



# Skagit County Planning & Development Services

DALE PERNULA, AICP *Director*

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## Supplemental Staff Report

From: Dale Pernula, AICP, Director

Re: Capital Facilities Plan 2014 Update

Date: September 30, 2014

### Responses to Planning Commissioner Inquiries

① **What happened to the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan after Planning Commission review? Where is the adopting ordinance?**

The Board of County Commissioners deleted sections of proposed Chapter 5 of the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan and then adopted it as part of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan Amendments docket. The final version of the plan is available from the PDS website at [www.skagitcounty.net/planning](http://www.skagitcounty.net/planning) (click on "Comprehensive Plan") along with the signature pages from the ordinance adopting the plan.

① **Are capital projects currently in progress this year included in the inventory tables?**

Capital projects that are in construction during this year are not listed in the 2015 CFP inventory or projects list. For example, the Dairy Creek Culvert Replacement project, listed as a 2014 project in the 2014 CFP, is still expected to be completed this year and does not appear in the 2015 CFP inventory table (because it is not yet constructed), nor in the 2015 projects list (because it is not planned for construction in 2015). Although the projects are not strictly required, CFP staff had planned to include such projects in the inventory tables with a notation that they were in-progress, but that was apparently not communicated well to other department staff.

① **How has County employment changed since last year's edition?**

The employee counts table in the 2014 CFP are from a different month than the 2015 CFP, resulting in a significant change in the number of seasonally-employed workers. Staff is evaluating better ways to represent this information or which data subset is most valuable for the purpose of capital facilities planning.

① **Multiple questions related to changes in County-owned capital facilities inventory and projects**

Last year's plan indicated that the MV Family Resource Center would be sold. That sale occurred, and the facility was consequently removed from the County's inventory.

The Worksource Building was erroneously listed in the County's Capital Facilities inventory. It is a planned acquisition that has not yet occurred. Staff recommend removal from the inventory table.

We are awaiting information from Public Works about paving the parking lot at the Concrete Shop and summary tables for the TIP. Planning Commissioners may need to ask those questions at deliberations.

① **Where are public surveys located showing support for trails?**

The Parks and Recreation Plan includes extensive documentation of strong public support for non-motorized and recreational trails. The plan collected public input from a variety of sources, including statistically valid public opinion surveys (2004 and 2011), public meetings, input from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and parks user groups, and park and trail usage statistics (Parks Plan, p. 1-3).

Chapter 7, Public Input Survey and Public Meetings (Parks Plan, p. 7-1), begins as follows:

There are several tools we use to acquire input from the public. It is our goal to extract information from a wide sample of residents and not just rely on those who are more vocal than the County as a whole. A detailed data table of the input from the countywide public meetings and month long public input survey is found in appendices of this Comprehensive [Parks and Recreation] Plan.

Those various forms of input have indicated consistently and repeatedly that “Trails continue to be **the most requested recreational need in Skagit County**” (emphasis added; Parks Plan, p. 9-7; see also pages 7-2 and 7-3; 7-9 through 7-12; 10-7, and 11-3; and Appendices A, B and C).

The adopted Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan indicates a similar level of support for non-motorized and recreational trails among the Skagit County public. The planning process for that plan utilized public meetings, meetings with council or planning commission members from each city and town, outreach to organizations working in the areas of open space, environmental and natural resource lands conservation, and a statistically valid survey of the voting public.

Of survey respondents, 64% were supportive or very supportive of “public access trails extending through and outwards from UGAs” (FAQ section, p. 4), while 63% were supportive/very supportive of the Cascade Trail and 58% were supportive/very supportive of the Centennial Trail (Chapter 3, p. 10). (The survey used a 1-5 rating system, with 1-2 expressing lack of support; 3 a neutral position; and 5-6 support or strong support).

① **Is the Open Space Plan a trails plan?**

The Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan, adopted by the Board of County Commissioners by Ordinance O20090009, fulfills the mandate found in RCW 36.70A.160 to “identify open space corridors within and between urban growth areas....[including] lands useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and connection of critical areas.” The plan was developed in response to an appeal by Friends of Skagit County to the Growth Management Hearings Board, which determined that the County’s provisions for UGA open space were inadequate and not explicitly mapped.

While not specifically a trails plan, the Open Space Concept Plan does discuss existing trails and proposed trails and how they fit within the open space network described in the plan (in

particular, see Chapter 2, Findings, pp. 7-8; and Chapter 3, Plans, pp. 10-11). As noted above, nearly two-thirds of the public who participated in the opinion survey conducted as part of the planning process expressed strong to very strong support for recreational trails being a part of the UGA open space network, as well as support for specific existing and proposed trails.

At the same time, the plan acknowledges that trails must be located and designed carefully to ensure that their users do not disrupt private property and activities, including working farm and forest lands: “[T]his plan has been modified to address these concerns by emphasizing passive forms of open space next to working farms and forests, the careful location of trail corridors, and providing interpretive information about their productive value.” (FAQs, p. 5)

### ① **What is the long-term plan for trails in the County?**

The County’s long-term plan for trails is best reflected in the Board-adopted 2013 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan and in the Board-adopted 2009 Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan.

The Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan contains extensive documentation and analysis regarding Skagit County parks facilities, including numerous recreational trails. It discusses various aspects of County parks facilities (including trails) in different chapters of the plan, including an inventory of existing facilities (chapter 3); park goals and objectives (chapter 4); existing operations (chapter 6); public input (chapter 7); level of service analysis (chapter 8); use patterns (chapter 9); analysis of needs (chapter 10); recommendations (chapter 11); and implementation strategy (chapter 12).

- Chapter 4, pages 4-4 and 4-5, describes the Parks and Recreation Department’s trail-development goals and objectives.
- Chapter 11, Recommendations, uses data from surveys, use patterns, level of service comparisons, public input, and other factors to rank park facility needs from Level 1 (High Priority) through Level 4 (No to Low Priority).
- Pages 11-3 through 11-9 comprise the Parks Department’s Recommended Trails Plan, which includes rankings for each park and recreational facility and a description of each facility’s needs. Both the Centennial Trail (p. 11-5) and Cascade Trail Improvements (p. 11-6) are listed as Level 1 priorities.

As noted above, both the Cascade Trail and the Centennial Trail are included in the UGA open space network concept described in the adopted Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan. This demonstrates consistency between the UGA Open Space Plan and the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan.

## Public Comments

The written comments below are available on the proposal website at [www.skagitcounty.net/cfp](http://www.skagitcounty.net/cfp).

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Connie Munsey	n/a	Testimony + Form (9/16)	Opposes Cascade Trail
Carol Ehlers	n/a	Form (9/22)	Wants inclusion of BVR roads
Todd Harrison	WSDOT	Letter (9/23)	Supports Centennial Trail
Marie J. Erbstoeszzer	n/a	Email (9/23)	Supports CFP and TIP
Sylvia Matterand	n/a	Testimony + 2 emails (9/24)	Supports Centennial Trail, replacement of Hwy 9 bridge
Ed Stauffer	Friends of Skagit	Testimony (9/23)	
Gary Hagland	Skagit CAPR	Testimony + letter (9/23)	Opposes trail projects
Brenda Cunningham	Skagit Land Trust	Testimony (9/23)	
Liz McNett Crowl	n/a	Testimony + letter (9/25)	
Ed Lipsey	n/a	Testimony + letter (9/22)	Recommendations re trail
Ivan Bacus Jr.	n/a	Testimony + photos (9/23)	Opposes Cascade Trail
Judy Olson	n/a	Email (9/24)	
Aileen Good	n/a	Testimony + Letter (9/19)	Opposes Cascade Trail
Randy & Aileen Good	n/a	Email (9/17)	Opposes Cascade Trail
Randy Good	n/a	Letter (9/20)	Opposes Cascade Trail
Randy Good	n/a	Testimony	
Randy & Aileen Good	n/a	Letter (9/25)	Opposes Cascade Trail
Ellen Bynum	Friends of Skagit	Email (9/25)	Various; opposes trail projects
Ellen Bynum	Friends of Skagit	Email (9/25)	Open Space Plan not adopted
Roger Mitchell	n/a	Email (9/25)	Questions

## Responses to Public Comments

### ☛ **The County has no comprehensive trail plan.**

As noted above, a comprehensive trail plan is contained in the 2013 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan, beginning on page 11-3. According to extensive evaluation criteria and procedures, the Centennial Trail and Cascade Trail Improvements rank as a level 1 need, the County's highest ranking.

🗨️ **When it acquired the Cascade Trail, Skagit County agreed to do everything the railroad was responsible for, including fencing the trail.**

Incorrect. The railroad was not responsible for fencing the rail line. Skagit County has addressed this fencing issue multiple times. See attached memo from the Parks & Recreation Department, which it sent to the commenting landowner in 2008.

🗨️ **Cascade Trail is dangerous due to proximity to river.**

The Skagit River is dynamic, changing its course over time. Mile 7 of the trail is adjacent to the river and several soft armoring projects have been constructed over the past 15 years to fortify this section. We can't always predict the effect a significant high water occurrence will have on the County's transportation infrastructure. If this section of trail paving is funded, Public Works Engineering Division will need to evaluate the stability of the stretch of Mile 7.

🗨️ **Cascade Trail is dangerous because it attracts criminal behavior.**

A Skagit County Parks Ranger followed up on numerous claims of crime attributed to the trail over the years. The ranger tried to substantiate these claims with the Sheriff's Department but did not find the alleged incidents on file, leading him to conclude that the claims were false.

Homeowners nationwide express the same concerns and fears about proposed trails in their neighborhoods. But studies in various parts of the United States seem to show that concerns about trails lowering property values and increasing crime are unfounded. In fact, trails have consistently been shown to increase (or have no effect on) property values; and to increase (or have no measurable effect on) public safety; and to have an overwhelming positive influence on the quality of life for trail neighbors as well as the larger community.

Moreover, the proposed Cascade Trail projects are not to establish new trails, but to pave existing trails. To the extent that increases recreational use of the trails, that could conceivably lead to an increase in public safety as more people equals more eyes.

🗨️ **Skagit County does not have clear title to Cascade or Centennial trail corridors.**

The **Cascade Trail** already exists; the proposed project would simply pave the existing trail. Skagit County currently has no pending claims against its interest in the Cascade Trail, and no commenter has alleged any specific issues with the County's property interests in the trail.

This is a very old argument. In 1999, commenter Randy Good sued Skagit County to challenge its acquisition under the National Trails System Act of the railroad right-of-way that became the Cascade Trail.<sup>1</sup> The County received summary judgment in its favor from the Court of Appeals,<sup>2</sup> which ruled the landowners had to bring their claim in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. Good requested review from the state Supreme Court, but was denied review.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Good's previous suit against the U.S. Surface Transportation Board in the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. *Good v. Surface Transp. Bd.*, 1998 U.S. App. LEXIS 7905, 1998 WL 202143 (D.C. Cir. Mar. 31, 1998)

<sup>2</sup> *Good v. Skagit County*, 104 Wash.App. 670, 17 P.3d 1216 (2001).

<sup>3</sup> *Good v. Skagit County*, 144 Wn.2d 1013, 32 P.3d 283 (2001).

For the **Centennial Trail** project, the proposal description clearly indicates the County will purchase right-of-way for the trail. The County has purchased existing sections of the trail in fee simple.

🗨️ **How does *Brandt Trust v United States* apply to the proposed trail projects?**

This 2014 U.S. Supreme Court decision does not apply to trails, e.g., the Cascade Trail, acquired through the federal railbanking statute. With the Centennial Trail, the County acquired property in fee simple, so it is not affected either.

🗨️ **Are LOS standards required for non-motorized TIP projects? Have they been applied to the trail projects?**

The 2013 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan does include level of service standards for park and recreational trail projects; see Chapter 8, specifically p. 8-4. The plan includes an extensive analysis of the County’s park and trail facilities, including inventory of existing facilities (chapter 3); park goals and objectives (chapter 4); existing operations (chapter 6); public input (chapter 7); level of service analysis (chapter 8); use patterns (chapter 9); analysis of needs (chapter 10); recommendations (chapter 11); and implementation strategy (chapter 12). On the basis of this extensive analysis, both the Cascade Trail and Centennial Trail have been identified as Level 1 (High) priorities.

🗨️ **What is Skagit County’s liability related to trails of this type?**

Washington State landowners (including the County) that make their property available to the public for recreational use without fee have immunity from most civil liability under the concept of “Recreational Use Immunity” codified at RCW 4.24.210.

🗨️ **No environmental review has been done on Cascade Trail.**

Skagit County Parks and Recreation pursues permits for all its projects. Environmental review is conducted after permit application for the identified project.

🗨️ **No SEPA review for trails, even though trails traverse critical areas.**

All projects undergo appropriate State Environmental Policy Act review and other permitting before construction. SEPA review is required for construction projects unless they meet a specified exemption.

🗨️ **US District Court case mandates Skagit County perform SEPA review on trails.**

Commenter did not cite any particular court case, and we are not immediately aware of any relevant case.

🗨️ **No adopted Trail Improvement Plan for Cascade Trail.**

We do not create documents called “Trail Improvement Plans.” However, the Cascade Trail is discussed and analyzed extensively in the 2013 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan.

🗨️ **No public input on Cascade/Centennial trails.**

The adoption of the current proposal is an obvious opportunity for public input. Responses above have also documented numerous opportunities for public input before adoption of the

existing 2013 Parks and Recreation Plan and prior plans. The parks plan not only has had extensive public input, but that input has consistently identified trails as the most requested recreational need in Skagit County.

The adopted Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan also involved significant public input, including a statistically valid public opinion survey. That survey indicated strong public support for public access trails and facilities that extend through and outwards from the urbanizing areas (64%), and specifically for the Cascade Trail (63%) and the Centennial Trail (58%).

**🗨️ Cascade Trail should be reopened as a rail line. Concrete area has 100 years of mineable limestone. County needs more work, not more recreation.**

The Cascade Trail was once a segment of Burlington Northern's railroad line. However, Burlington Northern discontinued all rail service in 1987 and had abandoned the rail line and removed the railroad tracks, ties, and ballast, by 1996. Skagit County acquired the rail line via the National Trails System Act's Rails-to-Trails Program in 1993. Placing the abandoned rail corridor into service as a trail is referred to as "rail banking," because it allows the railroad to re-establish service in the corridor at some future date.

In 2005, the Washington State Legislature appropriated money for the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to perform a feasibility study to examine what it would take to restore freight rail service along the former rail line. [WSDOT's 2006 study](#) found that "the total estimated cost to restore rail service along the former rail line between Sedro-Woolley and Concrete without an adjacent trail is \$60.2 million in 2006 dollars. It would cost approximately \$86.8 million (in 2006 dollars) if the rail line was paralleled by a pedestrian/bicycle/equestrian trail." The study identified other challenges, including the need to ensure there is demand for such rail service and to ensure that the rail line could safely operate within the Skagit River floodway.

Additionally, the report stated: "Unless there is sufficient traffic on the line to generate enough revenue to keep the rail line in a state of good repair, the owner of the rail line may have to provide some type of operating subsidy to maintain the tracks, bridges, ballast, ties, and public crossings. If the owner is a public agency, then these operating subsidies must be provided through taxes collected by some public entity." (p. 7-2)

Commenters provided no basis to evaluate the "mineable limestone" assertion. Local mineral expert Mike Crawford (a member of the panel involved in the feasibility study) said resolutely at the study's conclusion that the cost/benefit didn't warrant a rail line and that there would be no rail line placed in this corridor in a foreseeable timeline.

**🗨️ Proposed trails do not comply with RCW 47.30.040.**

The cited statute provides that "the following factors shall be *considered*" [emphasis added] before establishing a trail. One such factor is "inclusion of trail in a plan for a comprehensive trail system..." Although the statute does not require every trail to be included in a comprehensive trail plan, both trails *are* included in the adopted 2013 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan.

Moreover, the Cascade Trail already exists; the proposed project would simply pave an existing trail. The Centennial Trail already exists in several sections; the proposed project would acquire more property.

🗨️ **No plan to prevent Skagit River from washing out trail.**

There are sections where Wiseman Creek changed directions and subsequently caused damage to the trail. The creek has once again been ponded behind the trail, allowing water to flow under the bridge crossings. Skagit County has a long-term plan for a boardwalk in this vicinity.

🗨️ **Projects need demand evaluation. Paving too expensive compared to likely use.**

We do not currently expect monies to be budgeted for the Cascade Trail paving projects. If Skagit County Parks and Recreation were to ask for these dollars, the County Commissioners would require a funding plan and evaluation of priority for funding.

Already, the 2013 Parks and Recreation Plan includes an extensive analysis of the County's park and trail facilities including the Cascade and Centennial trails. This includes an inventory of existing facilities (chapter 3); park goals and objectives (chapter 4); existing operations (chapter 6); public input (chapter 7); level of service analysis (chapter 8); use patterns (chapter 9); analysis of needs (chapter 10); recommendations (chapter 11); and implementation strategy (chapter 12). On the basis of this extensive analysis both the Cascade Trail and Centennial Trail have been identified as Level 1 (High) priorities.

Ultimately, budget and spending choices are decisions for the County's governing body, i.e., the Board of County Commissioners.

🗨️ **RCW 36.70A.070(6) requires the Comprehensive Plan to include a transportation element with forecasts of future needs and demands.**

The Comprehensive Plan (and the Capital Facilities Plan update) incorporates by reference the [2003 Transportation Systems Plan](#) ("the TSP"). The TSP, which will be updated next year as part of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, includes demand forecasts.

🗨️ **RCW 36.70A.070(8) requires the Comprehensive Plan to include demand estimates for trails.**

The referenced statute does not contain such a requirement. Instead, the statute requires the Parks and Recreation element to include "estimates of park and recreation demand for at least a ten-year period," which does not imply that the County must estimate level of demand for every trail or every trail segment. Moreover, RCW 36.70A.070(9) eliminates the requirement to include a Parks and Recreation element at all.

Again, the Cascade Trail is already established. The proposed projects would simply pave the existing trail. The 2013 Parks and Recreation Plan already contains significant documentation of park and recreation demand resulting in the Cascade and Centennial trails being identified as Level 1 (High) priorities.

🗨️ **Projects need to be compared to Comprehensive Plan for internal consistency.**

The projects are consistent with the Non-motorized Transportation Goals and policies found on pages 8-8 and 8-9 of the Transportation Element (Chapter 8) of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan. Commenters did not identify inconsistencies.

🗨️ **Projects should mitigate for loss of farmland, forestland, and residential rural uses.**

Skagit County has no general policy requiring such mitigation. Regardless, the rail corridor where the Cascade Trail is now located was established in the 1890s so presumably any loss of farmland, forestland, or residential rural uses resulting from the establishment of the corridor occurred a long, long time ago.

🗨️ **Parks and Rec should construct new Clear Lake restroom.**

This restroom will be in place before spring of 2015.

🗨️ **Open Space Plan was not adopted by Skagit County.**

Friends of Skagit submitted the following comment:

The Board of Friends of Skagit County would like to reiterate that the UGA Open Space Concept Plan has not been officially adopted by Skagit County or any of the towns and cities or SCOG... We would appreciate staff and elected officials using consistently truthful and accurate words to describe the UGA OS Concept Plan and its status, as any inaccurate suggestions misleads the public.

In fact, the Board of Skagit County Commissioners adopted the Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan (available at [www.skagitcounty.net/openspace](http://www.skagitcounty.net/openspace)) on September 8, 2009, by [Ordinance O20090009](#). The Open Space Plan went through the same process for adoption that Comprehensive Plan Amendments go through, i.e. public comment, public hearing, and review and recommendation by the Planning Commission. County staff has repeatedly informed Friends of Skagit and its director that the Open Space Plan *has* been adopted by the Board. Staff does not know why Friends of Skagit continues to claim otherwise.

## Attachments

- Skagit County Parks and Recreation Department memo regarding fencing of Cascade Trail (March 7, 2008)
- Excerpts from Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Plan (adopted September 8, 2009)
- Excerpts from Skagit County Parks & Recreation 2013 Comprehensive Plan (adopted December 3, 2013)

# Memo

To: Robert Vaux, Parks Director, Skagit County Parks and Recreation  
From: Brian Adams, Operations and Lands Manager, Skagit County  
Parks and Recreation  
Date: March 7, 2008  
Subject: Procedures Concerning Cascade Trail Fence Damage.

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## I. Factual Background.

The Cascade Trail bisects a number of properties all along its east/west route as it runs a length of the Skagit River corridor. It crosses several creeks, sloughs, and channels as it winds through the lower reaches of the watershed. There are neighboring fences within the parcel's boundaries and we have been willing to leave these fences within County owned rail banked property as long as the fence doesn't interfere with the movement of people who use the trail for non-motorized transportation and/or recreation.

The trail corridor width is generally 100 feet. There are places where it is at least 200 feet but for most of the length the public trail corridor is 100'. Within the confines of the county trail corridor there are agricultural fences, a gravel trail surface, and vegetation. The vegetation includes a mix of multi canopied trees and underbrush. Both native plants and non-native plants are found along the corridor. Skagit County sprays herbicides on the trail corridor during the growing season to help control the prolific growth of the exotic vegetation. We generally spray to the fence line of the neighboring properties. The larger trees along the corridor are a varied mix of both deciduous and coniferous varieties.

## **II. Summary of Procedures.**

On occasion, natural processes cause trees to fall from our park corridor on to neighboring properties. When these trees fall they often will break or damage barbed wire strands and posts. As part of the County's good neighbor philosophy the Parks Department has sometimes repaired these fences and posts in the past (subject to the procedure and limitations further described below).

### **a. Fence damage caused by trees falling from County park land.**

The process generally happens in one of two ways. Our east county ranger may find the damage and make the determination of whether the fallen tree came from within our boundaries. We also may get phone calls from neighboring property owners alerting us to the fallen trees. The phone call will often be taken by our front office staff and forwarded to me. I take the information and call or e-mail one of our staff to make a site visit to document the damage. Usually one of our Park Rangers is dispatched to the scene to view the damage and make contact with the landowner. Once the determination of damage is made, the Park Ranger will call the appropriate staff to let them know if there is an immediate threat of resource loss due to the damage. If there are livestock that are within the fence boundaries and the fence is in need of immediate repair, we often try to dispatch the needed amount of staff to take care of the problem. While the County has no legal obligation to repair the fence, we have often done this work out of courtesy to the Park's neighbors.

### **b. Fence damage caused by trees located on private land (or other causes).**

If it is determined that the damage is the result of trees fallen from the landowner side of the fence we report our assessment to the landowner so that they can make the repairs to the fence in a timely manner. If we determine the fence has collapsed due to rotted posts or other deteriorating factors, we will let the owner know that the fence is in need of repair, maintenance and/or replacement. Agricultural fences have a life expectancy and will often succumb to the eroding forces of nature. Obviously, the County has no obligation to repair fences under these circumstances.

### **c. Conclusion.**

While the County is under no legal obligation to repair any such fencing, for the time being, our future response to these fence issues will generally continue to be the same. Upon receipt of a complaint, we will assess the fence and alleged fence damage to determine whether the damage was likely a result of a tree falling from County park property. If so, we may agree to do the necessary repairs, and we would only repair the section of fence damaged by the tree. When possible, we will retie the original wire. In rare occasions we will bring new material to do the repairs.

The County will not maintain, repair, or replace fencing that is damaged due to other causes. Fences that have simply outlived their life expectancies have been and will continue to be the responsibility of the fence owner, regardless of any alleged tree damage. Fences that are damaged by the trees not belonging to the County will also continue to be the responsibility of the landowner.

We will continue to obey maintenance agreements with property owners along the trail. There are atypical maintenance agreements on record that were penned with neighboring property owners when the trail was originally established. These agreements were made due to the reversionary rights of a limited amount of Park neighbors. These particular agreements are not the norm and are not blanket policies (or standard practice) for the entire corridor.

EXCERPTS

2013



# Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan



Skagit County Parks and Recreation  
315 South Third Street  
Mount Vernon, WA 98273



December 2013  
Final Adoption

will provide the department with policy direction and implementation of strategies. It helps to provide direction for SCPR in regards to property acquisition, park development, capital improvement planning, and programs for the next six years.

The elements contained in this plan include:

- An analysis of the community's population and setting
- An analysis of existing parks, open space areas and trail facilities
- An analysis of existing department operations
- An assessment of recreation and facility needs
- Recommendations for the acquisition and development of parks, open space and trail systems
- Recommendations related to management, administration, and other aspects of providing park and recreation services
- Recommendations for funding and implementing the plan

## **PLANNING PROCESS**

The planning process consisted of four basic steps. We used all studies available to us, including the study conducted by Applied Research Northwest (ARN) for the prior plan. The ARN survey asked Skagit County residents a number of specific questions in order to obtain estimates of residents' preferences for parks and recreation facilities development and priorities for future planning. Questions related to recent activities, desired expansion of existing facilities (including athletic fields, campgrounds, trails, etc.) and the addition of a new public indoor facility including classrooms and a multi-purpose gym. Development of the Northern State Recreation Area was also included in the study. We also used recent surveys from the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) as well as a public input survey done through the internet.

The second step was to hold public meetings throughout the three County districts. The meetings served as a forum for listening to the concerns and desires of County residents. An internet survey was developed to help the public communicate their desires.

The third step of the process was to reassess the parks and recreational services and verify as to what modifications to the current levels of service (LOS) standards are presently warranted. This determination was made through public meetings, the county-wide survey, input from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), consultation with user groups, as well as input from Skagit County Parks and Recreation (SCPR) staff.

The fourth step was to refine the previously established vision and set goals to support the implementation of the modified plan. The modified plan included adjustments to previous recommendations for park and recreation services. These services consist of improvements to existing parks, acquisition and development of new parks, and changes to the administrative and operation functions of the Department.

The fifth and final step includes a series of implementation strategies for funding and managing the actions of SCPR for the next six years.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public participation in this type of study is critical because local needs vary, depending upon the values local residents place on their region. Since every region is different, national standards or analogous recommendations may not meet Skagit County's specific recreation needs. As a result, public involvement in the planning process was essential and was solicited with a multipronged approach.

The level of public involvement included:

- Surveys
- Public Meetings
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Input
- SCPR Staff Input
- Contributions from Local User Groups

## **KEY MECHANISMS**

Skagit County Parks receives input from the general public. The flow of input comes in many forms including, but not limited to:

### **Parks and Recreation Advisory Board:**

Skagit County Parks and Recreation has a 9-member advisory board which meets monthly. The Park Board reviews acquisition offers, policy recommendations, works in concert with park staff to develop master plans, and provides input into development projects. Over the next six years, the Park Board will continue to provide a sounding board for the public to provide input about a variety of park issues. These meetings are advertised by web and the agenda allows time for the public to comment and/or submit proposals.

### **Site Master Plan Processes:**

Park sites with significant development opportunities are typically subjected to a master plan process. This process incorporates input from a variety of park users, neighbors, and the general public in developing the future vision for a given park. As such, it is a good vehicle for folks to express their opinions on their park needs. For sites which do not go through a formal master plan process, neighborhood meetings are a good way for concerned citizens to develop an understanding of planning and development efforts.

**Public Comments:**

Skagit County Parks and Recreation staff has contact with their clientele on a daily basis. This contact provides a forum for staff to receive recurring advice, criticism, comments, assessment, analysis, and/or praise from park users. Letters, electronic mail, phone calls, and other types of correspondence come in regularly. This information is often presented and discussed at SCPR staff meetings. This informal type of feedback from the public is taken in earnest and is another piece of the formula which contributes to everyday decisions and long range planning made by the department.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY AND PUBLIC MEETINGS**

There are several tools we use to acquire input from the public. It is our goal to extract information from a wide sample of residents and not just rely on those who are more vocal than the County as a whole. A detailed data table of the input from the countywide public meetings and month long public input survey is found in appendices of this Comprehensive Plan. This chapter contains the summaries of comments we obtained through our interface with the public.

Identifying recreation needs is a difficult task because every region is different and community values vary according to many internal factors. In essence, identifying recreation needs is the process of the comparing the supply of existing facilities and programs against the demand for facilities and programs demonstrated by local residents. In Skagit County it is somewhat more complicated because the region also attracts significant users who live beyond the County boundary. Two of the sources of information used to quantify community desires and establish program and/or facility priorities were household surveys and a series of community workshop meetings.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE 2011 HOUSEHOLD PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY**

For the 2012 Comprehensive Plan Update, Skagit County Parks and Recreation (SCPR) prepared a public input survey that was delivered via the internet. This survey was open for the entire month of June 2011. The overall goal of the study was to provide SCPR with estimates of residents' preferences for parks and recreation facilities development and priorities for future planning. This survey was open to all residents of the county and was advertised in the following ways

1. Two press-releases and subsequent public service announcements in the Skagit Valley Herald,
2. An invitation was sent to the entire customer database of the Parks Department;
3. A link listing on the Skagit County splash page as well as the Parks Dept splash page;
4. An invitation was sent to all city planning departments and all city parks departments;
5. An invitation was sent to Parks Advisory Board for re-distribution to other user groups;
6. The survey was advertised during the public meetings held in late 2010 and early 2011;
7. The survey was advertised on TV channel Skagit 21.

At the conclusion of the survey 353 households completed the survey. Once a household (computer) had completed the survey, software allowed the survey to be modified but not taken

a second time. This placed some sidebars on attempts to complete more than one survey. It is acknowledged the 2011 public input survey was limited as use for survey data in comparison to our other surveys that were done by random-sample and were statistically valid. The sampling of the 353 households was just another tool utilized for obtaining input from the public and served as a summary of public input gathered for use in this planning document. It was an augmentation of all other means of obtaining the public’s recreational need.

## 2011 PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY FINDINGS

### Park Usage:

Nearly all (93%) of the respondents reported their household had used a park facility in the past 12 months. The most popular activities respondents reported household members spending time on were trails in natural areas, trails near where people lived, access to shorelines, and visiting wetlands / viewing wildlife. (Table 7.1)

**Table 7.1  
Parks Activities Regularly Used\***

Park Activity	% of Use
Trails in Natural Areas	79%
Trails near where I live	67%
Access to Shorelines	55%
Wetlands / wildlife viewing	49%
Group Picnic / BBQ	41%
Playgrounds	29%
Boat Launch	28%
Camping - tents	20%
Special Events (such as Clear Lake Triathlon)	15%
Soccer	13%
Camping – RV’s	11%
Softball	7%
Baseball	7%
Basketball	6%
Disc Golf	5%

### Park needs and projected use:

1. When asked what the top four priorities are, respondents reported that trails were the top priority in terms of the uses currently provided by SCPR, specifically “wilderness trails-

non motorized” (1<sup>st</sup>), followed by “trails near where I live” (2<sup>nd</sup>), Preservation of natural open space (3<sup>rd</sup>), and “Shoreline Access” (4<sup>th</sup>).

- When respondents were asked to rank the most needed facilities, trails, open space and shoreline access were the top priorities. This was handled as an open ended response in an attempt to reduce bias but various responses were grouped into appropriate categories. Some priorities are not listed, such as “Model Rocket Launch Areas” as they represented less than one percent of the respondents. See the complete list in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2  
Top Development Priorities

Top Development Priorities	N=353
Walking / Hiking Trails	69.43%
Bike Trails	50.66%
Shoreline Access	25.76%
Open Space and Wetland	20.09%
Park / Picnic areas	15.28%
Outdoor Sports Fields	13.54%
Swimming Pool	13.10%
Indoor Rec Courts / Center	10.48%
Camping Facility	10.04%
Playground	9.61%
Boat Launch	7.42%
Equestrian Facilities	5.68%
Shooting Range	5.68%
Dog Park	2.62%
Education / Env Center	1.75%
Motorized Trails	1.75%
Disc Golf	1.75%
Golf	1.31%
Fairgrounds	1.31%

**Community satisfaction:**

In general the community appears satisfied with the quality and quantity of recreation and facilities current offered by SCPR.

### **Public Shoreline**

Skagit County shares a shoreline with the surrounding Puget Sound waters, is drenched with splendid valley rivers, and is peppered with a multitude of lakes. These waters characterize Skagit County as a unique and beautiful place. The enjoyment of County waters is crucial to its residents. Private landholdings continue to be swallowed up by development and residents are finding fewer places for recreation along the shorelines.

### **Recreation Trails**

Trails continue to be the most requested recreational need in Skagit County. County residents are interested in loop and linear type trails. While numerous trails exist throughout the county, residents like trail systems within walking distances of their homes. Even though trails are prevalent throughout many of the neighboring counties, the number and mileage is inadequately inventoried and accurate comparisons are difficult. Citizens of the county continue to ask for trails that connect regional trail systems. Linear trail systems such as the Centennial and Evergreen trails have missing links and acquisition will be necessary to see them for completion. Recent development projects on the Centennial Trail in Snohomish County will place user pressure on Skagit County to continue this corridor. Trails are relatively cheap to build and maintain. Because of their low cost and popularity, SCPR will continue to provide trails when opportunities arise. Motorized trails are currently being provided for at an adequate level. The Walker Valley Trails provided by the DNR have been reduced and were closed on a couple of occasions, resulting in a shortage of facilities for local motorized trail enthusiasts. If the closures become a normal occurrence, there will be renewed pressure to accommodate their needs. SCPR will have to continually monitor the Walker Valley situation.

### **Swimming Pool**

Skagit County is deficient in pools for its residents. Anacortes has a multi-purpose pool, there are two small pools in Mount Vernon—one for health club members, and another at the YMCA. Shelter Bay on South Fidalgo Island has two pools for use by their homeowner association. There is a need for a pool to accommodate the people of central and East County. Although County and State surveys have indicated a strong need for a multi-purpose swimming facility, the cost of maintaining such a facility would require strong partnerships and dedicated funds.

## ANALYZING PROGRAM AND FACILITY NEEDS

Park types serve as the vessel for programs and facilities. For the purpose of analyzing program and facility needs, a similar formula used for measuring the need for “park type” was used for establishing more specific park needs. LOS comparisons for programs and facilities were inventoried by the counties with which SCPR is making comparisons. Due to data insufficiencies in regards to comparable county service levels, SCPR ranks program/facility need by evaluating public input, use patterns and survey results.

**Table 10.2**  
**Point Rankings of Facility/Program Needs**

Facility Type	LOS	Public Input Survey	Use Patterns	Other Factors	Total	Average
Non-motorized Trails	N/A	5	5	5	15	5
Public Shoreline	N/A	5	5	5	15	5
Boat Launches	N/A	5	5	5	15	5
Camping - RV and Tent	N/A	3	5	3	11	3.7
Swimming Pools	N/A	5	5	1	11	3.7
Indoor Recreation Center (gym)	N/A	3	5	3	11	3.7
Softball Fields	N/A	3	3	3	9	3
Group Picnic	N/A	3	3	3	9	3
Motorized Trails	N/A	3	3	3	9	3
Shooting/ Training Facility	N/A	3	3	3	9	3
Equestrian Activities	N/A	3	1	5	9	3
Adult/Junior Soccer Fields	N/A	3	3	3	9	3
Disc Golf	N/A	1	3	3	7	2.3
Senior Baseball Fields	N/A	3	3	1	7	2.3
Youth Baseball Fields	N/A	3	3	1	7	2.3
Youth Soccer Fields	N/A	3	3	1	7	2.3
Env Education Center	N/A	3	3	1	7	2.3
Golf Course	N/A	3	N/A	1	4	2

### **Non-motorized Trails Score Derivation**

1. **Survey Results:** The survey shows a strong desire for the addition of trails in Skagit County. The surveys consistently rate trail facilities as the highest need with walking / hiking trails the top need and bike trails the second ranked need.
2. **Use Patterns:** The statewide patterns is consistent with local information, trails are the top ranked activity. Trails provide opportunities for wildlife viewings, bike riding, hiking, photography, walking pets, transportation, etc.
3. **Public Input and Other Factors:** Trails continue to be the number one park need of both Skagit County and Washington State residents. People like to have an array of trail choices throughout the County. Linear Trails often provide connectivity from parks, towns, resources, and other locations. With adequate widths, they can also provide important wildlife corridors. Additional ADA trails are needed in Skagit County. There are three types of trails that recreationalists specify in their needs analysis: linear transportation trails, loop trails, and destination trails.

### **Public Shoreline Score Derivation**

1. **Surveys:** Shoreline access and shoreline fishing are very highly ranked.
2. **Use Patterns:** Water activities and nature viewing are top SCORP activities.
3. **Public Input and Other Factors:** When river fish are running, the SCPR department is inundated with phone calls and visits from concerned recreationalists about the deficiency in regards to river access. Currently there are almost 50 miles of public shoreline in Skagit County. Of the fifty miles, about 30 are saltwater, 5 miles are lake, and 13 miles are River/Creek. Most of the public shoreline is in the western portion of Skagit County, and along the Skagit River in the eastern portion of the County. There is a deficiency in the amount of public shoreline access in Skagit County, especially in regards to lakes and rivers. Fishing, kayaking, paddle boarding, sailing, canoeing, water skiing, and many other recreational activities are connected to water access.

### **Boat Launch Score Derivation**

1. **Surveys:** surveys show a strong demand for additional boat ramps.
2. **Use Patterns:** Water Activates are a top SCORP activity. River access is declining as many sites have become inoperable. The sites that do exist are distributed sporadically.
3. **Public Input and Other Factors:** Puget Sound boating for fishing, wildlife viewing, and general pleasure is increasing in popularity statewide. As the state age trends move towards an older and retired population, the demand for this type of recreation is going to increase further. The San Juan's are especially popular and launching sites can be used to capacity at peak season. Marinas have been moored to capacity in some years. Improved access for those that can't afford marina moorage is needed. The Swinomish

## **PROJECT AND RENOVATION DESCRIPTIONS**

Following is a description of the above recommended projects. To assist in comparison they will be presented within the following categories.

- 1. Trail Plans**
- 2. Park Development Plans**
- 3. Open Space Plans**
- 4. Shorelines Plans**
- 5. Sports Fields Plans**

### **1. RECOMMENDED TRAILS PLAN**

Trails continue to be the most demanded recreational facility asked for by Skagit county residents. The 2007 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) surveys show similar trends. The (SCORP) document makes recommendations for local agencies and encourages trail opportunities. The plan specifically states, "If there is a weakness in the local response statewide, it may be in addressing high-participation activities that take place away from a traditional park, especially bicycling and walking. Health professionals increasingly regard walking and bicycling, both for recreation and transportation, as valuable tools that can help people build healthier lifestyles. Community oriented trails, paths, and routes for walking and cycling can encourage people to participate in health oriented activities; encourage children to walk or bicycle to school; and encourage adults to commute without a car".

Trails and paths, therefore, can provide multiple benefits for the states citizens including recreation, health, and transportation. The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) encourages local government to work more closely with transportation and health professionals on non-traditional recreation projects such as bicycle lanes and walking routes to and from schools and businesses. They also encourage local governments to consider outdoor recreation sites and facilities as integral elements of the public infrastructure, as important to the public health and welfare as utilities and roads. The safety of trail-users will continue to be a priority.

Trails need to be provided for at every opportunity. Anacortes, Burlington, Mount Vernon, and Sedro-Woolley identified proposed trail corridors in their plans as well as connection points to the County-wide system. Anacortes completed the popular Tommy Thompson Parkway Trail and is

looking to extend the trail along the Guemes Channel, towards Washington Park. A proposed trail connecting the Anacortes Community Forest Lands to the Deception Pass Park is perhaps the longest unfulfilled need in Skagit County. The trail has been in every SCPR comp plan dating back to the first edition, written in 1972. The connections provide valuable Fidalgo Island recreational and transportation routes of east and west as well as north and south, respectively. Skagit County will work in finding regional trail links to this and other outside agency trails. City, County, State, and Federal agencies should continue to work together to assure a healthy and user-friendly trail system in Skagit County.

Skagit County residents have identified a need for more primitive trails. Burlington has proposed these types of trails on Burlington Hill and Mount Vernon has recently expanded their trail system on Little Mountain. Anacortes has over 50 miles of primitive trails in the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. Skagit County has proposals for more trails at Sharpe Park, Northern State Recreational Area and Pilchuck Forest. Skagit County Public Works and the City of Sedro-Woolley have been promoting the extension of the State Route 20 Trail between Burlington and Sedro-Woolley. ADA paved routes are proposed for sections of this trail. There is also a mile of ADA trail proposed at Lake Shannon.

The recommended recreational trails plan includes a combination of loop, destination and linear type trails. To complete these sections it will require in some cases, access easements or outright purchase of property. In other cases where no other options exist, the route may need to utilize existing road right-of-way to complete a segment. A description of the major recreation trails found in the plan is described below.

### **Trail Design Guidelines**

**Trail Corridors** – The trails are to be routed so as to maintain a natural setting, to avoid unnecessary disturbance to private landowners adjacent to the trail and to preserve wildlife habitat and important vegetation. While the minimum acceptable trail easement is 25 feet, the more practical and desirable easement width is 35 feet except in riparian areas where it is 100 feet.

**Road Crossings** – Road crossings should occur at points of good visibility, perpendicular to the roadway (if possible) and at natural crossings, if possible. Full access sections should be equipped with curb cuts.

**Signage** – Trails should be signed at road crossings and all other public access points with signs that define uses and restrictions. More primitive trails should be signed only at the main entrances. These signs should describe uses, trail surface conditions, limitations, such as ADA degree of access.

## **Northern State Recreation Area Trails Plan**

### **Level 1**

The NSRA trails component is the development of an integrated non-motorized trail network throughout the Northern State Recreation Area property that provides for at least six miles of trail. Trails were identified as the highest priority type of facility to include at NSRA in the countywide survey administered in the NSRA planning process. Several trail types are included in the master plan for NSRA, including multiple use trails, interpretive trails, limited use trails, and exercise trails. The entire master plan for NSRA can be viewed in the appendices. Connecting neighborhoods to the NSRA trail system is a priority. The new berm trail around the alluvial fan will be an interpretive trail. Connecting the interpretive berm trail to form a loop has been mentioned by park users as something they would like to see accomplished. The trail accessing the park from the west at McGarigle Road needs to be improved. A boardwalk type trail should be established parallel to SR 20 to connect the two north and south berm trails at NSRA.

## **Centennial Trail**

### **Level 1**

The Centennial Trail is a regional trail system with the potential to run continuous through Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom County. These neighboring counties have been actively buying and creating connections with monies dedicated within their capital facility plans, with scheduled completion planned for 2012. The Skagit portion is divided into two segments. The northern segment between Sedro-Woolley and Whatcom County will follow State Route 9. Because this segment is on-street, it will probably be used primarily for bicycling. South of Sedro-Woolley, the Centennial Trail follows abandoned railroad corridor. The County has purchased

approximately eight miles of this route but anticipates that the remaining portion could be located within street rights-of-way, at least in the near-term. This is an excellent opportunity to create multi-use trails for bicyclists, walkers, horseback riders and other users. This is envisioned to be part of an overall off-street trail one day connecting British Columbia to Seattle. The initial segment of the trail is located near the Snohomish/Skagit County boundary and was once owned by the Pilchuck Tree Farm. Within the boundaries of the site, three separate creeks converge. Immediately south of the site, Snohomish County owns an additional parcel of land, which has been identified as a potential trailhead for the Centennial Trail. A master plan should be developed for the Pilchuck site. Possible plans could include a wetland interpretive area containing boardwalks, signs and shared interpretive facilities.

### **Sharpe Park Trail Extension**

#### **Level 1**

Sharpe Park encompasses conifer lowland forest, a wetland, rocky bald, a seasonal stream, and coastal frontage property. These combined land characteristics make the property very unique biologically due to the habitat interface of these differing features. Sharpe Park is also a vital connecting link between shoreline and the Montgomery-Duban Headlands. Together, Montgomery-Duban Headlands and Sharpe Park comprises a 110-acre natural area including almost a mile of rugged, natural shoreline on Rosario Strait. The property features a spectacular view, encompassing most of the Olympic Range, the straits, and Lopez, Allan, Burrows, and other islands. A mile of trail is proposed on the south end of the property, extending from the Bluff and dropping down to Fox Beach. A community group has approached SCPR to financially partner with the county on the potential purchase of a land-locked parcel at the south end of the park.

### **Cascade Trail Improvements**

#### **Level 1**

The Cascade Trail will need some improvements made to trestles and pedestrian bridges in the coming years. Plans are being put together to regularly look at the structural integrity of the structures and prioritize maintenance needs based on the reports that come from these visits. A board walk at Wiseman Creek is needed to elevate the trail above the directional changes in flow location. The first mile of the trail should be paved west of Fruitdale Road. The trail should be maintained and enhanced to a higher standard near towns and cities.

# EXCERPTS

*Image - west of Skagit River Delta from top of Little Mountain Park, Mount Vernon*



*Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan  
Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG)  
January 2009*

**2.3: Aren't there already enough organizations working to save open space in the County?**

Numerous private organizations in Skagit County are actively involved in conserving open space assets including fish and wildlife habitat, working farmlands, and unique forestlands.

These groups have accomplished a great deal through their efforts to conserve important county open space assets and are actively involved in the management, restoration, and enhancement of these conserved lands.

However, their missions do not include a focus on the urban growth areas. With a few exceptions, most lands they protect are located in more remote parts of the county. As a consequence, some of the most threatened remaining open spaces are located within or adjacent to the designated urban growth areas (UGAs) of the county.

Therefore, the task of meeting the GMA open space goals has not been accomplished. And, **there is a "gap" or lack of sufficient** funds with which to make up the cost differences necessary to protect open space lands adjacent or within the UGAs compared to the lower cost of such lands in the rural areas.

**2.4: What happens next and how can I get involved?**

The cities, towns, county, and SCOG board will be asked to adopt the plan. The Skagit County Planning Commission will schedule public hearings before making a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners. The schedule for public hearings will be posted on the county web site.

**3. Public involvement and survey**

**3.1: How is the public involved in creating, updating, and approving these UGA open space plans?**

Cities were consulted at public meetings of their choice and included Planning Commissions, Parks Commission, and joint meetings of Planning Commissions and City Councils.

Two public information meetings were held April 14 and June 24, 2008, with announcements in the local newspapers and county web site with email notifications to various groups that have expressed interest.

A survey of public opinion was conducted during the summer of 2007 and the county web site was used to publicize it. Results are summarized below.

Future comment opportunities will be available when each jurisdiction considers the final plan for adoption. The Skagit County Planning Commission is expected to take the plan under advisement in late 2008, at which time at least one public hearing will be held.

The county and the cities are subject to RCW 36.70A.140, which requires early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans including this open space plan.

**3.2: What are the results of the public survey?**

In June 2007 a random sample of resident voter households in Skagit County was contacted to participate in a controlled sample survey concerning open space needs and priorities in general and the proposed concepts in this plan in particular.

450 households agreed to participate in the survey and were mailed a copy of a summary description of the plan and a copy of the questionnaire. Survey results were compiled for the first 200 households who completed the surveys by follow-up telephone call - the number planned for in the original survey scope.

The resulting survey results are accurate to within +/-8% of the opinions of the county's registered voter household population. Key findings include:

**a: Existing open space protection and conditions** - most of the respondents felt existing protections are inadequate for each of the following:

- farmland,

- scenic areas,
- wildlife habitat,
- historical landmarks,
- forests,
- parks,
- trails, and
- other access features

**b: Open space trends and values** - respondents agreed that Skagit County:

- Has some of the most valuable wildlife habitats, woodlands, and farms in the region if not country (90%),
- UGA open spaces should be interconnected (70%),
- Unacceptable amounts of these open spaces are being lost to urban development (64%),
- Open space efforts should do more than preserve land – but should also restore, enhance, and manage the land 59%),

**c: Priorities for open space include:**

- Productive and working farmlands adjacent to UGAs (74%),
- Forestlands adjacent to UGAs (67%),
- Wildlife habitat and corridors within UGAs (62%),
- Scenic landscapes and roadside views (61%),
- Historical & cultural landmarks (55%),
- Public access trails extending through and outwards from UGAs (64%),
- Day-use parks within UGA open space (65%), and
- Interpretive trails within UGA open space corridors (52%).

**d: Specific UGA concept maps:**

When shown maps of each UGA concept, respondents from throughout the county supported each illustrated plan with high ratings given by more than 50%

**e: Specific trail proposals:**

Respondents also gave high ratings to each of the following trails: Anacortes-Burlington, Cascade, Swinomish Channel, Pacific Northwest/Interurban, Centennial, and Skagit-Snohomish Trails.

**f: How to organize and pay for an open space program** - respondents were asked for their opinion about how to implement and fund an open space plan.

- Regarding organization - survey respondents favored a coordination role for the county and cities, rather than a more active role as “principal agent.”
- Regarding funding - survey respondents were informed about and then asked to rate funding sources available to counties and cities. 59% said they would pay some amount for a property tax levy (the mean dollar amount was \$89.40 per household per year. Survey participants were marginally supportive of a local option sales tax dedicated to open space and not at all in favor of a 3rd real estate excise tax (REET), local option fuel tax, or local option vehicle license fee where each option would be dedicated to open space.

## **4 Farms and forests**

**4.1: How will this plan protect farmland?**

County residents place a high value on protecting farmland and forests, as borne out in the survey results above. Farms and forests have inherent open space qualities as a secondary benefit to their productive value.

RCW 36.70A.160 stipulates the open space corridors shall include lands useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and connection of critical areas as defined in RCW 36.70A.030. Identification of a corridor under this section of the RCW by a county or city ***shall not restrict the use or management of lands within the corridor for agricultural or forest purposes.***

Farm and forest protection is accomplished by a variety of tools outside the scope of this plan. Examples are restrictive zoning, purchase of development rights, and limits on urban expansion.

This plan can help protect farms and forests by providing “urban separators” where UGAs are close to the agriculture and forest zones. It is in these areas that the potential for “edge” conflicts exist.

<p>“rural by design”) that is not cluttered with commercial uses, advertising, and other urban characteristics?</p>	
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<p><b>Scenic resources</b></p> <p>“The view from the road”, however, is rapidly disappearing or being blocked or replaced with roadside clutter consisting of advertising signs, rural commercial uses, hobby farms, and/or inappropriate developments?</p>	<p><i>dis-/agree</i> 1-2 3 4-5</p> <p>21% 19% 59%</p>
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<p><b>Public access activities</b></p> <p>Skagit County public access trail systems and park activities could extend from open space corridors within the urbanizing areas out into the countryside to access some of the most diverse and scenic features in the county and region?</p>	<p>12% 17% 72%</p>
<p>Public access trail systems and park activities should extend from the inner most urban areas out into the countryside within and through natural open space corridor networks to provide easy access to urban and rural residents alike?</p>	<p>16% 19% 64%</p>
<p>Major existing public trail corridors, however, are located within park boundaries or on former railroad corridors and dikes located in rural areas that are not easily accessed by residents of the urbanizing areas on a daily basis?</p>	<p>20% 25% 54%</p>

As shown, the survey respondents agreed overwhelmingly with the statements elicited from public and non-profit open space agency and organization representatives concerning trends that are imperiling open space, scenic resources, and public access in the county at the present time.

## 2.6 Population growth impacts

Survey respondents were asked if in the next 20 years the Skagit County population is projected to increase by another 51,600 people or 46% more than the existing population of 113,100

persons, whether existing policies and programs will be sufficient to protect the county’s open space resources.

<p>In your opinion, will <u>existing UGA open space and public access trail conditions, trends, policies, and programs</u> be enough to conserve and protect Skagit County’s UGA related open space resources?</p>	<p>51% no 18% yes 32% don't know</p>
--	--

As shown, a majority of the respondents do not think existing policies and programs will be sufficient to conserve and protect Skagit County’s UGA related open space resources. However, a significant percent of the respondents may not know what existing policies and programs are. They may also not know whether they are or will be sufficient.

## 2.7 UGA open space and public access trail priorities

In light of the preceding, survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of the following open spaces within and adjacent to the urbanizing areas (UGAs) of the county in general whether such areas are protected by critical area ordinances, land use agreements, conservation easements, or land purchases by public or private organization efforts.

	<i>low</i>	<i>/</i>	<i>high</i>
	1-2	3	4-5
<p><b>UGA open space conservation needs</b></p> <p>Productive and working farmlands adjacent the urbanizing areas?</p>	13%	14%	74%
<p>Mature and older growth forestlands within and adjacent the urbanizing areas?</p>	16%	18%	67%
<p>Wildlife habitat and migration corridors within and through the urbanizing areas?</p>	19%	20%	62%
<p>Scenic landscapes and roadside views entering and leaving the urbanizing areas?</p>	14%	26%	61%
<p>Historical and cultural landmarks and sites within and adjacent the urbanizing areas?</p>	14%	33%	55%
<p><b>UGA public access activities</b></p> <p>Public access trails and facilities that extend through and outwards from the urbanizing areas?</p>	15%	22%	64%
<p>Fishing, swimming, car-top boating,</p>	15%	21%	65%

picnicking, and other day use activities within open space corridor networks in and adjacent the urbanizing areas?	
--	--

	<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
<b>Public access activities</b>	
Interpretive trails, exhibits, and centers within open space corridor networks that extend outwards from the urbanizing areas?	16% 34% 52%

As shown, survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated **all** of the open space conservation and public access trails and activities were of the utmost importance (scores greater than 50% for ratings of 4-5) per the rank orders shown.

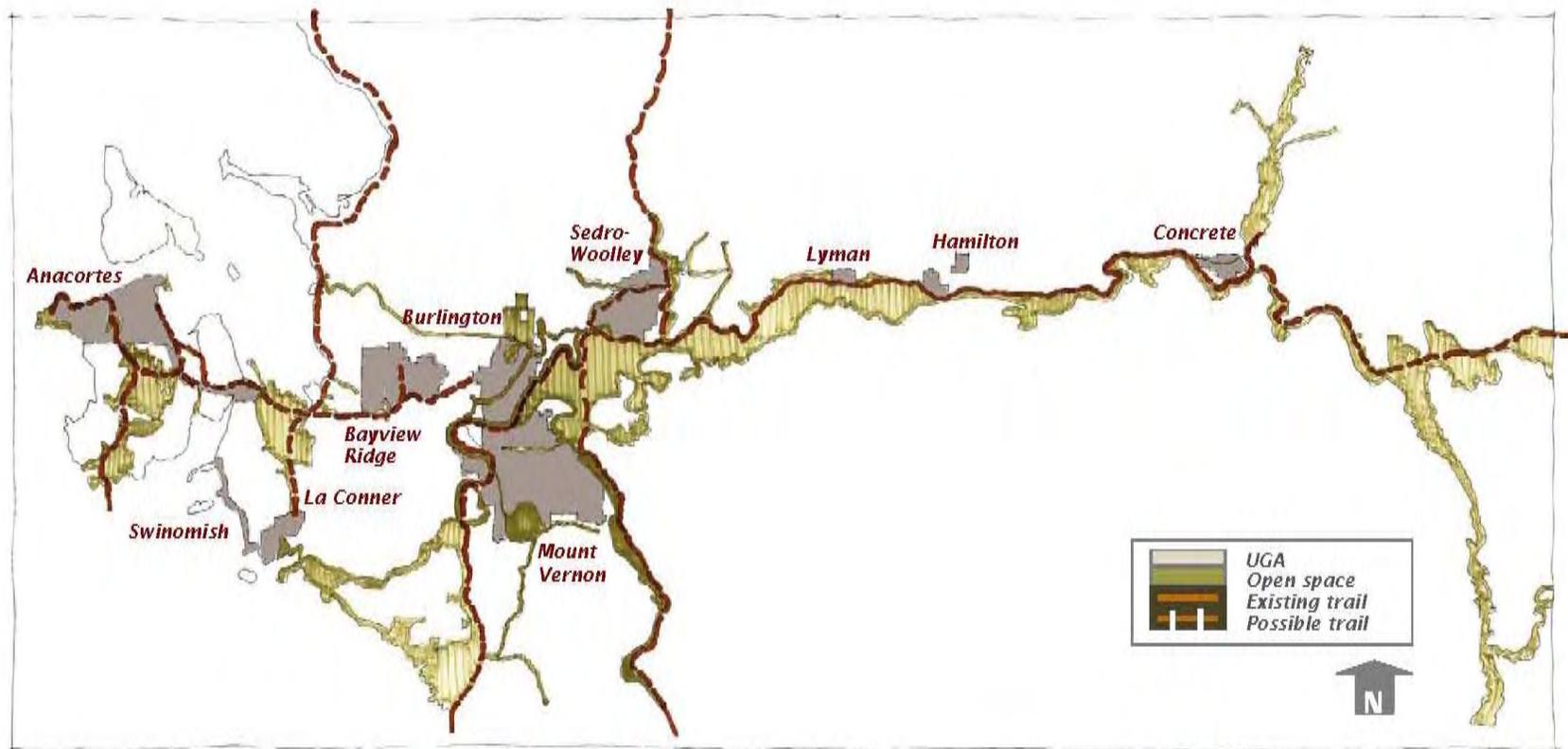
## 2.8 Conclusions

Based on the results above, a principal purpose of this SCOG planning effort, therefore, is to define concepts and strategies by which to define UGA open space and greenway separators that can also link with the other open space initiatives being carried out in the more rural areas of the county by public and non-profit agencies and organizations.

A secondary purpose of this SCOG planning effort is to devise a UGA open space separator and greenway strategy that will complement existing open space efforts by other public and private agencies and organizations in a manner that will benefit and enhance rather than duplicate or compete with these on-going and successful efforts.



Photo - historic Rosario Schoolhouse (1891) on Fidalgo Island



## Chapter 3: UGA Open Space Concept Plans

### 3.1 Countywide concept plan

*The following proposals are based on the results of the workshop planning sessions and the mail-out/phone-back survey of countywide resident voter households. The proposals are CONCEPTUAL, in some instances, subject to further study and coordination with public and private participants that may modify the eventual project particulars.*

The Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan is and will be a composite of the open space, recreation, trail, and land use plans developed by each city, sub-area, tribal, port, state, and federal jurisdiction – subject to the updating of these plans and planning elements by each jurisdiction on a

housekeeping basis every year and on a comprehensive basis every 7 years in accordance with GMA requirements.

The individual jurisdictional plans share common open space definitions and objectives consisting of a focus on the Skagit River from Concrete through Hamilton, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, and Mount Vernon; on the Swinomish Channel to La Conner and the Swinomish Indian Reservation; on the Community Forests through Anacortes; and on Deception Pass State Park lands across Fidalgo Island to Whidbey Island.

As shown in the graphics, these UGA corridors could extend around and from the cities outward into the most rural

landscapes and features linking the UGAs into continuous greenway systems across the county using these features as an open space framework.

This concept was vetted in the countywide mail-out/phone-back survey of registered countywide voter households described in Appendix D. Survey respondents were asked to rate the countywide concept on a 1 to 5 scale where 1-2 were the lowest priorities, 3 was a neutral score, and 4-5 were the highest priorities.

	<i>low / high</i>
	<i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
<b><i>UGA open space corridors</i></b>	
<b><i>Countywide UGA open space corridors</i></b> - could focus on the Skagit River from Concrete through Hamilton, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, and Mount Vernon; on the Swinomish Channel to LaConner; and on the Community Forests and State Park through Anacortes? As shown in the graphics, these corridors could extend from the cities outward into the most rural landscapes and features linking the UGAs into continuous greenway systems?	12% 18% 71%

As shown, survey respondents gave overwhelming support to this countywide approach to the UGA open space concept.

***Public access systems***

The UGA open space corridors could be accessed by a network of regional on and off-road multipurpose hike, bike, and some horse trails extending through the open space corridors and the UGAs, and outwards from the UGAs and Skagit County to connect with Whatcom, Snohomish, and Island Counties.

These multipurpose trail systems have been planned on a regional basis by public and non-profit agencies and organizations and include proposals extending north to Bellingham and Whatcom County, east through Rockport to Ross Lake National Recreation Area, south to Arlington and Snohomish County, southwest to Stanwood and Snohomish County, and west through Anacortes and Whidbey Island.

These trail concepts were also vetted in the countywide mail-out/phone-back survey of registered countywide voter households described in Appendix D. Survey respondents were asked to rate the trail proposals on a priority scale.

	<i>low / high</i>
	<i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
<b><i>UGA public access systems</i></b>	
<b><i>Anacortes-Burlington Trail</i></b> - could extend west from Burlington along SR-20 through the Bayview Ridge UGA to link with Swinomish Channel and PNW Trails to LaConner and Anacortes? The Anacortes-Burlington Trail would create a countywide trail linkage with other major trail systems?	16% 17% 64%
<b><i>Cascade Trail</i></b> - could extend through the Skagit River open space corridor from Rockport through Concrete, Hamilton, Sedro-Woolley, and Burlington? An eastern extension of the trail could link with the Ross Lake National Recreation Area?	13% 22% 63%
<b><i>Swinomish Channel Trail</i></b> - could extend north from LaConner along the Swinomish Channel to the PNW Trail and provide access to the estuaries and wetlands in Padilla and Fidalgo Bays.	17% 21% 59%
<b><i>PNW/Interurban Trail</i></b> - could extend south from the Interurban Trail in Whatcom County through Bayview to the Swinomish Channel then west through Anacortes to Deception Pass and Whidbey Island?	17% 22% 58%

	<i>low / high</i>
	<i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
<b><i>UGA public access systems</i></b>	
<b><i>Centennial Trail</i></b> - could provide access from Snohomish County trail systems past Lake McMurray, Big Lake, the Nookachamps, Skagit River, and Northern State Hospital to link with Whatcom County trail systems to Lake Whatcom, Bellingham, and the Canadian border?	17% 21% 58%
<b><i>Skagit-Snohomish Trail</i></b> - could extend from the Nookachamps south through Mount Vernon and Britt Slough then along the South	21% 20% 58%

Fork of the Skagit River to link with Fir Island, Conway, Stanwood and the Snohomish County trail systems.	
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As shown, all of the trail proposals were given the highest priority (score 4-5) by a majority of the survey respondents.

*The corridor locations shown in the graphics are CONCEPTUAL, subject to more detailed location planning with public and private landowners and organizations prior to actual trail project design and construction implementation.*

In concept, the trails are sited along the edge or in some instances across the open space corridors in locations that do not intrude onto sensitive habitats or niches occupied by endangered or threatened wildlife or eco-systems.

The goal is to provide public access along and where appropriate, within open space corridors where the public may enjoy open space assets without risking intrusions that can detract from wildlife preservation or enhancement objectives and from agricultural or forestry operational requirements and private property prerogatives.

***Interpretive centers and day-use parks***

UGA open spaces preserve and protect significant natural resources, wildlife habitats, historical and cultural landmarks, scenic vistas and viewpoints, and other features of educational, interpretive, and informative interest to residents and visitors.

These features should be provided appropriate interpretive opportunities including trail and viewpoint access, signage, exhibits, and even centers with educational materials and programs.

Where appropriate, open space related day-use park activities including fishing, boating, and camping may also be incorporated as open space adjuncts to increase public access and interpretive opportunities.

The concept of providing interpretive and day-use park activities was also vetted in the mail-out/phone-back survey of countywide registered voter households described in Appendix D. Survey respondents were also asked to rate interpretive center opportunities on a priority scale.

	<i>low / high</i>		
	<i>1-2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4-5</i>
<b><i>UGA public access systems - activities</i></b>			
<b><i>Interpretive centers and day-use parks</i></b> - be installed where appropriate along the trail corridors identified above to increase interpretive opportunities and open space related day-use park activities?	18%	29%	51%

As shown, a majority of survey respondents gave interpretive centers and day-use parks a high priority (score 4-5).

The following pages describe the open space concepts currently adopted in each jurisdiction’s current comprehensive plans and currently under consideration by the appropriate jurisdiction’s planning and parks staff and advisory planning groups, and by elected officials as determined from a series of public workshops with staff, Parks or Planning Commission or City Council in each jurisdictional area.