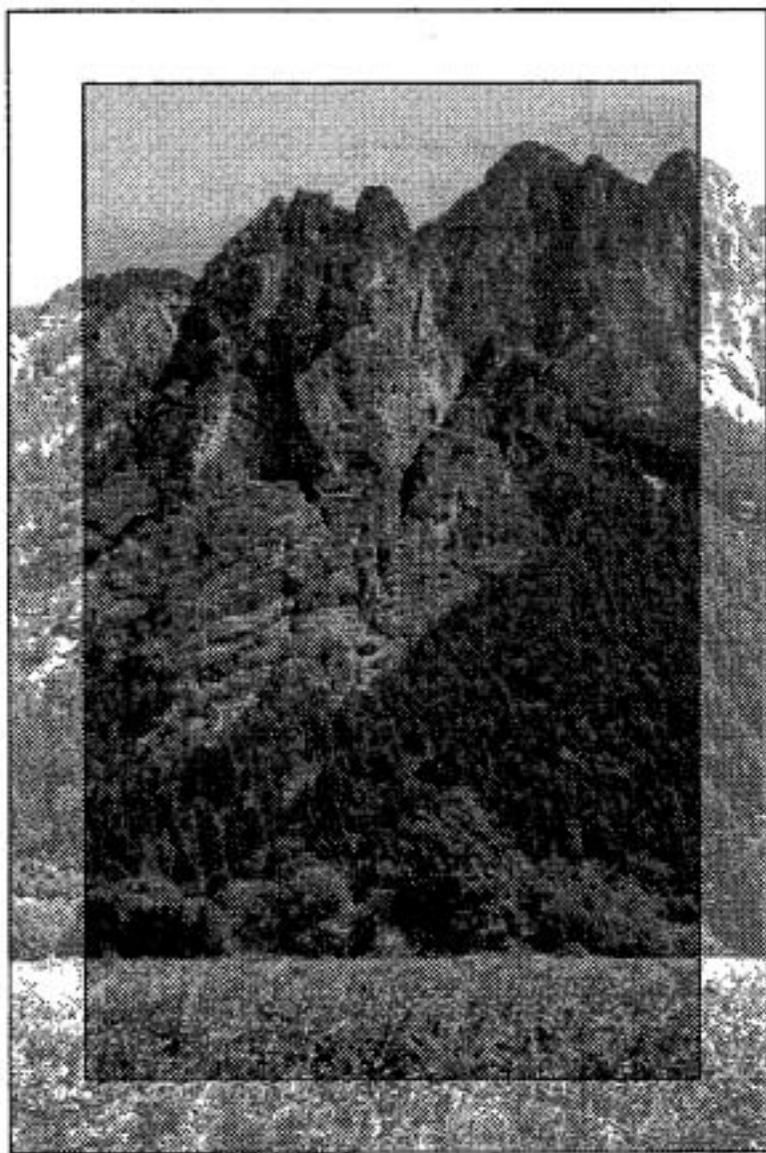
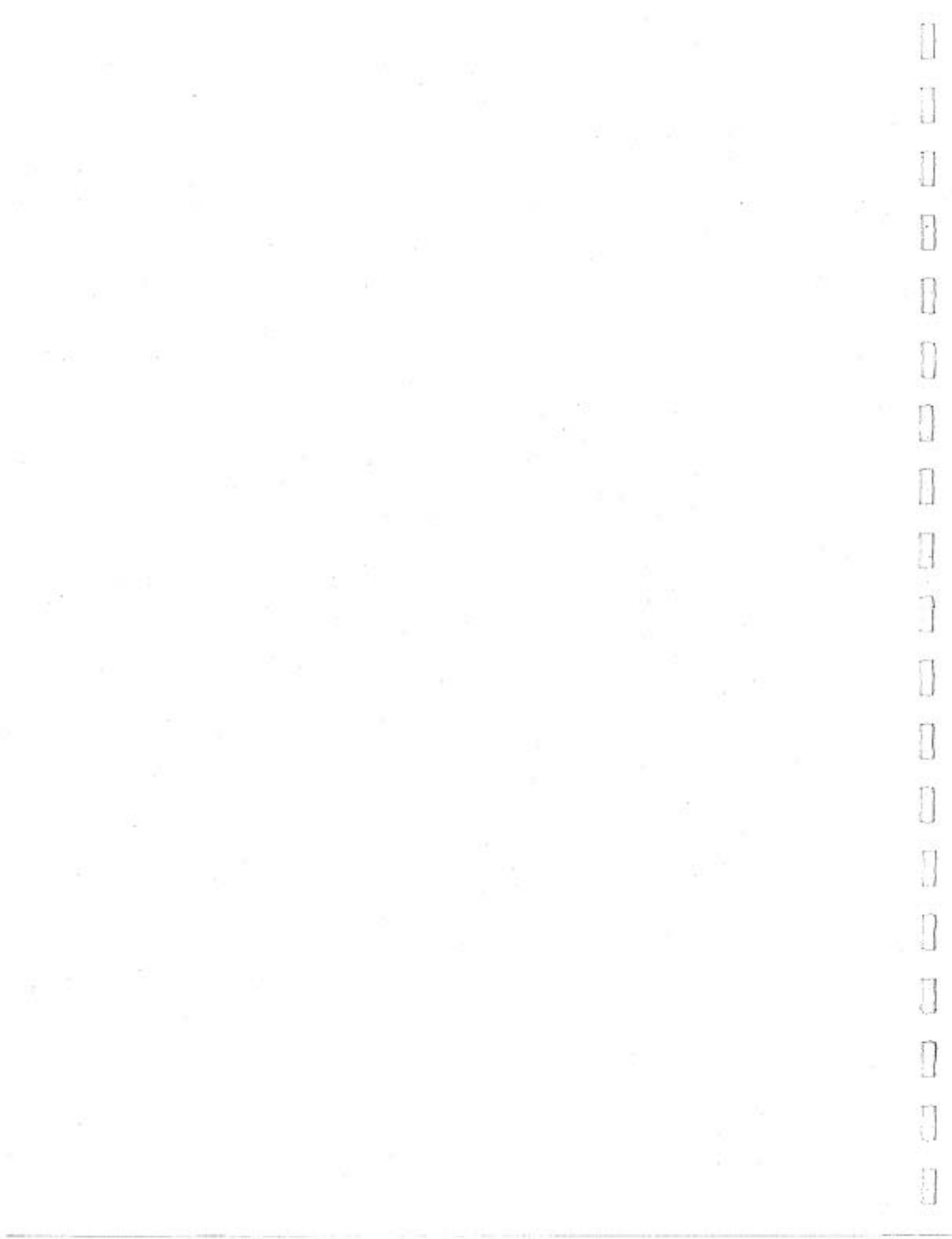


Background of the Farm & Forest Project



Chapter Two





Chapter 2

Background

As King County created its 1994 Comprehensive Plan, it gave special recognition to the urgent need to stem the loss of farms and forests by mandating a study to develop new strategies for preserving those uses in the rural zone. In May 1995, the County's Department of Parks, Planning and Natural Resources commissioned a consultant team¹ to develop a strategy consisting of four elements:

1. Recommendations regarding the designation of "rural farm and forest districts where farming and forestry will be encouraged through the creation of incentives and further zoning protections";
2. An analysis of the barriers to farming and forestry within King County;
3. Development of specific measures to address those barriers; and
4. Recommendations for the expenditure of approximately \$6 million in Arts and Natural Resources Initiative funding and \$1.4 million in Farmland Preservation Program funds which had been set aside as pilot funding for farm and forest preservation.

The team was given five months to meet this challenge.

Methodology

Advisory Committees

The team began by assembling three advisory committees to guide the study process:

- A farm advisory committee, acting under the auspices of the King County Agriculture Commission, provided the team with the advice of active farmers;

¹ The Consultant Team members are shown on page I.

- A forest advisory committee was established to reflect the diverse interests engaged in forestry and forest preservation within the county, and;
- A committee of County staff was assembled representing the various departments and divisions of the government which influence farming and forestry.

The members of these three committees are listed at the beginning of this report. Their efforts were extremely important to the progress of the study. In the aggregate, the committees conducted more than 30 meetings between May and October of 1995 to assist the consultant team in developing the recommendations contained in this report. In addition to the advisory committees, the team interviewed more than two dozen key civic leaders with an interest in preservation of the working landscapes of King County.

Public Meetings

Through these interviews and structured discussions within the committees, the team developed a list of specific issues related to the disappearance of farm and forest land within the rural areas of the county. These impressions were then tested in two public meetings, attended by more than 100 residents of rural communities.

As a result of this work, it became evident that the task of preserving the farm and forest lands of King County would require a coherent strategy to preserve the *practice* of farming and forestry as well as the land base for these uses. It also became clear that those who are pursuing these vocations currently feel estranged from the County, and that any effort to preserve the farms and forests must first rebuild the relationship of trust between rural residents and their government.

With the advisory committees' assistance, the team honed the long list of issues raised in interviews and public meetings to a specific list of barriers that must be addressed if farming and forestry are to survive in rural King County. The team then began a search for strategies to address those barriers. This search included a review of past studies conducted locally as well as a review of the literature for models that had been tested elsewhere in North America.

Site Visits and Mapping

During the same period, the team conducted site visits to each of the farm and forest study areas and worked to create a set of maps to illustrate various characteristics of the study areas. (A full set of the maps produced as part of the study is included as Appendix A.) Through the site visits and mapping, the team was able to develop an understanding of the complexity of the study areas, and to identify a range of preservation strategies that reflects the diversity of these lands. Chapter 4 of this report describes the diverse "landscapes of rural King

County" and outlines specific goals for preservation within each of these areas.

The mapping also helped to shape several of the team's recommendations. For example, by mapping ownership patterns, it became evident that strategies had to be crafted to deal with corporations that have large tracts of forest lands as well as with individuals whose holdings are scattered throughout the study areas. As another example, the mapping of parcels involved in current-use taxation gave the team the ability to gauge the impact of the four different current-use programs and to make recommendations to enhance their impact on preservation.

The site visits and mapping were also used to test the County's *original determination* that the study areas were worthy of preservation. The findings of that exercise are discussed in Chapter 3.

Review of the Strategies

These efforts culminated in the development of draft preservation strategies which were discussed in detail by the advisory committees and in a second set of public meetings. The strategies were then revised to reflect public comment and reviewed again by the committees. The recommendations that comprise the strategy to preserve farms were adopted unanimously by the Agriculture Commission and the farm advisory committee. The forest advisory committee, which had been organized to reflect the full range of opinion on forestry issues, provided advice to the team and did achieve consensus in support of a number of the recommendations. However, the committee did not formally adopt the forest strategy.

The team's proposed strategies are contained in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report. On October 20, 1995, the draft report was submitted to the County staff for review.* Based on their comments, and a series of meetings with key officials, the draft was revised, and this final report was prepared.

The County Executive's final recommendations regarding the strategies proposed in this report will accompany the submission of this document to the County Council during March 1996.

* (See Appendix Q for comments in the draft report.)

