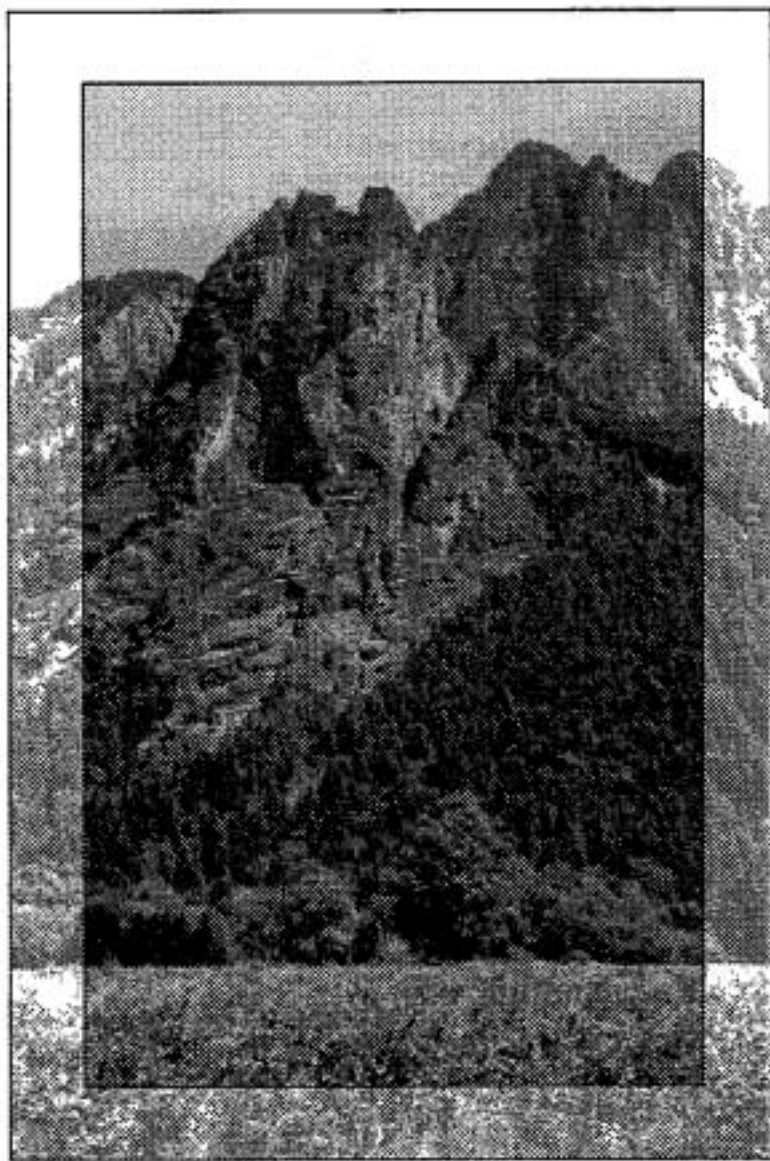
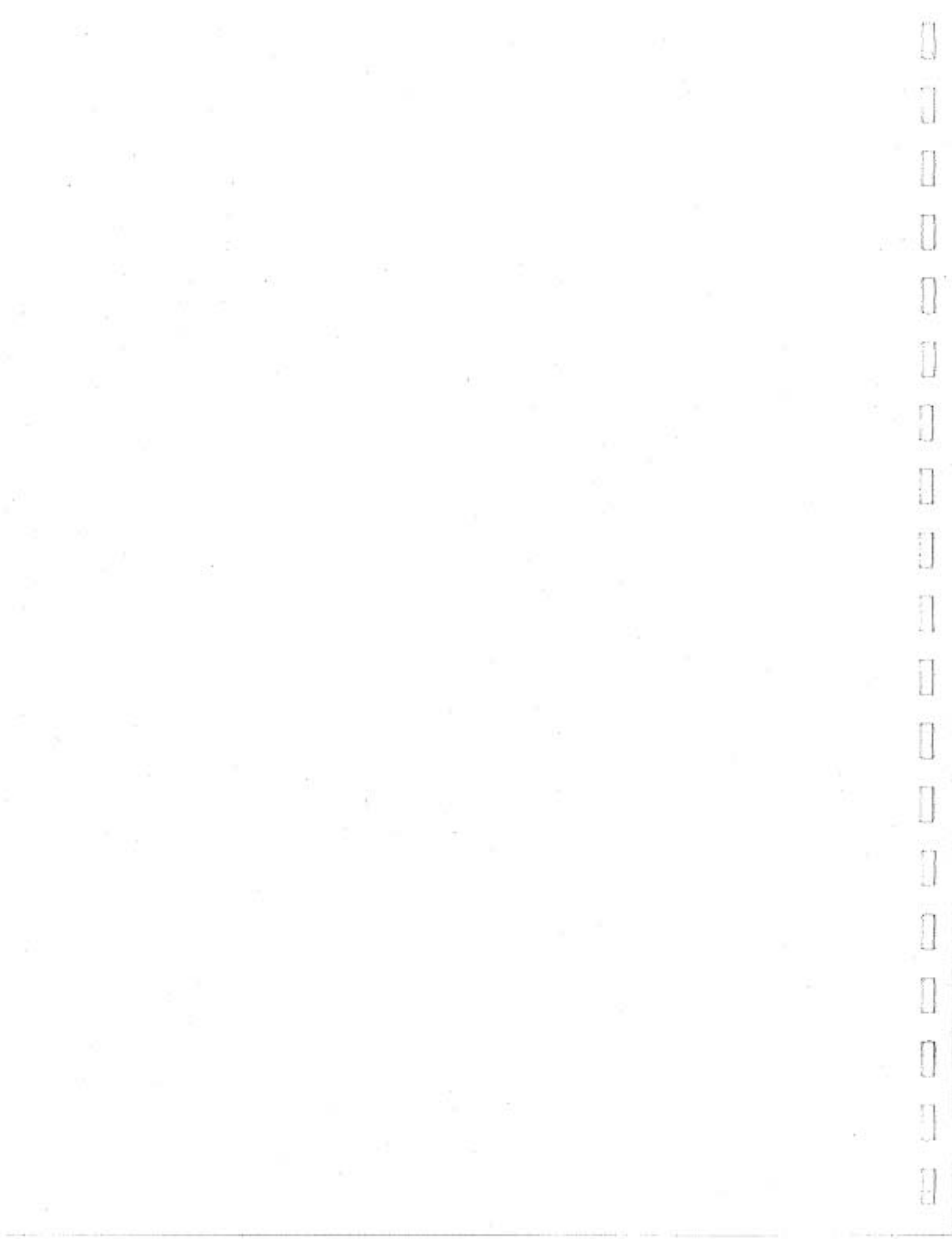


The Rural Farm and Forest Districts



Chapter Three





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The Rural Farm and Forest Districts

The 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan calls for the designation of "rural farm and forest districts where farming and forestry will be encouraged through the creation of incentives and further zoning protections." The County's planning policies (LU-8) state that lands which meet the following criteria shall be considered for designation:

- A. *Large blocks of land, either identified by King County or proposed by the property owners, with resource land characteristics or agriculture or forestry production potential;*
- B. *Land enrolled in the current use assessment program as farm and agricultural land or timber land under RCW 84.34 or enrolled for tax purposes as timber land under RCW 84.33;*
- C. *Land in proximity to designated Agriculture and Forest Production Districts, offering mutual buffering benefits and low potential for conflicts with adjacent uses; and*
- D. *Land with valuable environmental features such as wildlife habitat, ground water recharge, salmonid streams or high-value wetlands.*

Prior to commissioning the Farm and Forest Study, the County identified 61,000 acres of forest lands and 6,000 acres of agricultural lands which appeared to meet these criteria, and were outside of the Agricultural and Forest Production Districts established in the Comprehensive Plan. These lands were defined as "study areas" and became the focus of the consultant team's work.

Site visits were conducted to test the validity of the County's initial assessment of the study areas. These efforts, together with a preliminary analysis of GIS data, led the team to conclude that the vast majority of the study areas meet the basic criteria established by the County for designation.

In the team's opinion, three agricultural study areas contained land which did not meet the criteria to be designated. These areas, and the team's rationale, are described below:

- The small, triangular farm study area west of the Snoqualmie Agricultural Production District appears to be comprised almost

exclusively of forested slopes on which little if any agricultural activity was evident. This land's importance appears to be that it is part of the forest buffer protecting the Snoqualmie Valley. Therefore the team recommends adding the parcel to the adjacent rural forest district and deleting it from the list of agricultural study areas.

- The "Big Rock" study area just south of Duvall was included as both an agricultural and a forest study area. The team's site visits did not reveal significant agricultural activity in the area, but did find forested lands that provide a buffer against the urban growth area to the north. Therefore, the team recommends designating the area only as a rural forest district.
- The farm study area near Fall City was found to contain a variety of uses beside agriculture, including a landing strip and many large suburban-style homes. In general, these uses were concentrated on the southwest side of the Snoqualmie River as it flows through the study area, while farming activity and other compatible resources (e.g., wetlands) are evident on the northeast side of the river. Therefore, the team recommends deleting the portion of the study area south and west of the river, and designating the balance of the study area as a rural farming district.

In addition, the proposed Grandridge development is within a Rural Forest District. The consultant team recommends removing the property from the district as soon as the initial permits have been granted.

With the exception of these parcels, the team's work generally validated the County's initial effort to identify appropriate lands for designation. However in the short time available, the team was not able to do the detailed, parcel-by-parcel analysis and landowner notification necessary for final designation. Based on the consultant team recommendation, these districts were initially designated in the King County Comprehensive Plan in December, 1995. Therefore, the County has directed that the initial designations be confirmed based on detailed analysis and proper notification during 1996.

The Value of Designation

Designation of the Rural Farm and Forest Districts will serve multiple purposes in the County's efforts to pursue the strategies outlined in this report:

- It will reinforce the public's perception of the County's determination to preserve the working landscape within the rural zone;

- It will provide an important signal to farmers and foresters that their activities are important to the County;
- It will set the stage for efforts to protect agriculture and forestry through “right to farm” and “right to forest” protections within the districts;
- It will provide a benchmark for measuring the impact of preservation strategies; and
- It will allow the County, when necessary, to target its funding and staff resources to the areas in which they can be expected to have the greatest impact.

It is important to note, however, that many of the incentives recommended in this study (particularly those for farming) are intended to be used *countywide*, and will not be applied exclusively within the districts. Nevertheless, it is likely that designation will become more important over time. Therefore, the team recommends that the County adopt more detailed criteria and establish procedures to designate additional Rural Farm and Forest Districts upon the request of citizens.

During the study, the team developed somewhat more complete draft criteria for designation. Those draft criteria were reviewed by the advisory committees, and may provide a useful starting point for County staff. The suggested criteria are listed at the end of this chapter.

Procedures for Requesting Additional Designations (Or Deletions)

As the incentive programs are developed and the relevance of designation becomes more evident, residents of the rural area may seek to secure district designation for parcels outside the initial study areas. The team recommends the following procedures to address that possibility:

- Any citizen, or group of citizens may nominate an area for designation by submitting a request in writing to the King County Department of Natural Resources (KCDNR);
- Upon receipt of a request, KCDNR would issue a public notice of the request and conduct a site visit to certify the information provided by the applicant(s);

- In those instances in which designation appears justified, KCDNR will issue an appropriate notice to property owners in and adjacent to the nominated area, affording them an opportunity to comment for 30 days;
- Once the comment period has expired, KCDNR will prepare a recommendation for the County Executive for submission to the County Council;
- In those instances in which a designation does not appear to be justified, KCDNR will provide the applicant(s) a written response documenting its rationale; and
- To the extent possible, this process would run concurrently with the annual review of proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.

The same process could be employed to respond to any citizen(s) who may wish to have the County consider removing parcels from designation.

Suggested Criteria for Rural Farm Districts

Study areas that have the following characteristics will be designated as *Rural Farming Districts*:

- I. Lands that are important for food production, including:
 - A. Parcels in contiguous ownership of 20 or more acres devoted primarily to agricultural production;
 - B. Parcels in contiguous ownership of five to 20 acres that have produced income from agricultural production of at least \$200 per acre in three of the past five years;
 - C. Parcels in ownership of less than five acres that have produced income from agricultural production of at least \$1,500 per acre in three of the past five years;
- II. Lands that have the potential for food production at the levels listed above as indicated by:
 - A. a documented history of agricultural production at or above the levels in criteria I.A. through C.;
 - B. productive soils;
 - C. predominantly unspoiled condition (e.g., minimal impervious surface, no adjacent toxic sites, etc.);
 - D. adjacency to lands in agricultural production or in other uses compatible with agricultural production;
 - E. accessibility and potential availability to nearby farmers seeking to expand production or to new farmers seeking to enter commercial farming;
- III. Lands that contain important historical agricultural landmarks (e.g., historic barns) which have educational or cultural value of regional significance.

Suggested Criteria for Rural Forest Districts

Study areas that have the following characteristics will be designated as *Rural Forest Districts*:

- I. Lands that are, or have the potential to be, important in the production of commercial forest products, including:
 - A. Parcels in contiguous ownership of 20 acres or more that currently contain merchantable timber as defined by the Forest Practices Act.
 - B. Parcels in contiguous ownership of less than 20 acres that are enrolled in current use taxation programs related to forestry.
- II. Parcels of any size that have a documented history of significant production of forest products and are potentially important to sustaining future forestry in King County as indicated by:
 - A. productive soil,
 - B. adjacency to the Forest Production District or rural lands in active forestry.
- III. Parcels of any size that contain forests that provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife as indicated by:
 - A. designation as priority reaches by Waterways 2000;
 - B. designation as part of the critical wildlife habitat network identified in the Comprehensive Plan;
 - C. designation by King County as either regionally significant or locally significant resource areas.
- IV. Parcels that have been identified by the Surface Water Management Division as providing aquifer recharge areas which benefit regional water quality.
- V. Forest lands that have the potential to provide buffers between cities, or between the urban growth area and the rural area, agricultural production districts, or the forest production districts;

- VI. Forest lands that have been identified by the Office of Open Space as providing important linkages in the County's network of parks and open space lands, including:
 - A. lands immediately adjacent to public parks and open space;
 - B. lands that are part of, or adjacent to the Mountain to Sound Greenway or the Urban Rural Greenway.
- VII. Forest lands that contain historic or cultural resources of regional significance.

