

## Forest Resource Lands Planning

### Designated Forest Resource Lands: Conserving Forest Resources for Future Generations

The County first designated [forest resource lands](#) following the state adoption of the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990. The Act required comprehensive planning in an effort to reduce the negative effects of unplanned growth and conserve the state's natural resources. Included were forest resource lands not already characterized by urban growth, with long term significance for the commercial production of timber. (RCW 36.70A.060)

Following [GMA guidelines](#), the county mapped and designated forest resource lands in the *Interim Forest Land Conservation Plan* and established limited development regulations in the *Interim Regulations to Conserve Forest Lands*; both adopted in 1992. The Forest Land Conservation Plan identified two designations of forest resource land for conservation: Local Forest, which occurs only within the Tulalip Reservation, and Commercial Forest (CF) which lies between the National (Federal) forests and rural lands. [Note: There are some agricultural lands adjacent the commercial forest lands as well, but lands adjacent to the commercial forest were largely rural.]

In [Snohomish County Code, Chapter 30.32A](#), the county adopted regulations for development on and adjacent to designated forest lands, with the goals of:

- Conserving forest resources;
- Ensuring compatibility between forest lands and adjacent uses; allowing designated forest land to continue to be used for the production of timber and other forest products, required GMA; and
- Encouraging a good neighbor relationship between forest landowners and residential and other landowners. (SCC 30.32A.010)

To support these goals, 'Forestry' zoning on designated Commercial Forest land prevents subdivision to parcels smaller than 80 acres; and 'Forestry' zoning on designated Local Forest land prevents subdivision to parcels smaller than 20 acres, with rural cluster subdivisions allowed. Subdivisions are restricted on designated Commercial Forest land, with certain exceptions, such as allowing for the installation of communication and utility facilities that must, by necessity, locate there. (SCC 30.32A.100)

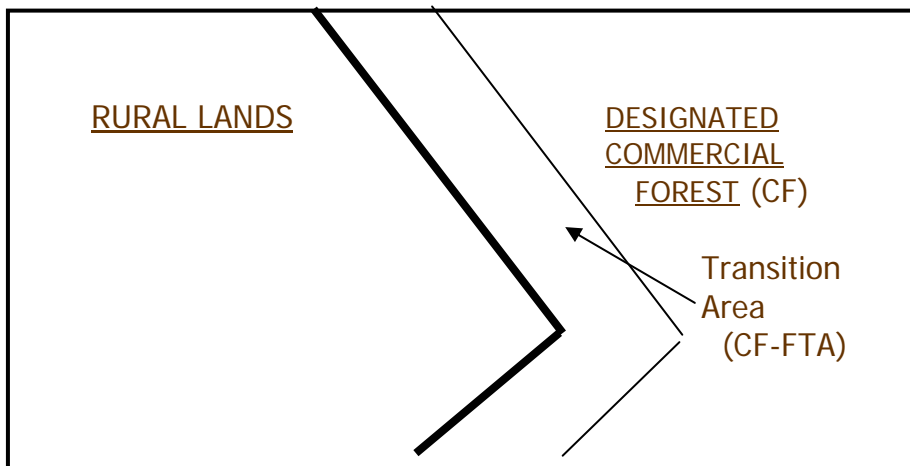
The county has established setback requirements in the form of resource protection areas:

- On subdivisions of parcels adjacent to forest land boundaries: resource protection areas of a minimum 100-foot wide must be established, and structures are not allowed within these areas. (SCC 30.32A.020)
- Siting requirements for new structures proposed on Local Forest land or adjacent to Commercial Forest land require the establishment and maintenance of a minimum 100-foot setback, which will serve as the resource protection area. (SCC 30.32A.110)
- Siting requirements for new structures proposed on Commercial Forest land, but not within the Commercial Forest-Forest Transition Area, are required to establish and maintain a 500-foot setback that serves as a resource protection area. (SCC 30.32A.120)

In October 1993, the County adopted the Right to Practice Forestry Ordinance in support of the timber industry, which provided that “forest management activities conducted on designated forest land in compliance with best management practices as defined by the current Washington Forest Practices Rules and Regulations (Title 222 WAC) and Washington’s pesticide regulations (WAC 16-228-1220 (5), and established prior to surrounding non-forestry activities, are presumed to be reasonable and shall not be found to constitute a nuisance unless the activity has a substantial adverse effect on the public health, safety, or environment.” (SCC 30.32A.200) The County also adopted a schedule of notification to land owners with property within 500’ of designated forest resource lands. [See “Right to Practice Forestry Notification of Proximity to Designated Forest Resource Lands” below.]

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), a group of committed volunteers with experience in the forest industry, convened to work on policies for forest resource lands. The Snohomish County Council adopted the FAC’s recommendation for a Forest Transition Area overlay as a part of forest lands policies in the 1995 Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan.

The Commercial Forest - Forest Transition Area (CF-FTA), was established as a quarter-mile overlay along the perimeter and within designated Commercial Forest (CF) land abutting rural land. Its purpose is described in the General Policy Plan (GPP), Land Use Chapter, Objective LU 8.E as creating “... a protected long-term Commercial Forest land boundary that will not be impacted by adjacent land use conflicts.”



**Current Snohomish County code requires that any newly created lots within designated commercial forest be greater than or equal to 80 acres in size.**

Current Comprehensive Plan policies for forest resource lands are found in the [General Policy Plan, Land Use Chapter, LU 56-61](#).

Allowable uses and development regulations are found in several sections of the Snohomish County Code:

- [SCC 30.21.025 \(3\): Purpose and Establishment of Zones – Resource Zones](#)
- [SCC 30.32A: Forest Lands](#)
- [SCC 30.41A.020 \(7\) Subdivisions -Exemptions](#)
- [SCC 30.41B \(7\) Short Subdivisions – Exemptions](#)
- [SCC 30.41C Rural Cluster Subdivisions and Short Subdivisions](#)

Not used in forest land, but may be used adjacent; see  
[SCC 30.41C.020 \(1\), \(2\) Applicability](#)  
[SCC 30.41C.200 \(2\), \(6\), \(8a\), \(11\) Design Standards](#)

### **Location of the County's Designated Forest Lands**

Of the approximately 1,348,458 total acres of land within Snohomish County, almost 663,000 acres of forest land are within the National Forest under federal jurisdiction and another 254,577 acres of forest land are within county jurisdiction. They are mapped on the [Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map](#), as follows:

- 283 acres, located in the northwest portion of the county within the Tulalip Reservation, are designated in the Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan as 'Local Forest';
- 254,294 acres, located in the eastern portion of the county adjacent to the national forest, are designated in the Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan as 'Commercial Forest';
- 56,184 acres of the 254,294 Commercial Forest acres are located within the 'Commercial Forest - Forest Transition Area,' a quarter-mile overlay along the perimeter and within designated Commercial Forest (CF) land generally abutting rural land.
  - PDS/GIS estimates, 2007.

### **"Right to Practice Forestry"**

#### **Notification of Proximity to Designated Forest Resource Lands**

If your property lies in or within 500 feet of designated forest resource land, you may have received a notification informing you of the potential for, or existence of, forest management activities.

The Snohomish County Code (*SCC 30.32A.210(1)*) requires the county to send a notice every three years to all property owners whose land is situated in or near designated forest resource lands. The purpose of this notice is: 1) to provide information on the designation and location of forest resource lands; and 2) to advise property owners on how they may be affected by activities related to forest resource management that may take place near their property. The notice states these activities may "include, but are not limited to, timber harvest, road and trail construction, the operation of machinery, trucks and aircraft, brush control, slash burning, the application by spraying of forest chemicals, and other forest management activities, which activities are lawful if conducted in compliance with Title 222 WAC." (*SCC 30.32A.220*)

The latest forest resource lands notification mailing was **September 25, 2006**.

If you would like to know if your property is within the forest resource notification area, please follow this [link](#).

### **Forest Practices Permits**

At this time, the County only provides environmental review (SEPA) for certain **Class IV General Forest Practices** permits. For information on the Forest Practices Application Review Process, and answers to general questions on regarding forest practices activities, please follow this [link](#).

## Taxation Programs for Forest Land Owners

The county administers two Washington State Department of Revenue programs for forest landowners:

- [The Designated Forest Land Program](#), under RCW 84.33, which provides lower taxes in acknowledgement of the long growth period and limited harvest period (income) inherent in the timber industry. The Designated Forest Land Program is for parcels over 20 acres.

For more information: <http://dor.wa.gov/docs/pubs/foresttax/forestmgmt.pdf>

Application: [http://dor.wa.gov/docs/forms/proptx/forms/applfordesigforestland\\_e.doc](http://dor.wa.gov/docs/forms/proptx/forms/applfordesigforestland_e.doc)

- [The Current Use Taxation Program](#) under RCW 84.34, which provides incentives to landowners to preserve open space, farm and smaller acreages of forest lands. This state program allows a tax break to property owners for certain types qualified properties, one of which is timber land, under the “Open Space – Timber” classification. Forest land owners with parcels between 5 and 20 acres remaining in timber production may be qualified to participate in this program, which offers a lower tax assessment in exchange for agreement to continue forest management activities, as set forth in a certified forest management plan.

For more information:

<http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us/documents/Departments/Assessor/openspace.pdf>

Application:

<http://dor.wa.gov/docs/forms/proptx/forms/AppForClassOpenSpaceLndTmbrAsses.doc>

Forest landowners interested in either of these programs may call the Snohomish County Assessor’s Office, Exemptions Division, at (425) 388-3540 for further details.

Participation in the Current Use Taxation Program can provide some stability to the smaller parcels of forested lands within the rural-forest interface and within urban and rural areas as well. Studies have shown that participation in the reduced tax classification programs, such as the current use program, is correlated to a reduced risk of conversion.

### **Current Forest Resource Planning Projects: Forest Transition Area Project**

The purpose of this project is to revise policies and regulations for the Forest Transition Area in a manner that will involve stakeholders in developing a proposal to protect designated commercial forestland, consistent with GMA; respond to new information on climate change; and promote positive relations between the county, the forest industry, the Department of Natural Resource and the public. The project began in May 2007.

For more information, please see the [Project Information Sheet](#) or contact the staff members listed below.

### **Questions?**

- If you have questions related to forest resource lands in the county, please contact:

Long Range Planning (Land Use)

- [Tom Niemann, Principal Planner](#)  
(425) 388-3311, ext. 2214
  - [Mary Hurner, Planner](#)  
(425) 388-3311, ext. 3258
- Other Resources for forest land management and stewardship:
    - Washington State Department of Natural Resources <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/>
    - WSU Extension <http://www.snohomish.wsu.edu>



Forest land has had a strong presence in the landscape, history and economy of Snohomish County. The timber industry in Snohomish County dates back to 1858, when the Cranney-Grennan mill, one of the most important early sawmills in the Washington Territory, was built in Utsalady, a settlement on the north side of Camano Island. (*Snohomish County: An Illustrated History*. Kelcema Books, 2005. p. 58-60; Photo from Ronald Holtum Collection)