

King County, with 1.9 million inhabitants, is the 14<sup>th</sup> most populous county in the country. With nearly one-third of Washington State's population, King County is also the state's urban center and economic engine. At the same time urban and rural, King County is known for its majestic mountain ranges, forests, farmlands, waterways and shorelines that define the natural beauty and character of the region's landscape, which extends from Puget Sound on the west to 8,000-foot Mt. Daniel at the Cascade crest to the east.

These natural features contribute to an open space system that provides environmental benefits and recreational opportunities. The open space system offers places to exercise, participate in competitive sports, socialize with others, and experience the solace of the natural environment. It provides habitat for fish and wildlife, maintains air and water quality, offers scenic beauty, and helps retain agriculture and forest activities in the county. Trails link the features of the county's regional open space system and serve recreation, transportation and habitat corridor functions.

Altogether, the lands that make up the county's open space system contribute to residents' physical, mental and emotional health and support the high quality of life for which our area is known. The open space system also contributes to the economic strength of the county by attracting businesses, jobs and tourists. King County residents have repeatedly declared the importance of preserving open spaces and quality of life through their continued support of funding for parks and recreation and to acquire a wide range of open space lands.

The 2010 *King County Open Space Plan: Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas*, an update to the 2004 plan, provides a framework guiding King County in the planning, development, stewardship and management of its complex system of 200 parks, 175 miles of regional trails, and 26,000 acres of open space. The plan reflects the many changes King County's Parks and Recreation Division has undergone in recent years and reconfirms the agency's mission and goals of stewarding regional passive and active parks, regional trails, natural area parks, local rural parks, and forest lands to provide recreation and environmental benefits to the residents of King County.

The Parks and Recreation Division's objectives for this plan include:

- Serving as a strategic plan guiding the division
- Establishing the policy framework for operating and capital funding priorities
- Improving coordination among King County agencies involved in expanding and stewarding King County's open space system
- Defining the division's role as a leader of regional trails, regional natural area parks, and regional recreation facilities
- Defining the division's role as a provider of local parks in the rural area of King County
- Providing clarification and guidance on maintenance and operations
- Guiding the development of individual park management and master plans

Over the past decade, the Parks and Recreation Division has transitioned from a traditional general-tax funded agency to an organization that is more entrepreneurial, accountable, and performance-driven. At the same time, new challenges are on the horizon; among the most pressing is maintaining a growing system of passive natural area parks and regional trails and fulfilling the commitment to generate business revenues from this asset base. Moreover, both six-year operations and capital expansion levies expire at the end of 2013. Funding the open space system beyond 2013 will require significant effort on the part of the King County Executive, the King County Council, the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, the Parks and Recreation Division, its partners and the public. Maintaining relationships

with civic, corporate and community partners will continue as a central tenet, as the agency remains committed to stewarding and enhancing the parks and trails that make up King County's remarkable open space system.

The Open Space Plan is organized into six chapters that provide an overview of King County, its landscape, and the parks, trails, natural areas, and forests that fall under the jurisdiction of King County. Chapter One provides background and context, including the natural setting of King County as a landscape. Chapter Two provides an overview of the Parks and Recreation Division and its goals as a major open space provider. Chapter Three discusses King County's approach to and classification of open space, including an overview and inventory of the open space assets managed by the Parks and Recreation Division. Finally, Chapters Four, Five and Six relate to the Capital Improvement Program and operations of the Parks and Recreation Division.

Consistent with the *King County Comprehensive Plan*, the term "open space system" is used in this plan in its broadest definition. Multiple King County agencies manage and acquire land for open space purposes, from recreation to habitat conservation to flood hazard reduction. As this Open Space Plan primarily guides the Parks and Recreation Division, the focus of the policies and content of this document is on parks, trails, natural areas, and forest lands, which are those open space lands largely managed by the Parks and Recreation Division. The Parks and Recreation Division works collaboratively with other divisions on open space acquisition and conservation strategies, such as the Water and Land Resources Division, which stewards open space lands for agricultural and flood hazard management purposes.

The Open Space Plan builds on and is informed by the planning efforts and public processes of previous documents, such as *King County's Open Space System: Parks, Trails, Natural Areas and Working Resource Lands (2004)*, the *King County Comprehensive Plan (2008)*, the *Parks Futures Task Force Report (2007)*, the *Regional Trails Inventory and Implementation Guidelines (2004)*, the *Parks Business Transition Plan (2002)*, and the 2009 King County Community Survey.