

**Response to a Council Request for a Work Plan
Regarding the R-650 Watershed Planning Process
per Ordinance 17485**



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Executive Summary

River valleys in King County provide rich soils for abundant agricultural production. Historically, these same rivers have provided an abundance of another culturally and economically important resource, salmon. Seasonally recurrent floods in river valleys put people, homes, businesses, farms, roads, and recreation at risk. Floods shape and reshape the paths of rivers and, in the process, both enrich and erode soil, creating and maintaining critical habitat, and enabling significant economic activities, while posing significant threats to life and property.

Providing new approaches for people, businesses, farms, and fish to be safe and thrive in the midst of our shared river valleys is the purpose of the R-650 watershed planning process.

On December 3, 2012, the King County Council updated the King County Comprehensive Plan through adoption of Ordinance 17485. Comprehensive Plan Policy R-650 (see Attachment A for full text) calls for, "...a collaborative watershed planning process with the goal of maintaining and improving agricultural viability, improving ecological function and habitat quality, and restoring floodplains through integrated, watershed-wide strategies." This report responds to Section 50.M of the ordinance, which calls for the Executive to complete a report outlining the work plan for the watershed planning process described in Comprehensive Plan Policy R-650. Section 50.M reads as follows:

1. "The Executive shall complete a report outlining the work plan for the watershed planning process to be established for an agricultural production district ("APD") as contemplated in Comprehensive Plan Policy R-650.
2. The report shall:
 - a. Establish the criteria for creating a watershed planning process;
 - b. Recommend the general work plan for any established watershed planning process; and,
 - c. The categories of stakeholders proposed to be included for any established watershed planning process and the proposed number of participants from each category. The categories shall be but are not limited to: farmer(s) and/or resident(s) affected by the proposed project(s) in the APD; a representative from the WRIA in which the affected APD is located; a representative from the King County Agriculture Commission from the affected APD; a representative from the King Conservation District; and subject matter experts.
3. The report shall be transmitted to the council by March 1, 2013..."

Introduction

The Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD) of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks will lead the effort to create the R-650 watershed planning process, working with affected stakeholder groups representing a cross-section of agricultural, habitat and flood plain restoration interests. The goal of the work will be, through collaborative stakeholder dialogue, to devise multi-objective strategies that consider farm, fish and river management priorities while improving conditions for all.

The expected outcomes of the watershed planning processes:

- Creation of an integrated long-term watershed strategy that balances the needs of salmon habitat, agriculture, and flood risk reduction. The focus will be primarily in the APDs, nearby farmlands and adjoining river valleys. Broader needs, opportunities, and priorities throughout the watershed will also be considered to provide appropriate balance and a broad enough geography to ensure that no one public benefit dominates. The strategy will include development of shared goals, criteria for considering tradeoffs between different approaches, and a landscape approach to creating improved conditions for all three public priorities in the river valleys: agricultural viability, ecological function and habitat quality, and restoration of floodplains.
- Development of a prioritized list of recommended actions for improving agricultural viability, ecological functions, habitat quality, and floodplain restoration for consideration by the Executive and, through the budget process or regulatory proposals, by the King County Council and/or, as appropriate, the King County Flood Control District. These recommendations may include program, regulatory and policy changes, construction projects, feasibility studies, funding strategies and grant proposals, and education efforts. This list will be updated as needed to inform budget proposals and/or future amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.
- Definition of a pathway for providing periodic update of the list of recommended actions over time, informing decisions about proposed actions and providing accountability for progress made.

The following section responds specifically to the request for Criteria, General Work Plan, and Participant Categories and Numbers.

A. Criteria for Creating a Watershed Planning Process

The Snoqualmie River and the Green River APDs, which contain the largest APDs coexistent with river corridors in King County, are distinct in geography, agricultural communities, habitat and flooding issues. The criteria below were used to identify a watershed/APD that could make substantive progress on a multi-objective strategy in the near term as well as serve as a pilot for other APDs and their watersheds:

- The area has the most imminent need for a multi-objective process based on community concerns and project readiness

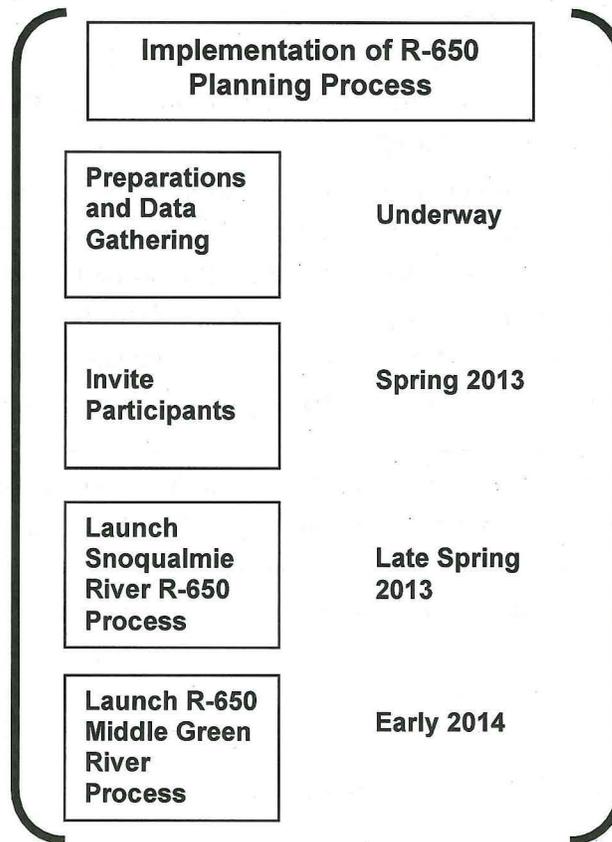
- A body of technical analysis has been developed for a reach or river such that critical technical questions can be addressed
- Habitat or floodplain restoration projects, or flood facility repairs, have been identified that have the potential to reduce agricultural viability at the site-specific scale
- The area is in, or predominantly in, the APD
- High value habitat restoration potential as defined in adopted Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) plans coexists with high priority agricultural lands
- Existing collaborative relationships between stakeholders, property owners, agencies, other stakeholders and county staff have already been established
- Funding is available to move forward on habitat and river management projects
- Agriculture landowners have already taken substantive actions to support fish recovery.

Given these criteria, the area that best meets the above criteria is the Snoqualmie watershed. The work will therefore focus in the Snoqualmie River during 2013-14, and lay the groundwork to undertake an additional R-650 process in the Green River beginning in 2014. The lessons from the Snoqualmie River work project will be used to ensure success on the Green River project.

B. General Work Plan

The watershed planning process will be initiated in three primary steps:

1. Preparation and compilation of existing conditions information for the river system/geographic area of concern including existing adopted plans; feasibility and engineering studies; technical information including limiting factors for habitat; hydrology and water quality conditions and future conditions models; geomorphological studies; agricultural production and infrastructure; community expectations; economic studies; land use and population growth projections; and other relevant information as determined during the technical scoping and through community input;
2. Formation of an R-650 watershed planning process committee that will define community interests and develop a shared vision and serve in an advisory role to the Executive; and
3. Development and completion of a planning process that takes the information from steps 1 and 2 and uses it to develop a set of potential future outcomes. The methodology to be used in step 3 will be defined during the pilot project but will likely follow historical planning practices used by King County in the development of other regional plans such as basin plans, the Farms Report, cost-benefit analyses, Endangered Species Act (ESA) recovery plans and water quality plans. Typically such plans have used current and future conditions simulation models and community value systems analysis to identify a set of future scenarios and a social/economic evaluation to evaluate the feasibility, benefits and costs of achieving different outcomes.



Preparations, Data Gathering, and Updating (Underway)

The internal King County work to initiate the planning processes will be completed by April 30, 2013, including the initial compilation of information and maps to inform the process. Such work will include at a minimum:

Context

- Survey of similar efforts in Snohomish, Skagit and Whatcom counties
- Water rights availability and demand (from Washington State Department of Ecology records)
- Review of agricultural priorities, activities and inclusion of demand for drainage or other infrastructure improvements
- Summary of flood risks and public safety hazards
- Summary of major habitat deficiencies and status of WRIA Recovery Plan priorities and implementation
- Overview of other economic, social, and policy issues and legal mandates that pertain to this work.

Inventory of Historical Work

- Inventory of existing farms; status; major crops; limits on production
- Actions farms have already taken to improve fish habitat plantings
- Community plans (if any)
- Flood hazard projects and status
- Actions already taken to reduce flood hazards for farms (farm pads, home elevations, levee repairs)

- Completed habitat restoration project sites

Geographic Information

- Known potential project sites (flood reduction/habitat/drainage/other) in the APD (from all project proponents)
- Known areas of greatest and least overlap of different community interests
- Potential actions to increase agricultural production.
- Known water quality and quantity issues

The project team will consult with the Agriculture Commission, WRIA Forums, Flood District staff, state and local regulatory agencies and affected tribes before finalizing the work program.

Formation and Launch of Watershed Planning Processes (Third Quarter 2013)

In 2013, Stakeholders will be identified and invited to join the Snoqualmie River R-650 Advisory Committee (see Section C) as soon as is feasible but no later than July 2013. The Committee will advise the Executive with respect to near- and long-term strategy development that benefits agriculture, habitat restoration and multi-objective river management that reduces flood hazards. The Water and Land Resources Division will staff the effort. Meetings will begin as soon as possible but in any event no later than the fall of 2013.

Committee work will reflect information from existing organizations, technical experts, groups of landowners, and other groups as appropriate based on geography, type of farming, habitat or flood actions proposed, or other aspects needing specialized input.

The following outcomes are anticipated from the Snoqualmie River R-650 process in 2013:

1. Identification of Stakeholder interests.
2. Agreement on operating rules for committee interactions and development of shared interests.
3. Sponsorship of one or more public workshops that engage a wider audience to:
 - a) inform the development of outcomes and vision for the future that takes all interests into account; and, b) discuss near-term priorities (see following paragraph).
4. A shared vision and watershed strategy for a suite of prioritized actions, tradeoffs, and potential outcomes towards agricultural viability, salmon recovery, and floodplain restoration.
5. A corresponding list/plan of recommendations to the Executive regarding priority programs, actions, regulatory changes, capital projects, costs of each and potential schedule for implementation.

The Advisory Committee will also make recommendations for how it should continue to be involved in watershed planning in the Snoqualmie River valley in the longer term including evaluation of monitoring information and achievement (or lack) of expected outcomes, and identify lessons learned for R-650 watershed planning in the Green River and other watersheds.

The workshops noted above will afford the opportunity for standing committee members to reach out to the community and build understanding across the geography and multiple interests at issue in the floodplains. Public workshops in WRIA 7 and the Snoqualmie APD will be conducted after the initial meetings and with input from the R-650 participants. The purpose of the workshops will be to test the emerging work of the watershed planning process participants in the larger community of stakeholders, build understanding, and further explore potential opportunities for multi-objective gains.

After the workshops, the committee will meet on a monthly basis starting as soon as possible and continuing into 2014. The work will focus on developing near-term and longer term strategies such as:

1. Identification of limited value-added regulations on agriculture for which relief can be sought from regulatory agencies (county, state or federal) to enhance agricultural productivity without undermining habitat gains, or,
2. Identification of habitat projects in the river corridor that pose no, or limited, threat to agricultural productivity within the watershed, or that have impacts that can be addressed through alternative strategies (see 3.).
3. Identification of alternative strategies that increase acreage and/or food production options available to farmers. These may include improved drainage; transfer of development rights; value added crops; new agricultural infrastructure including food processing plants; alternative marketing options such as public procurement contracts; zoning changes in cities and the county to enhance economic development.

Following this work, the committee may continue to advise the County on an intermittent basis to ensure implementation of a systematic approach to multi-objective river management.

When the work in the Snoqualmie pilot area has advanced enough to inform efficient methodology, and the resources to begin the planning process in the Green River are available, work will be undertaken in the Green River watershed including the Enumclaw Plateau. This work will build on the work in the Snoqualmie River valley and depend upon strong community participation from the watershed and the WRIA 9 partnerships.

C. Advisory Committee (Categories of Stakeholders and Proposed Number of Participants)

WLRD will seek input from the following types of non-elected advisory committee members:

- Rural landowners (up to 3 from the APD of whom at least one is a landowner in a potentially affected area)
- WRIA Representatives (2, one each policy and technical)
- Agricultural Commission (1, who lives in the affected APD)
- King Conservation District Board of Supervisors or Delegate (1)
- Adjacent Cities (up to 2)
- King County Flood Control District Staff (1)

- Tribes (2, one each from Tulalip and Snoqualmie Tribes)
- Agricultural Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) (1)
- Environmental NGO (2)

Potential additions:

- Washington State Department of Ecology (1)
- Washington State Department of Fisheries and Wildlife (1)
- Washington State Conservation Commission (1)
- Washington Department of Agriculture (1)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (1)

The stakeholder group will establish on-going relationships with the Snoqualmie Forum and the comparable King County Flood Control District body.

Budget

The work is estimated to need about 4000 hours of staff time (both operating and capital staff) in 2013 and \$150,000 for consultant assistance and technical support also in 2013. The technical support will likely include future scenarios modeling, economic analyses, and compilation of technical information and/or response to community questions and is estimated at \$90,000. The facilitation assistance is estimated at \$60,000. This budget is in addition to WLRD staff support for project management; technical analysis; consultant management and quality control.

The adopted 2013-14 budget for R-650 (budget referred to R-648 which was the policy number prior to adoption of the 2012 King County Comprehensive Plan) appropriated by the King County Council was:

- \$215,000 for 2013
- \$217,250 for 2014

Based on the planning process outlined in this report, we believe the appropriation is sufficient. As the pilot moves forward, if additional resource needs are identified we would work to develop a budget proposal for Council consideration.

Comprehensive Plan Policy R-650 with Explanatory Text

Policy R-650 is in the Resource Lands Section of Chapter 3 of the updated Comprehensive Plan. It is preceded by explanatory text as follows:

The river valleys in King County are critical locations for agriculture, salmon habitat and natural floodplain processes. In compliance with growth management, portions of several of these valleys were designated as Agriculture Production Districts (APDs) to protect the diminishing farmland for long-term commercial agriculture, thereby preventing their conversion to other uses that are often incompatible with habitat protection or that would require expensive flood risk reduction projects.

Some of the highest quality of salmon habitat in King County is found within the APDs. As a result of federal listing of Chinook salmon as a threatened species, King County is obligated to take actions for protection of Chinook habitat in our watersheds. Such actions include restoration of habitat in portions of each of our rivers and, because many sections of our river systems are in a highly altered state, those reaches within APDs offer some of the most promising opportunities for habitat restoration critical to salmon recovery. Each of the Water Resources Inventory Area Salmon Conservation Plans has recommended additional protection or restoration of critical habitat within the APDs. At the same time King County is committed to the preservation of productive agricultural soils and local agricultural production and protection of public safety in flood prone areas through the restoration of floodplain processes.

The farmers in the county support fish protection and fish recovery through many regulated and voluntary actions. King County recognizes that fish, flood management, and farm interests must work together in a collaborative manner. It is essential that farmers and other property owners in each watershed be directly included in planning and in the review of integrated, watershed-wide strategies that support the needs of agriculture, fish recovery, and flood risk reduction and floodplain management. Specific habitat protection rules should not jeopardize the agricultural productivity within the APDs.

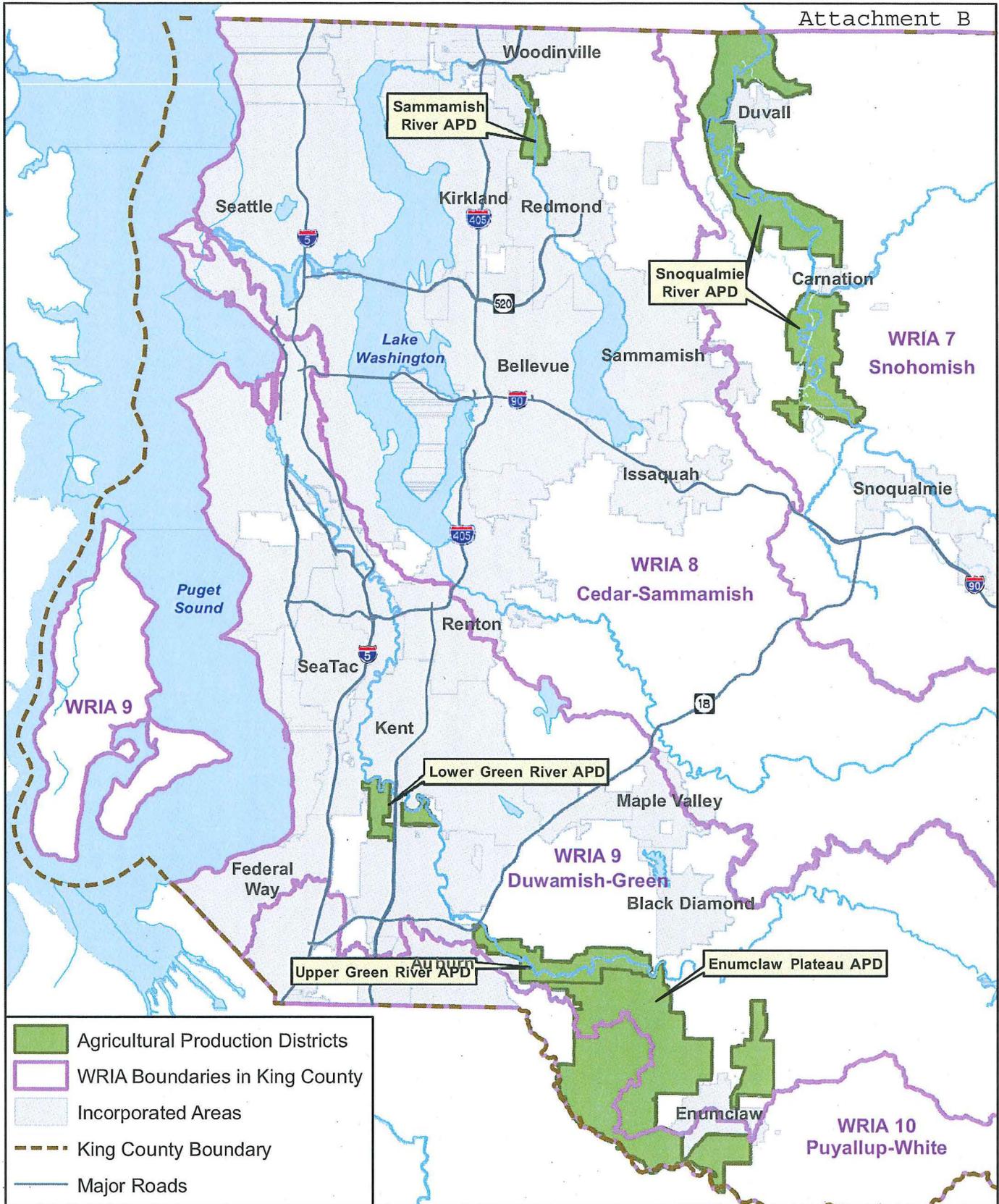
R-650 Aquatic habitat restoration projects, floodplain restoration projects and projects under King County's mitigation reserves program in an Agricultural Production District (APD) shall be evaluated through a collaborative watershed planning process with the goal of maintaining and improving agricultural viability, improving ecological function and habitat quality, and restoring floodplains through integrated, watershed-wide strategies. A watershed planning process shall be established for an agricultural production district because of the number of potential restoration projects and shall:

- a. Ensure that agricultural viability in the agricultural production district is not reduced as the result of actions taken and that agriculture remains the predominant use in the agricultural production district;
- b. Evaluate and recommend actions at all scales across the affected watershed to maintain and improve agricultural viability, restore ecological functions

and aquatic habitat and restore floodplains, including voluntary actions taken by landowners;

- c. Be a collaborative effort among affected land owners, interested stakeholders, and King County and be updated on a periodic basis; and
- d. Identify and recommend actions that King County should take or ensure are taken to maintain and improve agricultural viability in the agricultural production district and address any impacts to agriculture from aquatic habitat restoration projects, floodplain restoration projects and projects under King County's mitigation reserves program constructed in the APD

Agricultural Production Districts in King County



Jan. 31, 2013



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