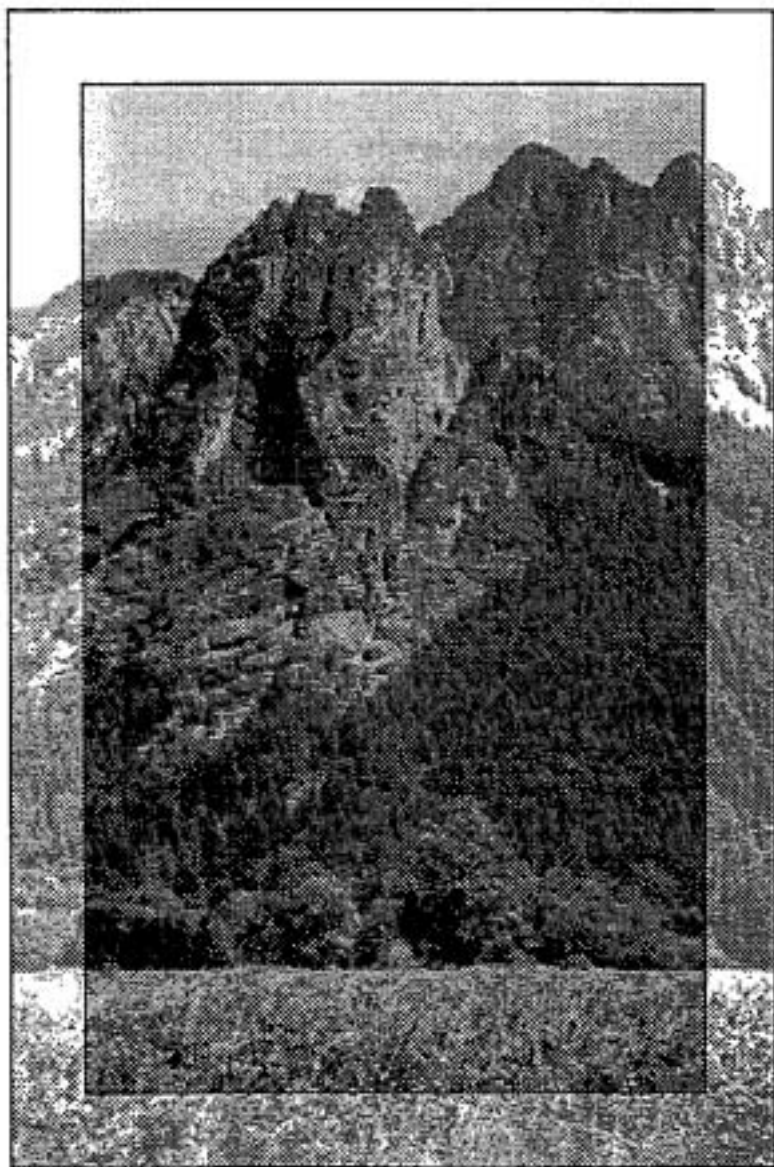


Farm & Forest



A Strategy for Preserving the Working Landscapes of Rural King County

Created for the King County Department of Natural Resources – 1996



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March 22, 1996

Dear Executive Locke:

We are very pleased to present the following report on strategies to preserve farm and forest land in King County. We believe this report represents a major milestone in King County's efforts to preserve these critical lands. King County has a long tradition of developing innovative strategies to conserve precious resource lands. Since the 1960s King County has been a national leader in developing a wide array of land acquisition and regulatory strategies that have preserved resource lands essential to our Northwest quality of life. We believe the Farm and Forest Report not only builds on that legacy, but will help the county take new directions in its search for effective solutions.

The ideas described in this report reflect the hard work of a large number of individuals. We worked with several citizen committees and a group of King County staff throughout the summer and fall of 1995. Nearly 50 citizens and a team of 30 county staff met regularly for five months to prepare this report. We also interviewed more than 30 stakeholders, received several hundred responses to a survey mailed to all farm and forest landowners, and held four well attended public meetings. We thank and admire those individuals for their ideas, energy, and dedication to maintaining King County's prized resource lands.

The initiative for this project began in 1994 when the King County Council adopted the Countywide Planning Policies and the Comprehensive Plan. Both documents established very clear policy direction to preserve the farm and forest resource lands in the rural portion of King County. The Countywide Planning Policies state:

Retention of resource-based uses and conservation of natural resource lands are important to maintaining the traditional character, environmental functions and values of the Rural Area. King County shall identify appropriate districts within the Rural Area where farming and forestry are to be encouraged and expanded.

Clearly the identification of strategies to preserve these lands was established as a high priority for the county. Farm and forest lands were recognized for their significant economic value and their importance to maintaining a lifestyle that both urban and rural residents enjoy.

However, while the policy direction to preserve the lands was clear, the language in the Comprehensive Plan and the Planning Policies suggests the difficulty in finding the right balance between regulatory and incentive strategies. Following are examples of some of the policy statements from the Comprehensive Plan that suggest some conflicting directions.

Comprehensive Plan Policy R-108 states:

King County shall identify, in partnership with citizens and property owners, appropriate districts within the Rural Area where farming and forestry are to be encouraged and expanded through incentives and additional zoning protections. These districts shall be designated and zoned by December 31, 1995. All incentive programs created by the county and related to zoning will be available to benefit landowners in the districts based on the zoning of their properties as of the effective date of this Plan.... Permitted uses in Rural Farm or Forest Districts should be limited to residences at very low densities (one home per 20 acres for forest areas, one home per 10 acres for farming areas)....

This policy suggests that zoning strategies are appropriate to be considered along with incentive programs for the newly designated farm and forest districts. The policy requires proposed incentive programs to be based on the 1994 Comprehensive Plan zoning designation of the rural farm and forest lands. The zoning adopted in the Comprehensive Plan for many of the farm and forest lands is one home per 5 or 10 acres, but the policy also states that densities in farm and forest districts *should* be lowered to one home per 10 or 20 acres.

The recommendations in the Farm and Forest Report attempt to reconcile the language in this policy by advancing incentives to cluster or transfer density in order to maintain large lots in the Rural Farm and Forest Districts, rather than by requiring a down-zone in the strictest sense. The Report also recommends baseline monitoring of the districts so that the success of the incentives can be monitored annually. In the event the incentives prove insufficient, it is recommended that the County consider a rezoning of the Farm and Forest Districts.

Comprehensive Plan Policy R-204 states:

A residential density of one home per 20 acres or 10 acres shall be applied to lands in the Rural Area that are managed for forestry or farming respectively, and are found to qualify for a Rural Farming or Forest District designation in accordance with Policy R-108.

This policy more strongly states that the lower densities will be applied. A problem with this policy is that the lower density shall be applied to lands "managed" for farming or forestry, in addition to qualifying for designation as a farm or forest district. The farm

and forest management provision would appear to reduce the value of lands for working farmers and foresters while not affecting the land values for those interested in development or land speculation.

While the policies cited above place an emphasis on regulatory approaches, other policies place an emphasis on the development of incentives. For example, Comprehensive Plan Policy R-402 states:

King County should use incentives to encourage farming and forestry in the Rural Area, including, but not limited to, tax incentives, expedited permit review and/or permit exemptions for resource activities complying with "Best Management Practices," reduced or eliminated processing fees for subdivisions for the purpose of recombining substandard lots and "right to farm" and "right to forest" provisions that would apply to all new development.

Additionally, policy RL-207 states:

King County should evaluate additional ways to encourage small-scale forestry outside the Forest Production District and land/water stewardship through landowner incentive programs and community-based education....

These and other Comprehensive Plan policies suggest the difficulty in finding strategies that will effectively preserve lands and be supported by a broad range of landowners and elected leaders. It is with this backdrop of the County's desire to find the right combination of incentives and regulatory strategies that the Farm and Forest Report recommendations were developed.

Throughout the five-month project, the large majority of farmers, foresters, landowners, and interested citizens stated that the County must craft strategies that will have a lasting impact on these important resource lands. Zoning, it was argued by most, provides temporary protections and is always subject to change. In addition, large-scale down-zoning would likely create an enormous amount of ill will among the citizens who must steward these farm and forest lands. Land acquisition was felt to be the best long-term solution toward conserving properties, but it was recognized that resources are limited for new acquisition programs.

Therefore, it was the general recommendation of the project's two advisory committees and the King County Agriculture Commission that a strong package of incentives would be the most effective means of conserving our rural farm and forest lands. This view was also widely supported by citizens who attended the project's four public meetings.

The package of incentives recommended in the following report has been devised to address two fundamental issues: (1) the preservation of the land base that supports farming and forestry, and (2) the encouragement of the business of farming and the

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------|--|
| APD | Agricultural Production District |
| CSA | community supported agriculture |
| CUT | Current Use Taxation |
| DDES | King County Department of Development and Environmental Services |
| FIP | Forestry Incentives Program |
| GIS | geographic information system |
| IRS | Internal Revenue Service |
| KCDNR | King County Department of Natural Resources |
| LUC | Land Use Committee |
| PBRS | Public Benefit Rating System |
| PSA | public service announcement |
| SIP | Stewardship Incentives Program |
| SMA | Shoreline Management Act |
| State DNR | Washington Department of Natural Resources |
| TDR | Transferable Development Right |
| TFW | Timber/Fish/Wildlife project |
| UGA | urban growth area |
| WDFW | Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife |
| WDOT | Washington Department of Transportation |
| WFFA | Washington Farm Forestry Association |

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The consultant team developed its recommendations for conserving the forest land base and promoting forestry activities with the significant involvement and generous time commitment of the citizen advisory committee. The recommendations also represent the opinion of dozens of interviewed stakeholders and landowners. While the advisory committee constantly aimed for consensus in its review or development of proposed recommendations, it was not always possible to achieve uniform agreement among such a large and diverse number of participants. Chapter 6 of this report builds on and amplifies the foundation of the many participants in this project, including the comments provided by members of the advisory committee to an early draft of this report. In the final analysis, however, the rural forest recommendations are the responsibility of the consultant team.

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