

CHAPTER 2

URBAN, OPEN SPACE AND LAND USE PROFILE

INTRODUCTION

Skagit County's Comprehensive Plan focuses on a Countywide, regional land use approach that is derived from Growth Management Act goals, Countywide Planning Policies, market and other factors affecting land development, projections about future trends, the community vision statements described in Chapter 1, and evolving public opinion.

The Plan is based on a vision of how Skagit County can grow and develop while protecting the region's high quality of life and equitably sharing public and private costs and benefits of growth. The Plan encourages well-managed development to protect public health, safety and welfare, and to enhance Skagit County's community character, natural beauty and environmental quality. The Comprehensive Plan establishes four general land use categories: Urban Growth Areas, the Rural Area, Natural Resource Lands, and Open Space areas. These various land use categories are distinguished from each other through land use *designations* that are reflected on the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Map. Each land use designation has a corresponding zoning district that contains the specific development standards for land use activities in that zone. Table 1 shows the general distribution of Urban, Rural, Natural Resource Land and Open Space areas in the County.

The Urban, Open Space and Land Use Element addresses the general distribution and location, and the appropriate intensity and density, of Urban and Open Space land uses. There are separate chapters for Rural and Natural Resource Lands – Chapters 3 and 4 respectively – because of their significance in Skagit County. The Urban, Open Space and Land Use Element also addresses certain land use goals and practices that are generally applied consistently across all land use categories: the treatment of historic land use approvals; pre-existing, non-conforming uses; public uses; lot certification; and land divisions.

URBAN GROWTH AREAS

Most new growth in Skagit County is encouraged to locate in Urban Growth Areas. These areas include the incorporated cities and towns and unincorporated land surrounding the

incorporated areas that the County has determined to be necessary and appropriate for urban growth through the year 2025. Each city or town in Skagit County has an Urban Growth Area (or UGA), although the UGAs for the towns of La Conner, Lyman and Hamilton do not extend beyond their town limits. There are also two non-municipal Urban Growth Areas:

Table 1 – Comprehensive Plan Land Use Designations and Acreage* (Source: Skagit County Mapping Services; **acreages not yet updated for 2005 GMA Update**)

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS	ACREAGE
Water Bodies	[176,869]
PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF REGIONAL/STATEWIDE IMPORTANCE (OSRSI)	
National Forest	282,898
National Park & Recreation Areas	130,853
Wilderness	83,539
State Parks & Recreation Areas	5,394
Other	15,884
Subtotal	518,568
NATURAL RESOURCE LANDS (NRL)	
Secondary Forest (SF-NRL)	41,190
Industrial Forest (IF-NRL)	319,391
Rural Resource (RRc-NRL)	25,950
Agriculture (Ag-NRL)	89,489
Subtotal	476,020
Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO)	[23,620]
RURAL LANDS	
Rural Village Residential (RV)	2,922
Rural Intermediate (RI)	8,297
Rural Reserve (RRv)	70,110
Subtotal	81,317
COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL LANDS	
Rural Business (RB)	157
Rural Freeway Service (RFS)	28
Rural Village Commercial (RVC)	18
Natural Resource Industrial (NRI)	229
Small-Scale Recreation & Tourism (SRT)	67
Rural Center (RC)	19
Rural Marine Industrial (RMI)	62
Cottage Industry/Small-Scale Business (CSB)	29
Subtotal	621
URBAN GROWTH AREAS (UGA)	
Incorporated UGA Areas	23,826
Unincorporated UGA Areas	11,594
Subtotal	35,420
TOTAL	1,111,946

*Acreage figures are derived based on the best information and technology available. Accuracy may vary depending on the source of the information, changes in political boundaries or hydrological features, or the methodology used to map and calculate a particular land use. Bracketed figures represent an overlay to other land uses and do not contribute to the total acreage.

Bayview Ridge UGA, and the Swinomish UGA. Only about three percent of all land in Skagit County is designated urban.

The Urban Growth Area designation recognizes historic urban development patterns and present and future needs for urban land. An adequate supply of land through 2025 will ensure that immediate and future urban needs are met, and will provide for an orderly and efficient transition from low-intensity land use to urban land use over time. The establishment or modification of Urban Growth Area boundaries takes into consideration population and employment growth projections for the planning period, the ability of local jurisdictions to provide required urban services in an efficient and economical manner, and the protection of critical areas and Natural Resource Lands of long-term commercial significance.

The County, cities and towns have worked closely together to establish development standards for the unincorporated portion of municipal Urban Growth Areas that address the needs of property owners, the local jurisdictions and service providers. Prior to annexation, only low-intensity rural residential and commercial uses are allowed, to preclude land division patterns and uses that may prevent future development at full urban densities. Urban development may only take place concurrent with the availability of public services and capital facility programs. When property is annexed and services are made available, development may occur at appropriate urban densities, resulting in an orderly, economical transition from rural to urban land use patterns.

Since many of the policies in the Urban, Open Space and Land Use Element refer to residential density, it is important to understand the difference between “gross density” and “net density.” Gross density means the total number of dwelling units divided by the total land area of the site or area, excluding nothing. Net density means the total number of dwelling units divided by the net area of the lot or site. The net area excludes roads, public open spaces, community facilities, and critical areas.

BAYVIEW RIDGE AND SWINOMISH UGAS

The only unincorporated Urban Growth Areas that are not expected to be annexed by a city or town are the Bayview Ridge UGA and the Swinomish UGA. The County is developing a subarea plan and development regulations for the Bayview Ridge UGA that includes land use and zoning designations specific to that area. The Bayview Ridge Subarea Plan has been developed following the goals, policies and procedures contained in the Community Plans and Implementation Element which is Chapter 12 of this Comprehensive Plan. The proposed land use designations for the subarea include:

- Bayview Ridge Residential (BR-R)
- Bayview Ridge Urban Reserve (URV)
- Bayview Ridge Light Industrial (BR-LI) (currently exists in Comprehensive Plan and zoning code)
- Bayview Ridge Heavy Industrial (BR-HI) (currently exists in Comprehensive Plan and zoning code)
- Aviation Related (AVR) (currently exists in Comprehensive Plan and zoning code)
- Bayview Ridge Community Center (CR-CC)

These designations have been created to respond to the existing and anticipated future growth conditions within the subarea based on an extensive community-based planning process including environmental review. The subarea plan will include a capital facilities element identifying needs and solutions for infrastructure improvements in support of anticipated growth.

The Swinomish UGA is located within a portion of the Swinomish Indian Reservation. The County's authority and responsibility for planning and land use management within the Reservation is promulgated by federal and case law. In general terms, within the exterior boundary of the Swinomish Indian Reservation the interests of the Tribe extend to all lands regardless of ownership while the County's regulatory authority extends only to non-trust and non-tribal fee-simple lands. As such, the County's regulatory authority is put into practice by adopting the Residential District (R) land use designation for the non-trust and non-tribal fee-simple lands within the Swinomish UGA, with the exception of the Hope Island Inn which is designated Commercial (C).

OPEN SPACE AREAS

There are a variety of types of open space lands in Skagit County. Open space areas include greenbelt corridors within and around urban growth areas, green belts which connect critical areas, lands receiving open space tax incentives, resource lands, conservation easements, rural open space areas, park lands, and significant historic, archaeological, scenic and cultural lands.

By December 1, 2007, Skagit County will develop a program to identify and prioritize open space corridors and greenbelts within and between UGAs that include lands useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and connection of critical areas. The program will include a list identifying and prioritizing open space and greenbelt lands desirable for public acquisition. Any potential acquisition that may be proposed by such a program will not include any condemnation actions; any potential acquisition for land for open space or greenbelts shall only be achieved by voluntary donation, CaRD subdivision, or mutually agreeable sale.

Public Open Space

Public open space areas include publicly owned lands that are dedicated or reserved for public use or enjoyment for recreation, scenic amenities, natural resource land management, or for the protection of environmentally sensitive areas. *Where identified below to be of regional or*

statewide importance, such lands are designated on the Comprehensive Plan/Zoning Map. Other publicly held lands, such as local neighborhood parks, scenic roads and highways, shorelines, rivers and streams, and utility corridors, *although not designated as open space on the Comprehensive Plan Map*, nevertheless offer similar open space functions and benefits. However, certain areas may not be open to the public, such as utility corridors, road easements, etc., where ownership or public safety reasons may preclude public access, even though these areas may provide open space benefits to wildlife.

Private Open Space

There are several private organizations in Skagit County that in some way set aside lands for conservation purposes, such as for their ecological, scenic, or natural resource values. Private land trusts, such as the Skagit Land Trust, the San Juan Preservation Trust, and the Nature Conservancy, among others, own or in some way administer a significant amount of land in Skagit County.

These private organizations contribute to the preservation of wildlife habitat, biodiversity, natural and scenic greenbelts and open-space corridors. Through the use of such techniques as conservation easements, purchase of development rights, or the outright purchase of land, development of these lands is limited or precluded altogether.

Open Space Taxation

Lands enrolled in a taxation program as defined in RCW 84.34 are identified in the Current Use Open Space Taxation Program map. This map also may change over time according to participation.

PUBLIC USES

Public Uses generally are government or quasi-government owned and operated facilities including primary and secondary schools, libraries, postal services, offices, training facilities, fire and police stations, and courts. Public Uses do not necessarily include Essential Public Facilities as provided for in Chapter 10 of this Comprehensive Plan.

Within each Comprehensive Plan land use designation, public uses may be considered as “special uses” under the Skagit County Unified Development Code. Public uses are reviewed as site specific projects so that public benefits and land use impacts can be analyzed and, if necessary, appropriate mitigation applied.