar were being cut and sold at a furious pace and the new city flourished.

An 1882 logging camp was the first development in the Burlington area with several shingle mills soon to follow. By 1891, the railway through the area made Burlington a center of transportation. Lyman was settled in the early 1870's with a lumber mill and shingle mill being

its earliest employers. Coal and iron deposits brought Hamilton's first residents, and the lumber industry turned it into an early 1900's boom town, with over 2000 inhabitants.

In 1909, Concrete was founded (named for its principal product), and boasted a cigar factory, stores, theater and confectionery. Concrete boasted the State's largest cement plant until closing in 1968. The Superior Cement Plant supplied almost half of the cement for the Grand Coulee Dam, as well as materials for other nearby dams.

Rockport was founded in 1901 and served as the terminus of the rail line from Anacortes. It was a popular stop-over during the construction of Diablo and Ross Dams. Marblemount began as a tent saloon (and later trading post) during the gold rush of the 1890's. Many miners came upstream by canoe to prospect along the Skagit River and the mountains above the Cascade River. Silver devaluation brought the end to that era for the community.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

According to the US Census, county and state population, growth rates were fairly similar in the 1890's. Since then, however, growth in Skagit County has outpaced state-wide growth. Growth rates for the various cities in the County are displayed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2
Historical Population Growth, 1970 - 2000

Area	1970	1980	Percent Change (1970-1980)	1990	2000	Percent Change (1990-2000)
WA State	3,413,244	4,132,253	21%	4,866,692	5,894,121	21%
Skagit County	52,381	64,138	22%	79,555	102,979	29%
Anacortes	7,701	9,013	17%	11,451	14,557	27%
Burlington	3,138	3,894	24%	4,349	6,757	55%
Concrete	573	592	3%	735	790	7%
Hamilton	201	283	41%	228	309	36%
LaConner	639	660	3%	656	761	16%
Lyman	324	285	-12%	275	409	49%
Mount Vernon	8,804	13,009	48%	17,647	26,232	49%
Sedro Woolley	4,598	6,110	33%	6,031	8,658	44%
Total (Cities)	25,978	33,846	31%	41,372	58,473	41%
Unincorporated	26,403	30,292	14%	38,183	44,506	17%

Source: Economic Association of Skagit County

The US Census provides information for areas within counties, called subdivisions. Skagit County has been divided into 14 such areas in Figure 2.3.
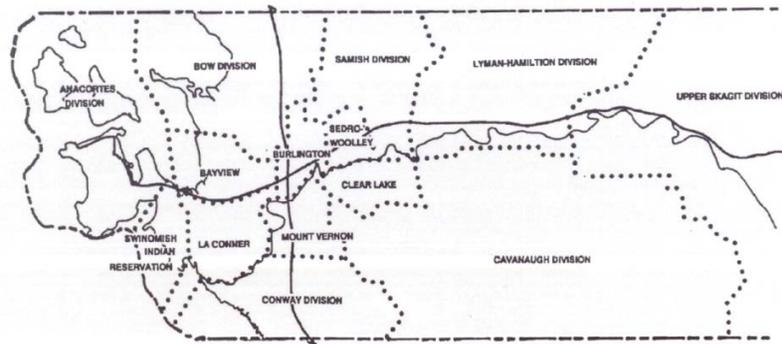

Figure 2.3
Census Tracts

County-wide, average household income was about $31,000 in 1990 and $43,000 in 2000. In general, average income showed a general decline from 1980 to 1987, and then began to increase with job growth in the late 1980's. Skagit County household incomes have increased annually since the local recession in the 1980's. Despite the recent increase, local household incomes continue to decline, relative to Washington State and national averages.

Age distributions are important because age is a major determinant of recreation interests and levels of participation within a county. In general, as a population ages, relative participation in active or competitive recreation activities declines. Overall, youth (younger than 18) tend to participate more frequently than any other age group, and tend to favor more strenuous and competitive activities, relative to other age groups. Young adults (ages 18 to 34) are also active, and form the core of adult competitive sports.

Adults (ages 35 - 64), on the other hand, appear to have less time to devote to recreational activities. They tend to maintain their homes and jobs more. Recreational time is at a premium and often limited to weekends and occasional evenings.

The senior population (age 65 and over) has more available time for recreation. As a group, they tend to favor more passive activities, such as walking, gardening, picnicking, boating, swimming, and crafts.

As shown in Table 2.3, Skagit County has an aging adult population. The median age in Skagit County was 32 in 1980, 35 in 1990, and 38 in 2000. This is typical of most areas as the "baby boomers" become older and the expected human life span increases.

Table 2.3
Age Distribution, 1990 - 2000

	Skagit County		Skagit County	
Age Group	Number of People 1990	Percent of Total 1990	Number of People 2000	Percent of Total 2000
Under 20	23,036	29%	30,099	29.2%
20 - 44	28,705	36.1%	33,573	32.6%
45 - 59	11,658	14.7%	20,036	19.5%
60 and over	16,156	20.3%	19,271	18.7%

Source: Economic Development Association of Skagit County

As shown in Table 2.4 below, Skagit County is primarily made up of Caucasians. By percentage, Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group in Skagit County.

Table 2.4
Ethnic Distribution

Ethnic Group	Number of People 1990	Percent of Total 1990	Number of People 2000	Percent of Total 2000
White	74,136	93.2%	89,070	86.5%
Black	318	.4%	450	.4%
Asian or Pacific Islander	795	1.0%	1,538	1.5%
Native American	1,750	2.2%	1,909	1.9%
Hispanic	2,546	3.2%	11,536	11.2%

Source: Economic Development Association of Skagit County

Despite recent economic diversification, Skagit County's economy remains heavily resource dependent, with primary sectors being agriculture and food processing, lumber and wood products, oil refining, tourism, retail, and marine-related industries (fishing, processing, boat building and repair). The unemployment rate was over 15 percent from 1981-1987, but has remained less than 10 percent since. The 1990 jobless rate was 6.7 percent; in 1995 it was 8.9

percent, and 6.8 percent in 2000. The Skagit County unemployment rate has generally been 1 to 2 percentage points higher than the Washington State average.

POPULATION GROWTH

In most communities, one of the primary elements affecting recreation demand is population growth. Table 2.5 shows county population for the year 2000 and forecasts for 2005 through 2020. As shown, population growth is expected to remain near its current rates. In relative terms, Skagit County is expected to grow at a much higher annual rate than the State of Washington. State-wide growth was close to 1.2 percent between 1955 and 2000, and expected to be at 1.1 percent from 2000 to 2005. With projected County growth averaging above 2 percent, the County population is expected to grow at twice the rate of the State during the next 16 years.

Table 2.5

Population and Project Increases

Year	Total Population	Average Annual Increase
2000	103,478	-
2005	114,635	2.20%
2010	125,508	1.95%
2015	137,714	1.95%
2020	152,812	2.20%

Source: Skagit County Planning