

Whatcom County

Open Space Applications

August 2025

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Planner II

Whatcom County Planning & Development Services

1970 Open Space Taxation Act

- Concern over conversion of resource lands, shorelines, wetlands, scenic vistas, historical sites, recreation opportunities
- Allow property owners to have their lands valued at its current use, not highest and best use (fair market value)
- Reduced property taxes
- Incentive to preserve as open space

Whatcom County's Open Space Programs

Assessor's Office

Designated Forestland (DFL)

- Must be used for commercial forestry, with a forest mgmt plan
- Highest tax reduction

Open Space Farm & Agricultural Land (OSAG)

- Must be used for commercial ag
- Second highest tax reduction

Planning & Development Services

Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs)

Open Space Land (OSL)

- Must provide benefits to the general public (e.g. recreational uses, conservation benefits, etc)
- Public access required
- Lowest tax reduction

Open Space Farm & Agricultural Conservation Land (OSFAC)

- Must be considered "Traditional Farmland," similar criteria to OSL
- Public access required
- Same tax reduction as OSL

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Planning & Development Services

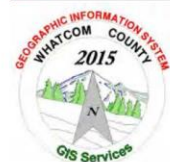
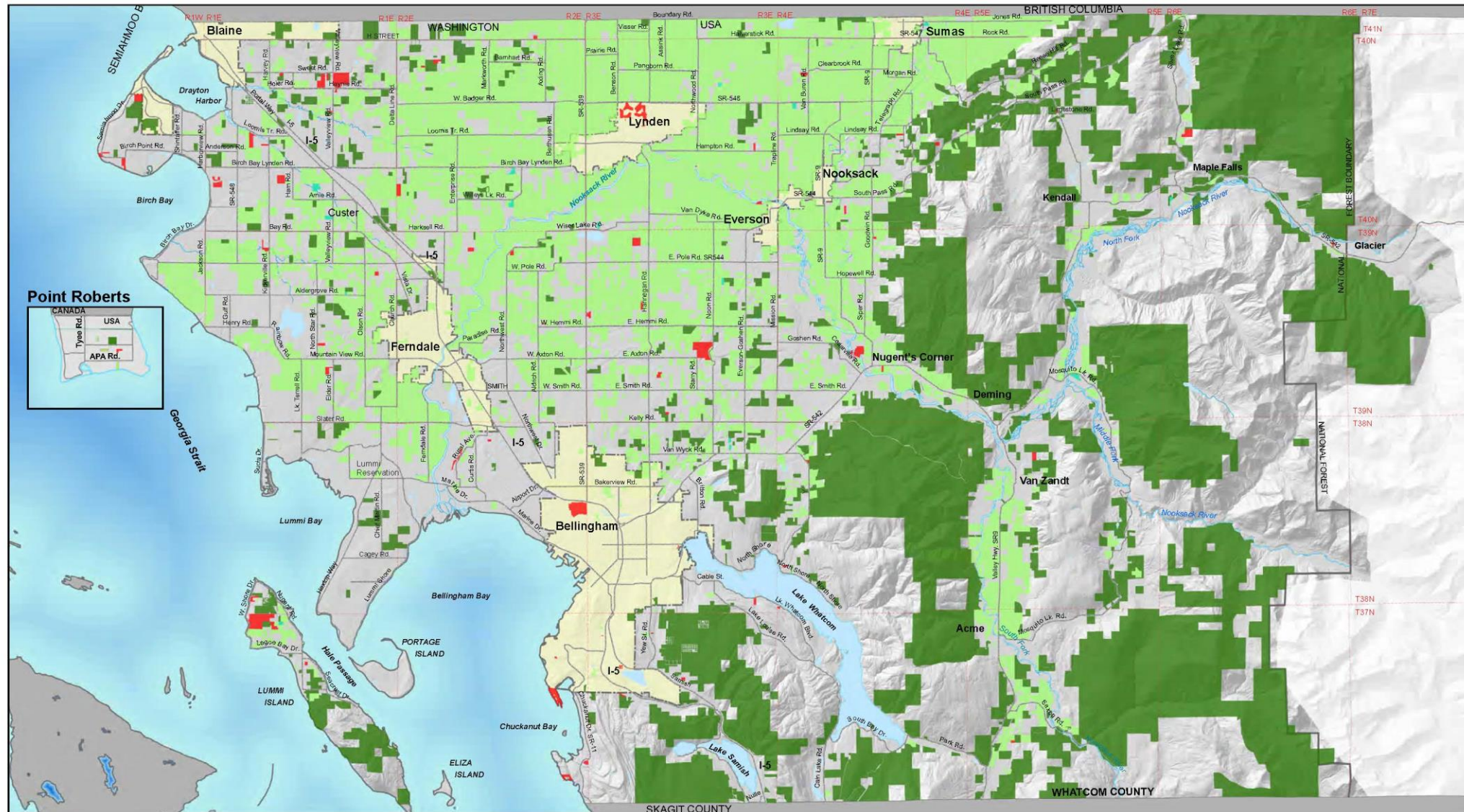
Public Benefit Rating System (PBRS)

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Whatcom County Property Tax Reduction Programs RCW 84.33; RCW84.34

- Farm & Agricultural Land
- Designated Forest Land
- Open Space Land
- Farm & Agricultural Conservation Land

Source:
-Whatcom County PDS 2015 (base)
-Whatcom County Assessor 2015

USE OF WHATCOM COUNTY'S GIS DATA IMPLIES THE USER'S AGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

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0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Miles

Process

PDS Staff

- Receive applications, conduct site visit
- Score property according to Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs)
- Recommendation to Planning Commission

Planning Commission

- Recommendation to County Council to approve in whole, in part, or deny individual applications

County Council

- Approve (in whole or in part), or deny individual applications

County Assessor

- Makes adjustments to assessed value and notifies owner of new value
- Ensures long-term compliance with Open Space Tax Agreement

Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs)

- Range of potential points relative to benefit provided to the public
- Points entered into PBRs formula
- Minimum PBRs score of 45 required for staff recommendation of approval
- PBRs used to arrive at new current use per acre value
- **Public access required:** Council MAY waive requirement for known habitat of endangered species, known archaeological sites, or wetland conservation.

Example PBRs Scoring Sheet:

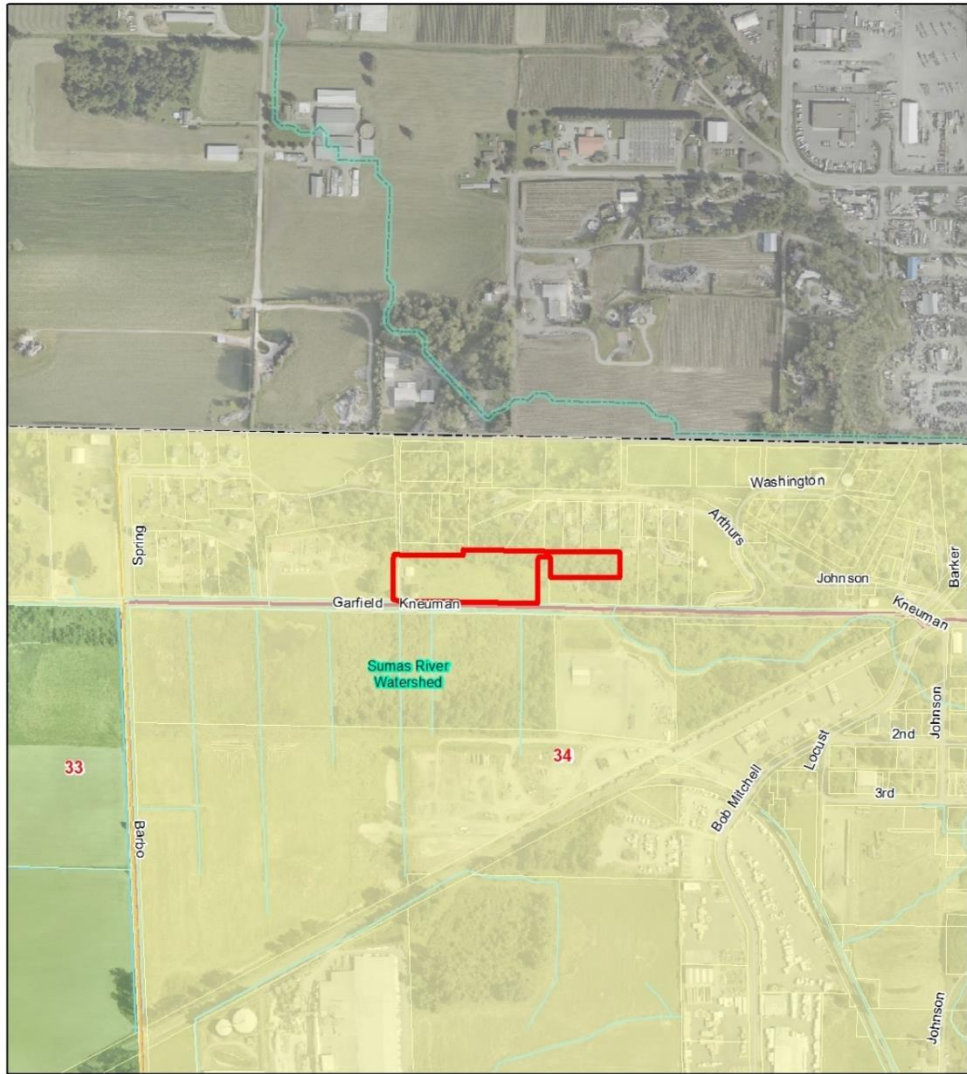
Basic Value Criteria - Open Space Land (BV)											
1	Conserve or Enhance Natural, Cultural or Scenic Resources (10 pts)									Max	Rating
	Conserve or enhance natural, cultural or scenic resources									2	2
	Lands which possess unique scenic vistas available to the public or are within the visual corridor of scenic roads or highways									2	0
	Lands which, when left in their natural state, would serve as buffers between areas of commercial or industrial activity and areas of human habitation									2	2
	Lands which can serve to prevent the spread of high density residential development into less developed areas									2	0
	Lands located adjacent to airports									2	0
	Total:									10	4
2	Protect Streams, Stream Corridors, Wetlands, Natural Shorelines And Aquifers (10 pts)									Max	Rating
	Lands within a 100-year floodplain									1.66666667	0
	Lands within or adjacent to areas of domestic water supply									1.66666667	0
	Lands near or adjacent to streams or rivers where, if alterations were to occur, a resulting loss of quality would also occur in the conditions of water and									1.66666667	1.66667
	Lands which provide for preservation of bogs or swamps									1.66666667	1.66667
	Lands adjacent to bodies of water, both marine and fresh									1.66666667	1.66667
	Lands including and adjacent to wetlands and tidal areas (these lands would not necessarily be approved contingent upon public assess agreement due to									1.66666667	1.66667
	Total:									10	6.66668
3	Protect Soil Resources and Unique or Critical Wildlife and Native Plant Habitat (10 pts)									Max	Rating
	Lands where slopes exceed 25% or areas where underlying geology and soils are known to produce unstable conditions									3.33333333	3.333
	Lands where, if alterations were to occur, a resulting high risk of soil erosion would follow									3.33333333	2.2
	Lands which represent habitats for unique or critical wildlife or native plants, or where there is a documented occurrence of									3.33333333	3.333
		State or Federal Endangered Species									
		State or Federal Threatened Species									
		Federal Proposed Endangered or Threatened Species									
		State Sensitive or Monitor Species as listed in the Washington Department of Wildlife Non-game Data System. (On parcels where there is this docume									
	Total:									10	8.866
4	Promote Conservation Principles by Example or by Offering Educational Opportunities (10 pts)									Max	Rating
	Lands which are an example of application of conservation principles									5	5
	Lands which offer opportunities for conservation education such as interpretive centers or trails									5	0
	Total:									10	5

Applications for Review

OSP2024-0006 – Lewis

- Application to reclassify from OSAG to OSL
- Three parcels totaling 5.11 acres
- PBRS score = 48.18
 - **PDS staff recommend approval**
- Planning Commission Public Hearing: April 10
 - **PC recommends approval**

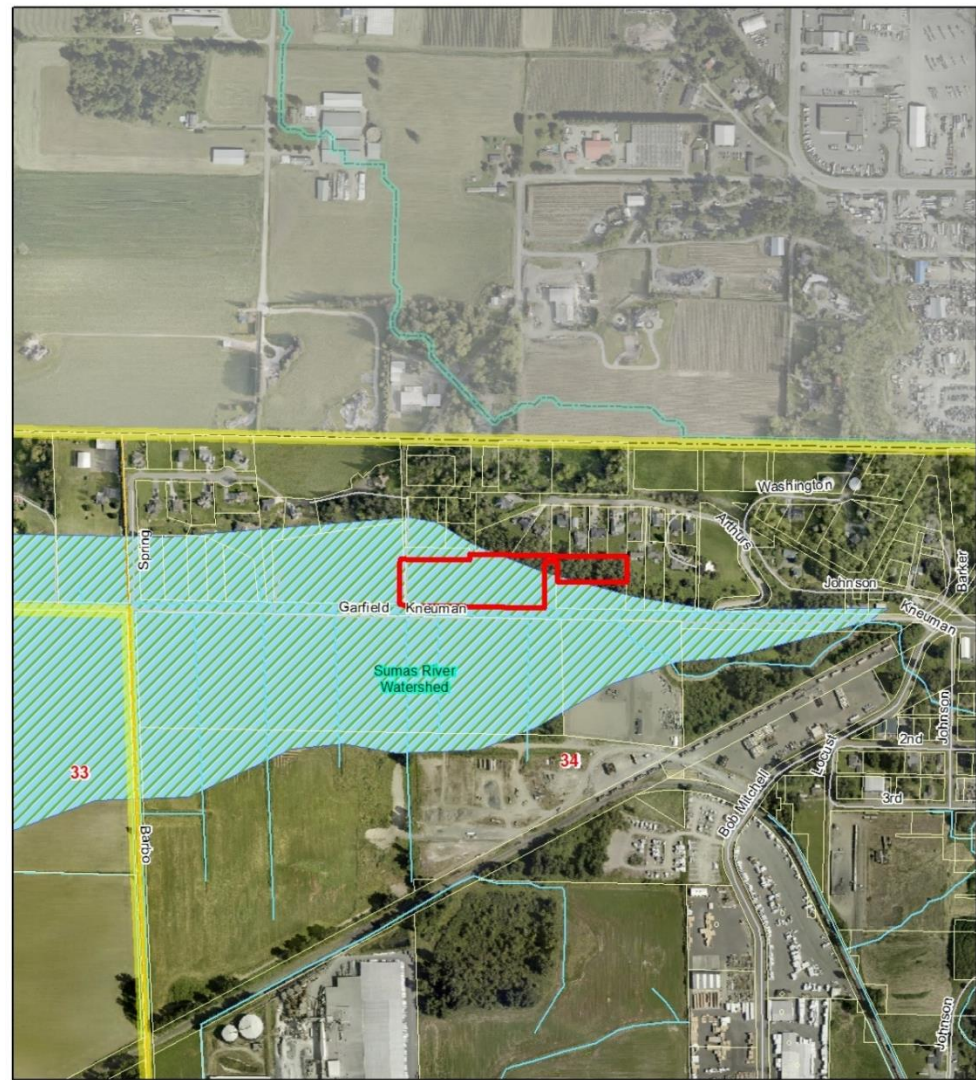




Whatcom County

Lewis OSP2024-00006

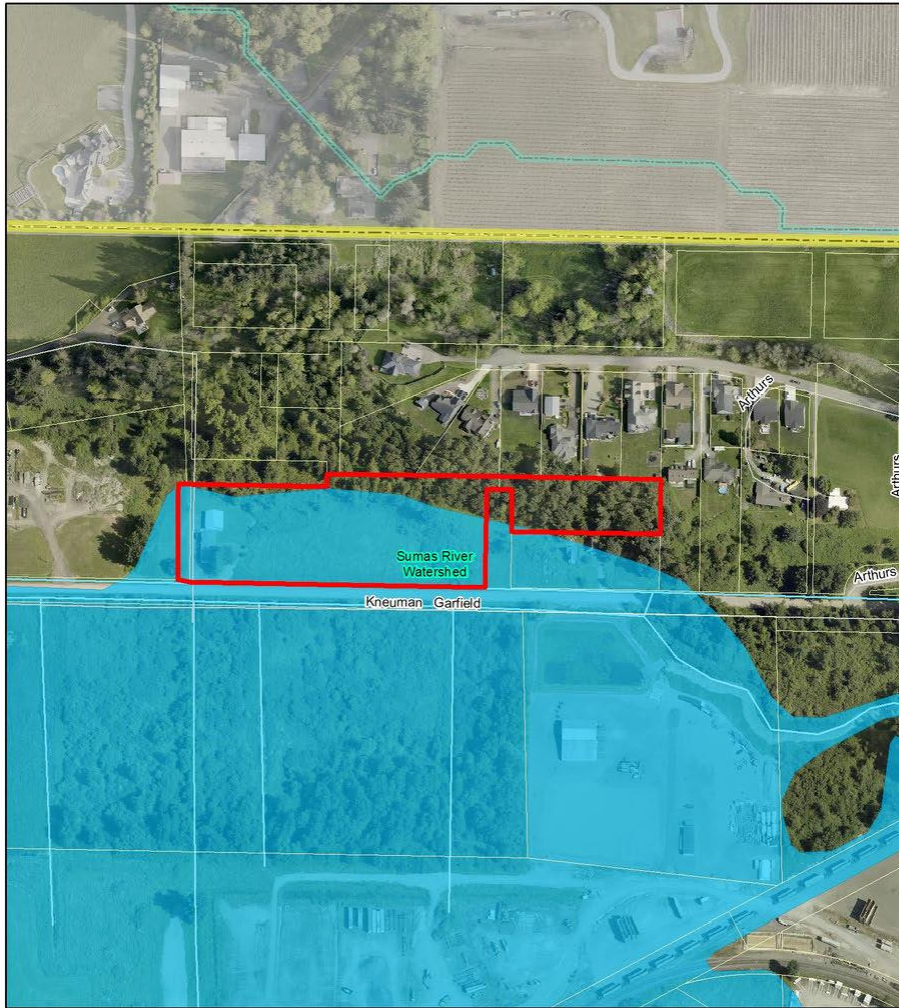
- Subject property (5.11 acres)
- Sumas City Limits
- Ag zoning



Whatcom County

Lewis OSP2024-00006

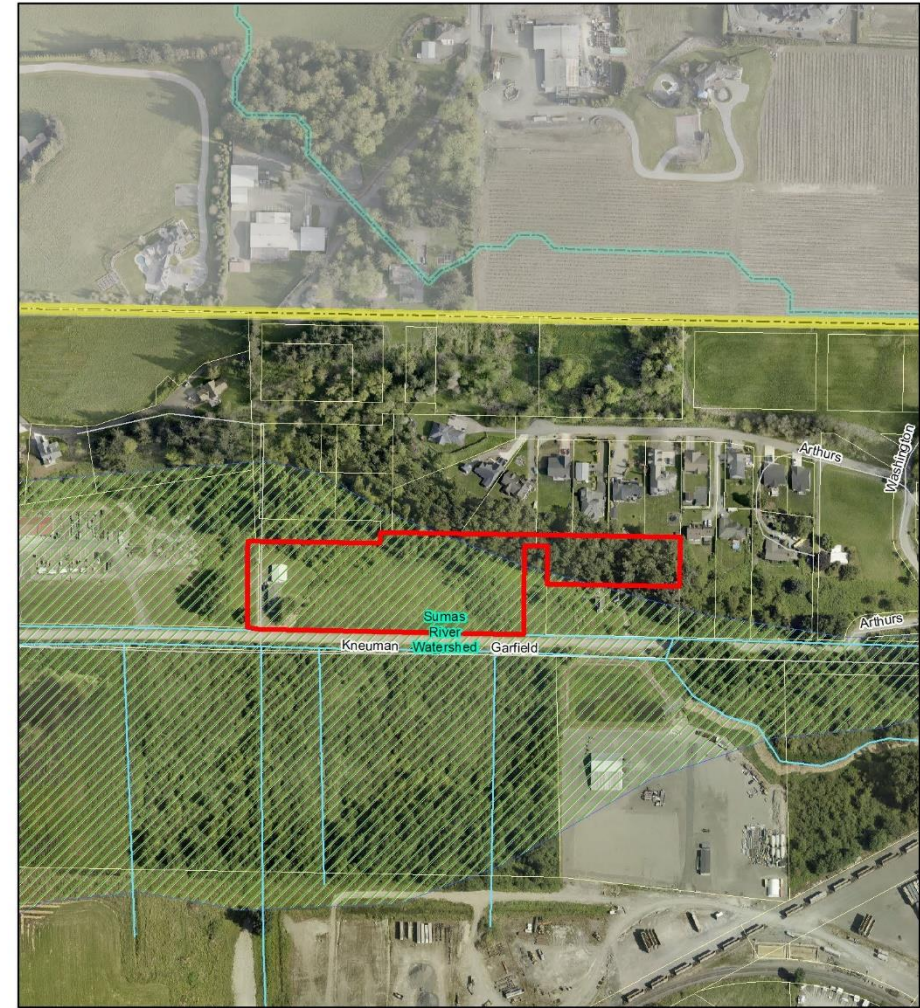
- Subject property (5.11 acres)
- Sumas City Limits
- Ag zoning
- Peat soils (modeled)



Whatcom County

Lewis OSP2024-00006

- Subject property (5.11 acres)
- FEMA 100 Year Floodplain



Whatcom County

Lewis OSP2024-00006

- Subject Site
- Rivers & Streams
- Surficial Aquifers
- Habitat Conservation Area, State Priority Habitats
- Peat soils (modeled)







Questions?

THIS PROPERTY IS
DESIGNATED
OPEN SPACE

Pursuant to the provisions of RCW 84.34, public access is permitted for recreational purposes subject to the terms and conditions of Whatcom County Open Space Agreement:

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