



**Skamania County Planning Department
Periodic Review, Natural Resource Lands
WAC Guidelines -- For Work Shop Discussion**

October 31, 2016

Skamania County is reviewing its GMA (Growth Management Act) natural resource lands designations pursuant to RCW 36.70A.130.¹ The County initially designated its GMA resource lands in 2005, and added to those designations in subsequent years, as earlier staff reports addressed. The below analysis provides input to the Planning Commission on Department of Commerce guidance designed to assist jurisdictions with identifying these lands.

"Designation means, at a minimum, formal adoption of a policy statement, and may include further legislative action."² It is a recognition that the land has commercial resource value, *i.e.*, for logging. Designation does not limit where natural resource use may occur, but instead is designed to promote commercial activity. "The purpose of designating natural resource lands is to enable industries to maintain access to lands with long-term commercial significance" for commercial resource use, and "not to confine all natural resource production activity only to designated lands...."³ "Successful achievement of the natural resource industries goal ... requires the conservation of land base sufficient in size and quality to maintain and enhance those industries...."⁴ Included as natural resource lands are "agricultural, forest and mineral resource lands which have long-term commercial significance."⁵ Such lands are further defined as follows.

- "Forest land" is land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, including Christmas trees subject to the excise tax imposed under RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, and that has long-term commercial significance. These lands are referred to in this chapter as forest resource lands to distinguish between formally designated lands, and other lands used for forestry purposes.
- "Agricultural land" is land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of

¹ The duties of fully planning and partially planning counties in this periodic review are distinct. WAC 365-190-040(3) (Under RCW 36.70A.130, all counties and cities must review, and if needed, update their natural resource lands ... designations. Counties and cities fully planning under the act must also review and, if needed, update their natural resource lands conservation provisions, comprehensive plans and development regulations.)

² WAC 365-190-040(3)(c).

³ WAC 365-190-040(6).

⁴ WAC 365-190-040(3)(d).

⁵ WAC 365-190-030(15).

berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, seed, Christmas trees not subject to the excise tax imposed by RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, finfish in upland hatcheries, or livestock, and that has long-term commercial significance for agricultural production. These lands are referred to in this chapter as agricultural resource lands to distinguish between formally designated lands, and other lands used for agricultural purposes.

- "Mineral resource lands" means lands primarily devoted to the extraction of minerals or that have known or potential long-term commercial significance for the extraction of minerals.
- "Minerals" include gravel, sand, and valuable metallic substances.⁶

If the County elects to amend its present natural resource designations, those "amendments should be based on consistency with one or more of the following criteria:

- (i) A change in circumstances pertaining to the comprehensive plan or public policy related to designation criteria in WAC 365-190-050(3), 365-190-060(2), and 365-190-070(3);
- (ii) A change in circumstances to the subject property, which is beyond the control of the landowner and is related to designation criteria in WAC 365-190-050(3), 365-190-060(2), and 365-190-070(3);
- (iii) An error in designation or failure to designate;
- (iv) New information on natural resource land or critical area status related to the designation criteria in WAC 365-190-050(3), 365-190-060(2), and 365-190-070(3); or
- (v) A change in population growth rates, or consumption rates, especially of mineral resources⁷

The primary change in circumstances with respect to the forest resource lands is the ongoing and precipitous commercial forestry decline due to litigation and environmental restrictions. This deteriorating circumstance warrants recognizing the extensive federal/state ownership of forest resource lands within the County.

**FOREST RESOURCE LANDS
WAC 365-190-060**

CRITERIA	INITIAL NOTES
(1) In classifying and designating forest resource lands, counties must approach the effort as a county-wide or regional process. Cities are encouraged to coordinate their forest resource lands designations with their county and any adjacent jurisdictions. Counties and cities should not review forest resource lands designations solely on a parcel-by-parcel basis.	The issue is being assessed on a county-wide basis. Work is also ongoing to coordinate with other federal, state and local governments, and community groups to protect and promote the logging industry within the region.
(2) Lands should be designated as forest resource lands of	The County's federal and state

⁶ WAC 365-190-030(7)(1)(13) and (14).

⁷ WAC 365-190-040(10).

<p>long-term commercial significance based on three factors:</p> <p>(a) The land is not already characterized by urban growth. To evaluate this factor, counties and cities should use the criteria contained in WAC 365-196-310.</p> <p>(b) The land is used or capable of being used for forestry production. To evaluate this factor, counties and cities should determine whether lands are well suited for forestry use based primarily on their physical and geographic characteristics.</p> <p>Lands that are currently used for forestry production and lands that are capable of such use must be evaluated for designation. The landowner's intent to either use land for forestry or to cease such use is not the controlling factor in determining if land is used or capable of being used for forestry production.</p> <p>(c) The land has long-term commercial significance. When determining whether lands are used or capable of being used for forestry production, counties and cities should determine which land grade constitutes forest land of long-term commercial significance, based on local physical, biological, economic, and land use considerations. Counties and cities should use the private forest land grades of the department of revenue (WAC 458-40-530). This system incorporates consideration of growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land. Forest land of long-term commercial significance will generally have a predominance of the higher private forest land grades. However, the presence of lower private forest land grades within the areas of predominantly higher grades need not preclude designation as forest land.</p>	<p>lands are largely not characterized by urban growth, and are either used or capable of being used for forest production. Environmental restrictions and litigation opposing logging has been the primary impediment to sustaining a healthy forest industry within the County.</p> <p>Under WAC Guidance, these federal and state lands should be accounted for. "When classifying and designating natural resource lands and critical areas, counties and cities should integrate regulatory and nonregulatory approaches together in a comprehensive program that relates to existing local, state, and federal efforts."⁸</p>
<p>(3) Counties and cities may also consider secondary benefits from retaining commercial forestry operations. Benefits from retaining commercial forestry may include protecting air and water quality, maintaining adequate aquifer recharge areas, reducing forest fire risks, supporting tourism and access to recreational opportunities, providing carbon sequestration benefits, and improving wildlife habitat and connectivity for upland species. These are only potential secondary benefits from retaining commercial forestry operations, and should not be used alone as a basis for designating or dedesignating forest resource lands.</p>	<p>These secondary benefits are only present when forest lands are properly managed. If they are not and diseased trees, coupled with uncontrolled understory growth, increases fire risks. This threatens not only the resource, but the surrounding community. This is a significant issue for Skamania County with respect to federal lands management. The County is hoping to use this GMA review process to improve federal management of forest resource lands.</p>
<p>(4) Counties and cities must also consider the effects of proximity to population areas and the possibility of more</p>	<p>The over 800,000 acres of federal and state forest lands</p>

⁸ WAC 365-190-020(3).

<p>intense uses of the land as indicated by the following criteria as applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The availability of public services and facilities conducive to the conversion of forest land; (b) 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; (c) The size of the parcels: Forest lands consist of predominantly large parcels; (d) The compatibility and intensity of adjacent and nearby land use and settlement patterns with forest lands of long-term commercial significance; (e) Property tax classification: Property is assessed as open space or forest land pursuant to chapter 84.33 or 84.34 RCW; (f) Local economic conditions which affect the ability to manage timberlands for long-term commercial production; and (g) History of land development permits issued nearby. 	<p>are consistent with these criteria. They are suited for commercial forestry use and are not threatened by urban development. Further, management is under a handful of agencies. This land was once far more productive than is the case at present. Environmental restrictions and litigation by environmental groups; however, have gutted the forest industry locally. Thus, it is not public services, settlement, parcel size, development patterns, property tax classification, local economic conditions, permitting history which is the issue for developing a viable commercial forest industry.</p>
<p>(5) When applying the criteria in subsection (4) of this section, counties or cities should designate at least the minimum amount of forest resource lands needed to maintain economic viability for the forestry industry and to retain supporting forestry businesses, such as loggers, mills, forest product processors, equipment suppliers, and equipment maintenance and repair facilities. Economic viability in this context is that amount of designated forestry resource land needed to maintain economic viability of the forestry industry in the region over the long term.</p>	<p>The County could designate the federal and state lands within County borders which are set aside primarily for forest resource management (over 800,000 acres). If this occurred, this would add to the 43,656 acres already designated within the National Scenic Area, and the 115,275 acres already designated within the West End and Swift Subareas. With this approach, roughly 90% of the County would be designated for GMA natural resource use. This is a more than sufficient supply to support GMA natural resource industries within the County. Again, as noted above, land supply is not what has impeded the healthy functioning of the forestry industry within Southwest Washington, including Skamania County.</p>

**AGRICULTURAL RESOURCE LANDS
WAC 365-190-050**

CRITERIA	INITIAL NOTES
<p>(1) In classifying and designating agricultural resource lands, counties must approach the effort as a county-wide or area-wide process. Counties and cities should not review resource lands designations solely on a parcel-by-parcel process. Counties and cities must have a program for the transfer or purchase of development rights prior to designating agricultural resource lands in urban growth areas. Cities are encouraged to coordinate their agricultural resource lands designations with their county and any adjacent jurisdictions.</p>	<p>The periodic review is county-wide. The County is active in promoting commercial agricultural use within the area.</p>
<p>(2) Once lands are designated, counties and cities planning under the act must adopt development regulations that assure the conservation of agricultural resource lands. Recommendations for those regulations are found in WAC 365-196-815.</p>	<p>The County does not plan under GMA. It is only required to designate natural resource lands.</p>
<p>(3) Lands should be considered for designation as agricultural resource lands based on three factors:</p> <p>(a) The land is not already characterized by urban growth. To evaluate this factor, counties and cities should use the criteria contained in WAC 365-196-310.</p> <p>(b) The land is used or capable of being used for agricultural production. This factor evaluates whether lands are well suited to agricultural use based primarily on their physical and geographic characteristics. Some agricultural operations are less dependent on soil quality than others, including some livestock production operations.</p> <p>(i) Lands that are currently used for agricultural production and lands that are capable of such use must be evaluated for designation. The intent of a landowner to use land for agriculture or to cease such use is not the controlling factor in determining if land is used or capable of being used for agricultural production. Land enrolled in federal conservation reserve programs is recommended for designation based on previous agricultural use, management requirements, and potential for reuse as agricultural land.</p> <p>(ii) In determining whether lands are used or capable of being used for agricultural production, counties and cities shall use the land-capability classification system of the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service as defined in relevant Field Office Technical Guides. These eight classes are incorporated by the United States Department of Agriculture into map units described in published soil surveys, and are based on the growing capacity, productivity and soil composition of the land.</p>	<p>Carson is the only unincorporated area in Skamania County that might be considered as a urban growth area, as such the Carson Subarea was the only area in the County that was not reviewed for agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance.</p> <p>The County evaluated all lands currently used for agriculture production and lands that are capable of such use for designation. Lands currently used for agricultural and lands capable of agricultural use are located along the southern border of the County and located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.</p> <p>The land capability classification found in <i>The Soil Survey of Skamania County</i> is</p>

<p>(c) The land has long-term commercial significance for agriculture. In determining this factor, counties and cities should consider the following nonexclusive criteria, as applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The classification of prime and unique farmland soils as mapped by the Natural Resources Conservation Service; (ii) The availability of public facilities, including roads used in transporting agricultural products; (iii) Tax status, including whether lands are enrolled under the current use tax assessment under chapter 84.34 RCW and whether the optional public benefit rating system is used locally, and whether there is the ability to purchase or transfer land development rights; (iv) The availability of public services; (v) Relationship or proximity to urban growth areas; (vi) Predominant parcel size; (vii) Land use settlement patterns and their compatibility with agricultural practices; (viii) Intensity of nearby land uses; (ix) History of land development permits issued nearby; (x) Land values under alternative uses; and (xi) Proximity to markets. 	<p>the suitability of soils for most kinds of field crops rated from Class I soils as being the most ideal to Class VIII soils that preclude their use for crop production. The <i>Soil Survey of Skamania County</i> indicates that Class I soils are not in Skamania County and only two types of Class II soils. Class II soils are those type of soils that have moderate limitations and subject to erosion.</p> <p>Access to the County's Agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance is off established county roads and State Highway 14.</p> <p>Resolution 2005-35 designated land classifications SMA Agricultural and GMA Agricultural of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area as Agricultural Lands of long-term commercial significance. The minimum lot size for the GMA Large Scale Agricultural zoning classification is 60 acres and the SMA Agricultural zoning classification is 40 acres</p> <p>The lands designated for commercial agricultural use are consistent with these factors. Therefore, the review of the County's agricultural lands of long-term significance concluded that no revisions to policies and/or development regulations are needed.</p>
<p>(4) When designating agricultural resource lands, counties and cities may consider food security issues, which may include providing local food supplies for food banks, schools and institutions, vocational training opportunities in agricultural operations, and preserving heritage or artisanal foods.</p>	<p>With its high subsidized lunch rates, food security is an issue.</p>

<p>(5) When applying the criteria in subsection (3)(c) of this section, the process should result in designating an amount of agricultural resource lands 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.</p>	<p>The County has designated sufficient acreage to maintain the agricultural industry. The County is predominantly in forest resource use, as opposed to traditional agricultural.</p>
<p>(6) Counties and cities may further classify additional agricultural lands of local importance. Classifying additional agricultural lands of local importance should include, in addition to general public involvement, consultation with the board of the local conservation district and the local committee of the farm service agency. It may also be useful to consult with any existing local organizations marketing or using local produce, including the boards of local farmers markets, school districts, other large institutions, such as hospitals, correctional facilities, or existing food cooperatives.</p> <p>These additional lands may include designated critical areas, such as bogs used to grow cranberries or farmed wetlands. Where these lands are also designated critical areas, counties and cities planning under the act must weigh the compatibility of adjacent land uses and development with the continuing need to protect the functions and values of critical areas and ecosystems.</p>	<p>Noted</p>