



5-Year Plan (2009 to 2014) Skagit Conservation District

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Organization of the Skagit Conservation District

A political subdivision of the State of Washington – authorities, powers and structure contained in RCW 89.08. The Skagit Conservation District was organized in 1942. It encompasses all lands within the County boundaries.

Function of the Skagit Conservation District

To make available technical, financial and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land manager with conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.

Who We Serve & Why

Landowners and other county residents who need technical, financial and/or educational assistance as well as government agencies, NGOs and schools needing specialized expertise or information in order to effectively address environmental issues.

Mission of the Skagit Conservation District

To bring voluntary, incentive-based natural resource solutions to citizens of Skagit County and beyond by providing technical, financial and educational resources.

Vision of the Skagit Conservation District

Quality water; quality habitat; quality working lands

Values of the Skagit Conservation District

Protecting our way of life and our future....sustaining natural resource based industries.

Natural Resource Priorities and Goals:

- *Land use planning/working land conversion/wildland/urban interface and intermix*
Continue to work with Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, Farmland Legacy, Agriculture and Forest Land Advisory Boards, WSU Extension and Skagit County, and state government to develop comprehensive policies to be the foundation for future land use decisions in Skagit County.
- *Negative human and animal impacts to water quality/ runoff/storm water from all sources*
By 2015 the SCD will serve 500 landowners impacting water bodies on EPA's 303(d) list in Skagit County.
By 2015 SCD will have a sustainable and well-established low impact development (LID) program which includes:
 - *Interlocal agreements with cities and towns that are subject to stormwater regulations*
- *Promote and implement adequate drainage for agricultural land*
SCD will support efforts to have three Coordinated Irrigation District Management Plans (CIDMP) implemented by 2015 in Skagit County.
- *Sufficient water for adequate food production, people, fish and wildlife.*
On an ongoing basis and in partnership with others, seek funding for the implementation of innovative solutions for long-term water quantity management.
- *Protect, preserve and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife*
By 2015 the SCD will serve 500 landowners impacting fish and wildlife habitat.
- *Streambank Erosion/Sediment Control*
By 2015 the SCD will serve 15 landowners to reduce sediment inputs into Skagit County waterways.
By 2015 sediment inputs from roads in the upper watersheds will be reduced.
- *Forest Health*
By 2015 the SCD will serve 25 landowners to implement forest health improvement plans.
- *Wildland Urban Interface*
By 2015 the SCD will certify 10 Firewise Communities.

Critical Geographic Areas:

- *Agricultural and forest lands of long-term significance*
- *Urban/suburban areas*
- *Samish River Basin and Samish Bay*
- *Skagit Delta*
- *Nookachamps Creek*
- *Padilla Bay/ No Name Slough/ Joe Leary Slough*
- *Fisher/Carpenter Creek*

Information – Education Priorities and Goals:

- *Provide conservation education opportunities and volunteer activities to residents of all ages throughout Skagit County, increasing knowledge of resource issues while building community stewardship.*
- *By 2015, provide five workshops for small-acreage landowners.*
- *By 2015 co-sponsor five seminars and workshops for producers for continuing education.*
- *By 2015 provide or co-sponsor information opportunities for the general public (e.g. radio, workshops, etc.).*

District Operations Priorities and Goals:

- *Adequate, stable, long-term funding for SCD programs*
 - *By 2012 SCD will have an approved assessment.*
- *Updated policies and procedures*
 - *Through 2015 SCD will continue to be in compliance with policies, procedures and legal requirements.*
- *By 2015 SCD will sell the development right for the PMC and set up a trust fund for statewide conservation district environmental education. (Administration TBD.)*

Trends Impacting Conservation in the Skagit Conservation District

- *Increased demand, but inconsistent and insufficient funding, for Skagit CD services and expertise because of:*
 - *Increased population moving into rural areas without a lot of planning*
 - *Declining profitability of traditional natural resource industries*
 - *Conflicting demands on natural resource uses*
 - *Government regulations*
 - *Mitigation Banking*
 - *Carbon Footprint*
 - *Air Quality*
 - *Biomass*
 - *Increased pressure on CD's municipal partners on stormwater*
 - *Citizens resistant to tax increases*

Strategies to Address Trends

- *The Skagit Conservation District will implement priority actions through the annual plan of work to address current and projected trends and will update the long range plan accordingly.*

Natural Resource Data (Source: Skagit County Planning and Development Services):

The natural resource lands designation indicates areas where Skagit County land-use plans, regulations, and incentives are intended to promote long-term, commercially significant resource use. These natural resources provide valuable products and raw materials that support jobs, create tax revenues, and are an important component in regional and local economies and markets. Farmlands and forests also provide aesthetic, recreational, and environmental benefits to the public, while contributing to a diverse community lifestyle and character. The land use zoning designations for natural resource lands are:

- Agricultural – Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL)
- Industrial Forest – Natural Resource Lands (IF-NRL)
- Secondary Forest – Natural Resource Lands (SF-NRL)
- Rural Resource – Natural Resource Lands (RRc-NRL)
- Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO)

Agricultural Natural Resource Lands

Agricultural Resource Lands are those lands with soils, climate, topography, parcel size, and location characteristics that have long-term commercial significance for farming. Skagit County designates agricultural lands primarily based on the presence of prime agricultural soils. These lands are concentrated in the fertile floodplain of the Skagit River as it flows into the Puget Sound. There are also agricultural lands designated along the upper Skagit Valley in areas of rich alluvial soils. Based on designation criteria, Skagit County has designated an estimated 89,169 acres of land as Agricultural lands, although, significantly fewer acres are in full agricultural production in any given year.

Designating valuable agricultural soils protects the resource for future use, regardless of current farming conditions. Designating also ensures a cohesive and distinct agricultural area within Skagit County, and limits the extent to which non-agricultural uses can conflict and interfere with farming. Primary crops and agricultural products in Skagit County include apples, berries, floriculture and sod, potatoes, peas and other vegetables, vegetable seeds, dairy, and ornamental nursery stock. Skagit County's annual Tulip Festival brings in over \$60 million in economic activity, adding to the over \$300 million in gross farm income annually – making agriculture a major contributor to the health of both the regional and Skagit County economies.

Despite the current strength of the agricultural industry in Skagit County, there are some significant challenges facing agriculture, primarily in maintaining the land base and ensuring long-term viability. Pressures to convert agricultural lands to residential, wildlife habitat, and other uses, conflicts with neighboring non-resource uses, regulatory limitations on farming, and fluctuating economic conditions all add to the industry's challenges.

Industrial and Secondary Forest Resource Lands

Forest Resource Lands are those lands with soils, parcel size, and location characteristics that have long-term commercial significance for forestry. Based on designation criteria, Skagit County has designated an estimated 314,576 acres of land as Industrial Forest Natural Resource Land (IF-NRL) and 38,750 acres as Secondary Forest Natural Resource Land (SF-NRL). Industrial Forest lands form the bulk and core of the commercially significant forest resource, with a surrounding Secondary Forest designation which provides a transitional density between that of Rural areas and Industrial Forest.

Secondary Forest also offers the potential for smaller-scale commercial timber operations, supporting natural resource industries, and limited residential uses. These lands are concentrated

in the slopes and foothills of the Cascade Mountains in the eastern and northern portions of the county.

Primary forest products in Skagit County include: raw logs, primarily for the domestic market, with some exports; lumber, both green and kiln dried; wood chips; and hog fuel (a mix of bark, sawdust, and planer shavings). Production of the later is expected to increase due to the increased development of cogeneration plants as energy sources for industry. Value-added products and industries include local cabinet making shops, engineered wood products, such as beams, and small fine wood product shops producing anything from custom wood furniture to musical instruments.

Aside from wood products, forestry is a significant contributor to the economy, environment and lifestyle in Skagit County. Support industries include logging, trucking, and equipment sales & service, small trucks, fuel, supplies and repair services. Spin-off services, such as retail grocery, clothing, restaurants, and other services also rely heavily on a healthy natural resource lands industry. An often overlooked benefit of good forest management is the industry's contribution to and protection of clean air, water, fish & wildlife habitat, and recreational activities.

Currently, there are significant challenges facing the industry, primarily in maintaining the land base and promoting a viable, long-term forest industry. The industry and the County have seen a decline in the strength and role of forestry in the Skagit County economy over the past 20 years – much of this due to declining harvests on Federal and State lands. Other challenges result from pressures to convert forest lands to other uses; regulatory requirements, economics and market factors.

Rural Resource Lands

Rural Resource lands are, generally, areas that have the combined land and land-use characteristics of long-term agricultural, forest or mineral lands, and have the potential for multiple use or smaller scale resource management. Because of this mixture, Skagit County Comprehensive Planning goals, objectives and policies applicable to both Agricultural and Forest Resource lands are applicable to the Rural Resource lands in Skagit County. Rural Resource lands generally are not managed for industrial-scale farming or forestry but nevertheless contribute to the natural resource land base. Where the Mineral Resource Overlay designation is also applied, industrial-scale mining can occur, however. Based on designation criteria Skagit County has designated an estimated 25,658 acres of land as Rural Resource Natural Resource Land (RRc-NRL).

The challenges facing owners of Rural Resource land generally relate to the economic viability of managing small parcels of resource lands, and pressures to develop other uses, such as residential. This is particularly true where Rural Resource lands are located between larger natural resource land parcels and Rural designated areas.

The Natural Resource Lands Element of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan promotes flexibility of uses on Rural Resource lands, while providing for incentives and support for small agricultural, forest and mining uses. Rural Resource lands allow for a range of uses that are complementary to natural resource land preservation.

Mineral Resource Overlay

The Mineral Resource Overlay is an overlay to Forest and Rural Resource lands, where geologic deposits and land use characteristics have long-term commercial significance for mineral extraction. Based on designation criteria, Skagit County has designated an estimated 60,134 acres of Mineral Resource Overlay. The predominant resources mapped in the Mineral Resource Overlay are sand and gravel construction materials. These resources are typically associated with alluvial and glacial deposits. Quarry rock and valuable minerals such as olivine-rich dunite and limestone have also been designated.

The challenges facing the mineral resource industry primarily relate to conflicting use concerns with neighboring residential uses. With increasing demands for construction materials in developing urban areas, especially in the Puget Sound region, it becomes increasingly important to identify and preserve access to the mineral resources of Skagit County. However, access to much of the county's minable resources has already been precluded by residential development. Skagit County's approach to designating mineral lands is to protect what is remaining, now and for the future. Doing so requires that mineral lands of long-term commercial significance be designated in areas where the impacts from mining, when it occurs, can be reduced to the greatest extent possible.

Skagit County Right to Manage Natural Resource Lands

Where non-natural resource land uses (primarily residential uses) extend into natural resource areas or exist side-by-side, natural resource management operations are frequently subject to nuisance complaints. When complaints relate to the undesired effects of properly regulated and conducted natural resource lands activities, natural resource land managers are required to set aside time and financial resources in order to respond. Right-to-Manage Natural Resource Lands policies are intended to promote a good neighbor policy between natural resource lands and non-natural resource land property owners by advising purchasers and users of property adjacent to or near natural resource land management operations of the inherent potential difficulties associated with such purchase or residence. It is essential that neighbors and residents of natural resource lands better understand and be prepared to accept attendant conditions and the natural result of living in or near natural resource lands and rural areas. The Right to Manage Natural Resource Land goals and policies establish mandatory disclosures for purchasers and users and provides authority to the Skagit County Assessor's Office to track these disclosures for the long-term protection of productive use of Skagit County's valuable resource lands.



Land Use Designations and Acreage (Source: Skagit County Mapping Services)

Land Use Designations	Acreage
Water Bodies	[176,696]
PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF REGIONAL/STATEWIDE IMPORTANCE (OSRSI)	
National Forest	282,812
National Park & Recreation Areas	130,848
Wilderness	83,530
State Parks & Recreation Areas	5,425
Other	16,727
Subtotal	519,342
NATURAL RESOURCE LANDS (NRL)	
Secondary Forest (SF-NRL)	38,008
Industrial Forest (IF-NRL)	319,623
Rural Resource (RRc-NRL)	26,871
Agriculture (Ag-NRL)	89,277
Subtotal	473,779
Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO)	[61,492]
RURAL LANDS	
Rural Village Residential (RV)	2,791
Rural Intermediate (RI)	8,035
Rural Reserve (RRv)	70,378
Subtotal	81,204
COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL LANDS	
Rural Business (RB)	186
Rural Freeway Service (RFS)	29
Rural Village Commercial (RVC)	20
Natural Resource Industrial (NRI)	239
Small-Scale Recreation & Tourism (SRT)	16
Rural Center (RC)	19
Rural Marine Industrial (RMI)	50
Small-Scale Business (SSB)	31
Master Planned Resort	113
Subtotal	703
URBAN GROWTH AREAS (UGA)	
Incorporated UGA Areas (not including incorporated water areas)	22,675
Unincorporated UGA Areas	11,409
Subtotal	34,084
TOTAL	1,109,112

Optimum Staffing Needs

- *Administrative*
 - Management, Policy and Inter-agency Coordination – 1 FTE*
 - Financial – 1 FTE*
 - Clerical – 1 FTE*
- *Technical - Conservation Planning and Implementation*
 - Commercial and Non-commercial Agriculture – 2 FTEs*
 - Fish and Wildlife Habitat – 2 FTEs*
 - Forestry and Firewise – 2 FTEs*
- *Engineering – 1.5 FTE*
- *Public Information, Education and Volunteer Opportunities*
 - Adult – 2 FTEs*
 - Youth – 1 FTE*
- *Monitoring – 1 FTE*
- *Data Management – 1 FTE*

Optimum Annual Budget Needs – All Sources

Category	Amount
Land Use	
Program	\$81,250
Cost Share PDR	\$1,000,000
Water Quality	
Program	\$287,500
Cost share	\$100,000
Drainage	
Program	\$32,500
Cost Share	\$40,000
Water Quantity	
Program	\$32,500
Cost Share	\$100,000
Fish and Wildlife	
Program	\$195,000
Cost Share	\$350,000
Erosion/Sedimentation	
Program	\$52,000
Cost Share	\$500,000
Forest Health	
Program	\$100,000
Cost Share	\$100,000
Firewise	
Program	\$100,000
Cost Share	\$50,000
Conservation Education	\$164,500
District Operations	\$272,250
Total	\$3,557,500

Key Decision Makers

- *The Skagit Conservation District will continue to work with many partners to implement priority action items, including but not limited to: elected federal, state and local government officials, as well as organizations and agencies involved in natural resource management.*
- *The District is in Congressional District 2, and Legislative Districts 10, 39 and 40.*
- *Skagit County is governed by a three- member Board of County Commissioners.*



Long Range and Annual Plans updated, reviewed, and adopted by Skagit Conservation District Board of Supervisors, April 20, 2010

Janet McRae, Chair

Resolution # _____