



SKAGIT COUNTY 2025
Comprehensive Plan Update

Climate Element Interviews Summary

December 2024

Interviews Overview

To inform Climate Element policy development, Skagit County and Cascadia Consulting Group (Cascadia) hosted interviews with key community organizations in Skagit County.

Interviews with key stakeholders aimed to:

- **Address gaps in representation** in the overall Climate Element community engagement process, particularly for groups typically excluded from planning processes or those significantly impacted by plan implementation.
- **Build community trust** by drawing from community lived experience and expertise, and by incorporating feedback from those likely to be impacted by policy changes.

Five virtual interviews with a total of seven interviewees took place from October 3 through October 14, 2024. Cascadia led the interviews and Skagit County staff attended. Kimley-Horn staff attended two of the interviews.

Interviewee Organization	Interview Date
Skagit Land Trust	October 3, 11:00am-12:00 p.m.
Community 2 Community	October 3, 2:00-3:00 p.m.
Mark Lundsén	October 10, 2:00-3:00 p.m.
Evergreen Islands	October 10, 1:00-2:00 p.m.
Skagit Watershed Council	October 14, 11:00am-12:00 p.m.

Interview Results

Interviews discussed greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction policy areas, resilience policy areas, high-priority climate impacts and groups to focus on in policy development, and additional considerations for Skagit County. Key takeaways and findings by topic are presented below.

Key Takeaways

- Attendees were overall strongly supportive of Skagit County creating GHG emissions reduction and resilience policies through the Climate Element.
- The most supported GHG emissions reduction policy topics among interviewees included:
 - Evaluate frequency and timing of Skagit County buses to expand bus access.
 - Transition Skagit County buses to electric vehicles.
 - Map possible areas for battery energy storage systems, solar, and wind, rather than waiting for developers to submit proposals.
- The most supported resilience policy topics included:
 - Protect shorelines, wetlands, and floodplains
 - Provide education about risks of owning property in floodplains. Offer assistance for people to make plans to mitigate hazards.

- Do not encourage building in rural areas; maintain farmland, forest land, and conservation as main uses in rural areas.
- Community 2 Community’s perspective filled a gap in farmworker representation for this Climate Element engagement process. Key takeaways from this conversation are:
 - Ensuring that the local agricultural economy is resilient means making sure that farmworkers survive and live well – including being protected in case of climate disruptions.
 - Farmworkers are underrepresented in engagement and decision-making and are marginalized in many ways.
 - Disruptions for farmworkers related to climate are many and varied. They include shifting agricultural seasons, which disrupts yearly work schedules; migrating workers from warmer places into Skagit County; dangerous work conditions, and missed work days.
 - Farmworkers would like a seat at tables regarding climate change and agriculture in Skagit County and will need support and flexibility to participate in co-governance with the County.

Policy Areas Feedback

GHG Emissions Reduction

Participants were first shown a set of possible policy areas for the Climate Element, including:

- Support the production of local, clean renewable energy sources such as solar, geothermal, wind, battery energy storage facilities, and pump storage hydro, in areas of the county that would support this use.
- Invest in solar infrastructure on county-owned properties and facilities as appropriate.
- Support the adoption and enforcement of regulations that ensure the construction of residential, commercial and industrial buildings use energy-efficient technologies and practices that save energy and costs.
- Support the expansion of electrical vehicle charging infrastructure throughout Skagit County.
- Transition Skagit County’s motor pool fleet to electrical vehicles to the greatest extent possible.
- Support the expansion of public transportation and multimodal transportation options such as bike lanes, sidewalks and trails.
- Support the expansion of opportunities to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste materials sustainably.

Then, they answered:

- What specific actions should Skagit County prioritize to **reduce its impact on climate change** (e.g., reduce emissions)?
- What else **should Skagit County keep in mind** as we draft and implement emissions reduction policies for the Climate Element?

Their responses are paraphrased and grouped into the Climate Element’s policy sectors below:

Sector	Recommendation	Organization
Overarching	Prioritize community education and incentives over mandates	Mark Lundsden
Agriculture & Food Systems	Protect food-producing land from development; minimize sprawl.	Community 2 Community
Buildings & Energy	Map possible areas for battery energy storage systems, solar, and wind, rather than waiting for developers to submit proposals.	Skagit Land Trust, Evergreen Islands
Buildings & Energy	Consider subsidies for small businesses to use energy-efficient technologies.	Community 2 Community
Buildings & Energy	Provide financial assistance for low-income residents to address natural gas leakage in their homes.	Community 2 Community
Ecosystems	Explore blue carbon sequestration	Evergreen Islands
Transportation	Expand electric vehicle charging, especially east of I-5. Include e-bikes.	Skagit Land Trust
Transportation	Transition Skagit County buses to electric vehicles.	Skagit Land Trust, Mark Lundsden
Transportation	Support electric vehicle expansion through education and demonstration vehicles.	Skagit Land Trust
Transportation	Establish and promote subsidies for low-income communities to buy electric vehicles and to maintain efficiency of internal combustion and EV vehicles they already own.	Community 2 Community
Transportation	Evaluate frequency and timing of Skagit County buses. Increase frequency between Skagit County and Bellingham and offer more buses in early mornings.	Skagit Land Trust, Community 2 Community, Mark Lundsden
Transportation	Update the Skagit County Open Space Plan and plan for more trails and trail connections.	Skagit Land Trust
Transportation	Expand bike lanes, particularly over bridges.	Skagit Land Trust
Waste Management	Establish waste management-related goals.	Community 2 Community
Zoning & Development	Require that 90% of development occurs in UGAs.	Skagit Land Trust
Zoning & Development	Discourage development in floodplains.	Skagit Land Trust
Zoning & Development	Support mixed use development, green spaces, and 15-minute walkable communities.	Skagit Land Trust

Climate Resilience

High Priority Climate Risks

Participants called out the following climate-intensified hazards as high priority for their organizations and/or communities:

- a. They mentioned that **sea level rise and riverine flooding** are increasing concerns; so are storm-related **winds, flooding, and landslides in alluvial areas**.
- d. **Fire and wildfire smoke** were frequently mentioned as concerns, particularly around the forested lands in Skagit County.
- e. Community 2 Community noted that **wildfire smoke** and **heat domes** have impacted farmworkers' health and earnings the most and impact agricultural products as well. Farmworkers are migrating to Skagit County because it is too hot in places like California.

High Priority Areas and Groups

Participants mentioned the following groups as particularly high priority for policies to focus on:

- Hamilton, Edison, LaConner. Edison and LaConner – these communities are vulnerable to flooding.
- Rural areas, floodplains, and working forests are important to protect, not develop.
- Farmworkers are marginalized, overburdened, and underrepresented.

Resilience Policy Areas Feedback

Participants were first shown a set of possible policy areas for the Climate Element. Then, they answered:

- What specific actions should Skagit County prioritize to strengthen the **preparedness and resilience** of its services (such as Planning, Public Works, Public Health, Parks & Recreation) and the communities they serve in response to climate change-intensified natural hazards?
- What else **should Skagit County keep in mind** as we draft and implement resilience policies for the Climate Element?

The following are the policy recommendations shared:

Sector	Recommendation	Organization
Overarching	Establish an environmental advisory board	Skagit Land Trust
Agriculture & Food Systems	Financially support local farm workers by establishing a fund to replace lost wages and provide emergency housing if needed due to extreme weather.	Community 2 Community
Agriculture & Food Systems	Establish a seat for farmworkers to participate in County policy decision-making, potentially on an advisory board, and provide support for them to participate.	Community 2 Community
Buildings & Energy	Streamline permit systems to facilitate building green infrastructure.	Mark Lundsén
Ecosystems	Analyze permit requests for forest conversions and protect forests from conversion.	Skagit Land Trust, Evergreen Islands
Ecosystems	Establish protections for secondary forests at the same level as protections for industrial forests. Consider buying development rights.	Skagit Land Trust
Ecosystems	Increase funding for conservation futures and expand their usage beyond farmland.	Skagit Land Trust

Ecosystems	Conduct a tree census and preserve trees	Community 2 Community
Ecosystems	Protect shorelines, wetlands, and floodplains	Mark Lundsden, Skagit Watershed Council
Emergency Management	Provide education about risks of owning property in floodplains. Offer assistance for people to make plans to mitigate hazards.	Skagit Land Trust, Mark Lundsden, Evergreen Islands
Emergency Management	Map vulnerable communities and climate hazards to fully understand potential climate impacts on communities. Share the underlying data.	Community 2 Community, Evergreen Islands
Emergency Management	Create public spaces with ample space for families to play, run around, relax, and cook during extreme weather, including during hot, cold, and smoky days.	Community 2 Community
Emergency Management	Establish Skagit County emergency response fund.	Mark Lundsden
Emergency Management	Plan road systems for adequate evacuation routes.	Evergreen Islands
Health & Well-being	Promote and incentivize green industries. Explore opportunities for green jobs for people working at oil refineries.	Mark Lundsden
Health & Well-being	Communicate when algal blooms occur.	Evergreen Islands
Zoning & Development	Do not encourage building in rural areas; maintain farmland, forest land, and conservation as main uses in rural areas.	Skagit Land Trust, Mark Lundsden

Additional Considerations

Participants mentioned some additional considerations for planning.

- b. **Mitigating climate change and resilience planning is critical.** We need to protect and restore natural systems to slow climate change. Natural ecosystems are carbon sinks.
- c. **It’s critical to keep people out of harm’s way.** Healthy ecosystems are going to help us adapt better to climate better. We expect more flooding and landslides. There is a cost to inaction around these topics.
- d. **Insurance will be as important as policy** as we think about a changing climate.
- e. **We value the diverse wildlife habitats** in this county. As the Climate Element is developed, we hope there is a recognition of the importance of biodiversity.
- f. **Recognize that funding is important** – restoration projects that help with community resilience can be an efficient use of dollars, more than replacing the same infrastructure.
- g. **The County should avoid offsets** to meet its climate goals.

- h. **Disruptions from climate impacts have real potential to interrupt our ability to feed ourselves locally.** This is an agricultural economy and anything that harms that needs to be looked at, including industrialization.
- i. **It is difficult for farmworkers and other largely non-white populations to participate in all white spaces, and not all spaces are culturally appropriate,** such as all English-language spaces and Roberts Rule spaces. It would be ideal for farmworkers to work in co-governance with Skagit County. It can take support for farmworkers to participate in these spaces.

Appendix A. Interview Guide

Introduction

Interviewers and interviewees share name, pronouns, organization, and roles.

Washington House Bill ([HB 1181](#)), passed in 2023, updates the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) to require cities and counties to integrate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction and climate change resilience policies into comprehensive plan updates. The Climate Element will include two important sub-elements: the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Sub-element and the Resilience Sub-element. The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Sub-element will include policies that reduce Skagit County's GHG emissions, reduce per-person driving miles, and prioritize actions that benefit overburdened communities. The Resilience Sub-element will include policies that enhance resilience to climate-intensified natural hazards.

We have completed some initial research and community engagement and are currently developing draft policies. On October 22, we will bring draft policies to Skagit County [Planning Commission](#). As part of this phase, we're conducting interviews with community- and climate-related groups. This interview will inform policy development and the final Climate Element.

Interviews with key stakeholders aim to:

- Address gaps in representation, particularly for groups typically excluded from planning processes or those significantly impacted by plan implementation.
- Build community trust by drawing from community lived experience and expertise, and by incorporating feedback from those likely to be impacted by policy changes.

Ground rules:

- There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in participants' honest opinions.

We have 11 questions to cover and 60 minutes. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Interview Questions

First, a general question:

1. In your own words, what is your role at your organization and how do you consider your work to be related to climate change?

Reducing Emissions

The next questions will focus on the greenhouse gas emissions reduction sub-element.

The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Sub-element will include policies that reduce Skagit County's GHG emissions, reduce per-person driving miles, and prioritize actions that benefit overburdened communities.

Policy areas could include:

- Support the production of local, clean renewable energy sources such as solar, geothermal, wind, battery energy storage facilities, and pump storage hydro, in areas of the county that would support this use.
 - Invest in solar infrastructure on County owned properties and facilities as appropriate.
 - Support the adoption and enforcement of regulations that ensure the construction of residential, commercial and industrial buildings use energy-efficient technologies and practices that save energy and costs.
 - Support the expansion of electrical vehicle charging infrastructure throughout Skagit county.
 - Transition Skagit County's motor pool fleet to electrical vehicles to the greatest extent possible.
 - Support the expansion of public transportation and multimodal transportation options such as bike lanes, sidewalks and trails.
 - Support the expansion of opportunities to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste materials sustainably.
2. What specific actions should Skagit County prioritize to **reduce its impact on climate change** (e.g., reduce emissions)?
 3. What else **should Skagit County keep in mind** as we draft and implement emissions reduction policies for the Climate Element?

Enhancing Preparedness and Resilience

The next couple of questions will cover climate hazards and possible resilience policies for the Resilience Sub-element.

Examples of climate-intensified natural hazards include drought, extreme rainstorms, flooding, increased pests that threaten crops and trees, heat waves, severe cold weather

events, loss of habitat and species, sea level rise, coastal erosion, landslides, wildfires, and wildfire smoke.

4. Given your role/community, which climate-intensified hazards do you believe should be Skagit County's **highest priority to address**, and why?
5. Are there **specific areas or populations** (e.g., low-income communities, rural areas) in Skagit County that you believe will be more impacted than others by these hazards? If so, where and why?

Policy areas in the Resilience sub-element could include:

- Protect community health and wellbeing and ensure that the most vulnerable residents do not bear disproportionate climate impacts.
 - Protect and restore natural areas and habitats such as shoreline, wetlands, and floodplains for their social, cultural, economic, and environmental benefits.
 - Enhance community preparedness and response to hazards and extreme events, such as through “resilience hub” facilities that support residents, coordinate communication, and distribute resources during heat waves, smoky days, and/or other extreme weather.
 - Promote and support incentives to help building owners make building weatherization improvements that bolster climate preparedness and continuity of operations.
 - Support and adopt policies and regulations to protect water quality from climate impacts such as sedimentation, algal blooms, and saltwater intrusion.
6. What specific actions should Skagit County prioritize to strengthen the **preparedness and resilience** of its services (such as Planning, Public Works, Public Health, Parks & Recreation) and the communities they serve in response to climate change-intensified natural hazards?
 7. What else **should Skagit County keep in mind** as we draft and implement resilience policies for the Climate Element?

Co-Benefits of Climate Policy

The next question is about co-benefits, which are the additional social, economic, and environmental benefits of a climate policy, aside from reducing GHG emissions or building resiliency to hazards. Examples of co-benefits include improves salmon recovery, promotes economic development, promotes equity and justice, provides cost savings, protects tribal treaty rights, improves public health and well-being, improves air quality, builds community knowledge, protects water quality, supports housing supply and diversity. Understanding which co-benefits are valuable to the community will help us prioritize, implement, and communicate about policies.

8. What **co-benefits** are most important to you/your community?

Additional Considerations

The final set of questions will cover any additional considerations for Skagit County to keep in mind through policy development.

9. Does your community face **any barriers to participation** in climate policy planning? If so, how can the County address these barriers?
10. What type of **resources and/or support** would your community benefit the most from (e.g., financial, educational)?
11. Are there **any additional considerations** the County should make as climate policies are developed and implemented?