

# Whatcom County Land & Water Integration Study

WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

DECEMBER 9, 2025



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# LAND & WATER INTEGRATION STUDY – OVERVIEW

“Better integrate land use (zoning) with available water supply to build resilience to current and future climate impacts.”



February 28, 2024

**Re: Integrating Land Use and Water Resources Planning per Council adopted Resolution 2022-422 and Comp Plan**

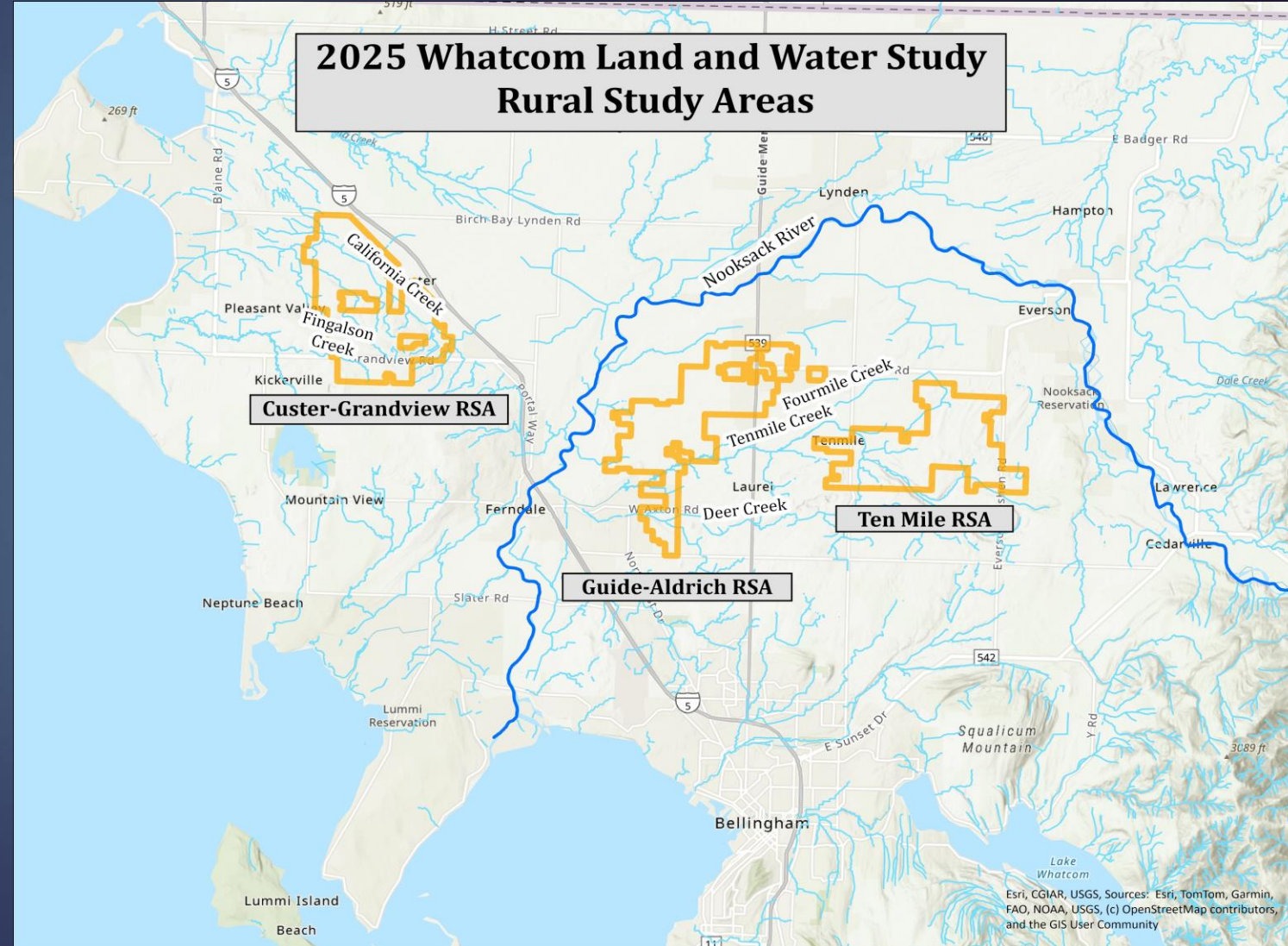
The comments included in this document reflect those previously submitted by the WRIA 1 Planning Unit in letters and comments to the Whatcom County Council and other Whatcom County representatives. For PDS staff soliciting comments from the Planning Unit, the Planning Unit pulled the salient points from the letters/comments, which are summarized below. These comments were unanimously approved by the Planning Unit at their February 28, 2024 meeting.

1. The County is in the process of studying land/water interaction in Rural Study Areas as a pilot initiated by the Planning Unit with the intent that the pilot would inform policies in the 2025 Comp Plan Update. The pilot focus is on the following recommendations for the 2025 Comp Plan Update:
  - Better integrate land use (zoning) with available water supply to build resilience to current and future climate impacts. Suggestions for doing this includes:
    - Focusing growth in cities and Urban Growth Areas that can accommodate that growth with reliable water supply;
    - Protecting key agricultural areas in perpetuity;
    - Exploring opportunities to provide water access to key agricultural areas;
    - Building community resilience to climate impacts.



# LAND & WATER INTEGRATION STUDY - OVERVIEW

- ▶ Evaluate relationship between land use/designation and water supply within three RSAs
- ▶ Identify existing or potential water resources
- ▶ Recommendations to bring land and water into balance
- ▶ Coordinate with Whatcom County staff, WRIA 1 Planning Unit, and a Project Team

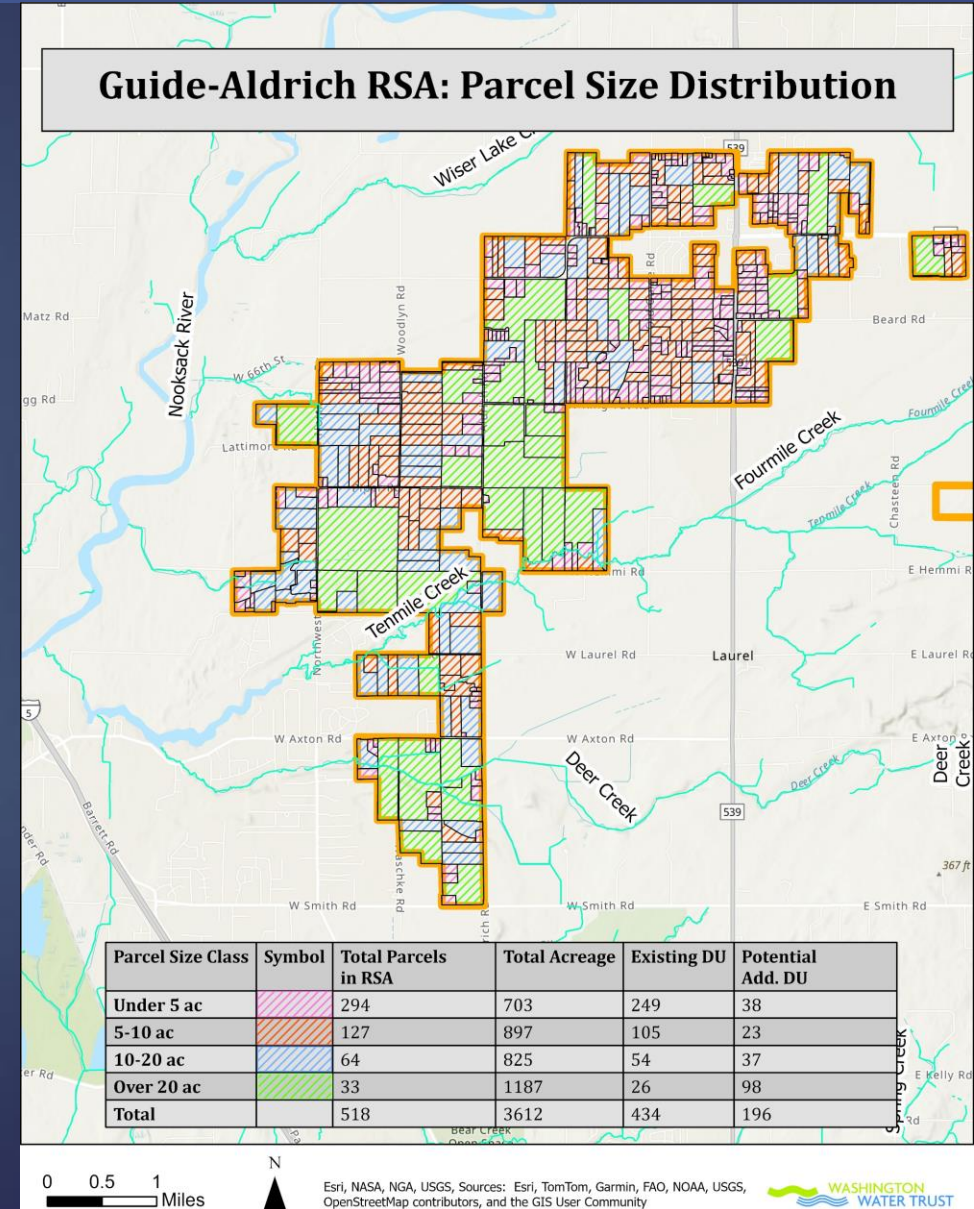


# LANDS EVALUATION

- ▶ Calculate Existing and Potential Development Units per RSA
- ▶ Organize parcels by acreage Size Classes

196 Potential Additional Development Units

10+ acre parcels = **97 Parcels**  
**2,012 acres**  
**56% of the RSA**



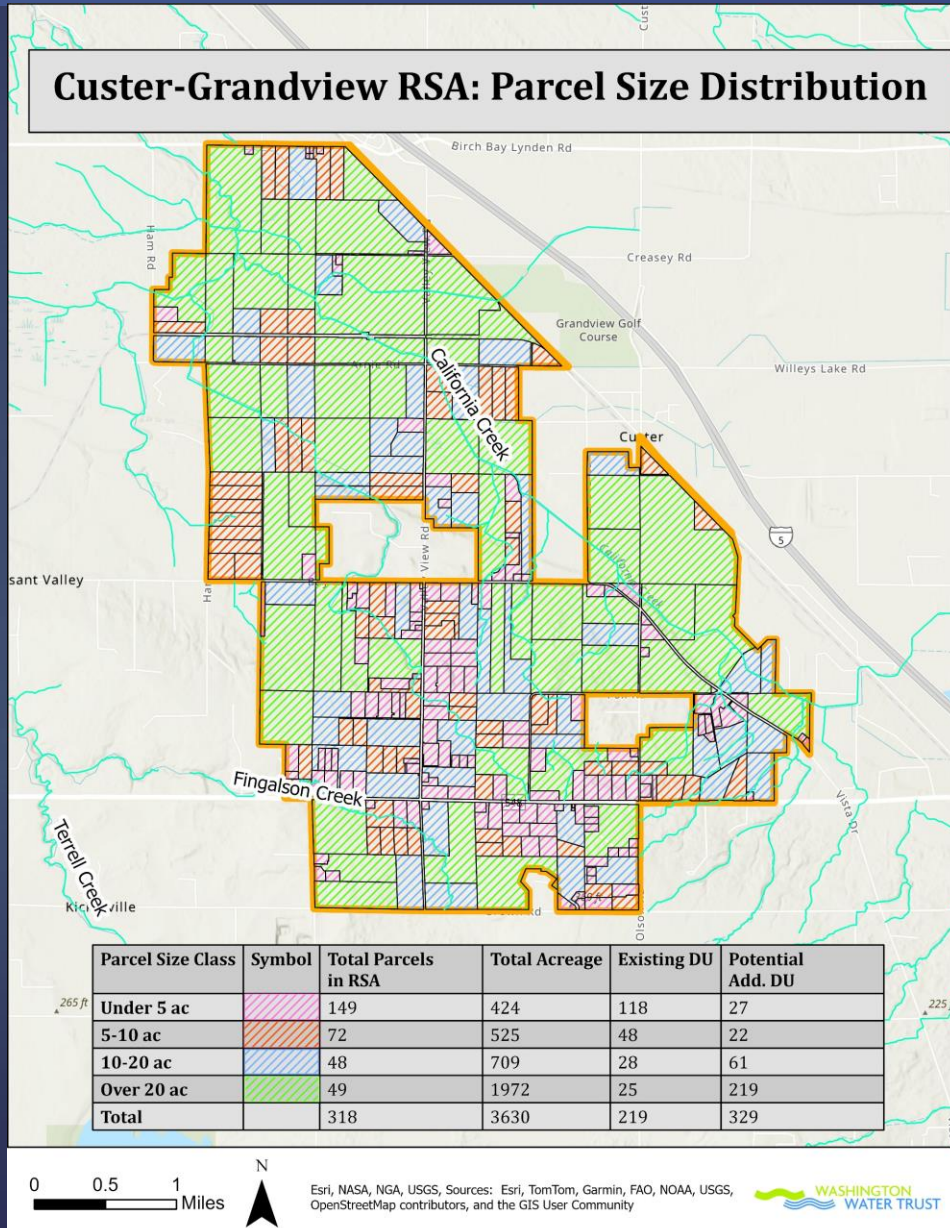


# LANDS EVALUATION

- ▶ Calculate Existing and Potential Development Units per RSA
- ▶ Organize parcels by acreage Size Classes

329 Potential Additional Development Units

10+ acre parcels = **97 Parcels**  
**2,681 acres**  
**74% of the RSA**

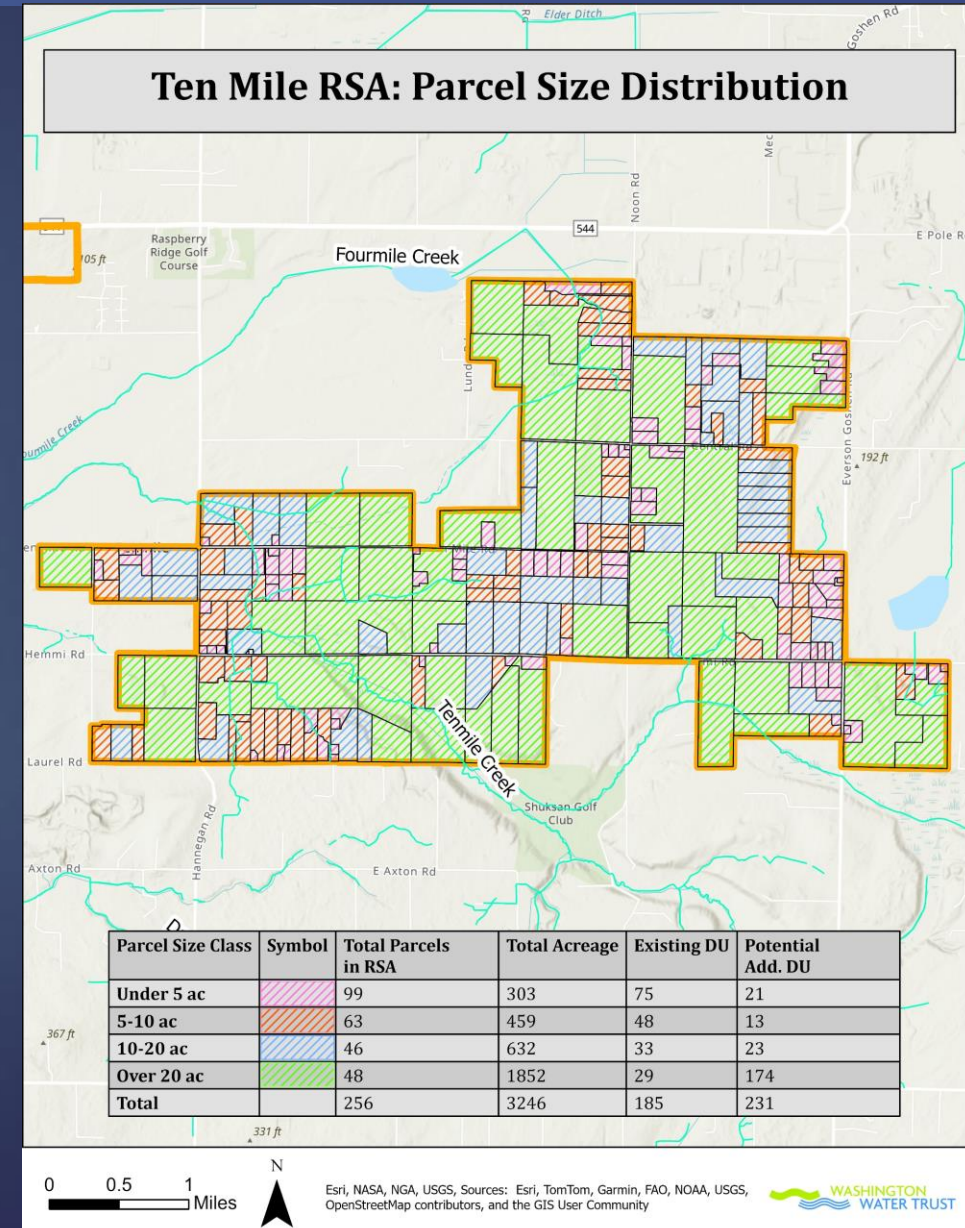


# LANDS EVALUATION

- ▶ Calculate Existing and Potential Development Units per RSA
- ▶ Organize parcels by acreage Size Classes

231 Potential Additional Development Units

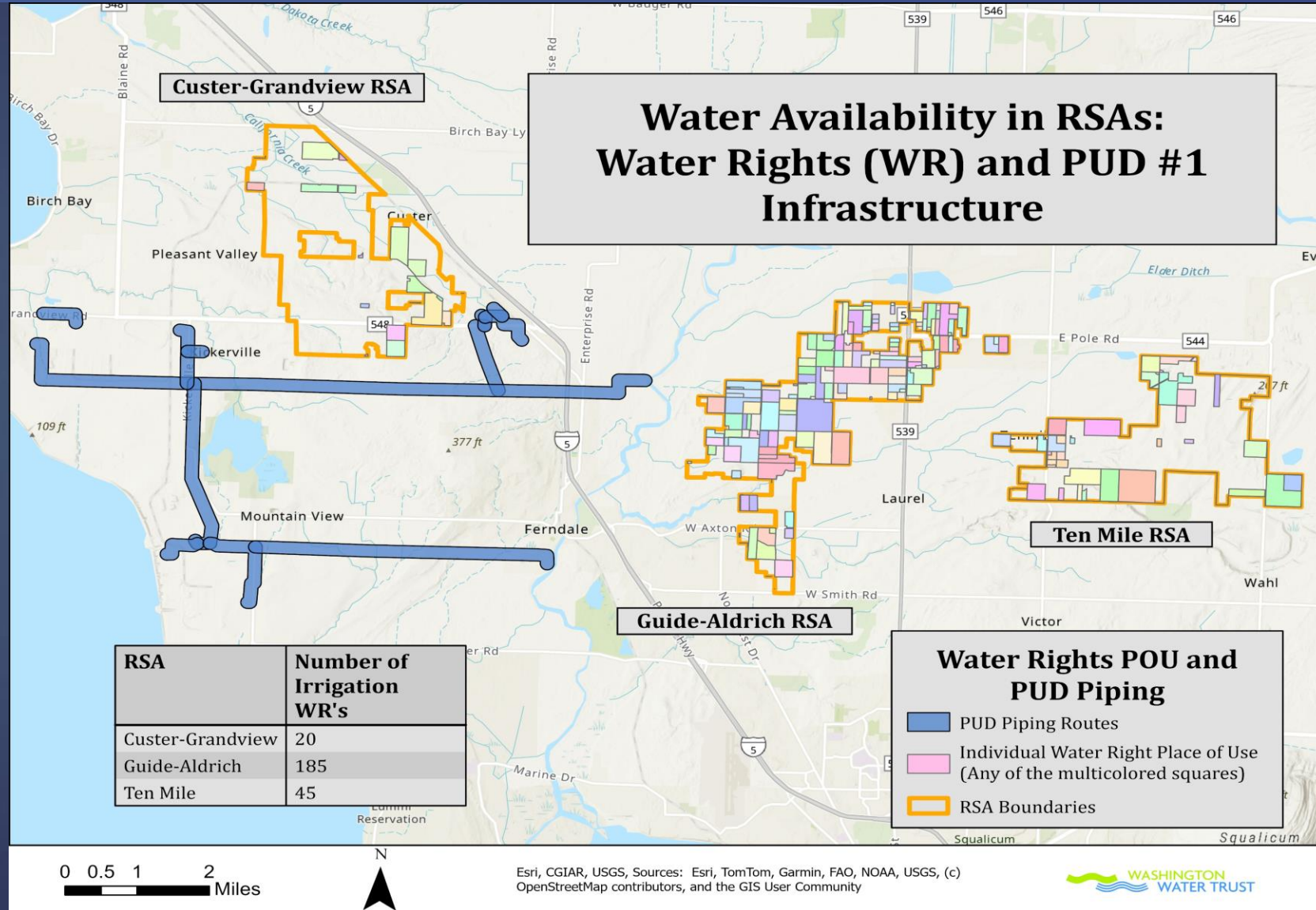
10+ acre parcels = **94 Parcels**  
**2,484 acres**  
**76% of the RSA**





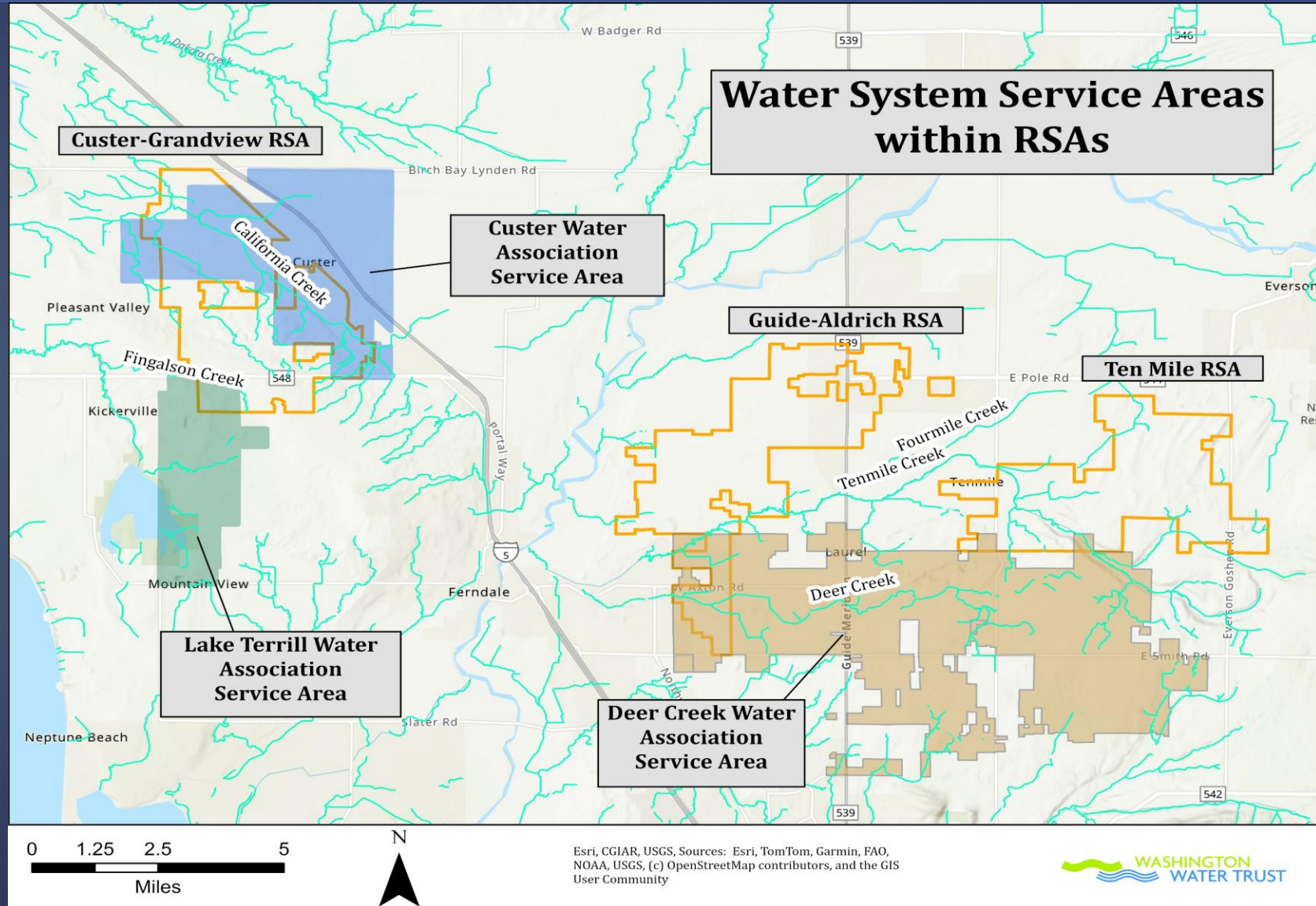
# WATER AVAILABILITY

- ▶ Irrigation Water Rights
- ▶ Existing PUD infrastructure



# WATER AVAILABILITY

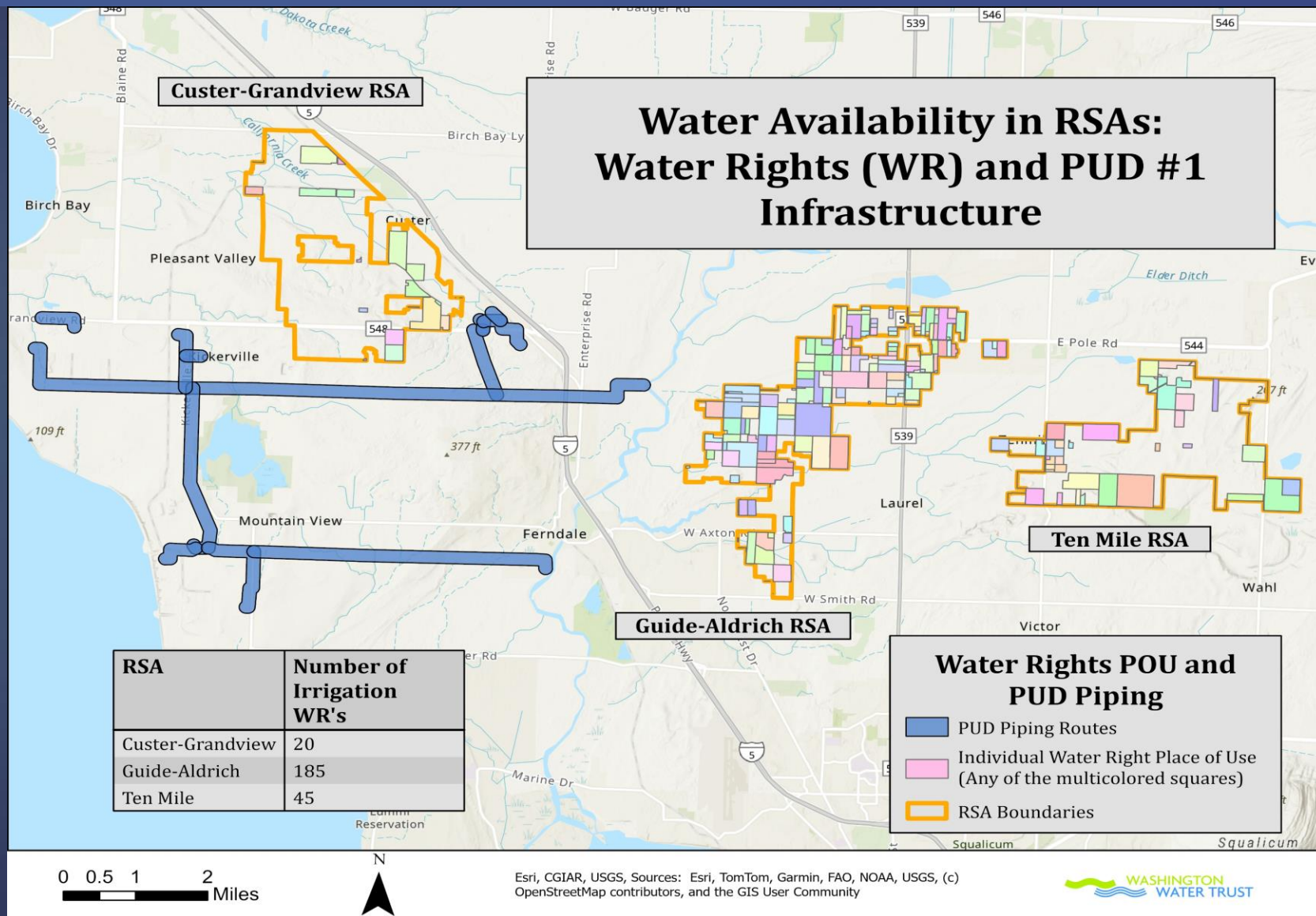
- ▶ 136 total known available connections from water systems
- ▶ Water system service areas larger than the RSAs
- ▶ Future development = reliance on rural wells





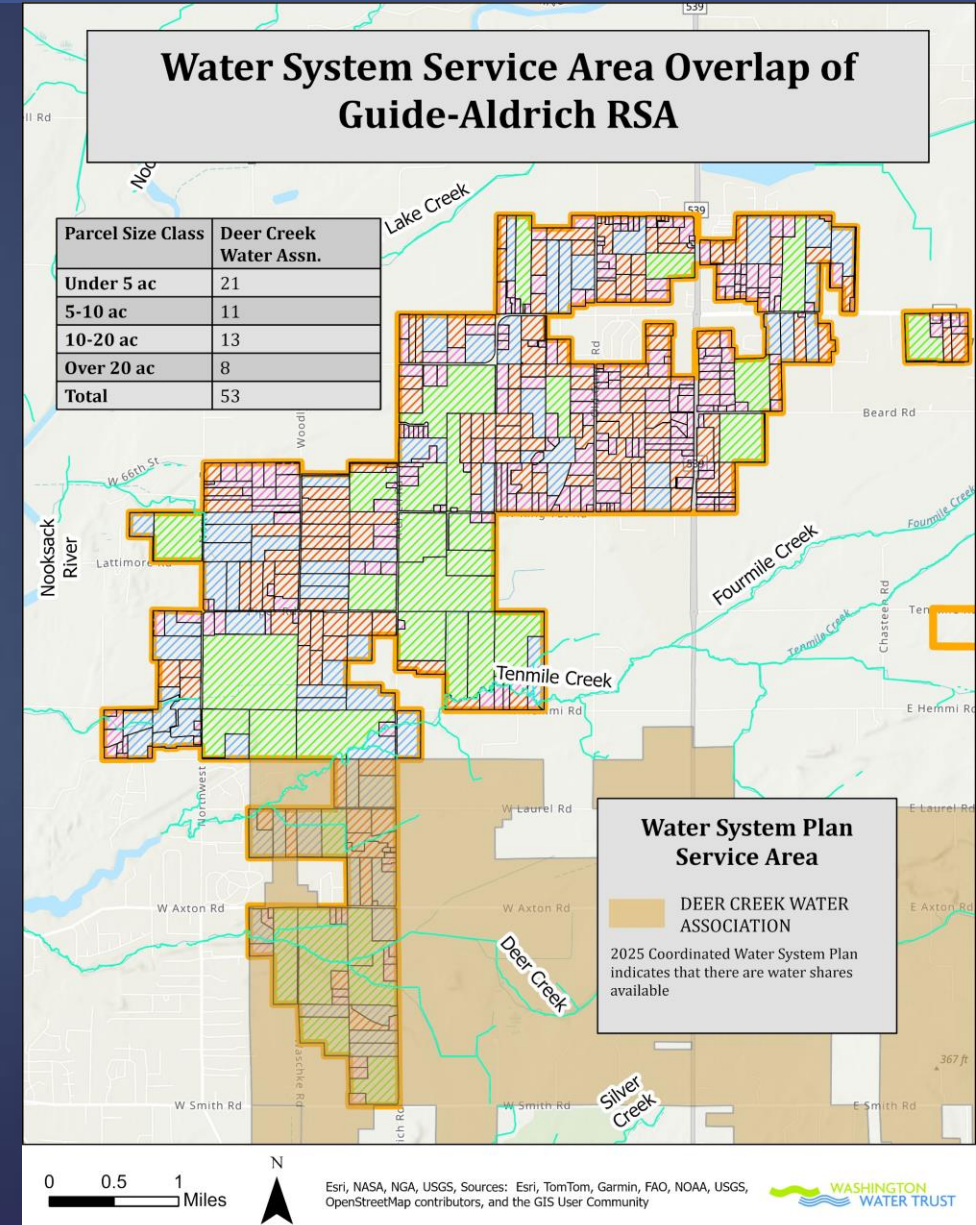
# WATER AVAILABILITY

- ▶ Insufficient irrigation water rights to support AG
- ▶ Conveyance capacity of water systems unknown
- ▶ Connections to PUD will require additional infrastructure



# WATER AVAILABILITY

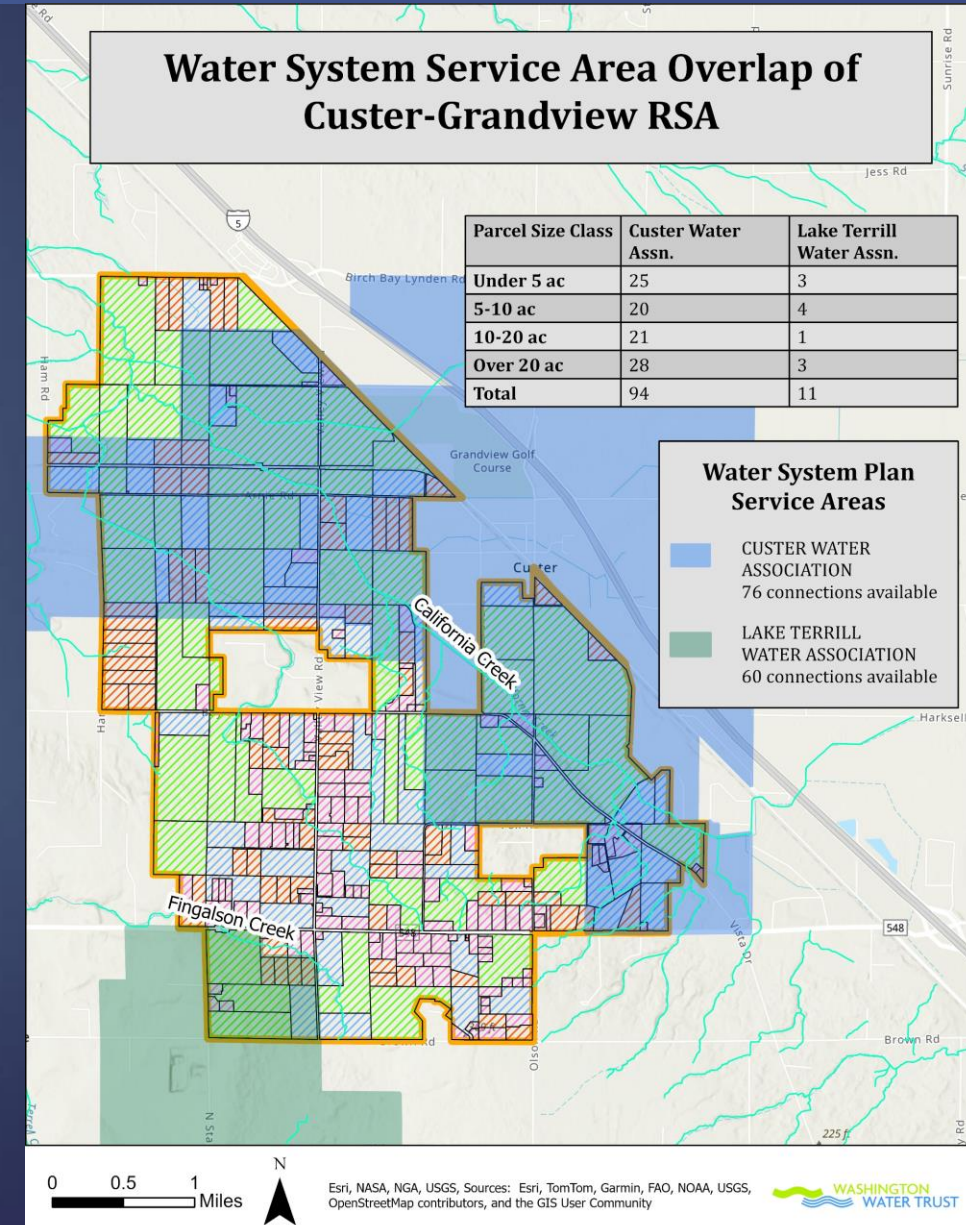
- ▶ Deer Creek Water Association = Unknown # of connections
- ▶ Future connections may or may not occur within RSA





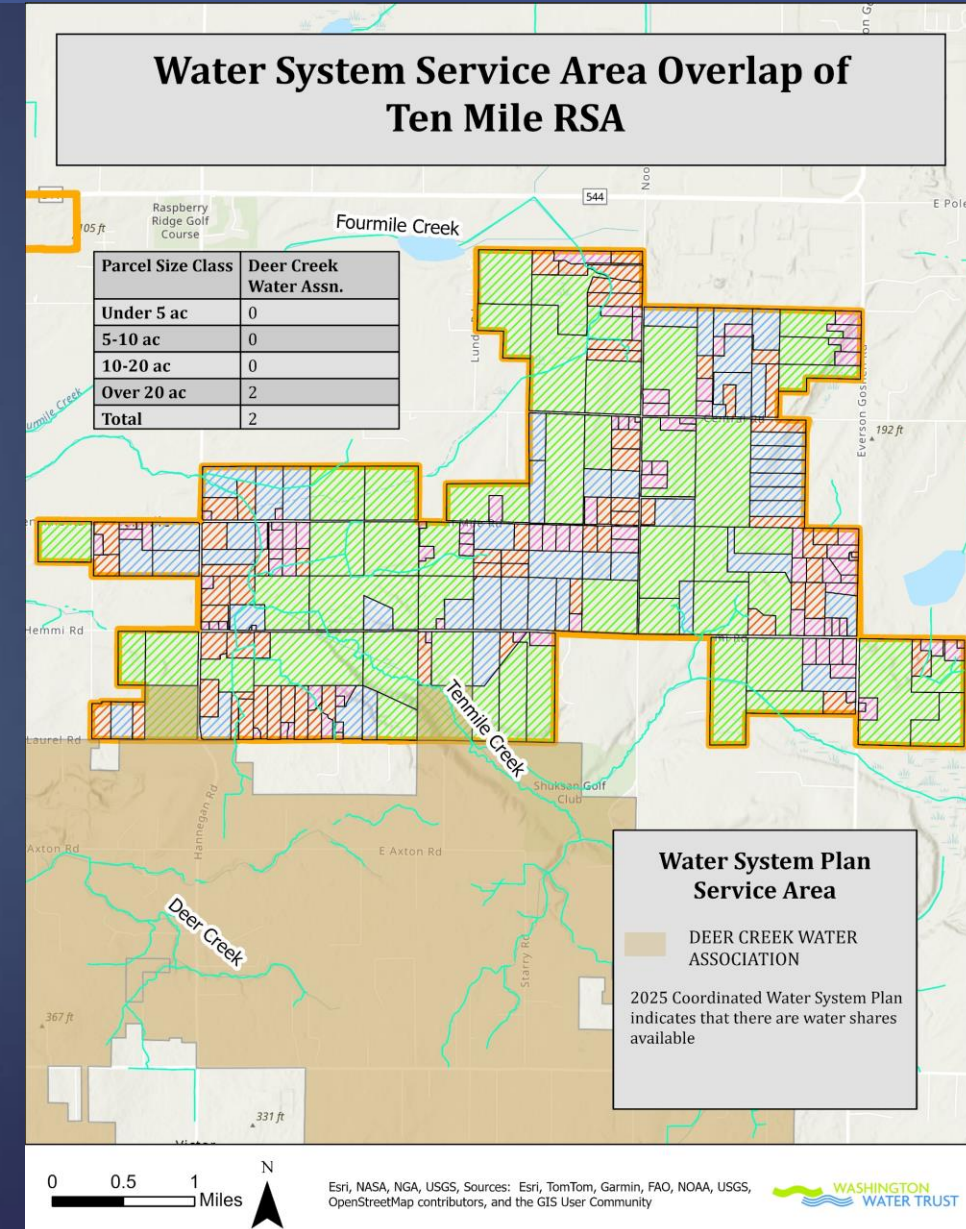
# WATER AVAILABILITY

- ▶ Custer Water Association = 76 available connections
- ▶ Lake Terrill Water Association = 60 available connections
- ▶ Future connections may or may not occur within RSA



# WATER AVAILABILITY

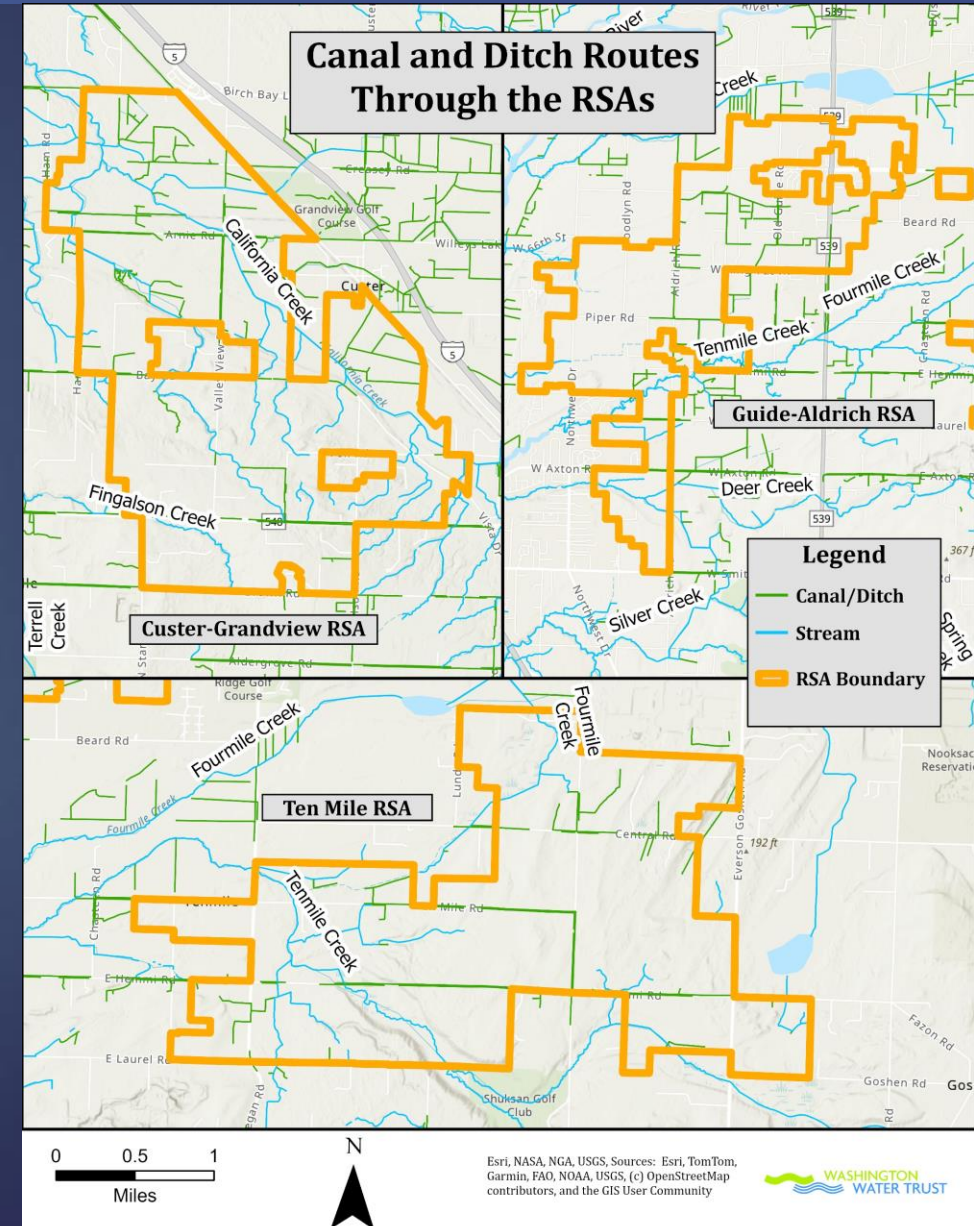
- ▶ Deer Creek Water Association = unknown # of connections
- ▶ 2 parcels overlap with service area





# AG PRACTICES & WATER SUPPLY ALTERNATIVES

- ▶ Climate change will further constrain water availability
- ▶ Identified Alternatives
  - ▶ Ag Water Bank
  - ▶ PUD Capacity
  - ▶ COB Water Right
  - ▶ Conveyance
  - ▶ Reducing Consumptive Demand
  - ▶ Alternative Cultivation Practices



# FINDINGS

- ▶ Insufficient water rights to support AG within RSAs
- ▶ Climate change = more constraint on water
- ▶ Resilient AG practices
- ▶ Important to **Integrate Land and Water Planning**
- ▶ Re-designate lands now preserves opportunities (while identifying water resources, practices)
- ▶ Further investigation into alternatives



# Questions

