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To: Skagit County Planning Commissioners and Skagit County Planning and Development Staff:

Included are excerpts from the Skagit County Parks and Recreation Plan referencing the extensive public support for trails and open space in Skagit County. The plan was put together based on the input of people from our county and was unanimously supported by the Planning commission and Board of County Commissioners in 2004. All surveys and public input we receive have one common thread: trails and shoreline access are the two most important needs of Skagit County residents. The information we are providing from our plan addresses trails, open space, and shoreline access.

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Provide a multi-use regional trail system, which connects to other county and municipal parks and community trail systems

Trail Development Objectives:

- Skagit County will work with other county, state, and city parks to establish links and connecting trails
- Provide trails for pedestrians (including, where feasible, access for persons with disabilities), bicyclists, equestrians, and other trail users.
- Provide for linkages of population centers, community facilities, workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, recreation areas, open space and cultural/historical areas. Coordinate with other agencies to ensure a comprehensive approach to trail planning.
- Separate recreational trails from motorized vehicle traffic where feasible.
- Create a management policy for SCPR operated trails.

Provide opportunities for water access and activities throughout the County.

Water Access Objectives:

- Identify future sites and partnerships to acquire additional salt water access sites along Puget Sound.
- Identify future opportunities for appropriate lakefront water activities at new park sites.
- Evaluate opportunities to develop new sites, or redevelop existing parks to expand water dependent activities at appropriate locations.
- Designate, maintain and promote aquatic trail opportunities and recreational experiences for users of kayaks, canoes, inflatable boats, pleasure boats, and small-non-motorized watercraft.
- Develop a plan to assess river access needs on Skagit River.

ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT GOAL

Acquire and develop parks and recreation facilities and open space areas to meet the needs of the public within available resources.

Acquisition and Development Objectives:

- Coordinate and cooperate with both public and private sector interests to further park and recreation opportunities
- Coordinate park planning and land acquisition efforts across jurisdictional boundaries and consider existing and planned infrastructure, population served, environmental constraints, and available resources
- Work with non-profit recreation providers to enhance the quality and quantity of available recreation facilities
- Make acquisition and development of water property for parks, trails, and open space a high priority

- Acquire and develop regional parks and secure open space in rural areas as opportunities to meet the other goals set forth in this plan occur
- Acquire parkland for community parks in Urban Growth Areas
- Ensure new sites respond to community's needs and/or demands, and are unique and/or are part of linked open spaces.
- Consider acquisition which provides habitat and/or recreation connectivity. Give special consideration to facilitate an open space corridor between The Anacortes Community Forest Lands and Deception Pass State Park.

OPEN SPACE GOAL

Conserve Open Space corridors within and between urbanizing areas to define communities, provide recreation, and protect habitat.

Open Space Objectives:

- Participate with other county, state, federal, and non-profit agencies to develop a vision for habitat and open space corridors within urbanizing areas (inside or outside of UGA's) for use in planning, regulating, and developing livable communities.
- Coordinate planning efforts and initiate projects that meet multiple objectives, such as urban area greenway planning, transportation planning, and storm water facility planning.
- Coordinate with regional subarea plan processes to assure open space objectives are being accounted for.

Excerpts from Applied Research Northwest Survey Vol. 2003 No.1, June 2003

PARK NEEDS AND PROJECTED USE SURVEY

1. Overall, participants favored multi-use trails. There was support for both recreation and transportation-related users of trails and non-motorized travel corridors.

2. When asked to prioritize a list of potential projects, trail corridors were near the top for all three workshop sessions. They were clearly the top choice among Anacortes and Sedro Woolley participants, whereas Mount Vernon participants were closely divided between a sports field complex, trails, and multi-use parks. Second place choices in Anacortes were multi-use parks and open space areas. Sedro Woolley participants were divided between multi-use parks, a sports field complex, and an indoor recreation center for their second choice project
4. Of those respondents who reported their household "probably" or "definitely" would use additional trails, 80% said their household would use additional hiking trails and 53% said their household would use bicycle trails.
5. When comparing compared need to projected use, trails and indoor facilities (aquatic, recreation and multi-purpose rooms) would be used the most, with 66% of the respondents saying they would definitely or probably use more trails, and 64% saying they would definitely or probably use an indoor aquatic facility.

The survey shows a strong relationship between households with children and park usage. Households with children were significantly more likely than others to use water access (88%), trails (80%), playgrounds (76%), outdoor athletic facilities (61%), RV/campgrounds (58%), indoor pools (40%), and indoor athletic facilities (31%).

Skagit County Use Patterns showing trail need

Recreation Trails

Trails continue to be the most requested recreational need in Skagit County. County residents are interested in loop and linear type trails. While numerous trails exist throughout the county, residents like trail systems within walking distances of their homes. Even though trails are prevalent throughout many of the neighboring counties, the number and mileage is inadequately inventoried and accurate comparisons are difficult. Citizens of the county continue to ask for trails that connect regional trail systems. Linear trail systems such as the Centennial and Evergreen trails have missing links and acquisition will be necessary to see them to completion. Trails are relatively cheap to build and maintain. Because of their low cost and popularity, SCPR will continue to provide trails at when opportunities arise. Motorized trails are currently being provided for at an adequate level. The Walker Valley

Trails provided by the DNR were closed in the winter of 2002/2003 resulting in a shortage of facilities for local motorized trail enthusiasts. If the closures become a normal occurrence, there will be renewed pressure to accommodate their needs. SCPR will have to continually monitor the Walker Valley situation.

Trail Need analysis

Table 10.2
Point Rankings of Facility/Program Needs

Facility Type	LOS	Survey	Use Patterns	Public Input	Total	Average
Boat Launches	N/A	5	5	5	15	5
Indoor Recreation Center	N/A	5	5	5	15	5
Non-motorized Trails	N/A	5	5	5	15	5
Public Shoreline	N/A	5	5	5	15	5
Regional Parks	5	5	5	5	20	5
Camping - RV and Tent	N/A	5	3	3	11	3.7
Group Picnic	N/A	3	3	5	11	3.7
Softball Fields	N/A	3	5	3	11	3.7
Community Parks	5	3	3	3	14	3.5
Swimming Pools	N/A	5	5	3	13	4.3
Open Space	1	3	3	5	12	3
Shooting/Training Facility	N/A	1	5	3	9	3
Neighborhood Parks	3	3	3	1	10	2.5
Adult/Junior Soccer Fields	N/A	3	1	3	7	2.3
Motorized Trails	N/A	1	3	3	7	2.3
Equestrian	N/A	3	1	3	7	2.3
Senior Baseball Fields	N/A	3	3	1	7	2.3
Youth Baseball Fields	N/A	5	1	1	7	2.3
Youth Soccer Fields	N/A	3	1	3	7	2.3
Football Fields	N/A	1	3	1	5	1.7
Golf Course	N/A	1	3	1	5	1.7
Skateboard Parks	N/A	1	1	1	3	1

Non-motorized Trails Score Derivation

1. **Survey Results:** The survey shows a strong desire for the addition of trails in Skagit County. The surveys consistently rate trail facilities as the highest need.

2. **Use Patterns:** Loop trail systems are the most popular form of recreation for County residents (Draggoo 1998). Trails provide opportunities for wildlife viewing s, bike riding, hiking, photography, walking pets, transportation, etc. Although existing trail systems are not over utilized and the number of trails in Skagit County is adequate, county residents enjoy a variety of trails to choose from.
3. **Public Input and Other Factors:** Trails continue to be the number one park need of both Skagit County and Washington State residents. People like to have an array of trail choices throughout the County. Linear Trails often provide connectivity from parks, towns, resources, and other locations. With adequate widths, they can also provide important wildlife corridors. Additional ADA trails are needed in Skagit County.

Trail Plan Recommendation

RECOMMENDED RECREATIONAL TRAILS PLAN

Trails continue to be the most demanded recreational facility asked for by Skagit County residents. The 2003 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP) surveys show similar trends. The (SCORP) document makes recommendations for local agencies and encourages trail opportunities. The plan specifically states, “If there is a weakness in the local response statewide, it may be in addressing high-participation activities that take place away from a traditional park, especially bicycling and walking. Health professionals increasingly regard walking and bicycling, both for recreation and transportation, as valuable tools that can help people build healthier lifestyles. Community oriented trails, paths, and routes for walking and cycling can encourage people to participate in health oriented activities; encourage children to walk or bicycle to school; and encourage adults to commute without a car”.

Trails and paths, therefore, can provide multiple benefits for the states citizens including recreation, health, and transportation. The Interagency for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) encourages local government to work more closely with transportation and health professionals on non-traditional recreation projects such as bicycle lanes and walking routes to and from schools and businesses. They also encourage local governments to consider outdoor recreation sites and facilities as integral elements of the public infrastructure, as important to the public health and welfare as utilities and roads. The safety of trail-users is will continue to be a priority.

Trails need to be provided for at every opportunity. Anacortes, Burlington, Mount Vernon, and Sedro-Woolley identified proposed trail corridors in their plans as well as connection points to the County-wide system. Anacortes is in the process of creating the Tommy Thompson Parkway Trail. The trail provides an important link along the northeast side of Fidalgo Island. Skagit County will work in finding regional trail links to this and other outside agency trails. City, County, State, and Federal agencies should continue to work together to assure a healthy and user-friendly trail system in Skagit County.

Skagit County residents have identified a need for more primitive trails. Burlington has proposed these types of trails on Burlington Hill and Mount Vernon proposes to expand their system on Little Mountain. Anacortes has over 30 miles of primitive trails in the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. Skagit County has proposals for trails at Northern State Recreational Area and Pilchuck Forest. Skagit County Public Works is designating the extension of the State Route 20 Trail between Burlington and Sedro-Woolley. There is also a mile of trail proposed at Lake Shannon.

The recommended recreational trails plan includes a combination of loop and linear type trails. To complete these sections it will require in some cases, access easements or outright purchase of property. In other cases where no other options exist, the route may need to utilize existing road right-of-way to complete a segment. A description of the major recreation trails found in the plan is described below.

Excerpts of the Sares Bluff Grant relating to trails

Residents of Skagit County have consistently identified non-motorized trails as their highest recreation priority. Surveys done as a part of the SCPR comp plan indicate a strong need for trails. When survey respondents were asked what recreational expansion of recreational areas they would most like to see, trails was the overwhelming favorite (20% listed trails as their top priority opportunity). Assessment work done in our 2001 Northern State Recreation Area community-based planning process showed similar results. When respondents were asked what facilities they would like to see at NSRA, the development of trails finished with twice as many votes as the next closest response (50 votes for trails; 26 for camp sites). Hiking/walking opportunities on trails are the one activity most people of Skagit County continually ask for. The Sares Bluff Project property is adjacent to Skagit County's Sharpe Park, which allows the public an expanded recreational opportunity at an already popular non-motorized trail system.

Of twelve choices for expanded recreational programs, “nature and outdoor activities” ranked third. When county residents were asked about their favorite recreation activity, wildlife watching also finished third. Finishing first and second was “walking for pleasure” and “beach activities”. “Nature walks” is the fifth most popular activity and “bird watching” is the eighth most popular activity. Combined, trail experiences far outweighed any other County assessed need.

This project fulfills several of Skagit County needs. These needs include walking trails, hiking trails, beach access, wildlife interpretive areas, open space/large natural areas, bird watching and wildlife habitat area, and natural area protection. The project allows public access to areas which are otherwise being lost to development. It increases the size and opportunities of an existing park and allows the biotic community a refuge from the ever expanding developments which continue to consume the local natural areas and swallow up the coastline properties.

Trails are a low impact use of the land and protect the land from the effects a development would otherwise bring. Trails on Sares Bluff will allow the public to enjoy the valuable resources this unique area has to offer. Giving the public access to this area enhances recreational opportunities and generates advocacy of our trails, open spaces, and park lands. Quality of life for both habitat and human beings is absolutely at the heart of this project.

RECOMMENDED SHORELINES PLAN

The ability of Skagit County residents to gain access to their shorelines has been a persistent issue over the past couple of decades. The loss of shoreline to development and the loss of shoreline access are occurring at a more rapid rate. Concern has been growing that not enough avenues to reach Skagit County’s shorelines remain and pressure is mounting on existing access ways. Demand for public access seems to be rising as participation in recreational boating, fishing, and shellfish harvesting grows while traditional access sites and affordable shorefront lands suitable for access diminish. Clearly, public access to Skagit County’s shorelines is an issue that will not go away. Once lands are lost to development, the ability to access shorelines will be lost forever. Because of the popularity of shoreline and the diminishing ability to access these shorelines, the priority for the acquisition and enhancement of these properties ranks fairly high. The monies available for these improvements vary.

Our County abounds with tideland recreational resources—miles of beaches and many important estuaries, in particular the Skagit and Samish River basins. In many ways, they are the legacies of Skagit we want to appreciate and preserve. To that end, we recommend and support working with local governments and non-profit agencies to find ways to acquire intertidal lands for the enjoyment of our public”.

Non-motorized Trails Score Derivation

4. **Survey Results:** The survey shows a strong desire for the addition of trails in Skagit County. The surveys consistently rate trail facilities as the highest need.
5. **Use Patterns:** Loop trail systems are the most popular form of recreation for County residents (Draggoo 1998). Trails provide opportunities for wildlife viewings, bike riding, hiking, photography, walking pets, transportation, etc. Although existing trail systems are not over utilized and the number of trails in Skagit County is adequate, county residents enjoy a variety of trails to choose from.
6. **Public Input and Other Factors:** Trails continue to be the number one park need of both Skagit County and Washington State residents. People like to have an array of trail choices throughout the County. Linear Trails often provide connectivity from parks, towns, resources, and other locations. With adequate widths, they can also provide important wildlife corridors. Additional ADA trails are needed in Skagit County.

Public Shoreline Score Derivation

1. **Surveys:** According to the Draggoo survey, the Padilla Bay Trail, a shoreline amenity, was the most visited county site. When survey respondents were given a choice of seven types of park areas, lake, river, and saltwater shoreline access finished first, second, and third respectively.
2. **Use Patterns:** Currently there are almost 50 miles of public shoreline in Skagit County. Of the fifty miles, about 30 are saltwater, 5 miles are lake, and 13 miles are River/Creek. Most of the public shoreline is in the western portion of Skagit County, and along the Skagit River in the eastern portion of the County. There is a

deficiency in the amount of public shoreline access in Skagit County, especially in regards to lakes and rivers

3. **Public Input and Other Factors:** Overall, Skagit County participation in shoreline activities is about 6% higher than the Northwest average (Draggoo 1998). Shoreline access is a popular subject with workshop participants. During the period river fish are running, the SCPR department is inundated with phone calls and visits from concerned recreationalists about the deficiency in regards to river access.

Public Shoreline

Skagit County basks in the surrounding Puget Sound waters, is drenched with splendid valley rivers, and is peppered with a multitude of lakes. The surrounding waters characterize Skagit County as a unique and beautiful place. The enjoyment of County waters is crucial to its residents. Private landholdings continue to be swallowed up by development and residents are finding fewer places for recreate along the shorelines.

RECOMMENDED OPEN SPACE PLAN

Depending upon one's point of view, the definition of Open Space varies widely. For some it includes land designated primarily for the preservation of wildlife habitat or agricultural farmland. To others, it may take on a broader meaning to include environmentally sensitive areas, lands used to buffer, and space to create a sense of seclusion.

In this report, Recreational Open Space (ROS) is defined as undeveloped land left primarily in its reported natural condition and used for passive recreational purposes, creation of separation and seclusion, and as buffers between urban uses. Sites designated primarily for agricultural farmland and wildlife habitat are not considered in this category of Open Space. ROS is further defined as large parcels of land that because of unique or scenic quality should be carefully monitored, planned and used. They may permit a variety of land uses as long as open space qualities are conserved. Maximum development is low impact day-use activities and trails.

Currently, most public open space acres and some wildlife habitat and environmentally sensitive areas in the County are managed by state and federal agencies or the City of

Anacortes. Both Burlington and Mount Vernon have proposed open space corridors in their recent GMA planning efforts. LaConner has policies related to open space areas but no specific areas have been set aside. The largest open space area in the County is the Wild and Scenic River Corridor, which is managed by the US Forest Service.

Skagit County currently has some undeveloped park site which now functions as recreation open space areas. These are sites which permit public access but provide little or no facilities or services. Some of them will eventually be developed, providing both recreational open space and active play areas. On the other hand, some of the County park sites are not anticipated to be developed for a long period of time and will remain as reserves for future generations.

Another open space classification is recommended and is called Recreation Resource Areas (RRA). These are large areas of land that because of unique or scenic quality should be carefully monitored, planned and used. This is not to say that they cannot be used for a mixture of land uses but because of their unique characteristics, the open space quality should be promoted. When applying this classification it means that special studies and efforts should be made to balance the open space qualities with other land uses.

There are a variety of tools available to protect other open space areas. Acquisition is an option and most likely necessary to provide broad public access. Other options include scenic and access easements, development restrictions, etc. It will be necessary to work closely with the Planning Department to ensure appropriate land use controls are in place to achieve open space objectives. It should be kept in mind that much of the natural open space now exists as sensitive lands and will be preserved through current land use controls. Therefore, it does not seem appropriate for the county to purchase these parcels when other mechanisms now exist to maintain their natural environment.

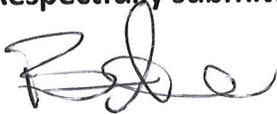
Proposed Open Space Development and/or Acquisition

Level 2

Opportunities to acquire open space lands should be pursued when possible. Skagit County should coordinate and cooperate with both public and private sector interests to further park and recreation opportunities. Park planning and land acquisition efforts should consider existing and planned infrastructure, population served, environmental constraints, and available resources. Partnerships with local land trusts and other non-profit agencies should be pursued as a way to find recreational opportunities at a low cost to Skagit County taxpayers.

Thank you for reviewing this information. The plan excerpts we have provided primarily refer to the recreational attributes of our open space lands. Open space lands also provide an important function to the wildlife of Skagit County. Many residents have settled here because of the natural beauty, including the splendor of our natural areas and the associated wildlife that live within. To keep the area inhabitable to our residents, the protection of these resources is increasingly necessary. The open space plan will help us find balance between the needs of our residents and the needs of the environment.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Adams", written in a cursive style.

Brian Adams
Operations and Lands Manager
Skagit County Parks and Recreation

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Vaux", written in a cursive style.

Robert W. Vaux
Director
Skagit County Parks and Recreation