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CONTACT: Craig Ladiser, PDS Director, (425) 388-7119

County Responds to ‘No Net Loss’ Standard for Critical Areas Protection

On Friday, June 3, Snohomish County released the preliminary draft of its revised Critical Areas Regulations (CAR) for public review. A companion piece, the draft Summary of Best Available Science (BAS) document, was published simultaneously.

The state Growth Management Act (GMA) requires local governments to update their critical areas ordinances every seven years. The update must include the use of science-based information in policies and regulations to protect the functions and values of environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas and geologically hazardous areas. Counties are held accountable by state agencies to assure that “no net loss” of critical area functions and values are achieved. Snohomish County must complete its CAR review and revision process by December 1, 2005.

In releasing the draft regulations, Craig Ladiser, Director of the County’s Planning and Development Services Department, said that CAR represents just one aspect of the County’s approach to environmental protection.

“Achieving ‘no net loss’ is the outcome of a combination of actions, not just implementing critical areas regulations,” said Ladiser. “The natural environment chapter of our Comprehensive Plan gives us three principal tools for achieving this objective: restoration and enhancement, development regulations, and monitoring programs. We have positive actions underway on all these fronts. Updating CAR will ensure that development activities in critical areas complement the County’s overall environmental protection strategy.”

Ladiser acknowledged that the County’s current regulations are generally less stringent than those recommended by the state. Both King and Pierce Counties have adopted stricter critical areas ordinances to gain state acceptance. Ladiser said that Snohomish County’s preliminary draft ordinance proposes specific changes in some areas for the same purpose.

“Our intent is to use all the regulatory and non-regulatory tools available to us to respond to the no-net-loss standard,” said Ladiser. “The challenge is in helping landowners understand where our flexibility is and where it is not. These documents are intended to continue a public participation process that will likely bring about changes in how we manage environmentally sensitive areas, some of which may require new County programs,” said Ladiser.

The *Preliminary Draft Critical Area Regulations* and the *Draft Summary of Best Available Science for Critical Areas* are accessible on the County’s website at www.co.snohomish.wa.us, by selecting Critical Areas Review and Update on the homepage, or as printed copies available for purchase at the reception desk on the Fourth Floor, Administration Bldg. West on the County campus. The cost of the *Preliminary Draft Critical Area Regulations* is five dollars and the *Draft Summary of Best Available Science for Critical Areas* ten dollars.

For further information on the critical areas update project, contact Critical Areas Update, M/S 604, 3000 Rockefeller Ave, Everett, WA 98201-4046; or email criticalareasupdate@co.snohomish.wa.us.