

Appendix C: Goals and objectives

The following goals and objectives were developed from the results of the workshops with open space agencies and organizations throughout Skagit County:

C.1: General goals

C.1.1: Land use – establish open space separators between the developing urban areas, and transitions between urban and rural land uses using Skagit County’s UGA open spaces.

C.1.2: Natural resources – protect sensitive natural resources including important aquatic and wildlife habitat, and productive farmlands and woodlands, by preserving natural spaces and rural resources within Skagit County’s UGA open spaces.

C.1.3: Scenic resources – preserve scenic landscapes and views that are important to the character of each community by including the resources within Skagit County’s UGA open spaces.

C.1.4: Cultural resources – protect and enhance important cultural, historical, and archaeological features by including them within Skagit County’s UGA open spaces.

C.1.5: Interpretation – provide opportunities for education and awareness programs by including interpretive natural and cultural exhibits and trails in Skagit County’s UGA open spaces.

C.1.6: Recreation – provide a recreational network of walking, jogging, biking, and horse trails that access potential interpretive and scenic resources within and adjacent Skagit County’s UGA open spaces.

C.1.7: Transportation – provide safe and direct non-motorized (hiking, biking, and horse) routes adjacent and through Skagit County’s UGA open spaces.

C.2: Land use

C.2.1: Separators – create open space networks that define “place” boundaries establishing breaks or separations between Concrete and Sedro-Woolley, Sedro-Woolley and Burlington, Burlington and Bayview Ridge, and transitions between urban and rural areas along SR-9, SR-20, Chuckanut Drive, and McLean Road, among others.

C.2.2: Public/private network opportunities – define a planned network of open spaces so that private developments can contribute or link privately-owned open space systems to be part of or extensions of the overall UGA open space system as in, for example, the Eglemont Development in Mount Vernon.

C.2.3: Flood control – include floodplains and flood-prone lands and the river dike and drainage systems along the Baker and Skagit Rivers, Nookachamps Creek, Gages Lake and Slough, Britts Slough, and Swinomish Channel in UGA open spaces.

C.3: Natural resources

C.3.1: Aquatic habitat – protect and enhance fresh and saltwater aquatic resources including fisheries, water fowl, and other species habitat in the Baker River, Skagit River including the North and South Forks, Samish River, Nookachamps Creek, Swinomish Channel, and Samish, Padilla, Fidalgo, Burrows, Similk, and Skagit Bays, and significant freshwater bodies such as Shannon, Gages, Barney, Heart, Whistle, Erie, and Campbell Lakes, as well as estuarine rearing and foraging resources in Skagit, Similk, Padilla, and Samish Bays that encompass, adjoin, and extend UGA open spaces.

C.3.2: Wildlife habitat and corridors – protect and enhance wildlife habitat including plant species, birds, and mammals within the marine, estuarine, freshwater, and terrestrial environments that encompass, adjoin, and provide migration corridors within and between UGA open spaces.

C.3.3: Agricultural lands – protect heritage, prime soils, and working farms in the Skagit River Valley, Nookachamps Creek, Skagit River Delta, and Fir and Fidalgo Islands by including them within UGA open spaces.

C.3.4: Woodlands – protect old growth, working forests, and significant woodland stands on US Forest Service, DNR, and other public and private properties on Burlington Hill, Little Mountain, and the Community Forest on Mount Erie by including them within UGA open spaces.

C.4: Scenic resources

C.4.1: Landscapes – protect existing scenic landscapes especially those that exemplify unique features that are visible from UGA open space viewpoints including Cap Sante Point, Mount Erie, and Little Mountain, are incorporated into major parks such as Northern State Recreation Area and Deception Pass State Park, and are prominent features of protected areas such as Padilla and Skagit Bays.

C.4.2: Scenic byways – protect scenic roads, rivers, and shorelines by preserving rural and marine land uses and activities, natural environments and vegetation, and scenic or visual features along UGA open space road and shoreline edges especially including the established SR-11 and SR-20 scenic byway corridors.

C.4.3: Viewpoints – protect and enhance scenic viewpoints that look into and onto visual landscapes including prominent high points such as Cap Sante Point, Mount Erie, Little Mountain, and Burlington Hill, as well as strategic overlooks or look-into places alongside and within the UGA open space network at the Baker and Skagit Rivers, Gages Slough, Nookachamps Creek, and Swinomish Channel.

C.5: Cultural resources

C.5.1: Landmarks – protect and interpret cultural, historical, and archaeological places, sites, and structures within the UGA open space system such as the cement and powerhouse

structures in Concrete, Northern State Hospital in Sedro-Woolley, BNSF Railroad facilities in Burlington, river steamboat landings and waterfront improvements in Mount Vernon, historical business district in La Conner, railroad jetty and marine waterfront in Anacortes.

C.6: Interpretation

C.6.1: Interpretive exhibits, trails, and centers – create and incorporate education and awareness programs and facilities within UGA open space systems such as the Padilla Bay and Tommy Thompson Trails, and Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NEER) interpretative center.

C.7: Recreation

C.7.1: Regional multiuse trails – develop a network of regional or countywide multiuse (hike, bike, and horse) trails including the Cascade, Centennial, PNW, and Skagit-Snohomish Trails adjacent, through, and into countywide and UGA open spaces to increase access, awareness, and interpretive opportunities provided that such access does not jeopardize critical wildlife habitat, working farmlands or forests, or other private resources and properties.

C.7.2: Community connections – link the regional or countywide multiuse trails with city or local trails that increase urban and rural resident access to parks, recreational areas, schools, public facilities, commercial, and employment areas in Concrete, Hamilton, Lyman, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, Mount Vernon, Bayview Ridge, La Conner, and Anacortes UGAs.

C.7.3: On/off-road linkages – where necessary and appropriate, extend regional and local multiuse trails within public road and utility rights-of-way that adjoin, cross, or access countywide and UGA open spaces to avoid off-road wildlife habitat intrusions, working farm or forest conflicts on a seasonal, interim, and sometimes permanent basis where it cannot be avoided.

C.7.4: Water trail linkages – where possible, connect on/off-road trails with water trails on the Guemes and San Juan Island Ferries and private excursion boat routes on the Skagit River, Swinomish Channel, Padilla, Similk, and Skagit Bays to increase public access and interpretive opportunities.

C.7.5: Accessibility – provide for disability access to encourage the use and enjoyment of all people with physical disabilities to the maximum extent possible similar to what has been provided on the Tommy Thompson, Padilla Bay, and Cascade Trails.

C.8: Transportation

C.8.1: Interconnections – link non-motorized transportation routes on SR-9, SR-11, SR-20, SR-237, SR-530, and SR-534 with the off-road Cascade, Centennial, PNW, and Skagit-Snohomish Trails systems to provide an interconnected network that parallels and provides access to UGA open spaces.

C.8.2: Rural access – extend non-motorized transportation routes outward from the UGAs to provide access to rural areas and landscapes as well as the UGA open space extensions on a countywide basis such as the biking designations on McLean



Photo – Rosario Beach, Deception Pass State Park, Fidalgo Island

Road, Whitney-LaConner Road, and Chuckanut Drive.

C.8.3: Entry points – link non-motorized transportation routes with the surrounding counties and region specifically including on-road alignments on SR-9, SR-11, SR-20, SR-237, SR-530, and SR-534.

C.8.4: Water trails – designate hand-carry and other non-motorized water craft routes that flow alongside and through countywide and UGA open spaces on the Baker River, Skagit River including the North and South Forks, Samish River, Swinomish Channel, and Samish, Padilla, Fidalgo, Burrows, Similk, and Skagit Bays.



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Appendix C: Goals and objectives
Skagit County UGA Open Space Plan

Photo - Mt Erie, Community Forest, Anacortes

Appendix D: Mail-out/phone-back survey

In June 2007 a random sample of resident voter households in Skagit County was contacted to participate in a controlled sample survey concerning open space needs and priorities.

450 households agreed to participate in the survey and were mailed a copy of a summary description of the plan and a copy of the questionnaire. Survey results were compiled for the first 200 households who completed the surveys by follow-up telephone call - the number planned for in the original survey scope.

The resulting survey results are accurate to within 8+/- percent of the opinions of the general population. The statistics are rounded and may not add to 100 percent and do not list “don’t know” responses. The statistics also account for undecided, did not know, or refused a response (which generally ranged from 0-7% depending on the question). The question numbers are listed in the left column and began with number 5 as 1-4 are reserved for questionnaire numbering. Following is a summary of the results for the total sample group.

Following are the summary results of the survey ranked in priority on a scale of 1 to 5 where 4-5 is the best condition or highest priority and 1-2 is the poorest condition or least priority. For analysis purposes, a 3 rating is considered to be an average condition or priority where the survey respondents could go in either direction (50:50 split) should a specific policy, plan, or program be proposed at this time. The undecided, did not know, or refused were not included in this summary analysis.

D.1: Survey participant characteristics

Question number

63	Which area of the county do you live in?	27% Anacortes area 6% LaConner area 2% Bayview area 9% Burlington area 28% Mount Vernon area
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		1% Lyman area 2% Hamilton area 1% Concrete area 12% Sedro-Woolley 14% Other county area
64	How long have you lived in the county?	0-1 2-5 6-10 10+ yrs 0% 13% 8% 80%
65	What type of housing do you live in?	own rent 95% 6%
66	What age group are you in?	18-24 25-34 35-49 50-64 65+ 0% 3% 14% 55% 29%

Place of residence - the distribution of survey participants closely approximates the distribution of households across the county with larger percentages residing in the cities compared with the smaller cities and rural areas.

Length of residence - heavily favors long time residents, which is likely to be common of frequent voters.

Tenure - survey occupants were predominantly owners, which is also likely to be common of frequent voters.

Age groups - were heavily represented in the middle to senior age spans (50+) compared to young to middle age adults (18-49) which is partly a reflection of older length of residence and the voting populations of the county.

D.2: Existing UGA open space and trail conditions

Survey respondents were asked to rate the following open space conservation and public trail access conditions within and adjacent to the urban growth areas (UGAs) in Skagit County in general on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the poorest and 5 the best condition possible.

<i>q#</i>	<i>UGA open space conservation efforts</i>	<i>poorest/best</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
7	Protection of prime agricultural soils and working farmlands adjacent to urbanizing areas?	31% 33% 36%
8	Protection of scenic areas and landscapes including viewpoints and vistas from hilltops and along entry roads into urbanizing areas?	25% 38% 36%
5	Conservation of wildlife habitat – especially within the Skagit River and its tributaries as they flow through the urban areas?	27% 42% 30%
9	Identification and preservation of historical and cultural landmarks, sites, and features within and adjacent to urbanizing areas?	27% 41% 30%
6	Preservation of woodlands – particularly mature, older forest stands within the urbanizing areas?	39% 34% 26%
13	Picnic grounds, shelters, and other day use activity areas in open space systems in the urbanizing areas?	21% 42% 36%
11	Public access trails for hike, bike, and horse (including handicap accessible) to or through open spaces in the urbanizing areas?	31% 37% 31%
12	Waterfront access for fishing, swimming, kayaking, and canoeing in open spaces in the urbanizing areas?	33% 35% 31%
10	Interpretive markers, exhibits, trails, and centers located in open spaces within or adjacent to urbanizing areas?	32% 41% 25%

As shown, the survey respondents did not rank any open space or trail feature to be of a best condition overall. In some instances, the respondents indicated conditions were equal (rating 3) or of worse condition (rating 1-2) than those that considered them to be in good condition (rating 4-5).

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Appendix D: Mail-out/phone-back survey
Skagit County UGA Open Space Plan

D.3: Open space trends in urbanizing Skagit County

Survey respondents were asked to what degree they agreed with the following statements made during workshops with open space organizations concerning trends that may be affecting the conservation of open spaces and trail developments within the UGAs of Skagit County.

<i>q#</i>	<i>Open space trends</i>	<i>dis-/agree</i> <i>1-2 3 4- 5</i>
14	Skagit County has some of the most valuable and productive wildlife habitats, woodlands, and farms in the region if not the country?	7% 10% 85%
18	Open spaces within the UGAs should be interconnected to flow through the cities into the surrounding countryside in a manner that conserves important assets and provides some logical and visible corridor networks?	11% 16% 73%
19	Open space conservation efforts must do more than just preserve land – conservation programs should also restore, enhance, and manage the land to provide the valuable natural and ecological functions it once did?	14% 17% 70%
17	Open spaces that are being created are often small, landlocked preserves within new residential developments that are not linked to a continuous open space network for the surrounding city or its residents – or between cities and urbanizing areas?	14% 21% 63%
15	An unacceptable amount of these valuable open space assets (wildlife, woodlands, and farms) are rapidly being lost to urban development within UGAs?	18% 19% 63%
16	An unacceptable amount of these valuable assets are also being lost to rural type land uses including roadside stands, hobby farms, big box houses, and other developments adjacent UGAs?	28% 25% 46%

<i>q#</i>	<i>Scenic resources</i>	<i>dis-/agree</i> <i>1-2 3 4- 5</i>
20	Skagit County has some of the most diverse and scenic resources in the region including mountain, valley, waterfront, farms and viewpoints?	2% 8% 90%
22	Rural roads and byways, especially the entry roads into and out of the urbanizing areas should retain an open and rural character (“rural by design”) that is not cluttered with commercial uses, advertising, and other urban characteristics?	15% 16% 70%
21	“The view from the road”, however, is rapidly disappearing or being blocked or replaced with roadside clutter consisting of advertising signs, rural commercial uses, hobby farms, and/or inappropriate buildings or developments?	21% 19% 59%
23	Skagit County public access trail systems and park activities could extend from open space corridors within the urbanizing areas out into the countryside to access some of the most diverse and scenic features in the county and region?	12% 17% 72%
25	Public access trail systems and park activities should extend from the inner most urban areas out into the countryside within and through natural open space corridor networks to provide easy access to urban and rural residents alike?	16% 19% 64%
24	Major existing public trail corridors, however, are located within park boundaries or on former railroad corridors and dikes located in rural areas that are not easily accessed by residents of the urbanizing areas on a daily basis?	20% 25% 54%

As shown, the survey respondents agreed overwhelmingly with the statements elicited from non-profit open space organizations concerning trends that are imperiling open space, scenic resources, and public access in the county at the present time.

D.4: Population growth impacts

Survey respondents were asked if in the next 20 years the Skagit County population is projected to increase by another 51,600 people or 46% more than the existing population of 113,100 persons, whether existing policies and programs will be sufficient to protect the county’s open space resources.

26	In your opinion, will <u>existing UGA open space and public access trail conditions, trends, policies, and programs</u> be enough to conserve and protect Skagit County’s UGA related open space resources?	51% no 18% yes 32% don't know
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As shown, a majority of the respondents do not think existing policies and programs will be sufficient to conserve and protect Skagit County’s UGA related open space resources. However, a significant percent of the respondents may not know what existing policies and programs are. They may also not know whether they are or will be sufficient.

D.5: UGA open space and public access trail priorities

In light of the preceding, survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of the following open spaces within and adjacent to the urbanizing areas (UGAs) of the county in general whether such areas are protected by critical area ordinances, land use agreements, conservation easements, or land purchases by public or private organization efforts.

<i>q#</i>	<i>UGA open space conservation needs</i>	<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
29	Productive and working farmlands adjacent the urbanizing areas?	13% 14% 74%

q#	UGA open space conservation needs	low / high		
		1-2	3	4-5
28	Mature and older growth forestlands within and adjacent the urbanizing areas?	16%	18%	67%
27	Wildlife habitat and migration corridors within and through the urbanizing areas?	19%	20%	62%
30	Scenic landscapes and roadside views entering and leaving the urbanizing areas?	14%	26%	61%
31	Historical and cultural landmarks and sites within and adjacent urban areas?	14%	33%	55%

q#	UGA public access trails and activities	low / high		
		1-2	3	4-5
33	Public access trails and facilities that extend through and outwards from the urbanizing areas?	15%	22%	64%
34	Fishing, swimming, car-top boating, picnicking, and other day use activities within open space corridor networks in and adjacent the urbanizing areas?	15%	21%	65%
32	Interpretive trails, exhibits, and centers within open space corridor networks that extend outwards from the urbanizing areas?	16%	34%	52%

As shown, survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated **all** of the open space conservation and public access trails and activities were of the utmost importance (scores greater than 50% for ratings of 4-5) per the rank orders shown.

D.6: UGA open space and trails plan proposals

Under the proposed UGA open space and trails plan, public and private governments and organizations may jointly conserve and restore wildlife, forests, farms, scenic areas, historical, and cultural sites within and adjacent to the UGAs of the county. The survey respondents were asked to rate the following proposals - as shown on attached preliminary concept graphics.

q#	UGA open space corridors	low / high		
		1-2	3	4-5
35	<u>Countywide UGA open space corridors</u> - could focus on the Skagit River from Concrete through Hamilton, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, and Mount Vernon, on the Swinomish Channel to LaConner, and on the Community Forests and State Park through Anacortes? As shown in the graphics, these corridors could extend from the cities outward into the most rural landscapes and features linking the UGAs into continuous greenway systems?	12%	18%	71%
43	<u>Anacortes UGA open space corridors</u> - could focus on Cranberry Lake and Community Forests, and Deception Pass State Park through the UGA and extend into the city to link with the Tommy Thompson Trail, Cap Sante and Washington Parks, the downtown, marinas, city trails, schools, and other assets.	12%	22%	61%
38	<u>Sedro-Woolley UGA open space corridors</u> - could focus on the Skagit River, Hart Slough, and Skiyou Island around the UGA and extend through the city on Brickyard and Hansen Creeks to link with Northern State Hospital County Park as well as the downtown, city trails, parks, schools, and other assets?	14%	23%	59%
40	<u>Mount Vernon UGA open space corridors</u> - could focus on the Skagit River, Nookachamps Creek, Barnes Lake, and Britt Slough around the UGA and extend through the city on Maddox and Carpenter Creeks to link with the Kulshan Trail, Beaver Pond, Little Mountain as well as the downtown, city trails, parks, schools, and other assets.	17%	20%	58%

<i>q#</i>	<i>UGA open space corridors</i>	<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
39	<u>Burlington UGA open space corridors</u> - could focus on the Skagit River and Hart Slough around the UGA and extend through the city on Gages Slough to link with Burlington Hill as well as the downtown, city trails, parks, schools, and other assets.	15% 24% 57%
42	<u>LaConner UGA open space corridors</u> - could focus on the Swinomish Channel, Sullivan Slough, and Skagit Bay through and around the UGA and extend into the city, Swinomish Village, and Shelter Bay to link with the downtown, schools, trails, and parks?	16% 24% 56%
36	<u>Concrete UGA open space corridors</u> - could focus on the Skagit River around the UGA and extend through the city on Lorenzan Creek and the Baker River, then north to Lake Shannon linking with the downtown, schools, parks, and other assets?	15% 30% 53%
41	<u>Bayview UGA open space corridors</u> - could incorporate the lands surrounding the runways and storm retention areas and extend through the UGA to link with Padilla Bay and Burlington?	17% 27% 53%
37	<u>Hamilton UGA open space corridors (not shown in the graphics)</u> - could focus on the Skagit River around the UGA? Depending on the final resolution of planning and design studies currently being accomplished for the city, the open space system could extend up Alder and Mud Creeks to link with local trails and other facilities?	21% 32% 41%
		<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
<i>q#</i>	<i>UGA major trails and activities</i>	
49	<u>Anacortes-Burlington Trail</u> - could extend west from Burlington along SR-	16% 17% 64%

	20 through the proposed Bayview UGA to link with Swinomish Channel and PNW Trails to LaConner and Anacortes? The Anacortes-Burlington Trail would create a countywide trail linkage with all of the other major trail systems?	
44	<u>Cascade Trail</u> - could extend through the Skagit River open space corridor from Rockport through Concrete, Hamilton, Sedro-Woolley, and Burlington? An eastern extension of the trail could link with the Ross Lake National Recreation Area?	13% 22% 63%
48	<u>Swinomish Channel Trail</u> - could extend north from LaConner along the Swinomish Channel to the PNW Trail and provide access to the estuaries and wetlands in Padilla and Fidalgo Bays.	17% 21% 59%
47	<u>PNW/Interurban Trail</u> - could extend south from the Interurban Trail in Whatcom County through Bayview to the Swinomish Channel then west through Anacortes to Deception Pass and Whidbey Island?	17% 22% 58%
45	<u>Centennial Trail</u> - could provide access from Snohomish County trail systems past Lake McMurray, Big Lake, the Nookachamps, Skagit River, and Northern State Hospital to link with Whatcom County trail systems to Lake Whatcom, Bellingham, and the Canadian border?	17% 21% 58%
46	<u>Skagit-Snohomish Trail</u> - could extend from the Nookachamps south through Mount Vernon and Britt Slough then along the South Fork of the Skagit River to link with Fir Island, Conway, Stanwood and the Snohomish County trail systems.	21% 20% 58%

<i>q#</i>	<i>Interpretive</i>	<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
50	<u>Interpretive centers and day-use parks</u> – be installed where appropriate along the trail corridors identified above to increase interpretive opportunities and open space related day-use park activities?	18% 29% 51%
<i>q#</i>	<i>Scenic corridors</i>	<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
51	<u>“Rural by Design” scenic overlay districts</u> – be established to conserve the “rural by design” scenic aspects (but not change land use allowances) for major roadway entries into and between the UGAs including SR-9, SR-11, SR-20, Old Highway 99, and other significant rural county roads?	16% 31% 50%

As shown, survey respondents ***gave overwhelming priorities*** to all of the open space, public access trail, and scenic corridor proposals - with the exception of Hamilton UGA for which there were no graphic representations.

However, the percents that did not have an opinion increased up to 7% for questions about some of the more rural UGAs where residents may not be as familiar with the physical proposals - and/or may not have been as interested.

On the other hand, survey respondents gave overwhelming support to all UGAs where graphics illustrated open space and trail proposals consistent with the county-wide theme, indicating their support for a county-wide as opposed to a parochial or local-only approach.

D.7: Role and responsibility alternatives

The county and cities could conserve UGA open space and trails proposed above under different policy priorities. Survey respondents were asked to prioritize the ***following functions that could be pursued by the county and cities for the***

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conservation of open space and trails within and adjacent to the UGAs.

<i>q#</i>	<i>Role and responsibility alternatives</i>	<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
53	<u>Coordinator</u> – the county and cities create plans, financing strategies, and implementation programs but may be an active agent as well as a facilitator involving as many other public, non-profit, and private organizations as possible to conserve, restore, enhance, and manage <i>regional UGA related</i> open spaces and public access trails and activities?	14% 16% 66%
52	<u>Regional conserver</u> – the county and cities be the principal agents to conserve, restore, enhance, and manage <i>regional UGA related</i> open spaces and public access trails and activities to the benefit and use of all residents on a <i>countywide basis?</i>	23% 25% 48%

As shown, survey respondents overwhelmingly favored a coordinator approach where public agencies involved as many other organizations as possible compared to a county-city or public agency approach primarily.

D.8: Joint venture opportunity and partner options

Besides Skagit County and the cities – the federal and state governments, tribes, ports, public utility and dike districts, non-profit organizations, and a variety of other public and private agencies own and maintain open spaces and trails within the county. Survey respondents were asked to rate joint venture projects to conserve open spaces and trails within and adjacent to the UGAs with the following organizations.

<i>q#</i>	<i>UGA open spaces and public access trail systems</i>	<i>low / high</i> <i>1-2 3 4-5</i>
55	<u>With non-profit organizations</u> – like the Nature Conservancy, Skagitonians for	12% 20% 66%

	Farmland Preservation, or Skagit Land Trust?	
54	<u>With other public agencies</u> - like federal and state agencies, tribes, ports, utility and dike districts?	14% 22% 63%
56	<u>With for-profit organizations</u> - like Puget Sound Energy (PSE), wetland mitigation developers, and private recreational facility developers and operators?	31% 25% 42%

As shown, survey respondents overwhelmingly favored non-profit and other public agencies. The survey respondents were somewhat receptive to the idea of also involving private organizations, though approval would likely depend on specifics.

D.9: Financing alternatives

Skagit County and its cities, like all jurisdictions in Washington State must structure fiscal policies to reflect recently adopted restraints on the use of property, license, and other taxes for the financing of general governmental services including the conservation of UGA open spaces and trail networks.

The following questions outline a number of alternative methods for conserving, restoring, and enhancing open space and trails within and adjacent the UGAs for your evaluation. The Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) could adopt some, most, or all of the following ways and methods for structuring the way the county and cities deliver and finance UGA open spaces and trails depending on the results of this survey, and in some cases subsequent voter approvals.

D.10: Real estate excise, fuel tax, license fee, and sales tax options

Subject to voter approval, the Skagit County Commissioners could institute a variety of optional fees and taxes to be

dedicated exclusively to the conservation, restoration, enhancement, and management of UGA open spaces and public access trail systems **on a countywide basis**. Survey respondents were asked to rate each of the following optional approaches.

Optional UGA open spaced dedicated fees and taxes **low / high**
1-2 3 4-5

60	<u>Local Option Sales Tax</u> - an additional 0.1% sales tax (equal to \$0.10 for a \$100 purchase) to be paid by residents and tourists to be dedicated <u>exclusively</u> to UGA open spaces and public access trail systems on a countywide basis?	38% 16% 47%
57	<u>Real Estate Excise Tax (REET-3)</u> - an additional 0.25% assessment of the sales price of all real estate property (equal to \$250 per \$100,000 of sale price) paid by the purchaser to be dedicated <u>exclusively</u> to the acquisition, restoration, enhancement, and management of UGA open spaces and public access trail systems on a countywide basis?	49% 11% 40%
59	<u>Local Option Fuel Tax</u> - an additional \$0.023 per gallon sales tax to be paid by residents and tourists to be dedicated <u>exclusively</u> to UGA open spaces and public access trail systems on a countywide basis?	57% 13% 30%
58	<u>Local Option Vehicle License Fee</u> - an additional \$15.00 per vehicle license registered in the county to be dedicated <u>exclusively</u> to UGA open spaces and public access trail systems on a countywide basis?	55% 17% 28%

As shown, survey respondents were **marginally supportive** of a Local Option Sales Tax - **and not at all in favor** of a 3rd REET, Local Option Fuel Tax, or Local Option Vehicle License Fee for the tax and fee amounts indicated where the funds generated

would be exclusively used for open space and public access trail purposes.

Approval to use the Local Option Sales Tax would depend on what extent a referendum on the issue would motivate the 16% who rated the proposal a 3 or mid-level priority at this time and in the abstract description provided.

D.11: Property tax levy

As an addition or as an alternative to any of the above tax and fee options, the Skagit County Commissioners could institute a ***limited duration*** property tax levy as a means of financing the conservation, restoration, enhancement, and management of UGA open spaces and trails ***on a countywide basis***. A countywide approach would ***share revenues*** between the county, cities, and/or other public or non-profit agencies that provide ***regional UGA related*** open space and public access trail system conservation projects and programs. Survey respondents were asked to rate this method.

q#		low / high		
		1-2	3	4-5
61	<i>Countywide UGA approach</i> - where revenues are shared between county, cities, and/or other public and non-profit agencies that provide <i>regional UGA related</i> open space and trail projects and programs?	36%	23%	39%

q#		Amount per year		
62	If a levy were to be put on the ballot <i>to finance regional UGA related open space and trail projects and programs on a countywide basis</i> , how much, if anything, would your <i>household</i> be willing to pay <i>per year</i> for this source of funding?	\$0	27%	
		\$1 - 99	19%	
		\$100-249	32%	
		\$250+	8%	
		Don't know	14%	
		Mean = \$89.40		

As shown, survey respondents were almost evenly split statistically between favoring and not favoring a property tax levy that would be exclusively used for open space and public

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Appendix D: Mail-out/phone-back survey
Skagit County UGA Open Space Plan

access trail purposes. Survey respondents were more receptive to the use of the Local Option Sales Tax than the property tax levy.

Even so, 59% indicated a willingness to pay some amount for a levy (compared to 27% that would not and 14% that did not know) for which the mean number was \$89.40 per household per year.

Approval to use a property tax levy or the Local Option Sales Tax would likely depend on what extent a referendum on the issue would motivate the respondents who rated the proposal a 3 or mid-level priority at this time and in the abstract description provided.

A proposal to use either approach will likely require more detailed descriptions of how much would be raised (and required of a levy or tax) to initiate more specific identified actions under what coordinating strategies to conserve open space, provide public access trails and activities, and protect scenic roads on a county-wide basis.

D.12: Comments

Survey respondents were asked if they had any specific comments or recommendations to make about the proposed UGA open space and public access trails plan or the survey - of which 57% of the respondents provided comments or suggestions described in the full technical results.

Appendix E: Financial resources

An analysis was accomplished of recent financial trends in Skagit County and the impact federal and state program mandates, revenue sharing, and the county's urbanization have on the discretionary monies available for open space. The analysis also reviewed trends in county revenues and the affect alternative revenue sources may have on open space and trail project and program financial prospects. Following is a brief summary of major findings.

E.1: Revenue and expenditures - general government

Skagit County's annual general governmental expenditures are derived from the combination of general, special revenue, debt service, and enterprise funds – as well as state and federal grants. Following is a brief summary of the revenue accounts of most interest and application to countywide open space and trail projects and programs.

D.1.1: General fund

The General Fund is derived from property taxes, licenses and permits, intergovernmental revenues including state and federal grants, service charges and fees, fines and forfeitures, and other miscellaneous revenues. General funds are used to finance most government operations including staff, equipment, capital facility, and other requirements – *and can be used to fund open space programs. None of the following general fund accounts, however, are currently funding open space projects and programs for the reasons outlined in the following descriptions.*

- ***Property tax*** - under Washington State's constitution counties may levy a property tax rate not to exceed \$1.80 per \$1,000 of the assessed value of all taxable property within the county jurisdictional limits. *In the year 2005, the county General Fund property tax rate was \$1.7832 per \$1,000 assessed value or 99% of the allowable maximum.*

The total of all property taxes for all taxing authorities, however, cannot exceed 1.0% of assessed valuation, or \$10.00 per \$1,000 of value. If the taxes of all districts exceed the 1.0% or \$10.00 amount, each is proportionately reduced until the total is at or below the 1.0% limit.

In 2001, Washington State law was amended by Proposition 747, a statutory provision limiting the growth of regular property taxes to 1.0% per year, after adjustments for new construction. After years of appeal, the Washington State Supreme Court upheld Proposition 747 in 2007 limiting all jurisdictions in the state to a maximum increase per year of 1.0% over the total amount of revenue raised in the year before, after adjustments for new construction. Any proposed increases over this amount are subject to a voter referendum.

The statute was intended to limit local governmental spending by controlling the annual rate of growth of property taxes. In practice, however, the statute reduces the effective property tax yield to an annual level far below a county's levy authorization, particularly when property values are increasing rapidly.

As a result, city and county jurisdictions are losing their effective sources of revenue as revenue levels fall below the annual impacts of inflation and below the level of investment or cost population growth impacts are requiring in new infrastructure and services.

Generally, the county has not appropriated very much of the annual General Fund budget for capital improvements – including no open space acquisition programs. Skagit County has building and infrastructure construction requirements, but given the declining buying power of annual county budgets, not had the capital resources available to initiate major construction projects from the general funds or non-dedicated funds accounts.

The 1% statutory limit on local property tax yields combined with the sporadic and undependable nature of federal and state grants and revenue sharing prevents and discourages the county from making long term capital investments in infrastructure necessary to support the county's development.

- **Property tax levy lid lifts (resetting the rate)** - Proposition 747, the statutory provision limiting the growth of regular property taxes to 1.0% per year, can be waived by referendum approval of a simple (50%) majority of Skagit County's registered voters.

Voters can be asked to approve a permanent resetting of the property tax levy rate that would adjust the amount of revenue the county can generate. The new total revenue that can be generated by a resetting of the rate would be subject to the same annual 1.0% limitation, however, and the total amount of revenue and the resulting property tax rate would start to decline again in accordance with the proposition.

However, the adjusted rate and revenue could be dedicated exclusively to finance specific capital improvement projects – such as open space and trail projects and programs that involve **construction, maintenance, and operations** aspects that a majority of the voters are willing to pay for under the adjusted or reset rate.

- **Limited purpose property tax levy lid lifts** – RCW 84.55.050(3)(c) authorizes referendum approval of a simple (50%) majority of registered county voters the resetting of the property tax levy rate on a temporary basis where the rate is adjusted until a specific amount of revenue has been generated to finance **construction, maintenance, and operation** of a project or program – after which the rate reverts to the original or a specified amount defined in the referendum.

A “plain vanilla” lid lift lasts as long as the funds are dedicated to the specified purpose. The levy amount bumps up in the 1st year to the new total rate specified in the ballot proposition then increases subject to the 1% limitation in growth thereafter.

There is a 9-year limit to the special purpose levy lid lift ...“if the limited purpose includes making redemption payments on bonds”. Otherwise, the duration of the limited purpose levy lid lift may be for as long as the ballot specifies and the voters will approve.

- **Sales tax** - is the second largest General Fund revenue source and may be used for any legitimate public purpose. The county has no direct control over this source. The taxes are collected and distributed by the state and may fluctuate with general economic and local business conditions.

- **Local Option Sales Tax (LOST)** - in 2000 the Washington State legislature approved special statutory authorization allowing Pierce County to add and collect an additional 1/10th of 1% of the sales tax for the sole purpose of financing improvements to regional parks.

Validated by voter approval, the additional taxes tax funds are used to acquire, develop, and maintain parks owned, operated, and support by Pierce County and/or local city and park jurisdictions such as the Tacoma Metropolitan Park District.

The legislature has since authorized this additional optional add-on to be available to other counties within the state.

D.1.2: County Roads Fund

The County Roads Fund is derived from property taxes, gas taxes, license fees, inter-governmental revenues including state and federal grants, service charges and fees, and other miscellaneous revenues. The County Road Fund is used to finance most roadway operations including staff, equipment, capital facility, and other requirements.

The County Roads Fund may also finance non-motorized transportation improvements and recreational trail projects that provide a connection between destinations. **Generally, however, due to the rising cost of roadway maintenance and the 1.0% limitation on revenue growth, Skagit County has not been able to finance much on or off-road non-motorized**

transportation improvements from the following revenue sources:

- ***Property tax*** - the County may levy up to \$2.25 per \$1,000 assessed value for road construction and maintenance needs on the assessed value of taxable property within the unincorporated area of a county – or a total of \$4.05 for Roads and the General Funds combined. *In the year 2005, the county’s Road Fund property tax rate was \$1.9454 per \$1,000 assessed value or 86% of the allowable maximum.*

Like the General Fund property tax, the Roads Fund property tax is also subject to Proposition 747’s limit on the growth of the regular property tax levy at 1.0% per year, after adjustments for new construction. Any proposed increases over this amount are subject to a voter referendum.

Any amount that is not charged up to the maximum at the time of the referendum, however, may be “banked” for future authorization – meaning the base rate may be increased up to the allowable limit at the time the 1.0% limitation was invoked in 2007.

- ***Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET-PTR)*** – Washington State (RCW 82.44) collects an annual excise tax paid by motor vehicle owners and administered by the Department of Licensing. Cities and counties receive a percent of the base tax allocation that must be spent on police and fire, or roadway improvements.

RCW 47.30.050 requires that local governments collect and dedicate not less than 0.005% of the total amount of MVET funds received during the fiscal year for the purpose of developing paths and trails (the Paths and Trails Reserve). The Paths and Trails Reserve was established to provide for the development and maintenance of paths and trails within the right-of-way of public roads.

Skagit County currently allocates this amount in a Special Paths account that is dispensed for on-road non-motorized improvements.

- ***Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax – Arterial Streets (MVFT-AS)*** – RCW 82.36 collects an annual tax paid by gasoline distributors and administered by the Department of Licensing. Cities and counties receive a percent of the base motor vehicle fuel tax receipts. The revenues must be spent for highway purposes including the construction, maintenance, and operations of streets, roads, and *non-motorized transportation systems*.

- ***Local Option Fuel Tax (LOFT)*** – RCW 82.80 authorizes a countywide voter approved tax equivalent to 10% of the statewide Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax and a special fuel tax of \$0.023 cents per gallon.

LOFT revenue may be distributed to the county on a weighed per capita basis. Revenues must be spent for highway (city streets, county roads, and state highways) construction, maintenance, or operation; the policing of local roads; or highway related activities – *including non-motorized transportation systems*.

- ***Licenses and permits*** – includes revenues generated from vehicle and truck license fees. Generally, these fees are used to pay for the inspections, processing, and other charges necessary to perform supporting highway and transportation services.

- ***Local Option Vehicle License Fee (LOVLF)*** - the Transportation Improvement Act (ESSB 6358 – RCW 82.80) authorizes countywide (no county levy – which does not require voter approval) local option fees up to \$15.00 maximum per vehicle registered in the county. Revenues are distributed back to the county and cities within the county levying the tax on a prorated per capita basis (1.0 for population in incorporated areas).

Revenues may be spent for "general transportation purposes" including the construction, maintenance, and operation of county streets, county roads and state highways, policing of local roads, public transportation, high capacity transportation, transportation planning and design and other transportation related activities – *including non-motorized transportation*.

- **Washington State intergovernmental revenue** – includes state grants or pass-through revenues, usually earmarked for specific programs. State grants are allocated under the Urban Arterial Trust Account (UATA) and Transportation Improvement Account (TIA) with a 20% matching requirement for alleviating roadways with traffic congestion or accident problems, and/or caused by economic development or growth. Both funds may be used for multi-modal improvements *including non-motorized transportation systems*.

- **Federal intergovernmental revenue** – includes federal grants or pass-through revenues, usually earmarked for specific programs. Federal grants are allocated under the Federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). Programs under this Act include the Surface Transportation Program (STP), Transportation Enhancement Program (STP-EH) and Safety Program (STPS) Funds which may be used for multi-modal improvements *including non-motorized transportation systems*. The US Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration administer federal governmental grants and pass-through funds.

D.1.3: Special revenues (taxes and fees)

Special revenues are derived from state and local option taxes dedicated to specific expenditure purposes, such as conservation futures, the real estate excise tax, motel and hotel tax, public art, criminal justice, convention center, and the like. Some special revenues may be used to finance limited capital facilities, such as open space projects and programs, where the local option allows.

Following is a description of local option taxes that may be used for open space purposes and the extent to which Skagit County is currently using them.

- **Real Estate Excise Tax (REET)** – RCW 82.46 gives county governments the option of adding up to three 0.0025% increments to the real estate excise tax (REET) for the sole purpose of financing local capital improvement projects –

including open space and trail systems. REET funds may not be used to finance operation and maintenance requirements.

Skagit County has adopted 2 REET options. *If approved by county voters, the county could adopt the 3rd REET option to be dedicated solely to park, recreation, and open space purposes if approved by county voters.*

REET is a viable financing tool for open space and trail acquisition and development projects. However, since REET funds are used for all county capital requirements, the funds may not be as easy to expense for open space and trail purposes as in years past when the county's General Fund was more significant and able to fund other county capital facility requirements.

- **Conservation Futures (CF)** – RCW 84.34 gives county governments the option of enacting by Council resolution or submitting a property tax levy for voter approval for the countywide acquisition of development rights or easements for the purpose of preserving open space, habitat areas, wetlands, agricultural, and timber lands.

The program may assess a range of rates per \$1,000 assessed value property tax on all taxable properties in the county, and dedicate the funds to the acquisition of farm, forest, open space, and recreation land.

A citizen-based Conservation Futures Advisory Committee must review and prioritize all projects submitted by eligible jurisdictions within the county including non-profit corporations or associations.

Skagit County's Conservation Futures currently funds the Farmland Legacy program that purchases development rights in the Ag-NRL zoning district. In conjunction with federal grants and non-profit ventures, the program is currently acquiring easements on about 700-900 acres per year. In 2005, the county's Conservation Futures tax rate was \$0.0576 per \$1,000 assessed value and generated \$603,777 in annual revenues.

D.1.4: Debt service funds

Debt service funds are derived from a dedicated portion of the property tax or general fund proceeds to repay the sale of general obligation (voted) and Councilmanic (non-voted) bonds. Both types of bonds may be used to finance open space and trail acquisitions – but not maintenance or operational costs.

- **Councilmanic (limited or non-voted) bonds** - may be issued without voter approval by the County Commission for any facility development purpose. The total amount of all outstanding non-voted general obligation debt may not exceed 1.5% of the assessed valuation of all county property – *or \$173,920,497 in the year 2005 based on a total taxable property value of \$11,594,699,782.*

Limited general obligation bonds must be paid from general governmental revenues. Therefore, debt service on these bonds may reduce the amount of revenue available for current operating expenditures and the financial flexibility the County Commission may need to fund annual budget priorities. For this reason, Councilmanic bonds are usually only used for the most pressing capital improvement issues.

- **Unlimited general obligation bonds** - must be approved by at least 60% of resident voters during an election which has a turnout of at least 40% of those who voted in the last state general election. The bond may be repaid from a special levy, which is not governed by the 1.0% statutory limitation on the property tax growth rate.

Total indebtedness as a percent of the assessed valuation that may be incurred by limited and unlimited general obligation bonds together, however, may not exceed:

- 2.5% - provided that indebtedness in excess of 1.5% is for general purposes (*in 2005, the 2.5% lid equaled \$289,867,495 including the 1.5% Councilmanic option*),
- 5.0% - provided that indebtedness in excess of 2.5% is for utilities, and

7.5% - provided that indebtedness in excess of 5.0% is for parks and open space development.

Monies authorized by limited and unlimited types of bonds must be spent within 3 years of authorization to avoid arbitrage requirements unless invested at less than bond yield.

Councilmanic and Unlimited General Obligation or GO Bonds may be used to construct but not maintain or operate facilities. Facility maintenance and operation costs must be paid from general governmental revenue or by voter authorization of special annual or biannual operating levies or by user fees or charges.

D.1.5: State grants

Washington State funds and administers a number of programs for wildlife habitat, open space, and non-motorized transportation and trails purposes using special state revenue programs.

- **Endangered Species Act (ESA)** - a Department of Ecology administered water quality program provides grants for up to 75% of the cost of water quality/fish enhancement studies. Referendum 39 monies can be applied to open space developments that propose to restore, construct or otherwise enhance fish producing streams, ponds or other water bodies.
- **Washington Wildlife Recreation Program (WWRP)** - provides funds for the acquisition and development of conservation and recreation lands. The Habitat Conservation Account of the WWRP program provides funds to acquire critical habitat, natural areas, and urban wildlife categories. The Outdoor Recreation Account of the WWRP program provides funds for local parks, state parks, trails, and water access categories.
- **Capital Projects Fund for Washington Heritage** - initiated on a trial basis in 1999, and since renewed, provides funds for the restoration and renovation projects for historical sites and buildings by local governments and non-profit agencies. The program is administered by the Heritage Resource Center (HRC).

- **Boating Facilities Program** – approved in 1964 under the state Marine Recreation Land Act, the program earmarks motor vehicle fuel taxes paid by watercraft for boating-related lands and facilities. Program funds may be used for fresh or saltwater launch ramps, transient moorage, and upland support facilities.
- **Aquatic Lands Enhancement Act (ALEA)** - initiated on a trial basis in 1985, and since renewed and expanded, uses revenues obtained by the Washington Department of Natural Resources from the lease of state owned tidal lands. The ALEA program is administered by the Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office (RCO – formerly the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation or IAC) for the development of shoreline related trail improvements and may be applied for up to 50% of the proposal.
- **Washington State Public Works Commission** - initiated a program that may be used for watercraft sanitary pump-out facilities.

D.1.6: Federal grants

Federal monies are available for the construction of outdoor park facilities from the National Park Service (NPS) Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office (RCO – formerly the IAC) administers the grants.

- **NPS (National Park Service) grants** - usually do not exceed \$150,000 per project and must be matched on an equal basis by the local jurisdiction. The RCO assigns each project application a priority on a competitive statewide basis according to each jurisdiction's need, population benefit, natural resource enhancements and a number of other factors.

In the past few years, project awards have been extremely competitive as the federal government significantly reduced the amount of federal monies available the NPS program. The state increased contributions to the program over the last few years using a variety of special funds, but the overall program could

be severely affected by pending federal deficit cutting legislation.

Applicants must submit a detailed comprehensive park, recreation, and open space plan to be eligible for NPS funding. The jurisdiction's plan must demonstrate facility need, and prove that the jurisdiction's project proposal will adequately satisfy local parks, recreation, and open space needs and interests. Due to diminished funding, however, RCO grants have not been a significant source of project monies for city, county, or other local jurisdictions in recent years.

- **TEA21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century)** - can be used to finance on and off-road non-motorized trail enhancements along major and minor arterial collectors roads or sometimes, within separate trail corridors. The program was adopted in 1993 and is administered by the Regional Transportation Organization (RTO) on behalf of the US Department of Transportation.

Applicants must demonstrate the proposed trail improvements will increase access to non-motorized recreational and commuter transportation alternatives.

- **National Recreational Trails Program (NRTTP)** – is the successor to the National Recreational Trails Act (NRFTA). Funds may be used to rehabilitate and maintain recreational trails that provide a backcountry experience. In some cases, the funds may be used to create new “linking” trails, trail relocations, and educational programs.

D.1.7: Enterprise funds

Enterprise funds are derived from the user fees and charges levied for utility operations including water and sewer, storm drainage, regional water, solid waste, and cemetery. Enterprise revenues may be used to pay operating costs, retire capital facility debt, and plan future replacement and expansion projects.

Enterprise funds may be created for an open space activity that has a revenue source sufficient to finance all costs. Enterprise

funds have been used on a limited basis for gun ranges, golf courses, equestrian centers, marinas, and similar self-financing operations – and may be used for storm mitigation banks or ponds or similar activities that charge fees.

E.2: Revenue prospects

Based on the preceding analysis, the following options could be used to finance countywide open space projects and program:

D.2.1: User fees and charges

Skagit County could enact by resolution an increasing array of special user fees, charges, and special assessments to pay for open space projects and program. One of the most promising may be the:

- **Local Option Vehicle License Fee (LOVLF)** - described earlier which allows up to an additional \$15.00 fee to be added to vehicle license fees for the purpose of **constructing, operating, and maintaining** non-motorized transportation.

The LOVLF fee could be used to develop the on and possibly some of the off-road trail proposals that frame and provide access to the UGA open space networks on a countywide basis.

Based on 2005 vehicle registrations within the county, the \$15.00 added fee would generate at least \$2,251,800 annually if enacted for non-motorized transportation or trail purposes.

D.2.2: Optional local dedicated taxes

Skagit County could seek voter approval to enact a variety of the special taxes and fees. One or more of the most promising may be those described earlier including the:

- **Local Option Sales Tax (LOST)** - which, if approved by voter referendum, could add **on a continual basis** an additional \$0.010 per \$1.00 of retail sales to be dedicated exclusively for **acquisition, operation, and maintenance** of open space projects and programs on a countywide basis.

Based on year 2005 retail sales statistics, LOST would generate at least \$924,868 annually for open space purposes and be paid by in-county residents as well as out-of-county residents and tourists.

- **Real Estate Excise Tax (REET 3)** - which, if approved by voter referendum, could generate **on a continual basis** \$0.0025 per \$1.00 of real property sales to be dedicated exclusively for **acquisition** of open space and trail projects and programs on a countywide basis.

Based on year 2005 real estate sales, REET 3 would generate at least \$164,134 annually for open space purposes and would be paid exclusively by in-county property sales and acquisitions.

- **Local Option Fuel Tax (LOFT)** - which, if approved by voter referendum, could add **on a continual basis** up to an additional \$0.023 per gallon of gas to be dedicated exclusively for non-motorized transportation **construction, operation, and maintenance** on a countywide basis.

Based on year 2005 estimated gasoline sales by county residents (not including sales to out-of-county residents and tourists, LOFT would generate at least \$1,425,990 annually for open space purposes and be paid by in-county residents as well as out-of-county residents and tourists.

D.2.3: General levy rate referendums

Skagit County could seek voter approval to reset or lift the levy rate lid on a permanent or temporary special purpose basis in accordance. One of the most promising options may be the special purpose levy lid lift described earlier where:

- **Property Tax Levy (PTL - Levy Lid Lift)** - which, if approved by voter referendum, could add **on a limited duration** (to be specified in the referendum but typically 6 years) an additional property tax to be dedicated exclusively for the **acquisition, operation, and maintenance** of open space projects and programs on a countywide basis.

Based on year 2005 assessed values, a \$0.00011 rate per \$1.00 valuation or \$24.48 annually for an average county house value of \$222,500 would generate \$1,641,082 annually, a \$0.00016 rate or \$35.60 annually would generate \$2,387,028 annually, or a \$0.00022 rate or \$48.95 annually would generate \$3,282,163 annually.

E.3: Regulatory approaches

In addition to the financing sources analyzed above, Skagit County could also use some of the following regulatory approaches to creating open space and trail systems using the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) and Growth Management Act (GMA) provisions.

D.3.1: SEPA impact mitigation – subdivision regulations

County subdivision policies require developers of subdivisions within the county, or on lands that may eventually annex to adjacent cities, to provide suitably designed and located open spaces, woodland preserves, trail systems, and other park or recreational facilities.

Such facilities may include major components of the open space and trail system that may be affected by the project's location or development. The county may also consider requiring developers provide acceptable long-term methods of managing and financing open space and trail maintenance and enhancement requirements. Attractive management systems could include:

- **ownership by a non-profit organization** - like a land trust, conservancy, or other agency who assumes responsibility for all operation and maintenance responsibilities and costs,
- **ownership by a homeowners or common property owners association** - who may contract maintenance responsibilities and assess property owner's annual costs, or
- **dedication of property** - to the county or an adjacent city or park district who assumes maintenance responsibilities using local city or park district funds.

The county should not accept title and maintenance responsibility unless the land or facility will be a legitimate open space and trail element that may be supported using public financing.

The county may be contracted by any of the other agencies to provide or oversee an operation and maintenance contract on the owner's behalf provided all county costs are reimbursed by an approved method of local financing.

D.3.2: GMA growth impact fees

Skagit County could expand upon the growth impact fee provisions provided in the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). Park and traffic impact fees could be applied to all proposed residential developments within the unincorporated county as a means of maintaining existing park, recreation, and open space and traffic levels-of-service (ELOS).

The ordinances could estimate the impact each development project will have on the open space and trail components of the park and traffic LOS within a countywide or UGA local service zone and make provisions for setting aside the resources, including lands or monies, necessary to offset the project's regional or local open space and trail impacts.

The dollar value of the project's open space and trail impacts could be offset by the project developer of an amount equal to the combined facility acquisition and development costs that the county and/or another providing agency would incur to maintain the same existing level-of-service (ELOS).

A developer may be allowed to choose any combination of land or cash mitigation measures including credit for any open space or trail facilities to be included within the project development. The ordinance should consider the following when determining the types of mitigation measures or development credits to be made available to the developer:

- **will the open space or trail** - be available to the public,

- ***have a designated owner*** - responsible for continuing operation and maintenance (the owner may be a common property owner's association, park district or other agency), and
- ***correspond to and not exceed or vary from*** - the types of open space and trail facilities that are being impacted (a developer could provide but should not be able to take full credit value for facilities for which there is no shortage, impact or local interest).

Land contributions can be accepted in lieu of monies if the lands will be suitable sites for future open space and trail systems. Land and monies accumulated under the proposed ordinance must be invested within a reasonable time of impact assessment or be returned to the contributing developer.

The county could conduct periodic program reviews with residents, user groups, cities, park districts, and other agencies to decide the most efficient and representative way of delivering the open spaces and trails mitigated by the ordinance.

D.3.3: Inter-local agreements

Skagit County should work with the cities to determine an equitable means whereby the open space and trail components of park and traffic impact fees can be collected from residential developments occurring within the urban growth area outside of existing city limits, but within the area each city eventually expects to annex.

A joint growth impact fee could be collected where the county and city maintain the same local and regional or citywide level-of-service (LOS) presently existing within the incorporated (city) and unincorporated (county) sections, and for the urban growth area in total.

A common fee could be collected by each agency then shared on a project by project basis for open space and trail improvements benefiting the residents of the UGAs as well as the county-at-large.



Photo - barn on Fidalgo Island

Appendix F: UGA Property Tax Levy & Open Space Advisory Committee

AN ORDINANCE of Skagit County related to policies for the implementation of the Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Plan and Program including the submission of a property tax levy as allowed by RCW 84.55 to provide an estimated amount of tax revenues for the purpose of acquiring through purchase or easement, restoring, enhancing, developing, and maintaining a network of UGA open spaces, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facilities.

WHEREAS, the Growth Management Act (GMA) stipulates Skagit County must have environmental element plans that protect critical areas such as floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, geological hazards, and significant wildlife habitat and migration corridors; and resource lands including working and productive forestlands, agricultural lands, and mines; and cultural resources including historical sites and landmarks, scenic views and aesthetic landscapes; and

WHEREAS, the GMA also stipulates Skagit County's Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) must have open space separators or definitions that incorporate the above in addition to park and recreational sites and facilities, regional and community trails, open space linkage corridors, and interpretive facilities; and

WHEREAS, multiple public, non-profit, and private agencies and organizations are currently actively preserving, protecting, restoring, enhancing, and managing wildlife, forestland, agricultural, and scenic open space resources through land purchases, easements, development and use agreements, among other methods in rural Skagit County including along the Skagit River, in the Skagit River agricultural valley, in the Skagit River delta, and in Padilla Bay, among other locations; and

WHEREAS, these agencies and organizations are not pursuing lands within or adjacent to Skagit County's UGAs due to cost, complexity, parcel fragmentation, policy confusions, and other factors such that there is a gap in projects, programs, and funding necessary to implement a Skagit Countywide UGA Open

Space Plan that meets GMA requirements; and

WHEREAS, a mail-out/phone-back survey of registered county voter households indicated clear and significant majorities favored the implementation of a Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Plan that creates and links open space separators, regional trail linkages, interpretive facilities, and scenic roads and byways around the UGAs with the open spaces being created by public, non-profit, and private agencies and organizations; and

WHEREAS, the survey of registered voter households also indicated significant majorities also favored the enactment of a financing method to provide for the UGA open space funding gap that matched and partnered or joint ventured with existing and potential public, non-profit, and private agency and organization efforts and resources;

NOW, THEREFORE, SKAGIT COUNTY DOES ORDAIN:

Section 1: Findings

1.1: The general fund of Skagit County does not have sufficient resources - to provide for the acquisition whether by purchase or easement, restoration, enhancement, development, and maintenance of open spaces, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facilities within, adjacent, and between the UGAs.

1.2: The Skagit County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) recognizes the need - to provide funds for the acquisition, restoration, enhancement, development, and maintenance of existing and future UGA related open spaces, regional trail corridor linkages, and interpretive facilities.

1.3: The Skagit County Board of County Commissioners finds and declares it is in the best interests of the County - that its voters have an opportunity to vote on the question of whether to acquire, restore, enhance, develop, and maintain UGA open

spaces, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facilities the cost of which is to be paid from an increase in the County's regular property tax levy above the limitations established in RCW _____ for a period of 10 years commencing in the year 20__.

1.4: The Skagit County Board of County Commissioners finds and declares that an emergency exists - requiring the submission to the qualified electors of the County the proposition whether the County shall levy regular property taxes above the limitation established in RCW 84._____ for their ratification or rejection at a special election on _____.

Section 2: Use of UGA Open Space funds

It is intended that proceeds from the additional tax levied pursuant to this ordinance shall be applied to acquire through purchase or easement, restore, enhance, develop, and maintain UGA open spaces, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facilities as outlined in Exhibit A: the Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Plan. Interest earnings on such proceeds shall also be applied to these purposes. The allocations are intended to be as follows:

2.1: Land acquisitions - approximately __% of the proceeds and interest of the levy are intended to be dedicated to land acquisition through fee simple, land easements, or other preservation method.

2.2: Development and improvement - approximately __% of the proceeds and interest of the levy are intended to be dedicated to the restoration, enhancement, development, and improvement of UGA open spaces, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facilities.

2.3: UGA open space preservation endowment - approximately __% of the proceeds of the levy are intended to be set aside to accrue interest. Interest earnings are to be spent on the maintenance of properties acquired or developed with UGA open space levy funds.

2.4: Funds raised thereby - shall also be used for all administrative and implementation costs to the County in

carrying out this program.

2.5: The above described program components are only illustrative guidelines - for implementation of the Skagit Countywide UGA open space program. In annual County budgets or by separate ordinance, the County shall from year to year determine the budget and allocations among the program components, change the scope of activities or the emphasis, and within a budget year reallocate unexpended and unencumbered funds from one program to another. Proceeds and appropriates unexpended at the end of any budget year shall automatically be carried over to the next budget year.

Section 3: UGA Open Space Advisory Committee

The Skagit County Board of County Commissioners shall establish a UGA Open Space Advisory Committee that shall provide citizen advice regarding the use of UGA Open Space Levy funds to acquire through purchase or easement, restore, enhance, develop, and maintain UGA open spaces, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facilities within and adjacent Skagit County's UGAs.

3.1: Committee membership - shall consist of 9 members who shall be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. Each member shall be a citizen of the United States, an elector of Skagit County, a resident of the State of Washington for at least 3 years and of Skagit County for at least 2 years prior to appointment to the Committee. Members shall be appointed from among community-minded citizens who are active in civic matters, supportive of the intent and objectives of the UGA Open Space Plan and Program, and geographically representative of the county's UGAs. The Committee may make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners for re-appointment and replacement of its members.

3.2: Terms - members shall be appointed to serve for a term of 3 years. Any vacancy in the membership of the committee shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment with the replacement filling the remainder of the unexpired

term. Members may serve for no more than 3 full consecutive terms.

3.3: Compensation-conflicts of interest - committee members shall serve without compensation from Skagit County, or from any trust, donation or legacy to Skagit County for their services; this limitation shall not preclude a member of their firm receiving compensation from the County under contract or otherwise for services rendered outside their duties as a Committee member; provided, that any Committee member having an interest or who contemplates acquiring an interest in any particular transaction, contract, or project must disqualify them self from any official action contributing towards an official recommendation to the County on that subject.

3.4-Authority and duties - the UGA Open Space Advisory Committee shall be authorized to do the following:

3.4.1: Evaluate current and future conditions, needs, opportunities, and priorities - and identify and develop annual and long range open space land, regional trail linkage, and interpretive facility acquisitions whether purchase or easement, restorations, enhancements, improvements, and maintenance project and program lists that implement the Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Plan for the county-at-large and each UGA.

3.4.4: Develop procedures and processes for soliciting requests-for-proposals (RFPs) - from public, non-profit, and private agencies and organizations for Skagit Countywide UGA open space, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facility projects and programs.

3.4.4: Develop public benefit evaluation and selection criteria for RFP submissions - from public, non-profit, and private agencies and organizations for Skagit Countywide UGA open space, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facility project and program submittals.

3.4.4: Award (on the Board of County Commissioners behalf) Skagit Countywide UGA open space levy funds - for UGA open

space, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facility projects and programs.

3.4.4: Monitor compliance and expenditures - for UGA open space, regional trail linkages, and interpretive facility projects and programs.

3.4.5: Issue annual evaluation reports and consult with the Board of County Commissioners and the public-at-large - identifying current UGA open space conditions and the actions taken each year to further the implementation of the Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Plan.

3.4.6: Issue in the annual report or at any time the Committee deems appropriate, any revisions, modifications, or other actions that should be undertaken - to improve upon funding sources, RFP solicitation, public benefit criteria evaluation, project and program awards, project and program compliance and expenditures that would improve upon the Plan or its implementation.

Section 4: Organization

4.1: A chair and vice-chairperson - shall be elected annually from the Committee members and may serve for up to 3 consecutive 1-year terms. The Committee shall adopt its own rules of procedure and shall have authority to make by-laws for the conduct of its business under this Ordinance.

4.2: The Committee shall hold at least 1 regular meeting each month - on such date as shall be fixed and publicly advertised by the Committee at its regular place of meeting. Additional meetings may be held as the Committee deems necessary. All meetings of the Committee shall be public meetings; provided that, to the extent necessary or appropriate, the Committee shall consider the selection of sites and the acquisition of real property in purchase or easement confidentially in executive session when public knowledge regarding such consideration would cause a likelihood of increased price.

4.3: Written minutes and records of meetings and actions of the Committee shall be kept - and all such records shall be public.

4.4: Skagit County Planning & Development Services Department staff - shall provide appropriate support to the Committee.

Section 5: Effective dates

This Ordinance establishing a Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Advisory Committee shall be in effect for so long as a UGA Open Space Levy (whether the current proposed levy or any successor thereto) is in effect in the County or there are funds collected through such a levy to be expended. In the event that the proposed UGA Open Space levy or any successor thereto expires without being replaced or extended, the Committee shall be disbanded.

Section 6: Election-ballot title

The Skagit County Board of County Commissioners requests that the Auditor of Skagit County, as an ex officio supervisor of elections, find the existence of an emergency pursuant to RCW 29A 04.330 (2) and call and conduct a special election in the County on _____, for the purpose of submitting to the qualified voters of the County for their approval the proposition authorizing the County to increase its regular property tax to \$___ per thousand of assessed valuation on all of the taxable property within Skagit County, for collection in ____ and to increase such levy for each of the 9 succeeding years as allowed by RCW 84.55 to be used for the cost of UGA open space and regional trail acquisition, restoration, enhancement, development, and maintenance as set forth in this ordinance.

The County Clerk is authorized and directed to certify to the County Auditor of Skagit County, Washington, as an ex officio supervisor of elections, as least 45 days prior to the _____ election date, a copy of this ordinance and the proposition to be

submitted at that election in the form of a ballot title in the following form pursuant to RCW 29A.36.071:

**SKAGIT COUNTY
PROPOSITION NUMBER __**

Skagit County's Proposition Number _ concerns a levy for UGA open space and regional trails.

For the purpose of funding the acquisition, restoration, enhancement, development, and maintenance of UGA open spaces and regional trails, this proposition would authorize Skagit County to increase its regular property tax levy up to \$___ per \$1,000 for collection in _____, and to levy the additional amount for 9 succeeding years together with annual increases thereon as allowed under RCW 84.55. Should this proposition be approved?

Yes_____

No_____

Passed by this Board of County Commissioners this ___ day of _____, 200_.

Appendix G: UGA Open Space - Public Benefit Rating Criteria

The following criteria will be used to evaluate properties or programs submitted for funding consideration under the proposed UGA Open Space program by the UGA Open Space Advisory Committee (UGA-OSAC).

Initial evaluations may simply add the number of checked boxes to determine which projects score the highest for funding consideration. Eventually, the UGA Open Space Advisory Committee may perfect a graduated scoring system that prioritizes the categories listed and the scores that may be achieved by applicant submittals.

1: Land use

1.1 Separators - does the property or program create open space networks that define “place” boundaries establishing breaks or separations between Concrete and Sedro-Woolley, Sedro-Woolley and Burlington, Burlington and Bayview Ridge, and transitions between urban and rural areas along SR-9, SR-20, Chuckanut Drive, and McLean Road, among others?

1.2: Public/private network opportunities - does the property or program define a planned network of open spaces so that private developments can contribute or link privately-owned open space systems to be part of or extensions of the overall UGA open space system as in, for example, the Eaglemont Development in Mount Vernon?

1.3: Flood control - does the property or program include floodplains and flood-prone lands and the river dike and drainage systems along the Baker and Skagit Rivers, Nookachamps Creek, Gages Lake and Slough, Britts Slough, and Swinomish Channel in UGA open spaces?

2: Natural resources

2.1: Aquatic habitat - does the property or program protect and enhance fresh and saltwater aquatic resources including fisheries, water fowl, and other species habitat in the Baker

River, Skagit River including the North and South Forks, Samish River, Nookachamps Creek, Swinomish Channel, and Samish, Padilla, Fidalgo, Burrows, Similk, and Skagit Bays, and significant freshwater bodies such as Shannon, Gages, Barney, Heart, Whistle, Erie, and Campbell Lakes, as well as estuarine rearing and foraging resources in Skagit, Similk, Padilla, and Samish Bays that encompass, adjoin, and extend UGA open spaces?

2.2: Wildlife habitat and corridors - does the property or program protect and enhance wildlife habitat including plant species, birds, and mammals within the marine, estuarine, freshwater, and terrestrial environments that encompass, adjoin, and provide migration corridors within and between UGA open spaces?

2.3: Agricultural lands - does the property or program protect heritage, prime soils, and working farms in the Skagit River Valley, Nookachamps Creek, Skagit River Delta, and Fir and Fidalgo Islands by including them within UGA open spaces?

2.4: Woodlands - does the property or program protect old growth, working forests, and significant woodland stands on US Forest Service, DNR, and other public and private properties on Burlington Hill, Little Mountain, and the Community Forest on Mount Erie by including them within UGA open spaces?

3: Scenic resources

3.1: Landscapes - does the property or program protect existing scenic landscapes especially those that exemplify unique features that are visible from UGA open space viewpoints including Cap Sante Point, Mount Erie, and Little Mountain, are incorporated into major parks such as Northern State Recreation Area and Deception Pass State Park, and are prominent features of protected areas such as Padilla and Skagit Bays?

3.2: Scenic byways – does the property or program protect scenic roads, rivers, and shorelines by preserving rural and marine land uses and activities, natural environments and vegetation, and scenic or visual features along UGA open space road and shoreline edges especially including the established SR-11 and SR-20 scenic byway corridors?

3.3: Viewpoints – does the property or program protect and enhance scenic viewpoints that look into and onto visual landscapes including prominent high points such as Cap Sante Point, Mount Erie, Little Mountain, and Burlington Hill, as well as strategic overlooks or look-into places alongside and within the UGA open space network at the Baker and Skagit Rivers, Gages Slough, Nookachamps Creek, and Swinomish Channel?

4: Cultural resources

4.1: Landmarks – does the property or program protect and interpret cultural, historical, and archaeological places, sites, and structures within the UGA open space system such as the cement and powerhouse structures in Concrete, Northern State Hospital in Sedro-Woolley, BNSF Railroad facilities in Burlington, river steamboat landings and waterfront improvements in Mount Vernon, historical business district in La Conner, railroad jetty and marine waterfront in Anacortes?

5: Interpretation

5.1: Interpretive exhibits, trails, and centers – does the property or program create and incorporate education and awareness programs and facilities within UGA open space systems such as the Padilla Bay and Tommy Thompson Trails, and Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NEER) interpretative center?

6: Recreation

6.1: Regional multiuse trails – does the property or program develop a network of regional or countywide multiuse (hike, bike, and horse) trails including the Cascade, Centennial, PNW, and Skagit-Snohomish Trails adjacent, through, and into

countywide and UGA open spaces to increase access, awareness, and interpretive opportunities provided that such access does not jeopardize critical wildlife habitat, working farmlands or forests, or other private resources and properties?

6.2: Community connections – does the property or program link the regional or countywide multiuse trails with city or local trails that increase urban and rural resident access to parks, recreational areas, schools, public facilities, commercial, and employment areas in Concrete, Hamilton, Lyman, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, Mount Vernon, Bayview Ridge, La Conner, and Anacortes UGAs?

6.3: On/off-road linkages – does the property or program where necessary and appropriate, extend regional and local multiuse trails within public road and utility rights-of-way that adjoin, cross, or access countywide and UGA open spaces to avoid off-road wildlife habitat intrusions, working farm or forest conflicts on a seasonal, interim, and sometimes permanent basis where it cannot be avoided?

6.4: Water trail linkages – does the property or program where possible, connect on/off-road trails with water trails on the Guemes and San Juan Island Ferries and private excursion boat routes on the Skagit River, Swinomish Channel, Padilla, Similk, and Skagit Bays to increase public access and interpretive opportunities?

6.5: Accessibility – does the property or program provide for disability access to encourage the use and enjoyment of all people with physical disabilities to the maximum extent possible similar to what has been provided on the Tommy Thompson, Padilla Bay, and Cascade Trails?

7: Transportation

7.1: Interconnections – does the property or program link non-motorized transportation routes on SR-9, SR-11, SR-20, SR-237, SR-530, and SR-534 with the off-road Cascade, Centennial, PNW, and Skagit-Snohomish Trails systems to provide an interconnected network that parallels and provides access to UGA open spaces?

7.2: Rural access – does the property or program extend non-motorized transportation routes outward from the UGAs to provide access to rural areas and landscapes as well as the UGA open space extensions on a countywide basis such as the biking designations on McLean Road, Whitney-LaConner Road, and Chuckanut Drive?

7.3: Entry points – does the property or program link non-motorized transportation routes with the surrounding counties and region specifically including on-road alignments on SR-9, SR-11, SR-20, SR-237, SR-530, and SR-534?

7.4: Water trails – does the property or program designate hand-carry and other non-motorized water craft routes that flow alongside and through countywide and UGA open spaces on the Baker River, Skagit River including the North and South Forks, Samish River, Swinomish Channel, and Samish, Padilla, Fidalgo, Burrows, Similk, and Skagit Bays?

8: Jurisdictional and leveraging

8.1: Land use policy - does the property or program conform to Skagit County and the affected city/UGA land use policies, zoning designations, and other goals and objectives?

8.2: Local leverage - does the property or program generate matching funds, donations, expertise, or labor from other local governments or non-profit organizations within the county?

8.3: State and federal leverage - does the property or program generate matching funds, donations, expertise, or labor from state and federal sources?

8.4: Public support - does the property or program have significant public support from the affected jurisdiction, participants or sponsors, local community, and affected adjacent property owners?

9: Feasibility and timing

9.1: Threatened status - is the property or program threatened with development or likely to be lost for open space if not acted upon?

9.2: Restoration - will the property or program restore or enhance open space, wildlife, woodland, farm, or other natural features that once characterized the site before urban development?

9.3: Stewardship - does the property or program have a sponsor who will assume responsibility for the operation, maintenance, and other stewardship requirements?

9.4: Distribution - will the property or program provide a geographic distribution of open space funds in order to maintain some equity between funds and population distribution within the county?

9.5: Feasibility - can the property or program be completed on time, within budget, within the scope as outlined in the submittal?

9.5: Hazard - does the property or program have any potential hazardous waste, environmental problem, special permit requirements, dilapidated structures, or other feature which could jeopardize its accomplishment with the funds or its long term open space potential?



Photo - Heart Lake in Community Forest, Anacortes