CHAPTER 3

NATURAL RESOURCE LANDS

# I. Introduction

The Natural Resource Lands chapter of the Comprehensive Plan addresses goals and policies for the four main resource lands in Thurston County: agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, and minerals. Natural resource lands are key to Thurston County’s economy, community, and history. These areas provide valuable products and raw materials that support jobs, create tax revenues, and are important components to the local and regional economies. Additionally, natural resource lands also provide aesthetic, recreational, and environmental benefits to the public. Protection and enhancement of these natural resource lands is important to the county and its community.

Growth Management Requirements

The Growth Management Act (GMA) sets the following goal for natural resource industries:

“Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands and discourage incompatible uses.”

RCW 36.70A.020 (8)

To support this goal, counties planning under GMA must:

* designate agricultural lands, forestlands, and mineral resource lands “not characterized by urban growth and that have long-term significance” for the commercial production of that resource.

RCW 36.70A.170

* adopt development regulations “to assure the conservation of [designated] agricultural, forest, and mineral resource lands.”

RCW 36.70A.060

Thurston County implements GMA’s statewide goals (see sidebar) as well as county-driven goals through policies and programs tailored to our local community’s vision for the county’s natural resources. Additionally, Thurston County also seeks to keep with the themes of equity, access, and a healthy natural environment, and aims to honor Tribal Treaties by protecting and restoring natural resources such as those that support Treaty-reserved fisheries, shellfisheries, and traditional shellfish and plant harvest areas. By preserving and protecting natural resource industries, Thurston County aims to continue access to healthy foods and resources for the community and local Tribes. This chapter is separated into sections by the four major natural resource industries:

* Agriculture
* Aquaculture
* Forestry
* Mineral resources

##### 2025 Update: Critical Issues

* Impacts from climate change, like extended droughts and threats of wildfire;
* Increasing population, development, and other incompatible uses near resource industries or lands;
* Pressure to convert rural resource lands to other uses;

Lack of supporting infrastructure and markets.

# II. Planning Context for Natural Resource Industries

Natural resource industries are discussed within the regional County-wide Planning Policies that guide coordination of planning across the cities within Thurston County as well as the county itself.

* 1. The boundaries of designated urban growth areas should be compatible with the use of designated resource lands and critical areas.
  2. Expansion of Urban Growth Boundaries must demonstrate that urbanization of the expansion area is compatible with the use of designated resource lands and critical areas.
  3. Reduction of an Urban Growth Boundary must be compatible with the use of designated resource lands and critical areas.

3.1.g Concentrate development in urban growth areas and protect rural areas by designating   
 rural areas for low intensity, non-urban uses that preserve natural resource lands, protect   
 rural areas from sprawling, low-density development and assure that rural areas may be   
 served with lower cost, non-urban public services and utilities.

* 1. Support the recruitment, retention and expansion of environmentally sound and   
      economically viable commercial, public sector and industrial development and resource   
      uses, including the provision of assistance in obtaining funding and/or technical assistance.
  2. Build a vital, diverse and strong local economy, including job opportunities that support community and household resilience, health, and well-being, by nurturing urban and rural agricultural and food-oriented businesses, and protecting resource lands.

10.7 Provide for public access to natural resource lands, while ensuring that uses and economic   
 activity which are allowed within those lands are sustainable.

# III. AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

### A. Community vision:

The Thurston County community envisions a diverse and thriving agricultural industry that can respond quickly to changing market conditions. They recognize:

* The essential role local food and crop production play in maintaining long-term community resilience and sustainability.
* The multiple secondary benefits provided by farmland, including land conservation, nutrient cycling, wildlife habitat, flood control, recreation, and scenic open space.
* maintenance of viable agricultural resources requires a partnership between the broader county community and agricultural industry.

The community is responsible for conserving prime farmlands, promoting local markets, minimizing incompatible land uses, and providing other community support. This includes support for regulatory processes that are sensitive to the needs of farmers while protecting the environment. Farmers take responsibility to preserve soil fertility and ground and surface water quality, and to promote a land stewardship ethic for existing and future generations.

### B. Background:

Agriculture in Thurston County has an important and varied role. While Thurston County has grown at a rapid pace and lost to development more than half the land that was farmed 50 years ago, the county still retains 38,000 acres of prime farmland, an additional 48,000 acres of prime farmland if drained or protected from flooding, and 92,000 acres of prime farmland if irrigated as mapped by the United States Department of Agriculture. Those prime soils are distributed widely throughout the county, including within urban growth areas. Not all areas that have prime soils will be suitable for commercial agriculture such as prime soils that were not historically drained or ones that lack water rights for irrigation. According to data collected for the Thurston County Voluntary Stewardship Program, land used for agricultural activities within the county is estimated at 64,000 acres in 2024, compared to 61,900 acres in 2013.,[[1]](#footnote-3)

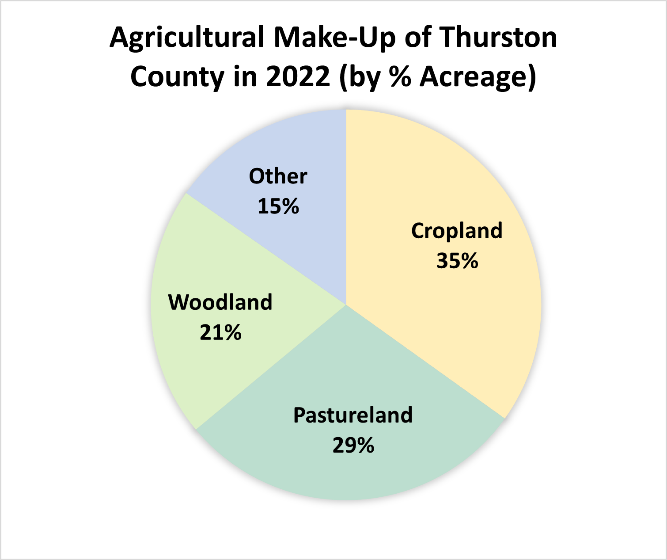


**Photo.** Horse carriage ride at pumpkin patch.  
Photo by Christina Shugart Eugy

As the county's population continues to grow, the need for conservation measures to protect agricultural resources intensifies because of increased development pressure on farmlands and greater local demand for agricultural products. This interconnection between urban and rural residents within the county and local farmers points to the need for community-wide awareness, appreciation, and support for farming.

### C. Farming Diversity and Markets:

Thurston County has a variety of types and sizes of farms. Farms in Thurston County come in sizes from less than an acre to more than a thousand acres. They include larger-scale commercial farms, organic farms, historic family farms, smaller-scale farms, close-to-market produce farms, orchard farms, and part-time farming operations. Along with chickens, cows, and sheep, Thurston County farmers raise alpacas, llamas, emus, and other diverse types of livestock. Proximity to markets has been a factor in sustaining the county's egg and poultry producers and attracting turf-growing companies to the area.



**Figure 3-1.** Agricultural make up of Thurston County. USDA Ag Census, 2022.

According to the 2022 USDA Agricultural Census, approximately 72 percent of farms reported making less than $10,000 per year from farm sales, while only 8 percent reported making more than $100,000. Cropland and pastureland are the two primary agricultural industries in Thurston County (See [Figure 3-1](#Figure31)). The 2022 USDA Agriculture Census also reports that Thurston County is ranked 17 out of 39 counties in Washington State for market value sales of agricultural products, and 2nd in the state for poultry and eggs, and 3rd in the state for aquaculture.

Regardless of farm size or commodity produced, farmers in Thurston County share a common sense of stewardship and love of the land. Farmers and residents that benefit from fresh, local agricultural products want farming to continue in this county. While maintaining and improving agricultural viability, maximizing voluntary programs, and leveraging existing resources are all critical components to the local and regional agricultural industry, this chapter particularly focuses on reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses. In addition to protecting existing agriculture, Thurston County shall enhance opportunities for future generations by supporting an affordable land base, soil fertility, and ground and surface water quality and quantity.



### D. Agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance:

The Growth Management Act (RCW36.70A.170) requires counties to designate agricultural lands of long‑term commercial significance. Designation of agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance intends to conserve lands that are used or can be used for commercial agriculture use, while discouraging residential encroachment and other incompatible development, and to encourage continued viability of agriculture. The designation does this primarily by limiting the number of houses on a property within it, limiting uses and development on prime farmland soils to those that support agriculture, and by notifying nearby neighbors that agricultural uses could occur which might cause dust, noise, and odors. The ability of owners or occupants to recover for nuisances arising from activities on the designated agricultural land may be restricted.

In 2006, the Washington State Supreme Court clarified the definition of “agricultural land” by stating:

[w]e hold that agricultural land is land: (a) not already characterized by urban growth (b) that is primarily devoted to the commercial production of agricultural products enumerated in RCW 36.70A.30(2), including land in areas used or capable of being used for production based on land characteristics, and (c) that has long-term commercial significance for agricultural production, as indicated by soil, growing capacity, productivity, and whether it is near population areas or vulnerable to more intense uses. We further hold that counties may consider the development-related factors enumerated in WAC 365-190-050(1) in determining which lands have long-term commercial significance. Lewis County v. Hearings Bd., 157 Wn2d 488 (2006) at page 502.

Criteria used to designate agricultural land of long-term commercial significance are based on: (1) the Washington State Supreme Court’s Definition of agricultural lands found in *Lewis County v. Hearings Bd., 157 Wn.2d 488 (2006);* (2) the Washington State Department of Commerce (COM) guidelines for the classification and designation of resource lands; (3) existing Thurston County policies; and (4) an analysis of local conditions. These criteria include:

##### 1. Soil Type:

The classification and identification of agricultural lands of long‑term commercial significance is based upon the land capability classification system of the United States Department of Agriculture Handbook No. 210. Those classes of agricultural lands are based upon consideration of growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition. They have been incorporated into map units of the Department's soil surveys. Thurston County uses prime farmlands as listed in the Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture Web Soil Survey (2022) that have a land capability classification of 1-3 or have a land capability classification of 4s and a National Crop Commodity Production Index (NCCPI) rating of 0.5 or higher. A list of soils used is included in Appendix C.

Designated lands should include predominantly (75% or more) prime farmland soils. Future designations of agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance should incorporate the most recent soils list from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The enumerated list of prime farmland soil types below is not intended as exclusive criteria.



##### 2. The Availability of Public Facilities and Services:

Since lands within Urban Growth Areas, as established within this Comprehensive Plan, are intended to be served by public facilities and services within a twenty-year period, agricultural lands of long‑term commercial significance should be located outside of these boundaries.

##### 3. Land Capability and Tax Status:

Designated agricultural lands should include only areas that are primarily devoted to the commercial production of agricultural products enumerated in RCW 36.70A.030(2), including land in areas used or capable of being used for production based on land characteristics. Aerial photograph interpretation can identify areas used for agriculture. Historic use information, current use information (including enrollment in the open space tax program) and soil types can help identify lands capable of being used for agriculture; however, these are not the only methods for determining land capability for agriculture.

##### 4. Relationship or Proximity to Urban Growth Areas:

Since lands within Urban Growth Areas, as established within this Comprehensive Plan, are intended to be developed at urban densities over a twenty-year period, agricultural lands of long‑term commercial significance should be located outside of those boundaries. Furthermore, designated agricultural lands should be separated from urban residential densities by a natural or man-made feature, (e.g., railroad, road, or river), to avoid potential land use conflicts.

##### 5. Predominant Parcel Size:

For Thurston County, the predominant parcel size is 20 acres or more, which, in conjunction with soil type, provides economic conditions sufficient for managing agriculture lands for long‑term commercial production.

##### 6. Land Use Settlement Patterns and Their Compatibility with Agricultural Practices:

Except within urban growth areas, adjacent residential development should be minimal and at rural densities of one unit per five acres. Recent subdivision activity near or adjacent to designated agricultural lands is an indication of settlement patterns that may influence the long-term viability of agriculture. The most compatible land uses within and adjacent to long‑term agricultural lands include forestry, mining, parks and preserves, and open space.

##### 7. Proximity of Markets:

Local or regional markets should be available. Designated agricultural lands should have access to road, rail, or air transportation routes to markets.

##### 8. Agricultural Diversity:

A diversity of agricultural activities should exist, or the area should be sufficiently large to support diverse agricultural activities. No single designated agricultural area should be smaller than40 acres. This helps assure land use compatibility for long-term resource use, and a diversity of agriculture uses in one area. Boundaries should follow landmarks visible on the ground when possible, to provide visual distinction of land use areas.

##### 9. Environmental Considerations:

Designated agricultural lands should be outside of Natural Shoreline Environments if they are not already being used for agriculture. The Shoreline Master Program regulations severely limit the ability to convert such areas to agricultural uses, and from one agricultural use to another.

The above criteria were applied to all agricultural lands of Thurston County and appropriate areas were designated as areas of long-term commercial significance. These lands are shown on Map N-1. Also included on Map N-1 are two areas of designated agricultural lands located in the Nisqually Valley, which merit special consideration due to their contribution to the distinctive character of a picturesque rural setting of the Nisqually Subarea, as highlighted in the Nisqually Subarea Plan. Lands of long-term agricultural significance are also identified as “Long-Term Agriculture” or “Nisqually Agriculture” on future land use map (Map L-1).

Farmland within the McAllister Springs aquifer recharge area was not found to meet long-term designation criteria due to the proximity of urban land uses to the north and the sensitivity of the aquifer to pesticide and fertilizer use, which may limit the viability of some types of farming operations. Low density zoning is maintained in this area, as are special provisions to protect water quality from the adverse impacts of a variety of land uses.

Table 3-1. Acreages of Long-Term Agriculture designation within Thurston County

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Land Use Designation** | **Acreage** |
| Nisqually Agriculture | 938 acres |
| Long-Term Agriculture | 14,223 acres |

Data Retrieved from: Thurston County Assessor’s Parcel Data, March 2024

Currently, there are 15,161 acres of designated agricultural lands: 938 acres are designated Nisqually Agriculture, and 14,223 acres are designated Long-Term Agriculture ([Table 3-1](#Table31)).

Becoming Designated: Future lands that meet designation criteria for agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance may also be considered for designation at the request of the landowner. Landowners may apply to voluntarily add individual properties to the designation through a comprehensive plan amendment. See the Goals, Objectives, and Policies section and Implementation Plan for specific requirements.

Redesignation of Agricultural Areas: While the emphasis of the Comprehensive Plan is to prevent the loss of agricultural lands, the county is subject to trends and events that it has little ability to control. The process and procedures used to identify and designate agricultural land are based on the best available information and reviewed at a countywide scale, and not site-specific conditions. While the areas designated for long-term agricultural use meet the primarily physical criteria for long-term commercial use, other factors, and site-specific conditions may arise that can render commercial agriculture activity completely non-viable. If farming economics changes so as to affect the long-term potential for farming in a substantial portion of an agriculture district, a land use designation may be reconsidered. In addition, if site-specific evidence conclusively indicates that land does not meet the criteria for designation as agricultural land, the land use designation should be reconsidered. The losses of an individual farm should not be reason, by itself, for eliminating or endangering the remaining acres of Thurston County’s best resources of agricultural land in the future.

Because of the significant amount of time needed to review natural resource lands and potential impacts from incompatible uses, piecemeal redesignation of lands within the designated agricultural areas should not be allowed. Site-specific proposals to de-designate natural resource lands must be deferred until a comprehensive countywide analysis is conducted where whole areas of land designated for long term commercial significance can be looked at holistically. The farm areas designated as agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance were chosen because there was a critical mass of operating farms with significant investments in land, buildings, and other improvements, productive farm soils, and absence of incompatible land uses. Piecemeal redesignation of individual properties from agricultural use to residential use can have a domino effect. Conflicts between new residents and surrounding farmers make it harder for the farms to continue. These conflicts also add pressure to those surrounding farmers to seek redesignation of their land.

The following criteria are provided to capture, in a general way, the limited nature of the circumstances under which the county should reevaluate a whole area designated as agricultural land of long-term commercial significance.

1. Changes in surrounding land use severely inhibit or severely interfere with continued agriculture use;
2. Changes in market conditions severely reduce the economic viability of agriculture use; or
3. Changes in regulatory requirements severely reduce the economic viability of agriculture use; or
4. Site specific scientific evidence conclusively indicates the land does not meet the criteria for designation as agricultural land. Site-specific evidence and requests for de-designation must be deferred to a comprehensive countywide analysis.

These circumstances should create severe losses of agricultural production lasting several years, covering a wide range of crops or products, and affect many of the producers in the area, before a reevaluation of agricultural lands is undertaken. One issue of concern is the ability of farmers to secure and maintain water rights for changing agricultural operations. More attention to this issue is needed at the state and local level.

# IV. AQUACULTURE RESOURCES

### A. Community vision:

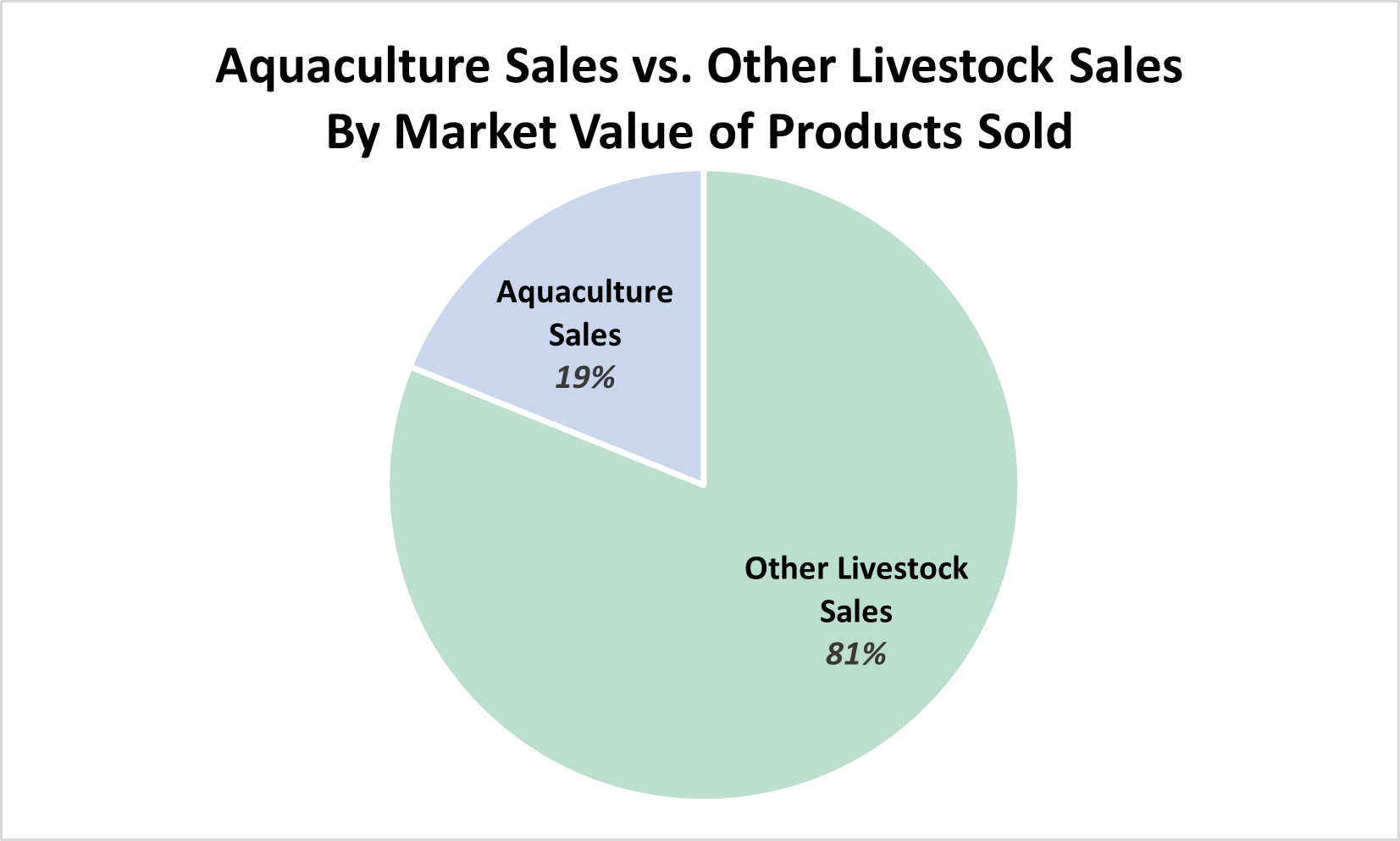


Figure 3-2. Livestock Sales in Thurston County USDA Ag Census, 2022.

The Thurston County community recognizes that aquaculture is of statewide and national interest. Properly managed, aquaculture can result in long-term over short-term economic and environmental benefit. Aquaculture, like other natural resource industries, is an important component of the county’s rural character and economy. Compared to other counties across Washington State, the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture reports that Thurston County is ranked 3rd in the state for market value of aquaculture products sold, and market value of sales of aquaculture make up nearly a fifth of the total value of livestock products sold within the County (see [Figure 3-2](#Figure32)). The residents of Thurston County envision a thriving and robust aquaculture industry and take responsibility for ensuring that its potential can be fully realized, and that ecological functions of shorelines are simultaneously upheld, or even enhanced. They also strive to initiate and maintain a constructive and progressive partnership with the aquaculture industry.

The aquaculture industry, comprised of responsible users of Thurston County’s marine and freshwater resources, promote wise stewardship of tidelands and other areas associated with aquaculture activities. The aquaculture industry supports regulations that are operationally feasible, scientifically sound, and fairly enforced. They are committed to environmental protection through full implementation of environmental codes of practice. Aquaculture practices are regulated by federal, state, and county agencies.

### B. Background:

A thriving shellfish industry is located along the county's Puget Sound shorelines. The warm, nutrient rich tide flats of southern Puget Sound is an exceptionally valued shellfish growing area. Thurston County is also home to oyster, clam (including geoduck), mussel, and scallop farming and fish hatcheries. Geoduck production began to increase in 2000 and has maintained a mostly upward trajectory, surpassing production of the Pacific oyster as of 2015.[[2]](#footnote-10) Thurston County is ranked 11 out of 14 counties in terms of total classified acres of shellfish growing areas.[[3]](#footnote-12) With an average value of sales at $35,092,000, Thurston County is ranked 3rd in the state and 13th nationally for aquaculture production.[[4]](#footnote-13) The 2018 Census of Aquaculture ranked Washington State as a national leader in shellfish production, second only to Mississippi based on aquaculture sales.[[5]](#footnote-15)

In addition to marine based aquaculture operations, several tribal, public, and privately owned land-based fish farms reside in Thurston County, including salmon and trout hatcheries. In 2023, there were 2 WDFW salmon hatcheries in Thurston County that hatch Coho, Chinook, and Steelhead. These operations rely on the plentiful and clean water from shallow aquifers to raise fish, many pumping millions of gallons a day. Unlike surface waters that have fluctuating temperatures dependent on the season, groundwater remains a constant 50 degrees, allowing for the consistent and sustained growth of the fish.

There are also several natural populations of Chinook and Steelhead within Thurston County, including 3 federally threatened populations. Wild salmon runs have continued to decline due to human influences (loss & fragmentation of habitat, pollution, dams, overfishing) and changes to the natural environment (fluctuating marine conditions, increase in predators, climate change), and Puget Sound Chinook and Puget Sound Steelhead are considered “in crisis” as of 2022 according the to the State of Salmon report.[[6]](#footnote-16)

Protection of commercial and recreational shellfish resources:There are over 40 commercial shellfish operations and associated industries in Thurston County. Most aquaculture occurs on leased, privately owned shoreline parcels. Shellfish is also harvested recreationally in public parks and on private beaches, and by the Tribes for their resource needs. Shellfish harvesting is an important aspect to quality of life in the county. Protection of this commercial and cultural resource is a growing concern in Thurston County. As our population continues to grow and the downstream impacts of development continue, additional pressure is put on the shellfish industry as those impacts threaten some shellfish growing areas.

Shellfish do not need clean water to grow, but they must be harvested from clean water to be safely eaten. Because shellfish are filter feeders, they filter all particles out of the water, including bacteria, chemical, biotoxins, and viruses. Accumulated contaminants can make people sick.[[7]](#footnote-17) The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) monitors water quality for shellfish harvesting. Thurston County references DOH’s Annual Inventory of Commercial and Recreational Shellfish Areas to determine what lands are designated as harvestable for shellfish. While Thurston County is on the lower end for total classified acres of shellfish growing areas, as of 2023 was ranked 3rd of 14 for number of acres prohibited for shellfish harvest, with southern Henderson Inlet, Budd Inlet and Nisqually Reach areas being closed to shellfish harvest.[[8]](#footnote-18)

Protection of water quality, both groundwater and surface water, is particularly important for commercial and recreational shellfish harvesting. Downgrades in water quality affect commercial growers and public health, and the county continues to experience downgrades of shellfish growing areas. The county forms a shellfish protection district when there is a downgrade, and works to restore the resource to a harvestable level. A combined shellfish protection district currently exists for Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach.

The county is concerned with protecting existing and future aquaculture operations from incompatible development. Aquaculture operations may conflict with other adjacent uses, such as public access, recreation, shoreline residential development, and natural protected areas. County policies discourage encroachment from incompatible uses to avoid nuisance conflicts and water quality degradation. The policies also provide that normal aquaculture practices should not be considered a nuisance unless they threaten the public health and safety. Clearly there is a need for balance on this issue, since aquaculture operations may be highly visible to the public and operate in areas where the environment is particularly fragile, and where other kinds of activities occur. Because of this, the policies recommend that adverse impacts from aquaculture operations be minimized. Development of guidelines to help guide aquaculture operations in avoiding potential conflicts is also proposed. Aquaculture operations within Thurston County are eligible to participate in the Voluntary Stewardship Program (see section III on Agriculture).

Tribes and shellfish: Tribes are a co-manager of shellfish resources and have usual and accustomed harvest areas as promised by the treaties signed in the 1850s, giving rights to harvest half of the shellfish for their own use. The Squaxin Island and Nisqually tribes are important stewards of all shellfish that occur in their usual and accustomed harvest areas in the waters of Thurston County. Tribes conduct commercial, ceremonial, and subsistence harvest for shellfish and finfish. Commercial harvests allow tribal members the opportunity to sell the shellfish products they harvest. The rights and responsibilities of tribes are an important consideration when planning for the protection and development of the shellfish resource, and when regulating land uses upstream from shellfish areas.

Upland fish farms: In addition to shellfish growing areas, Thurston County is also home to a handful of finfish farms on upland sites. Land-based fish rearing facilities, seaweed and net pen rearing facilities also require good water quality to operate. Supporting this unique aquacultural activity, while minimizing potential water pollution and land use conflicts, is an important goal of the Comprehensive Plan.

# V. FOREST RESOURCES

### A. Community vision:

The Thurston County community recognizes the multiple public benefits of public and private forest land, including economic benefits, wildlife habitat, scenic resources, and recreational opportunities. Supporting economically viable forest land slows the conversion of rural areas to other non-resource uses and supports a rural economy of both large and small forestry operations. The community wishes to encourage forestry by avoiding regulations that place an undue burden on forest landowners, while recognizing the responsibility of forest landowners to be good stewards of the county’s forests and other environmental resources.

### B. Background:

Forest lands are an important economic resource for Thurston County and the State of Washington. This valuable resource must be conserved and protected to ensure timber and forest production into the future. It is the State's policy to encourage forestry and restocking of forests (RCW 84.33.010). Good forestry management and environmental stewardship has many benefits, including improved water and air quality, carbon sequestration, reduced soil erosion, protection from storm and flood damage, biodiversity and wildlife habitat, and scenic and recreational open spaces.

Forestry production activities have had a long history in Thurston County evolving from the timber "mining" days of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the sustained yield forestry management that occurs today. Currently, approximately 60 percent of Thurston County is covered by forest, and over 30 percent of the county is managed for forestry by private or public operators. Additional forest land is maintained on military reservation lands within Thurston County. DNR-managed trust lands in the county, such as Capitol Forest, are managed to conserve forest resource lands, and also provide extensive recreation opportunities that help to generate revenue for local county services, public schools, and universities. Recreation opportunities (Chapter 9) exist both in state- and privately-owned timber lands in the county. Forest lands offer a variety of recreational experiences, including camping, fishing, hiking, hunting, target shooting, off-road vehicles, winter activities, rock climbing, and more.



A variety of other economic products are harvested from forests in Thurston County additional to timber, including hard woods, salal, ferns, moss for the floral industry, and mushrooms for a growing local and export food market.

### C. Designating Forest Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance:

The Growth Management Act requires cities and counties to classify and conserve forest lands of long-term commercial significance. The Act defines "long-term commercial significance" as determined by the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long-term commercial production, in consideration of the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land. The Washington State Department of Commerce recommends that classification of forest lands be based on the private forest land grades of the Department of Revenue (WAC 458-40-530; see [Table 3-2](#Table32)), among other criteria. Thurston County employed this land grade system, in addition to physical, biological, economic, and land use factors, to help determine which areas should be designated as forest lands of long-term commercial significance.

Table 3-2. Washington State Private Forest Land Grades

| Species | Site Index (Growth Potential) | Land Grade[[9]](#footnote-20) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Douglas Fir | 136 ft. and over | 1 |
|  | 118 ‑ 135 ft. | 2 |
|  | 99 ‑ 117 ft. | 3 |
|  | 84 ‑ 98 ft. | 4 |
|  | under 84 ft. | 5 |
|  |  |  |
| Western Hemlock | 136 ft. and over | 1 |
|  | 116 ‑ 136 ft. | 2 |
|  | 98 ‑ 115 ft. | 3 |
|  | 83 ‑ 97 ft. | 4 |
|  | 68 ‑ 82 ft. | 5 |
|  | under 68 ft. | 6 |
|  |  |  |
| Red Alder | 117 ft. and over | 6 |
|  | under 117 ft. | 7 |

The predominant species growing in Thurston County is Douglas Fir. There is no occurrence of land grade 1, and very little of land grade 4. Most of the county is evenly split between land grade 2 and land grade 3. For designating forest lands of long-term commercial significance, Thurston County initially identified those areas where forest land grade 2 predominates.

In addition to physical growing conditions, however, the state also requires that the county consider the effects of proximity to population areas and the possibility of more intense uses of the land, as indicated by:

1. The availability of public services and facilities conducive to the conversion of forest land.

In Thurston County, this is defined as the areas where the extension of public services and facilities is not planned for at least 20 years. Since lands within the Urban Growth Area boundaries, as established within this Comprehensive Plan, are intended to be served by public facilities and services within a 20-year period, forest lands of long-term commercial significance should be located outside of these boundaries.

1. The proximity of forest land to urban and suburban areas and rural settlements: forest lands of long-term commercial significance are located outside the urban and suburban areas and rural settlements.

In addition to being outside Urban Growth Areas, long-term forest lands should be far enough from urban areas that land use conflicts are avoided.

1. The size of the parcels: forest lands consisted of predominantly large parcels.

For Thurston County, this means parcel sizes of predominantly 640 acres or larger.

1. The compatibility and intensity of adjacent and nearby land use and settlement patterns with forest lands of long-term commercial significance.

For Thurston County, this means that residential development should be minimal within the surrounding area and generally at a rural density of one unit per five acres to limit land use conflicts with forestry operations, such as trespassing, vandalism, shooting, and dumping. Other compatible land uses within and adjacent to commercial forestry include agriculture, mining, parks, preserves, and other open space. Each area designated as forest land of long-term commercial significance should total approximately 5,000 acres or more.

1. Property tax classification: property is assessed as open space or forest land pursuant to Chapter 84.33 or 84.34 RCW.

Thurston County considered properties enrolled in the Classified or Designated Timber programs, as well as public land managed for timber production.

1. Local economic conditions which affect the ability to manage timber lands for long-term commercial production.

Economic conditions should be conducive to long-term timber management. In Thurston County, unfavorable economic conditions include locations with high administrative costs due to complaints from nearby landowners, locations requiring extensive security control efforts, and locations in which allowable forest practices such as burning and chemical applications will significantly interfere with other permitted land uses. Favorable economic conditions include land grade 2 forest soils, which provide (in conjunction with large parcel sizes) the growth potential to manage timber lands for long-term commercial production.

1. History of land development permits issued nearby.

For Thurston County, this means that recent residential development is an indicator of a pattern or direction of growth that may be encroaching on the forest land.

The above criteria were applied throughout unincorporated county areas to designate forest lands of long-term commercial significance. Designated long-term commercially significant forest Lands (as of August 23, 1993) are shown on Map N-1. Currently designated forest lands of long-term commercial significance are identified as “Long-Term Forestry” on the Future Land Use Map, Map L-1. Future lands meeting these criteria may also be designated.

Much of the forest land within Thurston County is considered forest lands of long-term commercial significance. Long-Term Forestry (see [Table 3-3](#Table33)) is the single largest land use designation in the county and makes up approximately 36 percent of county lands. Commercial and rural forestry also occurs in the Rural Residential Resource 1/5 designation within the county. Nearly 50,000 acres of forest and timber land enrolled in the Open Space Tax Program are not designated as Long-Term Forestry.[[10]](#footnote-21)

Table 3-3. Acreage of Forestland in Thurston County

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Zone*** | ***Acres of Land*** | ***Percentage of Land Base*** |
| Long-term Forestry (LTF) | 140,956 acres | 36 % |
| Open Space Forest Land (outside LTF) | 48,998 acres | 12 % |
| Timberland (outside LTF) | 2,223 acres | 0.5 % |
| *Total* | *192,117 acres* | *49 %* |

Data Retrieved from: Thurston County Assessor’s Parcel Data, March 2024

# VI. MINERAL RESOURCES

### A. Community Vision:

The Thurston County community recognizes mining as an important part of the local and regional economy. Mineral resources such as sand and gravel supply materials for road maintenance and construction projects throughout the region. The community seeks a balance between the need for mineral resources and the need to protect the environment and the community from any adverse impacts of mining through best management practices, reclamation, and restoration. Good stewardship of mining operations takes a partnership among mining operators, community members, and regulatory agencies.

The Growth Management Act defines "minerals" as gravel, sand, and valuable metallic substances (RCW 36.70A.030(12)). Other minerals may be designated as appropriate.

### B. Background:

Thurston County is fortunate to possess ample deposits of valuable mineral resources, consisting primarily of sand, gravel and bedrock, and also some coal and metal ore deposits. The mineral deposits are valuable considering their proximity to major population areas and construction projects that use sand and gravel.

Although rich in sand and gravel, the county has relatively few areas of high-quality basalts used in construction activities. Shot rock is important for highway construction and flood control rip rap. The sandstone quarries at Tenino have provided valuable building material for the State Capitol and other structures around the county. These resources occur throughout the county with the largest concentrations found in the west and south. A major portion of the county’s mineral resources overlaps with designated forest resource lands of long-term commercial significance. The quantity of commercially significant sand and gravel has been estimated at 6.1 billion tons (3.8 billion cubic yards), and bedrock resources are estimated to be unknown. This is much more than sufficient to meet long-term demand for the foreseeable future. [[11]](#footnote-22) There are no known valuable metallic minerals (such as silver or gold) within the county.

Thurston County’s planning efforts for mineral lands are guided by GMA statute and rules, which set forth three primary steps:

1. *Identify* all mineral resources (primarily sand, gravel and bedrock) and *classify* these resources based on estimates of quantity and quality, and commercial value;
2. *Designate* mineral resource lands which have long-term commercial significance, and which are not already characterized by urban growth. Designation must also consider relevant geologic, economic, land use and environmental criteria identified in the GMA rules; and
3. *Conserve* designated mineral resource lands through policies and development regulations to ensure that extraction is feasible and is not inadvertently precluded by development, or because surrounding land uses will conflict with and interfere with future extraction.

### C. Designating Mineral Resources of Long-Term Commercial Significance

Within Thurston County, minerals of potentially long-term commercial significance include sand and gravel deposits, coal deposits, and a few rock resources, such as columnar basalt (shot rock) and sandstone.

In the past, Mineral Resource Lands were designated on a site-by-site basis, only including existing mining operations. Lands or portions of a legal lot or parcel meeting criteria were designated through a Comprehensive Plan Amendment process.

In order to meet state guidelines, Thurston County contracted with Associated Earth Sciences, Inc. (AESI) to identify and classify mineral resources in the county and create a base inventory map showing the location of mineral resources. AESI developed a draft inventory and classification system largely based on data from DNR and USGS, with some supplementary information from Washington Department of Transportation and private studies. This inventory identified 189,475 acres of land containing long-term commercially significant mineral resources, which were eligible to be considered for designation.

Mineral resource land designation and associated policies in this chapter are based on:

* A geologic inventory supplemented site-specific data when available.
* A hierarchical classification of resources based on resource quality and quantity.
* Designation criteria consistent with WAC 365-190-170.
* Policies to balance potential conflicts.

The mineral resource land designation represents an increase in designated mineral lands from 5,623 acres (pre-update) to 142,666 acres (2020 update). The mineral resource land designation of 142,666 acres represents a reduction from the overall geologic inventory of 189,475 acres of potentially viable mineral deposits ([Table 3-4](#Table34)). The current designated mineral resource lands are mapped as an overlay to the Future Land Use Map (FLUM). Areas were excluded from consideration based on jurisdictional and legal issues, environmental constraints, and land use compatibility.

*Table 3-4. Acreage of Mineral Resource Lands in Thurston County*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Mineral Resource Lands*** | ***Acres of Land*** |
| Previously Designated Mines (pre-2020 update) | 5,623 acres |
| Mineral Resource Lands Inventory (2017) | 189,475 acres |
| Designated Mineral Lands (2020 update) | 142,666 acres |

##### Co-designation of Long-Term Mineral Resource Lands and Long-Term Agricultural Lands

As a natural result of geologic forces, it is not uncommon in Thurston County to have quality mineral deposits located under some types of prime farmland soils. Mining operations may result in temporarily breaking up the contiguous land base that is a central component of the Agricultural Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance. Removing, stockpiling and spreading soil to allow for mining may create a risk to the productive capacity of prime farmland soils. There is a natural conflict between the two competing natural resource industries: agriculture and mining. While agriculture is a sustainable industry, mining relies on a fixed, non-renewable resource.

Allowing for co-designation of mineral lands and agricultural lands may be compatible, but it is critical that the identified land base for agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance not be jeopardized. Agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance are designated based on a number of criteria (see section III.E), one of which is a threshold of prime farmland soils on the property. This may mean that a parcel within the agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance designation has some portions of a parcel that are not as high-quality for farming as other parts of a contiguous block. Allowing mineral extraction on the edges of designated long-term agricultural lands may provide a valued use of the land when it does not break apart the contiguous designated land base for agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance.

To determine the location of mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance, the county applies state minimum guidelines provided by the Washington State Department of Commerce under WAC 365-190-070 (see sidebar). Based on those guidelines and additional considerations to protect public health, safety, and the environment, the county has developed the following criteria to designate mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance.

Counties must designate mineral resource lands in order to achieve the natural resource industries goal of the Growth Management Act. The major requirements under State guidelines include the following:

* Must approach designation as a countywide process, and not review mineral lands solely on a parcel-by-parcel basis;
* May consider a longer planning period than the typical 20 years, to assure the availability of minerals for future uses and not preclude their access due to incompatible development;
* Should base their classification of mineral lands on underlying geology and distance to market, and should use information from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the United States Geological Service, and relevant information from property owners;
* Should determine if adequate mineral resources are available for projected needs from designated mineral lands;
* Must consider mining a temporary use at any given location, that could be followed by another land use after mining is;
* Should designate mineral lands as close as possible to their likely end use area;

In classifying mineral resource lands, counties should consider the following minimum guidelines:

* Geology: depth and quality of resource and characteristics of resource site
* Projected life of the resource
* Resource availability and needs in the region
* Accessibility and proximity to point of use or market
* Energy costs of transporting materials
* Proximity to population areas
  + General land use patterns
  + Availability of utilities, including water supply
  + Surrounding parcel sizes and uses
  + Availability of public roads and public services
  + Subdivision and zoning of small lots
* WAC 365-190-040; 070

GMA Guidance for Designation of Mineral RESOURCE Lands

##### MINIMUM DESIGNATION CRITERIA

1. Mineral Deposits. Designated mineral resource lands should contain deposits consisting of sand and gravel, coal, sandstone, basalt, or other igneous rock, based on U.S. Geological Survey maps or site-specific information prepared by a geologist, or as indicated by State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) mining permit data.

2. Location. Designated mineral resource lands shall be separated by a distance of at least 1,000 feet from public preserves, which include parks, national wildlife refuges, state conservation areas, wild life areas, and other government owned preserves, but excluding hunting areas. In addition, designated mineral resource lands shall be at least 1,000 feet from urban growth areas and rural residential areas with existing densities predominantly one dwelling unit per five acres or higher, in order to minimize land use conflicts during the long-term operation of the mine.

To qualify for a mineral resource designation, at least 60% of the area within 1,000 feet of a proposed site must be made up of parcels 5 acres in size or larger, excluding parcels owned by the applicant.

3. Minimum Site Size. An area proposed for the mineral resource lands designation should be at least 5 acres in size.

4. Marketability. Mineral resource lands shall contain non-strategic minerals which are minable, recoverable and marketable in the present or foreseeable future as determined by a licensed professional geologist.

5. Mineral resource lands shall not include historical/cultural preservation sites.

6. Mineral resource lands may include lands designated for long-term forestry.

****

Designation means that the presence of mineral resources and analysis of land use compatibility has been completed at a broad, landscape scale, and designated sites are eligible to apply for the permits needed for extraction and/or processing of minerals. Designation does not mean that any specific site within the designation will be approved for an active mine. Such designation should not be used as a basis for granting a special use permit. Every proposal for mineral extraction must complete additional environmental review at the project level and obtain the required permits.

Becoming Designated:In order to receive a permit for mineral extraction, the land must first be designated mineral resource lands. If land is not currently designated as a mineral resource land of long-term commercial significance (Map N-2), it may be eligible for designation with the appropriate information. This process is completed through a comprehensive plan amendment with the required geologic information. See the Goals, Objectives, and Policies section for specific requirements.

Removal from Designation: A property owner may file an application for the removal of designation. This process is completed through a comprehensive plan amendment with the required geologic information. De-designation is typically deferred until a periodic Comprehensive Plan Update when a countywide comprehensive update can be complete, but the county may consider de-designation outside of a comprehensive update if a mining operation has ceased, and the site has been reclaimed. See the Goals, Objectives, and Policies section for specific requirements

Beyond Designation: Protecting mineral deposits of long-term commercial significance for mining use is an important goal of the designation process, permitting process, and comprehensive plan policies. Policies aim to prevent residential and other incompatible uses from locating adjacent to these deposits. Several factors are addressed outside of the designation process. For example, the county recognizes that a mining operator's hauling distance to the resource user is an important factor to its economic viability. However, the policies also provide that mining activity should not encroach on existing residential uses nor adversely affect the environment.

Designated mineral lands may include environmentally sensitive areas. The presence of critical areas on the site may prohibit or restrict mineral extraction operations, as addressed at the site-specific permit level. Mine operators must go through all required review and permitting prior to beginning any mining activity on designated land. Map N-2 identifies mineral resource lands that meet the designation criteria and is considered the "Official Designated Mineral Resource Lands" map. Map N-2 is an overlay to the underlying land use designation of property shown on the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map. Map N-2 supplements but does not change the underlying land use designation of affected properties.

Long-term commercially significant (designated) mineral deposits should be conserved for long-term resource extraction. To this end, the following measures shall be implemented:

1. A Resource Use Notice shall be provided to new developments within a specified distance of designated mineral lands.
2. Existing mining operations outside designated mineral lands shall inform prospective property owners of the long-term resource nearby.

These measures are intended to assure that the use of lands adjacent to designated mineral lands shall not interfere with the continued use, in accordance with best management practices (BMPs), of the designated lands for mineral extraction.

# VII. RESOURCE LANDS AND COMPETING LAND USES

### A. Balancing Conflicts:

An overarching concern of rural landowners is the potential impact that resource industries – agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, and mining – can have on their properties. On the other hand, resource industry operators share concern about the impact of encroaching development on their business operations. Resource industry operations can result in noise, smells, water impacts, erosion, traffic, and more that impacts neighboring land uses. Encroaching development can also impact business operations of resource industries by increasing nuisance complaints.

The policies in the Comprehensive Plan aim to protect resource industry operations by providing protection against nuisance claims. Forest and agricultural practices that remain consistent with good practices and are established prior to surrounding non-resource activities should not be considered a nuisance unless they threaten the public health and safety, consistent with RCW 7.48.305. Additionally, the County requires resource use notices for plats and permits within certain distances of designated resource lands – agriculture, forestry, and mining. These notices let landowners and builders know of potential nearby resource industry activities that can result in noise, smells, or other impacts and that landowners’ ability to recover from nuisances may be limited.

The county’s permit process for new forest, agriculture, and mining operations considers impacts to groundwater, surface water, air protection, noise and travel impacts, habitat and surrounding land uses. Permits are not only required at the county level for many commercial resource operations but are often also required at state and/or federal level. The county also implements conditions and best management practices through the Special Use Permit process for mining across all zones and designated areas, and for forest management activities across rural residential zones outside of designated areas.

Mining operations must also comply with the Mineral Extraction Code, which has regulations to protect water resources and lessen conflict with nearby land uses through proper management of hazardous waste, dust and smoke, roads, and noise. Existing, non-operating or abandoned mining sites pose a concern to many county residents. These sites may leave aquifers vulnerably exposed and invite illegal waste dumping. The reclamation process is an important process managed by DNR and is required for all active and future mining operations. Several old and abandoned pits exist in the county from before mining was permitted and reclamation was required.

### B. Conservation Tools for Resource Lands:

An overriding philosophy in the Comprehensive Plan is that to preserve forest, agriculture, and mining industries and land for future generations, these businesses must remain economically viable. Several of the policies in this chapter focus on maintaining and enhancing economic viability to the resource industries.

Thurston County has programs that support resource lands both within and outside of designated areas – primarily for agriculture and forestry. These programs can help to reduce tax burden, increase economic viability, and minimize conversion. Open Space Tax Programs are the primary tools to protect forested and agricultural areas from conversion through tax reduction. Other conservation tools like the Voluntary Stewardship Program, conservation easements, fee simple purchase, Transfer of Development Rights, and Purchase of Development Rights programs protect lands for agricultural use and support improved economic viability (see [Table 3-6](#Table36)).

##### Open Space Tax Program

In 1970, the Washington State Legislature passed the Open Space Tax Act, recognizing the need to protect open space, farm, and forest lands from high property taxes in an effort to stem conversion of these lands to urban and suburban land uses. The Open Space Tax Program supports both forest and agricultural lands.

For agriculture, the county has a local farm and agricultural tax classification that provides eligible farmers the ability to have their productive and idled farmland taxed at its current use, instead of its “highest and best use.” This significant property tax savings helps reduce pressures to convert farmland and helps relieve speculative land values which drive up property tax assessments. In addition, the county also administers an open space classification with a lower tax benefit than current use farmland. This program can include idled farmland. Changes were made to the eligibility criteria for farm and agricultural conservation land under the open space classification in 2023 to increase flexibility. While many farmers are currently enrolled in this program, some are not or do not know how to enroll.

For forestry, the county administers a designated forest land classification which applies to commercial forest lands in current use. There is also a timberland open space program and has a lower tax benefit.

In 2024, approximately 9 percent of the county’s lands were enrolled in an Open Space program related to agriculture. Of those lands enrolled, approximately 87 percent was enrolled as current use agriculture, and the remaining 13 percent was enrolled as open space, which can include idled farmland. Of forest lands, making up nearly 49 percent of the counties land base, nearly 11 percent were enrolled in an open space program related to forestry and located outside of designated forest lands.

Table 3-5. Acres of Land Enrolled in Open Space Tax Program

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Open Space Tax Program** | **Acres Enrolled** | **Percentage of Land Base** |
| Current Use Agriculture | 31,776 | 8% |
| Open Space Open Space | 4,693 | 1% |
| Designated Forest Lands (outside of LTF) | 48,998 | 12% |
| Timberland (outside of LTF) | 2,223 | 0.5% |
| **Total Acreage Enrolled** | **167,647** | **43%** |

Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

The Voluntary Stewardship Program was created under the Growth Management Act ([Chapter 36.70A RCW](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=36.70A" \t "_blank)) in 2011 to give counties the option to use locally driven watershed-based plans and incentive-based tools to protect critical areas located on agricultural lands. Prior to 2011, the main tool for counties to ensure protection of critical areas on agricultural land was regulation. Regulation of agricultural land can threaten farm viability and lead to legal battles. The VSP provides an alternative approach to balance the protection of critical areas with agricultural viability.

Instead of enacting further critical areas regulation on agricultural lands, the VSP allows the county and a technical assistance provider to work closely with landowners to develop voluntary, site-specific stewardship plans. The VSP is a watershed-wide, incentive-based approach to protect and voluntarily enhance critical areas while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture.

Conservation Futures

Conservation Futures is a land preservation program authorized by RCW 84.34.200 that protects, preserves, maintains, improves, restores, and limits the future use of threatened areas of open space, timberlands, wetlands, habitat areas, culturally significant sites, and agricultural farmlands within Thurston County. Thurston County established a Conservation Futures program in 1989. Conservation Futures funds, acquired through a property tax levy, may be used for the following approaches to agricultural land conservation:

* Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)

Thurston County established a Purchase of Development Rights Program (PDR) in 2011. This program authorizes Thurston County and other qualified conservation programs to purchase development rights with the intent to preserve farmland. Landowners are compensated when they agree to conserve their land. Generally, property owners retain ownership and continue to reside on their lands under the PDR program. The PDR program is open to all lands that meet the definition of agricultural lands, as defined by the Open Space Tax Program (RCW 84.34.020).

* Fee Simple Purchase

This program is the acquisition of land by an entity such as a land trust or conservation agency. For example, land may be leased or sold to farmers who agree to use the land for agricultural purposes. Land trusts own the land in a fee simple purchase and have the greatest control over how the land is managed. Some tools to create affordable access include allowing long-term leases or sale of land in exchange an agreement to use sustainable agricultural practices.

* Agricultural and Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust, where the use of the property is permanently limited in order to protect agricultural or conservation value. In the case of an agricultural conservation easement, continued agricultural use is required, but landowners may continue to occupy the land.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

Thurston County’s Transfer of Development Rights Program (TDR) allows agricultural landowners to realize the value of their land without having to sell the property for development. The county’s Transfer of Development Rights Programs allows property owners of land in the Long-term Agriculture zoning district (Sending Area) to gain credit for unused development rights that can be sold and transferred to another property in an urban area (Receiving Area). This approach helps to preserve the rural character and agricultural economy of Thurston County.

Habitat Conservation Plan.   
The Thurston County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) requires mitigation for permitted development impacts which occur in the habitat of federally listed and federal candidate wildlife associated with prairie and wetlands. The HCP conservation land system, which provides offsite mitigation for these development impacts, includes working lands easements for farmers whose properties lie within the HCP covered area. By developing a conservation easement for HCP covered species, farmers can receive money for their land while continuing their farming practices. The properties retain value as habitat for listed and rare species while supporting agriculture and rural character in Thurston County.

Table 3-6. Acres of Land Enrolled in Conservation Programs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Program** | **Acres Enrolled** |
| Open Space Tax Program | 167,647 |
| Transfer of Development Rights | 220 |
| Purchase of Development Rights | 942 |
| Fee Simple Purchase (Conservation Futures) | 899 |
| Agricultural & Conservation Easements (Conservation Futures) | 1,145 |
| Habitat Conservation Plan Acquisitions | 260 |
| Habitat Conservation Plan Working Lands Easements | 7 |

Data Retrieved from: Thurston County Assessor’s parcel data (March 2024), TRPC (2017), CPED internal data (2024)

County programs are only one mechanism to preserve agricultural, forest, and other habitat lands in Thurston County—acquisitions and easements are also funded by federal, state, non-profit, and private sources. In addition, 260 acres have been acquired in support of the Thurston County Habitat Conservation Plan, with more acquisitions and working lands easements to be established over the next 30 years. While the HCP acreage acquired at the time of this Comprehensive Plan update consists only of new reserves, conservation grazing will be applied, to the extent practicable, as a means of invasive plant control.

# VIII. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES – Goals, Objectives and Policies

## **GOAL 1:** PRESERVE AGRICULTURAL LAND IN ORDER TO ENSURE AN ADEQUATE LAND BASE FOR LONG-TERM FARM USE.

**OBJECTIVE A:** Conserve and enhance agricultural lands for long-term farming use, including those outside of agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance.

**POLICIES:**

1. New residential uses adjacent to existing farms should be developed in a manner which minimizes potential conflicts and reduces unnecessary conversion of farmland. The use of “cluster” development patterns should not result in increased density adjacent to existing farms, and should ensure that resource use parcels intended for agricultural use can be reasonably farmed.
2. Commercial farmland owners will be encouraged to retain their lands in commercial farm production and enroll their land in the Open Space Farm and Agriculture Tax Program.
3. Farmland owners no longer meeting commercial requirements for current use agriculture will be encouraged to enroll their land in the Open Space Tax Program as Farm and Agricultural Conservation Land.
4. In order to reduce development pressure on farms in rural areas, future development should be directed toward designated growth areas where existing and planned services can more easily accommodate growth. Outside these growth areas, densities should remain low.
5. Consider new incentives to encourage clustering on rural residential lands that overlap with prime farmland soils and have active farms to further conserve prime farmland soils for future agricultural operations that are not already protected as long-term agriculture.
6. Consider a new agricultural zone that applies to agricultural lands located outside of the long-term agriculture designation that protects underlying agriculture soils and existing operations from incompatible adjacent uses and development pressures and maintains and enhances agricultural viability.
7. Agricultural lands within the Nisqually Valley should be given a high priority for protection by means customized to the Valley's unique characteristics. Agricultural lands within the Nisqually Subarea should be protected from the encroachment of existing and potential residences within the valley and along the adjacent wooded hillsides.
8. Continue to develop innovative strategies for the conservation of farmland and to encourage farmers to stay in agriculture. Strategies such as rural cluster subdivisions, Purchase of Development Rights (PDR), Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), conservation easements including HCP working lands easements, and the Voluntary Stewardship Program should continue to be implemented throughout the county.
9. Work with conservation groups and farmland owners to encourage participation in voluntary programs for the conservation of agricultural and working lands.

**OBJECTIVE B:** Educate the community about the value of the county's agricultural resources and encourage community support of agriculture.

**POLICIES:**

1. Encourage schools, local organizations, and the media to provide more information on the importance of local agriculture to all community members and special problems agricultural operators can run into.
2. Work with community groups to support the continued viability of agriculture and encourage community support for it.
3. Encourage education of the value of prairie land for management and ecological and traditional food resources. New reserves under the county HCP conservation land system will include tribal harvest of camas where feasible, and public outreach events related to the HCP will address the role of indigenous people as having managed prairies since time immemorial.

**OBJECTIVE C:** Provide regulations that are supportive to long-term agricultural use.

**POLICIES:**

1. Train staff to assist farmers in working through often time consuming and complex processes and regulations at the local, state, and federal levels.
2. Encourage farmer participation in the Voluntary Stewardship Program to promote the long-term viability of agricultural activities in participating watersheds while protecting and enhancing critical areas as so to help relieve the regulatory burden.
3. Provide the agricultural community with an advocate, or “agricultural liaison”. The advocate will provide technical assistance and facilitate objectives of the county’s Working Lands Strategic Plan, as well as the Voluntary Stewardship Program.
4. Noxious weeds pose a significant economic threat to agriculture. The county Noxious Weed Control Board should have the opportunity to recommend control options as part of their integrated pest management program in accordance with the proposed Ground Water Management Plan, the Thurston County Pest and Vegetation Management Policy, and any other applicable county policies.
5. Thurston County shall not be precluded from regulating agricultural chemicals if adequate protection of the resources and public health are not being met by existing regulatory agencies.
6. Within Thurston County, agricultural activities consistent with good agricultural practices and established prior to surrounding nonagricultural activities shall be given protection from nuisance claims in accordance with state law, RCW 7.48.305.
7. Continue to work with flood agencies and neighboring jurisdictions to address ongoing flooding problems of the Chehalis River and other areas that adversely affect agricultural operations.

## **GOAL 2:** CONSERVE AGRICULTURAL LAND OF LONG-TERM COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

**OBJECTIVE A:** Prioritize agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance for conservation (no net loss).

**POLICIES:**

1. Conserve an underlying land base designated for agricultural land of long-term commercial significance sufficient to maintain and enhance the economic viability of the agricultural industry in the county over the long term; and to retain supporting agricultural businesses, such as processors, farm suppliers, and equipment maintenance and repair facilities.
2. Designated agricultural lands will be zoned at very low densities to ensure the conservation of the resource for continued agricultural use. The residential density of areas within Long-Term Agriculture shall not be greater than one dwelling unit per 20 acres and in Nisqually Agriculture shall not be greater than one unit per 40 acres, except when allowed by specific clustering regulations.
3. Limit non-agricultural development within designated agricultural areas to non-prime farmland soils whenever possible.
4. Non-agricultural development within designated agricultural areas should be compactly developed, in order to conserve the largest area possible for continued agricultural use.
5. Provide flexibility for farmers by allowing a variety of associated uses that support agriculture in agriculture zones and within the agritourism overlay district, provided they are located on non-prime farmland soils where possible.
6. Discourage the establishment or expansion of local improvement districts, utility local improvement districts, or sewer, water or public utility districts into designated agricultural areas of long-term commercial significance.
7. Except within urban growth areas, land uses that are adjacent to long-term commercial agriculture areas should be of compatible use, such as sawmill operations, warehousing, agribusinesses, and low density residential.
8. Adequate water rights should be reserved for designated agricultural land of long-term commercial significance for both future production and to support programs conserving designated agricultural land.
9. Explore reserving water rights to support protection of designated agricultural land of long-term commercial significance.
10. The designation of agricultural land of long-term commercial significance will only be reevaluated for removal at the time of a periodic update and only if changes in surrounding land use or farming economics create severe conditions that impact the viability of the agricultural operation, losses lasting several years, or impact a wide range of crops or products and affect a majority of the producers in the area.
11. A landowner may submit application for inclusion in the Long-Term Agriculture designation outside of the periodic update cycle by filing a comprehensive plan amendment.
12. A landowner with a portion of property enrolled in Long Term Agriculture may voluntarily enroll contiguous parcels in Long Term Agriculture, even if they do not meet the designation criteria. A comprehensive plan amendment application is required. Applications will be reviewed with the periodic update.
13. A resource use notice will be placed on any new subdivision or residential building permit located within 500 feet of designated agriculture land of long-term commercial significance, which states that a variety of commercial agricultural activities may occur that may not be compatible with residential development. The notice will also state that a person's right to recover under a nuisance claim against agricultural activities may be restricted.

**OBJECTIVE B:** Provide programs that help farmers of agricultural land of long‑term commercial significance realize the capital from the land's development potential without converting it to non‑agricultural uses.

**POLICIES:**

1. Explore updates to the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs that improve the overall market demand for these programs.
2. Educate and encourage farmers to utilize Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs as economic incentives to stay in agriculture.
3. Educate and encourage farmers to work with land trusts and conservation agencies to use fee simple purchase and conservation easements as economic incentives to stay in agriculture.
4. Encourage farmers to participate in the VSP to maintain and improve the long-term viability of their agricultural operations.
5. Explore approaches to administering water in cooperation with farmers, including water banking, that would allow farmers to realize value of inchoate or excess water.

**OBJECTIVE C:** Provide partnership opportunities with tribes to conserve designated long-term agricultural lands through traditional active management practices.

**POLICIES:**

1. Work with Tribes with usual and accustomed harvesting lands and waters to encourage access to traditional foods and resources.
2. Protect access to harvest of traditional foods and resources by working with tribes to consider programs that could support traditional modes of active management by defining certain end products (camas bulbs, native seeds, etc.) as agricultural products, where appropriate and mutually agreed.

AQUACULTURE RESOURCES – Goals, Objectives and Policies

## **Goal 3:** PROTECT AND PRESERVE AQUACULTURE GROWING AREAS TO ENSURE AN ADEQUATE RESOURCE BASE FOR LONG-TERM USE.

**OBJECTIVE A:** Provide land use and water management programs to conserve and enhance commercial marine aquaculture areas and land based aquaculture for long-term economic use.

**POLICIES:**

1. Impacts to shellfish growing areas classified for harvest by the Department of Health should be addressed throughout County ordinances.
2. Uses of lands that are near designated marine aquacultural areas should be compatible, such as forestry and low density rural residential. Those uses should not increase stormwater runoff or otherwise degrade water quality for aquacultural use.
3. Facilities for land based and marine aquacultural operations should be protected from incompatible adjacent or nearby land uses.
4. Land based and marine aquacultural activity should not be considered a nuisance if carried out in a reasonable manner and within applicable regulations. Restrictions should not be imposed on aquacultural activities unless they are necessary for preserving ecological function of shoreline areas or the public health, welfare, and safety.
5. Proposed residential and other uses in aquacultural areas should be developed in a manner that minimizes potential conflicts with aquaculture operations.
6. Aquacultural activities should be undertaken in a way that minimizes adverse impacts, such as noise, lights, and views from upland property and general environmental quality.
7. Aquacultural operations that draw on groundwater supplies should not degrade the quality nor substantially reduce the quantity of groundwater.
8. Water quality in the county's marine and inland waters, and groundwater in the county should be protected from degradation. Degraded waters should be restored within the drainage basins of designated commercial marine aquaculture areas, or areas of significant recreational shellfish harvesting.
9. Consider the possibility for landowners in drainage basins that feed aquaculture growing waters to be eligible for the Open Space Tax Program, if they undertake conservation measures to protect water quality.
10. Support Tribal access to traditional fish and shellfish harvest areas.
11. Encourage the location, design, and operation of aquaculture activities in a manner that supports long-term beneficial use of the shoreline and protects and maintains shoreline ecological functions and processes.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM:

The Shoreline Master Program is the county document which governs development on the shorelines in compliance with the State Shoreline Management Act (RCW 90.58). Within the master program there are policies and regulations relating to aquaculture. The Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives and policies are intended to complement those in the master program; both documents should be consulted in reference to developing in the shoreline area.

FOREST RESOURCES – Goals, Objectives and Policies

## **GOAL 4:** CONSERVE FOREST LANDS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN A VIABLE FORESTRY INDUSTRY WHILE PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES.

**OBJECTIVE A:** Conserve and enhance forest lands for long-term economic use.

**POLICIES:**

1. Residential development adjacent to forestry uses should occur in a manner which minimizes potential conflicts and reduces unnecessary conversion of forest land through use of such mechanisms as clustering, buffers, etc.
2. Support and encourage the maintenance of forest lands in timber and current use property tax classifications consistent with RCW 84.33 and 84.34.
3. Within Thurston County, forest practices consistent with good practices and established prior to surrounding nonforestry activities shall be given protection from nuisance claims in accordance with state law, RCW 7.48.305.
4. Provide outreach and information to forestland owners about county regulatory and permitting processes.
5. Seek funding opportunities to be used to purchase development rights from willing forest landowners to preserve the resource for future generations.

Work with conservation groups, commercial family forestland owners, and others to encourage voluntary participation in a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program for the conservation of managed working forest lands. **OBJECTIVE B:** Encourage forest lands to accommodate public recreation and conservation of fish and wildlife habitats, scenic vistas, and nearby property values.

**POLICIES:**

1. Public trails, camping facilities, and other low intensity recreation uses are encouraged in forest lands.
2. Support cooperative resource management as developed in the Timber, Fish and Wildlife agreement, which is an agreement among industrial timber landowners, environmental groups, state resource agencies, and Indian tribes for managing the state's public and private timber lands and public resources.
3. Some mature forest stands should be purchased in the metropolitan fringe areas of the county for their historic and aesthetic values for parks and other recreational uses, unless they are designated as forest lands of long-term commercial significance.
4. When timber harvesting is for conversion to other uses, the county will ensure that harvesting is done in a manner compatible with current and future land uses of the surrounding area and maintenance of water quality, environmentally sensitive features, and fish habitat and conserves trees over 25” in diameter for carbon sequestration.
5. When harvesting forest lands for conversion to other uses only the area being converted to another use should be harvested to allow for maintenance of water quality, localized flood control, shade benefits and carbon sequestration.
6. Forestry activities should not alter wetlands or stream corridors.

## **GOAL 5:** CONSERVE FOREST LANDS OF LONG-TERM COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN ORDER TO ENSURE AN ADEQUATE LAND BASE AND DISCOURAGE INCOMPATIBLE USES.

**OBJECTIVE A:** Conserve forest lands of long-term commercial significance (no net loss) and enhance for productive economic use.

**POLICIES:**

1. The primary land use activities in forest lands of long-term commercial significance should be commercial forest management, agriculture, mineral extraction, recreation, accessory uses, and other non-forest related economic activities relying on forest lands.
2. Land use activities within or adjacent to forest lands of long-term commercial significance should be sited and designed to minimize conflicts with forest management, and other activities on forest land.
3. Commercial forest land considered desirable for acquisition for public recreational, scenic and park purposes will be evaluated for its impact on a viable forest industry and local government revenue and programs.
4. Discourage the establishment or expansion of coal improvement districts, utility local improvement districts, or sewer, water or public utility districts in lands designated as long-term commercial significance which result in the imposition of assessments, rates, or charges on designated forest land.
5. Encourage clustering of residential development on rural lands adjacent to commercial forestry. The open space in clustered development should be adjacent to the forest lands of long-term commercial significance.
6. Encourage the continuation of commercial forest management by supporting land trades that result in consolidated forest ownerships and are in the public interest and work to conserve legacy forests.
7. Encourage the continuation of commercial forest management by working with forest managers to identify and develop other incentives for continued forestry.
8. Strongly discourage residential development within the Long-Term Forestry designation. However, nothing in this policy should be construed to prevent the owner of designated Long-Term Forestry from living on his/her land, provided that applicable building requirements are met.
9. Subject to any state or local regulation of critical areas, the county encourages the multiple economic use of forest land for a variety of natural resource and other land use activities particularly suited for forest lands because of physical and topographical characteristics; remoteness from populated areas; availability of water supplies; the quality of the forest environment; or where the efficient provision of statewide or regional utilities, energy generating and/or transmission facilities, or public facilities require access across or use of such forest lands.
10. Designated forest lands of long- term commercial significance will be protected from nuisance claims from neighboring development through a resource use notice placed on any new subdivision or residential building permit located within 500 feet. The notice will state that a variety of forestry activities may occur that may or may not be compatible with residential development, and a person’s right to recover under a nuisance claim against forestry operations may be restricted.

## **GOAL 6:** PROTECT RURAL FOREST LANDS FROM PRESSURES TO CONVERT TO OTHER USES.

**OBJECTIVE A:** Provide measures to protect owners of rural forest lands from development pressures.

**POLICIES:**

1. Development regulations will accommodate and encourage clustering of residential development on rural lands adjacent to rural forest lands. The open space in clustered development should buffer rural forest land from development.
2. Encourage that land use activities adjacent to forest land in rural areas be sited and designed to minimize conflicts with forest management and other permitted activities on forest land.
3. Utilize a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program as an incentive for property owners to conserve forest lands within the county to ensure that working forest lands continue to stay available for such uses.

MINERAL RESOURCES – Goals, Objectives and Policies

## **GOAL 7:** IDENTIFY, DESIGNATE AND CONSERVE MINERAL RESOURCE LANDS OF LONG-TERM COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

**OBJECTIVE A.** Identify, classify and designate mineral resource lands that are not characterized by urban growth, that contain commercially significant mineral deposits, and that satisfy applicable criteria established by the Growth Management Act (GMA) statute and rules, and Thurston County’s Comprehensive Plan.

**POLICIES:**

1. Using the best information available, identify all unincorporated lands that contain commercially valuable deposits of mineral resources. The Mineral Resource Lands Inventory map (Map N-3) is a geologic inventory of large areas throughout the county (“prospects”) containing deposits of sand, gravel, bedrock and other mineral resources.
2. Designated mineral resource lands are identified on Comprehensive Plan Map N-2. The mineral resource designation is an overlay to the underlying land use designation of property shown on the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map, which supplements but does not change the underlying land use designation of affected properties.
3. Properties that are currently designated as mineral resource lands in the Comprehensive Plan and/or that are operating pursuant to a valid mining permit are considered to be mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance.
4. Designation as mineral resource land indicates that the property has been reviewed to determine the presence or absence of specific geologic, land use and environmental features at a county-wide, comprehensive planning level, and that the land is potentially appropriate for mineral extraction subject to adopted site-specific review and permitting procedures and applicable development regulations. Designation does not convey any permit, approval or authorization to mine or otherwise use, alter or develop any designated property, and is not a substitute for site-specific review and permitting of a proposed mining operation consistent with applicable Thurston County development regulations. Designation does not create a presumption that an individual property or project should be approved for mining.
5. Designation as mineral resource lands in the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan is a pre-condition for submitting an application to the county to extract mineral resources on a specific site, unless a site meets specific exceptions as listed in the county Code.
6. Using the best information available, Thurston County should identify all unincorporated lands that meet the minimum designation requirement. The Designated Mineral Resource Lands map (Map N-2) should be periodically reviewed.
   1. At the time of any countywide update to the Designated Mineral Lands Map (Map N-2), in the event that new parks exist that were not previously excluded from the map and meet the definition of “public parks and preserves”, the county should exclude the park from the designated mineral lands map, but should also consider reducing or eliminating the 1,000 foot separation distance. This is based on the understanding that future parks are siting in a known designated mineral resource use area.
   2. For the purposes of the Designated Mineral Lands Map (Map N-2), a “public park and preserve” is defined as the following: a park in the Thurston County Parks Layer that is at least 5 acres or larger, and is government owned, including public preserves, national wildlife refuges, habitat and wildlife areas, natural areas, state conservation areas, and developed or undeveloped parks used for passive or active recreation. This definition does not include the following: non-government parks, parks smaller than 5 acres, trailhead parcels, county-owned boat launches, county-owned trails, the off-road vehicle park, and the Evergreen State College. This is displayed on the in-chapter map located on page 3-26.
7. Designated mineral resource lands may be removed from the Comprehensive Plan map by action of the Board of County Commissioners if it is determined that mineral excavation is no longer an appropriate use because of changed conditions and/or the land no longer meets the criteria for designation. Removal from designation should be delayed until the time a countywide analysis can be completed.
8. Mineral lands and agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance may be co-designated when mining would not negatively impact the contiguous land base of designated agricultural lands, and when the co-designated land is contiguous with adjacent mineral lands.

**OBJECTIVE B.** Ensure that lands adjacent to designated mineral resource lands do not interfere with mineral extraction.

**POLICIES:**

1. Mineral extraction industries should be allowed to locate where prime natural resource deposits exist.
2. Conserve designated mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance for potential mineral extraction, and ensure that the use of adjacent lands does not interfere with the use of designated mineral extraction sites that are being operated in accordance with best management practices and other laws and regulations.
3. Mineral extraction sites that are being operated in accordance with applicable best management practices, and all other county, state, and federal laws and regulations and existed prior to non-extraction surrounding land uses will be protection from nuisance claims from landowners who have been notified of designated mineral lands and/or the mineral extraction site.
4. Discourage new residential uses from locating near prime designated mineral deposit sites until mineral extraction is completed, unless adequate buffering is provided by the residential developer.
5. A permit may be issued for properties within a certain distance of designated mineral resource lands only after the resource use notice has been signed by the property owner and recorded against the property, according to the requirements in the Thurston County Code. The notice shall contain a statement that the ability of owners or occupants to recover for nuisances arising from activities on the designated mineral lands may be restricted. The notice shall also inform that an application might be made for mining-related activities, including mining, extraction, washing, crushing, stockpiling, blasting, transporting, and recycling of minerals (RCW 36.70A.060).

## **GOAL 8:** ENSURE THAT IMPACTS TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND OTHER SURROUNDING LAND USES FROM EXTRACTION ON MINERAL RESOURCE LANDS OF LONG-TERM COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE ARE MITIGATED FOR AND MANAGED THROUGH THE PERMITTING PROCESS.

**OBJECTIVE A.** Provide regulatory mechanisms that balance and minimize conflicts between extractive industries, other land uses, and general environmental concerns.

**POLICIES:**

1. Locate designated mineral resource lands in low-density rural areas where conflicts between extraction operations and surrounding land uses can be avoided or minimized. Designated lands should not be characterized by a predominance of environmental constraints.
2. Extraction industries shall not adversely impact adjacent or nearby land uses, or public health and safety.
3. Areas where existing residential uses at densities of greater than 1 unit per 5 acres predominate shall be protected against intrusion by mineral extraction operations.
4. Buffer mineral extraction sites that are adjacent to existing residential areas. Buffers could consist of berms and vegetation to minimize impacts to adjacent property owners.
5. Mineral extraction activities shall not negatively affect nor endanger surface and groundwater flows and quality.
6. Some critical areas may prohibit or restrict allowed mineral extraction uses. Consider critical areas, including fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, floodplains, aquifer recharge areas, and geologic hazard areas at the permit level before approving mineral extraction, as regulated under Thurston County Code, Title 24.
7. Evaluate impact on public roads at the permit level before approving new or expanding mineral extraction.
8. Mineral extraction on designated agricultural lands should be avoided unless the soils can be restored to their original productive capabilities, as identified in a soil survey, as soon as possible after mining occurs.
9. When feasible, accessory uses to mining (crushing, screening, or washing) should be located on mineral lands that are not on prime farmland soils. In the event that prime farmland soils cannot be avoided, the footprint should be minimized.

## **GOAL 9:** ENSURE THAT RECLAMATION AND RESTORATION ARE DESIGNED FOR THE APPROPRIATE POST-EXTRACTIVE USE OF THE SITE AND ARE COMPATIBLE WITH PLANNED FUTURE USE OF ADJACENT LANDS.

**OBJECTIVE A.** Identify and plan for post-extractive uses of mineral resource lands at the time of permitting a mineral operation.

**POLICIES:**

1. Identify post-extractive uses for mineral resource lands at the time of permitting,.
2. Restoration of mineral extraction sites should occur successively as the site is being mined. Restore the site consistent with the appropriate future land use and blend with the adjacent landscape and contours.
3. Ensure that mine site excavation and reclamation are consistent with county, city, and tribal land use plans and the state Surface Mine Reclamation Act (RCW 78.44).
4. Encourage innovative reclamation plans in concert with private landowners for the final conversion of exhausted mineral resource lands into desirable uses – such as park land, open space, forest land, community lakes, housing, agricultural land, and other uses – that are compatible with the Comprehensive Plan and zoning. These uses should be compatible with adjacent land uses. Such reclamation plans will be considered as favorable mitigations of the mining activity during the county’s SEPA review process.
5. In areas of co-designated mineral lands and agricultural lands, post-reclamation of mineral extraction sites must maintain the long-term agricultural use and should occur in a timely fashion.

1. Thurston County. (July 2024). Voluntary Stewardship Program 2019-2024 5-Year Monitoring Report. *Thurston County,* p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
2. Washington Sea Grant. (December, 2015). Shellfish Aquaculture in Washington State. *University of Washington.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
3. Department of Health. (April, 2023). Thurston County State of Classification Report. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
4. USDA. (2022). Census of Agriculture: Thurston County Profile. *United States Department of Agriculture*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
5. USDA. (2018). 2018 Census of Aquaculture. *United States Department of Agriculture.* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
6. State of Salmon. (2022). Salmon Status in Washington. Retrieved from: https://stateofsalmon.wa.gov/executive-summary/salmon-status/ [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
7. Thurston County. (February, 2001). Shellfish Facts. *Thurston County Environmental Health.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
8. Department of Health. (April, 2023). Thurston County State of Classification Report. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
9. Land Grade 1 = highest, Land Grade 7 = lowest. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
10. Data retrieved from Thurston County Assessor as of March 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
11. AESI, *Mineral Resource Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance Inventory Study*, August 2017. In 2016, Thurston County contracted with Associated Earth Sciences, Inc. (AESI) to identify and classify mineral resources in the county and create a base inventory map showing the location of mineral resources. AESI developed a draft inventory and classification system largely based on data from DNR and USGS, with some supplementary information from Washington Department of Transportation and private studies. This inventory (Map N-3) identified 189,475 acres of land containing long-term commercially significant mineral resources, which were eligible to be considered for designation. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)