

# **KING COUNTY SHORELINE PUBLIC ACCESS PLAN**

September 2010

## **A. Purpose and General Description of Public Access Plan**

Public access is one of the three overarching State goals for shoreline management. The Shoreline Management Act (SMA) requires local governments to assure that shoreline recreational development is given priority (WAC 173-26-241 (3)(i)), and, along Shorelines of Statewide Significance, local governments must increase public access to publicly owned shoreline areas (RCW 90.58.020). Local governments are also required to promote and enhance the public interest with regard to rights to access waters held in public trust by the State while protecting private property rights and public safety.

The King County Shorelines Technical Appendix (May 2007) includes an inventory of existing formal and informal shoreline public access opportunities in the unincorporated area and identifies gaps in public access opportunities. This Public Access Plan describes King County's priorities for providing new public access to major shorelines in the unincorporated area. This Plan focuses on King County owned land and identifies areas for pursuing new County voluntary acquisitions. The King County Shorelines Technical Appendix includes information on other public agencies and private entities that provide public access along the shorelines.

### **1. Defining Public Access**

Ecology's guidelines define public access as the ability of the general public to reach, touch, and enjoy the water's edge, to travel on the waters of the state, and to view the water and the shoreline from adjacent locations (WAC 173-26-221(4)(a)). King County recognizes that there is both formal and informal public access occurring on unincorporated area shorelines.

King County used the following criteria to identify formal and informal public access sites.

- Formal public access sites are those managed specifically by King County for recreational use by the public. These formal sites are primarily managed by the Parks and Recreation Division of the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (Parks).
- Informal public access sites include those where access is not formally developed or managed by King County for recreation and those where public access is not specifically allowed. These informal sites are primarily owned and managed by Parks and the King County Department of Transportation.

King County will apply the following criteria when it consider establishing new formal shoreline public access sites:

1. Shoreline public access points, including view points, trails within shoreline areas, and other sites, must minimize impacts to ecologically critical areas;
2. Shoreline public access points must not present a public safety risk;
3. King County site management should minimize adverse impacts to adjacent properties; and
4. Use of or access to the site must be in accordance with guidance on public use contained in King County property or site management guidance and funding sources associated with King County ownerships.

King County will also consider the availability of legal parking or the ability to provide legal parking nearby. However, parking will not be a requirement for public access, since some sites will be accessed by means other than automobiles (for example, along regional trails).

## **B. Methods and Priorities**

### **1. Methods**

As described in the King County Shorelines Technical Appendix, gaps in existing formal public access to shorelines were identified by King County parks and natural land managers based on:

- A notable geographic absence in public access opportunities
- A notable absence in type of public access opportunities
  - Visual: opportunity for viewing shoreline or water, such as from a viewpoint or trail
  - Physical: opportunity for entering the water
- Informal access and use of a site in the gap area has been identified, confirming need
- General population in proximity to and demand for access in the area

A subset of the gap areas were identified as priority areas for providing new public access or improved public access where informal access already exists. Remaining gap areas are considered areas where additional future opportunities for public access may be pursued. Existing County ownerships or street ends<sup>1</sup> were identified as priority sites for providing new or improved public access if they fall within a priority area. If

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<sup>1</sup> Street ends are defined as points where a King County road (on County owned right-of-way) ends within the shoreline jurisdiction in the unincorporated area. Street ends may provide opportunities for the public to access shorelines.

there are no County ownerships within a priority area, that area is considered a general location where the County may pursue new voluntary acquisitions for public recreation.

Creating opportunities for new formal public access could include expanding facilities at existing formal access sites, improving informal access sites, and creating new access in areas such as public street ends along the shoreline.

## **2. Public Access Priorities**

The results of the gaps and priorities analysis resulted in the identification of ten priority shoreline areas where King County can focus efforts to provide new formal public access on existing County ownerships or pursue new voluntary acquisitions for public recreation (see <http://www.kingcounty.gov/shorelines> for maps). These priority areas include:

### **Gap 1: Snoqualmie River Area**

The Snoqualmie River gap is found in the most northerly section of the river in King County. The Snoqualmie Valley Trail runs from Rattlesnake Lake south of North Bend to Duvall just short of the northern county line. The gap section includes the county ownership of an undeveloped trail section that is planned for development at such time as this section has a defined destination across the county line. The trail meanders along the Snoqualmie River for portions of this distance providing visual access to the river. County parks in Duvall and Carnation to the south provide developed parks with river access. There are no King County ecological or working resource lands in this area.

### **Gap 2: Bassett Pond Area**

This gap area contains Bassett Pond Natural Area, a 32 acre site that is part of a larger natural area complex (Cold Creek) totaling 160 acres; Cold Creek runs through the complex. The natural area has parking, a picnic shelter and trails providing limited visual and physical access to the creek; a non-maintained trail provides both visual and physical access to the pond. The site management plan for the complex calls for parking and trail improvements at Bassett Pond Natural Area.

### **Gap 3: North Raging River Area**

This gap area contains the Raging River Natural Area (51 acres); the Raging River runs outside along the western edge of the site. Although there are unimproved trails on the site, they do not provide visual access to the river. There is limited informal parking on the road alongside the natural area.

#### **Gap 4: South Raging River Area**

The South Raging River gap section is located north of State Highway I-90 in east central King County. The Preston Snoqualmie Trail, an approximately seven mile long developed regional trail, runs along the western edge of the gap area. Two King County Parks, Preston Park (.6 acre) and the Preston Mill Site (24 acres), are located within this area as well. The Raging River transects the Preston Mill site and there is potential for improving the limited visual access to the river from within the site. This gap section does not contain any King County managed natural resource lands.

#### **Gap 5: Issaquah Creek Area**

This gap area contains Log Cabin Reach Natural Area on Issaquah Creek. The site supports limited visitor parking. The property has several trails which provide visual and informal physical access to Issaquah Creek at multiple points along the creek.

#### **Gap 6: Northwest Cedar River Area**

The Cedar River flows approximately 22 miles from the Landsburg Dam to its outlet to Lake Washington in the city of Renton. Numerous opportunities for formal public access occur to the west within the city and to the east at Landsburg. The 16-mile Cedar River Trail offers visual access along the river for most of its length through unincorporated King County to the boundary of the Cedar River Watershed.

There are no park sites offering formal physical access identified along the Northwest Cedar River gap area of the river. There are approximately 230 acres of natural areas in nine sites that are adjacent to the river, several King County Roads right-of-ways that provide access to the Cedar River, and several properties managed by the county's river and floodplain management program. Most of the natural areas were acquired under the Cedar River Legacy program for their habitat value; a few sites were acquired in previous decades as natural portions of larger regional parks. Low-impact passive recreation is a secondary goal for natural areas, where such use does not harm the ecological value of the sites. Several natural areas have informal access points regularly used by the public to view and access the river. Topography, wetlands, and restrictions on public road access or feasible parking areas are the main constraints to river access at many natural areas.

#### **Gap 7: Southeast Cedar River Area**

The Southeast gap area of the Cedar River offers extensive visual access to the shoreline, but no public park sites are found within this section to provide formal physical access to the river. There are approximately 260 acres of natural areas in five sites that are adjacent to the river, at least one King County Roads right-of-way which provides access to the Cedar River, and a few properties managed by the county's river and floodplain management program. Most of the natural areas were acquired under the Cedar River Legacy program for their habitat value. Low-impact passive recreation

is a secondary goal for natural areas, where such use does not harm the ecological value of the sites. Most of the current river access points on natural areas occur at one natural area which provides multiple view and informal physical access points. Topography, wetlands, and restrictions on public road access or feasible parking areas are the main constraints to river access at the other natural areas.

### **Gap 8: Soos and Covington Creeks Area**

There are no King County properties within the Soos Creek gap area, therefore no public access opportunities exist at this portion of the two creeks. There is access to Soos Creek immediately downstream at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife property and a King County Natural Area, and on nearby public lands along the Green River. Immediately upstream of this gap area, the King County Parks Soos Creek Trail extends for miles, providing visual and informal physical access along the creek.

### **Gap 9: Green River Area**

The Green River gap area is located within the Upper Green River Agricultural Production District, where most of the land is in private ownership and is used for agricultural production. The Agricultural Production District is intended to preserve farming on agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance, in keeping with the King County Comprehensive Plan and the Washington State Growth Management Act. There are several hundred acres of natural areas in this gap area. Access primarily occurs at the western edge of the designated gap area, at the King County Hatchery Natural Area and adjacent Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife property; additional access opportunities occur downstream on natural area, State and City of Auburn lands. Access also occurs at the upstream edge of this designated gap area within a natural area, as well as other opportunities further upstream on King County Parks land and several thousand acres of State Parks. Most of the natural areas within the identified gap do not support feasible public access opportunities due to steep topography or lack of legal or physical access.

### **Gap 10: White River Area**

The White River gap area is located along the river between Highway 410 and Boise Creek. The Enumclaw Plateau Trail is planned to link with the Pierce County Foothills Trail System within this gap area. This trail will include a bridge crossing of the White River and will provide the public with visual and potential physical access to the White River in an area that does not offer many opportunities for shoreline access of any type.

## **C. References to Existing King County Public Access Plans and Projects**

The following planning and policy documents outline management objectives and goals for management of the King County Park and Natural Resource lands and establish priorities for acquisition, planning, and development of open space, park, natural areas, working resource areas (farm and forest), and trails.

King County Countywide Planning Policies (2006)

King County Comprehensive Plan (2008, with updates through 2010)

King County Open Space Plan: Parks, Trails, and Natural Areas (2010 Update)

King County Parks and Recreation Division, Business Plan (2002)

King County Regional Trails Plan (1992)

King County Parks and Recreation Division Regional Trail Inventory and Implementation Guidelines (2004)

King County Parks and Recreation Regional Trail Needs Report (2006)

King County Water and Land Resource Division Programmatic Plan for Management of King County-owned Ecological Lands (2004)

King County Water and Land Resource Division Programmatic Plan for Management of King County-owned Working Forest Properties (2003)

King County Water and Land Resource Division Ecological Lands Handbook (2003)

King County Greenprint (March 2005)

Public Boating and Fishing Access to the Cedar (October 2006)

Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River Valley Phase II – River Corridor Public Use Concept (September 1997)

In addition, individual master plans or site management guidelines have been developed for many of the parks and natural resource land sites. It is the intent of King County Shoreline Master Program to support implementation of many of the plans, policies and projects identified in the documents listed above.

## **D. How This Plan Should Be Used**

This Plan is a guidance document that is meant to help direct future shoreline public access acquisitions, planning and development. The Plan is intended to be implemented through existing King County park and recreation programs, primarily through the Department of Natural Resources and Parks.

## **E. Public Access Plan Priorities - Maps**

Public access priority maps are available online at [your.kingcounty.gov/shorelines](http://your.kingcounty.gov/shorelines). The maps illustrate the highest priority areas for shoreline public access.