



5-Year Plan (FY2025 to FY2029) Skagit Conservation District

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Organization of the Skagit Conservation District

The Skagit Conservation District is a political subdivision of the State of Washington – its authorities, powers, and structure are contained in RCW 89.08. The Skagit Conservation District was organized in 1942. It encompasses all lands within the County boundaries.

Function of the Skagit Conservation District

The function of the Skagit Conservation District is to make available technical, financial and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land manager with conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.

Who We Serve & Why

The Skagit Conservation District is here to serve landowners and other county residents who need technical, financial and/or educational assistance as well as governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies, and groups and schools needing specialized expertise or information in order to effectively address environmental and land use issues.

Mission of the Skagit Conservation District

The mission of the Skagit Conservation District is to bring voluntary, incentive-based natural resource solutions to the citizens of Skagit County and beyond by providing technical, financial, and educational resources.

Vision of the Skagit Conservation District

The vision of the Skagit Conservation District is to have quality water, quality habitat, and quality working lands.

Values of the Skagit Conservation District

The values of the Skagit Conservation District are protecting our way of life and our future...sustaining natural resource-based industries.

Skagit County Natural Resource Data & Information:

(Source: Skagit County Comprehensive Plan, 2007, Skagit County Planning and Development Services)

The natural resource lands designation indicates areas where Skagit County land-use plans, regulations, and incentives are intended to promote long-term, commercially significant resource use. These natural resources provide valuable products and raw materials that support jobs, create tax revenues, and are an important component in regional and local economies and markets. Farmlands and forests also provide aesthetic, recreational, and environmental benefits to the public, while contributing to a diverse community lifestyle and character. The land use zoning designations for natural resource lands are:

Agricultural – Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL)

Industrial Forest – Natural Resource Lands (IF-NRL)

Secondary Forest – Natural Resource Lands (SF-NRL)

Rural Resource – Natural Resource Lands (RRc-NRL)

Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO)

Agricultural Natural Resource Lands

Agricultural Resource Lands are those lands with soils, climate, topography, parcel size, and location characteristics that have long-term commercial significance for farming. Skagit County designates agricultural lands primarily based on the presence of prime agricultural soils. These lands are concentrated in the fertile floodplain of the Skagit River as it flows into the Puget Sound. There are also agricultural lands designated along the upper Skagit Valley in areas of rich alluvial soils. Based on designation criteria, Skagit County has designated an estimated 89,169 acres of land as Agricultural lands, although significantly fewer acres are in full agricultural production in any given year.

Designating valuable agricultural soils protects the resource for future use, regardless of current farming conditions. Designating also ensures a cohesive and distinct agricultural area within Skagit County and limits the extent to which non-agricultural uses can conflict and interfere with farming. Primary crops and agricultural products in Skagit County include apples; berries; floriculture and sod; potatoes, peas, and other vegetables; vegetable seeds; dairy; and ornamental nursery stock. Skagit County's annual Tulip Festival brings in over \$60 million in economic activity, adding to the over \$300 million in gross farm income annually – making agriculture a major contributor to the health of both the regional and Skagit County economies.

Despite the current strength of the agricultural industry in Skagit County, there are some significant challenges facing agriculture, primarily in maintaining the land base and ensuring long-term viability. Pressures to convert agricultural lands to residential, wildlife habitat, and other uses conflict with neighboring non-resource uses, regulatory limitations on farming, fluctuating economic conditions, and changing weather patterns all adding to the industry's challenges.

Industrial and Secondary Forest Resource Lands

Forest Resource Lands are those lands with soils, parcel size, and location characteristics that have long-term commercial significance for forestry. Based on designation criteria, Skagit County has designated an estimated 314,576 acres of land as Industrial Forest Natural Resource Land (IF-NRL) and 38,750 acres as Secondary Forest Natural Resource Land (SF-NRL). Industrial Forest lands form the bulk and core of the commercially significant forest resource, with a surrounding Secondary Forest designation which provides a transitional density between that of Rural areas and Industrial Forest.

Secondary Forest also offers the potential for smaller-scale commercial timber operations, natural resource industries support, and limited residential uses. These lands are concentrated on the slopes and foothills of the Cascade Mountains in the eastern and northern portions of the county.

Primary forest products in Skagit County include raw logs, primarily for the domestic market, with some exports; lumber, both green and kiln dried; wood chips; and hog fuel (a mix of bark, sawdust, and planer shavings). Production of the latter is expected to increase due to the increased development of cogeneration plants as energy sources for industry. Value-added products and industries include local cabinet making shops, engineered wood products, such as beams, and small fine wood product shops producing anything from custom wood furniture to musical instruments.

Aside from wood products, forestry is a significant contributor to the economy, environment, and lifestyle in Skagit County. Support industries include logging, trucking, and equipment sales and service, small trucks, fuel, supplies, and repair services. Spin-off services, such as retail grocery, clothing, restaurants, and other services, also rely heavily on a healthy natural resource lands industry. The timber, fish and wildlife agreement led to good forest management practices that are the industry's contribution to and protection of clean air, water, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreational activities.

Currently, there are significant challenges facing the industry, primarily in maintaining the land base and promoting a viable, long-term forest industry. The industry and the County have seen a decline in the strength and role of forestry in the Skagit County economy over the past 2 years – much of this due to declining harvests on federal and state lands. Other challenges result from pressures to convert forest lands to other uses, regulatory requirements, economics, and market factors.

Rural Resource Lands

Rural Resource lands are, generally, areas that have the combined land and land-use characteristics of long-term agricultural, forest or mineral lands, and have the potential for multiple use or smaller scale resource management. Because of this mixture, Skagit County Comprehensive Planning goals, objectives, and policies applicable to both Agricultural and Forest Resource lands are applicable to the Rural Resource lands in Skagit County. Rural Resource lands generally are not managed for industrial-scale farming or forestry, but nevertheless contribute to the natural resource land base. Where the Mineral Resource Overlay designation is also applied, industrial-scale mining can occur, however. Based on designation criteria, Skagit County has designated an estimated 25,658 acres of land as Rural Resource Natural Resource Land (RRc-NRL).

The challenges facing owners of Rural Resource land generally relate to the economic viability of managing small parcels of resource lands and pressures to develop other uses, such as residential. This is particularly true where Rural Resource lands are located between larger natural resource land parcels and Rural designated areas.

The Natural Resource Lands Element of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan promotes flexibility of uses on Rural Resource lands, while providing for incentives and support for small agricultural, forest, and mining uses. Rural Resource lands allow for a range of uses that are complementary to natural resource land preservation.

Mineral Resource Overlay

The Mineral Resource Overlay is an overlay to Forest and Rural Resource lands, where geologic deposits and land use characteristics have long-term commercial significance for mineral extraction. Based on designation criteria, Skagit County has designated an estimated 60,134 acres of Mineral Resource Overlay. The predominant resources mapped in the Mineral

Resource Overlay are sand and gravel construction materials. These resources are typically associated with alluvial and glacial deposits. Quarry rock and valuable minerals, such as olivine-rich dunite and limestone, have also been designated.

The challenges facing the mineral resource industry primarily relate to conflicting use concerns with neighboring residential uses. With increasing demands for construction materials in developing urban areas, especially in the Puget Sound region, it becomes increasingly important to identify and preserve access to the mineral resources of Skagit County. However, access to much of the County's minable resources has already been precluded by residential development. Skagit County's approach to designating mineral lands is to protect what is remaining, now and for the future. Doing so requires that mineral lands of long-term commercial significance be designated in areas where the impact from mining, when it occurs, can be reduced to the greatest extent possible.

Skagit County Right to Manage Natural Resource Lands

Where non-natural resource land uses (primarily residential uses) extend into natural resource areas or exist side-by-side, natural resource management operations are frequently subject to nuisance complaints. When complaints relate to the undesired effects of properly regulated and conducted natural resource lands activities, natural resource land managers are required to set aside time and financial resources in order to respond. Right-to-Manage Natural Resource Lands policies are intended to promote a good neighbor policy between natural resource lands and non-natural resource land property owners by advising purchasers and users of property adjacent to or near natural resource land management operations of the inherent potential difficulties associated with such purchase or residence. The County is participating in the State Conservation Commission Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) which the District helps implement through providing technical assistance.

It is essential that neighbors and residents of natural resource lands better understand and be prepared to accept attendant conditions and the natural result of living in or near natural resource lands and rural areas. The Right to Manage Natural Resource Land goals and policies establish mandatory disclosures for purchasers and users and provides authority to the Skagit County Assessor's Office to track these disclosures for the long-term protection of productive use of Skagit County's valuable resource lands.



October 23, 2024

Land Use Designations	Acreage
Water Bodies	[182,760]
PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OF REGIONAL/STATEWIDE IMPORTANCE (OSRSI)	
National Forest	281,331
National Park & Recreation Areas	130,849
Wilderness	83,533
State Parks & Recreation Areas	5,575
Other	16,604
Subtotal	517,892
NATURAL RESOURCE LANDS (NRL)	
Secondary Forest (SF-NRL)	37,700
Industrial Forest (IF-NRL)	321,412
Rural Resource (RRc-NRL)	26,522
Agriculture (Ag-NRL)	88,545
Subtotal	474,179
Mineral Resource Overlay (MRO)	[61,543]
RURAL LANDS	
Rural Village Residential (RV)	2,715
Rural Intermediate (RI)	8,044
Rural Reserve (RRv)	70,126
Subtotal	80,885
COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL LANDS	
Rural Business (RB)	186
Rural Freeway Service (RFS)	46
Rural Village Commercial (RVC)	25
Natural Resource Industrial (NRI)	184
Small-Scale Recreation & Tourism (SRT)	91
Rural Center (RC)	19
Rural Marine Industrial (RMI)	53
Small-Scale Business (SSB)	31
Master Planned Resort	113
Subtotal	748
URBAN GROWTH AREAS (UGA)	
Incorporated UGA Areas (not including incorporated water areas)	23,145
Unincorporated UGA Areas	11,176
Subtotal	34,321
TOTAL	1,108,025

Trends

- Ever-changing government regulations
- Declining profitability and increasing cost to operate
- Declining forest health
- Greater frequency of extreme weather conditions
- Increasing population
- Unincorporated Skagit County population growth exceeds 20% benchmark goal
- Conversion of natural resource lands
- Citizen's resistance to increased taxes

Strategies to Address Trends

- Provide information to assist landowners in complying with environmental regulations
- Provide opportunities for landowners to protect natural resources while maintaining or increasing profitability
- Seek funding to assist forest landowners in addressing forest health threats from fire, insects, and invasive species.
- Support land use planning and implementation of policy and programs that prioritize the use of natural resources lands for sustainable natural resource uses.
- Operate the SCD in a cost effective and efficient manner providing technical assistance that helps landowner productivity and reduces risk of catastrophic wildfire or flooding through better resource management decisions.

Criteria for Selecting Conservation Priorities:

The Skagit County Comprehensive Plan is used as the basis to document what resources we have in Skagit County. The Skagit Conservation District then assesses resource concerns utilizing information from a variety of technical sources to assist in evaluating program priorities, development, and implementation. Data sources used have included, but are not limited to the following:

ECY -WAC 400-12 Watershed plans
ECY - TMDL (Lower Skagit, Nookachamps, Samish)
PSP - Puget Partnership Action Agenda
PSP - Puget Sound Shellfish Initiative
SCD – Stream Team Data
SCD - Storm Team Data
NRCS Resource Inventory
ECY - Instream flow rule
Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan
Stillaguamish Chinook Recovery Plan
Skagit County Forest, Fish, and Farmland Initiative
SWC Habitat Work Schedule
[*National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy: Phase III*](#)

Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel report on Ocean Acidification

[Healthy Forest Restoration Act](#)

[Healthy Forest Initiative](#)

USDA Forest Service State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs

[DNR – Forest Action Plan \(2020\)](#)

WSCC – Forest Health and Community Wildfire Resilience (WA Climate Commitment Act)

Public health concerns, followed by the need to maintain the beneficial uses of Skagit County natural resources, are top priorities in program prioritization consideration. Implementation strategies are then developed consistent with our vision and values.

Priority Natural Resource Conservation Needs & Geographic Areas, Measures of Success and Goals:

Priority Natural Resource Conservation Needs:

- Water Quality
- Forest Health
- Land use conversion/population growth
- Habitat
- Soil Tilth
- Climate Change/Ocean Acidification
- Water Quantity
- Invasive Species
- Nutrient Management

Priority Geographic Areas:

- Lower Skagit/Samish (WRIA 3)
 - Samish
 - Padilla Bay/Bayview
 - Nookachamps
 - Skagit Delta
 - Fisher/Carpenter
 - Urban areas
- Upper Skagit (WRIA 4)

Measures of Success and Goals:

Water Quality Protection and Improvement

By 2029, water quality in Samish Bay will have been improved sufficiently to allow the Department of Health to upgrade from conditional use to approved status.

The SCD will continue its stream and storm team water quality monitoring program to ensure data drives SCD actions. SCD will review and update the scope of work with partner agencies for this program.

By 2029, monitoring in other priority waterbodies will indicate improvement trends.

Forest Health Protection and Improvement

By 2029, the SCD will implement: technical assistance on afforestation /reforestation projects, continued outreach and education for forest landowners to access cost share, and provide technical, financial assistance, and outreach and education for communities to address forest health.

By 2029, the SCD will meet regularly with the Skagit County Forest Advisory Board to provide updates on the District's forestry programs and receive feedback on county forestry priorities.

Appropriate Land Use Conversion/Population Growth

By 2029, the SCD will have worked with project partners and the community to ensure an additional 5000 acres of farmland is protected in perpetuity from development.

Habitat Protection and Restoration

By 2029, the SCD will work with project partners to implement restoration projects through the Riparian Grant Program and its successors, streamlining a tiered incentives program.

By 2028, the SCD will work to get 75% of its CREP contracts renewed.

Soil Tilth Maintenance

By 2029, the SCD will implement five projects that reduce field erosion into drainage infrastructure.

Climate Change/Ocean Acidification

By 2029, the SCD will participate in Skagit climate change adaptive management project design and development activities.

By 2025, SCD will sell its first round of carbon credits on planting projects as a pilot program to fund restoration maintenance activities.

Water Quantity – too much and too little

By 2028, the SCD will implement a pilot project in a priority watershed to install LID practices to show the positive impacts on aquifer recharge.

By 2029, the SCD will work to help producers implement at least 3 irrigation efficiency projects.

Information – Education & District Operations Priorities, Measures of Success, and Goals:

By 2029, increase by 10% small-acreage landowners attending workshops.

By 2029, co-sponsor five seminars and workshops for producers for continuing education.

By 2029, increase by 10% the information opportunities for the general public (e.g. social media, radio, workshops, etc.) that the district provides or co-sponsors.

Through 2029, maintain adequate, stable, long-term funding for SCD programs.

Through 2029, continue to be in compliance with policies, procedures, and legal requirements.

Needs of Land Manager

Programs and technical assistance from SCD staff

Regulatory certainty

Assistance with understanding and addressing issues brought by Tribal treaty rights and court decisions

Assistance in dealing with competing uses for resource lands

Clarity on who to contact for conservation work

Strategies for dealing with finite natural resources – e.g. water

Recognition of the legal framework for voluntary conservation work and landowner stewardship

District education programs, which bring greater knowledge to citizens about natural resources and funding for those programs

Incentives to adopt best management practices for natural resource protection

Milestones, Timeline & Actions

Priority: Water Quality

Measurable Goal: Samish Bay from Conditionally Approved to Approved

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Samish Bay Upgraded	5 years	Technical assistance, farm plans written, BMPs implemented, outreach programs conducted, DNA testing
Development of a comprehensive water quality monitoring program	3 years	Delineate priority areas, identify funding needs, implement as funding allows
Water quality improvement watershed wide	5 years	Technical assistance, farm plans written, BMPs implemented, outreach programs conducted

Priority: Forest Health Protection and Improvement

Measurable Goal: Assist 5 landowners per year in the development of a forestry plan, and outreach and education to landowners through technical assistance and workshops.

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Identify and prioritize forest landscapes for treatment,	3 years	Data gathering and analysis Incorporate landscape treatment options into CWPP and Natural Hazard Mitigation Planning process.
Provide forest landowners with a multi- agency workshop for planning, cost-share, and forest products market information	Annually	Engage key cooperators from County (i.e. Assessor and Noxious Weed Board), DNR, NRCS, WFFA, and WA Tree Farm Program Build key partnerships and funding mechanisms for annual workshop
5 Afforestation/Reforestation projects	2029	Coordinate with key partners (i.e. WSCC and DNR) to secure appropriate seed sources for afforestation and reforestation. Build an afforestation/reforestation workflow template Develop forest stewardship plans and implementation procedures as needed
Provide support for Firewise communities with forest health treatments	Annually	Coordinate with key partners (i.e. WSCC and DNR) to provide technical, financial, and outreach and education.

Priority: Land Use Conversion/Population Growth

Measurable Goal: 5000 acres protected

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
1000 acres protected	annually	Advocacy, participation and coordination with agencies, governments, and NGOs, information education
Provide more local funding for conservation easements	5 years	Develop application for RCPP

Priority: Provide Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) support and continue the Backyard wildlife program with a minimum of 25 landowners,.

Measurable Goal: Ten percent Increase in acres protected/restored

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Assist with local, regional, and statewide salmon recovery efforts	Through 2029	Participation, coordination with governments, agencies, NGOs and private landowners
Maintain acres enrolled in the CREP program		Renew CREP contracts, develop new projects
Continue fall cover crop program		Identify and acquire funding annually

Priority: Soil Tilth - Identify a small and large model farm that can be shared as an example.

Measurable Goal: Five projects completed

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
1 soil health project completed annually	2029	Coordinate with project partners and landowners, develop and implement projects

Priority: Climate change/Ocean Acidification

Measurable Goal: Installation of water monitoring gauges to collect better data for groundwater management decisions over time.

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Install 2 groundwater gauges	2027	Utilize local Skagit water use task force information to identify project partners.

Priority: Water Quantity

Measurable Goal: Install water monitoring gauges to get better groundwater and surface-water availability data to inform decision making.

Milestones	Timeline	12 Month Actions
Data collection system streamlined and data published	2027	Work with partners to implement pilot project

Key Decision Makers

The Skagit Conservation District will continue to work with many partners to implement priority action items, including, but not limited to elected federal, state, and local government officials, as well as organizations and agencies involved in natural resource management.

The District is in Congressional Districts 1 and 2 and Legislative Districts 10, 39, and 40.

Skagit County is governed by a three-member Board of County Commissioners.

Washington Conservation Districts - assisting land managers with their conservation choices - The grass is greener on the other side of the fence, because the fence is there.

