

Chapter Nine Parks and Recreation

Introduction

Recreational opportunities in Whatcom County are abundant. The County's geography and its natural features contribute greatly to opportunities for recreation. Bounded by sea and forested mountains, with wide open vistas, and vibrant flowing rivers, streams, ~~and tranquil lakes, mountains, and shorelines, Whatcom County is a perfect spot for residents and visitors alike who seek a wide variety of outdoor recreational experiences as well as entrepreneurs looking for a great place to locate a business, attract employees, and grow recreation based and other types of businesses.~~

~~Recreation is a vital component to the rich quality of life enjoyed by many Whatcom County residents and visitors. Whether formal or informal, public or private, indoor or outdoor, Recreation has always played an important role in the quality of life for Whatcom County residents. Choices to recreate abound with three national wilderness areas, a national forest, one national park, two national recreation areas, three state parks and multitude of county and local parks and trails all located within the County. Over recent decades, Whatcom County has become a regional destination for many recreational enthusiasts, and has attracted many new residents who now call Whatcom County "home." Recreation provides health and social benefits while contributing to the economics of the community supporting tourism, hospitality businesses, equipment manufacturers, retailers, and outfitters. Recreational opportunities and abundance of parks and trails is often used as a recruitment tool by area businesses and institutions.~~

~~This chapter explores many of the key issues involved in maintaining the high quality of Whatcom County's existing recreational services and facilities, and also outlines strategies in the form of goals and policies that support the provision of expanded recreational services and facilities.~~

~~According the Whatcom County's 2024 -Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (CPROS) Plan, the County Park System had over 2,840,000 combined visitations to park and trail facilities in 2022. Park facility visitations accounted for approximately 1,166,000 (40%) while trails accounted for 1,674,000 (60%). These numbers equate to an Annual Average Growth Rate (AAGR) of nearly 18% for parks and 45% for trails. Based on existing inventory and population, Whatcom County is currently meeting its 1997 adopted minimum level of service for developed parks and activity centers. It currently has a trail deficit of approximately 68 miles.~~

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Access to recreation areas provides significant economic benefits through tourism, retail sales, and business retention and recruitment. In Whatcom County, recreation expenditures annually amount to \$919,404,000 in spending. This spending supports over 6,496 jobs in a variety of industries. The recreation industry itself supports 279 businesses employing 3,728 persons with \$67,595,000 in revenues. County residents spend an average of 78.1 days a year recreating compared to the state average of 59 days annually (Source: 2015: Economic Contribution of Outdoor Recreation to Whatcom County, Earth Economics).

The continued availability of diverse and numerous recreational opportunities will play a key role in ensuring a high quality of life for future generations in Whatcom County.

This chapter explores many of the issues involved in maintaining the high quality of Whatcom County's existing recreational services and facilities, and also outlines goals and policies to support the provision of expanded recreational services and facilities. This chapter establishes policy direction. Specific projects, priorities, and implementation strategies are defined in the CPROS Plan.

Purpose

~~This primary focus of this chapter is primarily focuses~~ on goals and policies that support park and recreation facilities designed to serve Whatcom County as a whole. Whatcom County's first ~~Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan~~ (CPROS Plan) was adopted in 1989 as part of Whatcom County's pre-growth management comprehensive land use plan. The CPROS Plan is regularly updated by the County Parks and Recreation Department in accordance with Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office requirements to retain eligibility for certain funding programs. This chapter relies on the CPROS Plan, which includes ~~historical~~ information on:

- ~~Whatcom County's communities; on existing park and open space inventory and demand for park and recreation facilities;~~
- ~~Parks and Recreation public participation processes; it outlines~~
- ~~standards for park and trail development, recreation, senior services; and contains~~
- ~~pPolicies that support implementation of park and recreation facility goals.~~

The goals and policies in this chapter ~~echo many of the goals and policies~~ inform recommendations found in the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space Plan. ~~In addition, the Whatcom County Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan and the 1991 Natural Heritage Plan also support and inform many of the goals and policies of this chapter.~~

Process

Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Department plays an essential role in providing recreation, senior services, and facilities to county residents and visitors. The Department leads the long-range planning needed to accommodate future parks,

~~senior centers, recreation, and open space needs in the next 20 years that this chapter seeks to guide and support. The CPROS Plan is a separate document from the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (WCCP), and is established for distinct but overlapping purposes. The CPROS Plan should be read alongside this chapter of the WCCP, as it informs many of the Issues, Goals, and Policies that are outlined in this chapter. In August 1989, Whatcom County adopted its first *Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan*, and subsequently this plan was adopted as part of the Optional Recreation Element of the County's comprehensive plan. In 1991, the Whatcom County Council approved a resolution that endorsed "*Preserving a Way of Life: A Natural Heritage Plan for Whatcom County*." The *Natural Heritage Plan* focuses primarily on a vision that supports preservation and conservation of natural areas in the county without necessarily assuming the need for public ownership. This chapter specifically references the *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space (CPROS) Plan*, the *Natural Heritage Plan*, and the *Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan*, all as background documents.~~

~~Existing Parks and Recreation facilities and services are responsive to an increasing resident population, and must also serve an increasing visitor population as Whatcom County increasingly becomes a regional and world class recreation destination.~~

~~In regards to existing Whatcom County Park system capacity, draft 2014 CPROS Plan, states, that: "In 2012, the Whatcom County Park system had over 732,000 visitations to parks and trails, and 186,000 visitations in senior services. In general, most parks areas and facilities are currently meeting visitor needs. Many parks have additional capacity or with improvements can accommodate greater user numbers without compromising the visitor's experience or the parks resources."~~

~~A joint Collaboration between planning effort between Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Department and Whatcom County Planning & Development Services Department will ensure that Parks & Recreation capital facilityies improvement projects that are identified in the CPROS Plan, are consistent with Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Parks & Recreation Level of Service (LOS) standards (adopted in WCCP Chapter 4), along with a six-year financing plan for improvement projects, (including senior centers,) addressed as part of the WCCP Capital Facilities Element. ~~Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Department plays an essential role in providing recreation, senior services, and facilities to county residents and visitors, and in the long range planning that is needed to accommodate future parks, senior centers, recreation, and open space needs in the county during the next 20 years of growth that this chapter of the WCCP seeks to guide and support. The CPROS Plan is a separate document from the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (WCCP), and is established for distinct but overlapping purposes. The CPROS Plan should be read alongside this chapter of the WCCP, as it informs many of the Issues, Goals, and Policies that are outlined in the following pages of this chapter.~~~~

GMA Goals and Countywide Planning Policies

This chapter supports fulfillment of several Growth Management Act (GMA) goals, including: Goal #9, Open Space and Recreation, GMA Goal #12, Public Facilities and Services, and Goal #-13, Historic Preservation by directly addressing parks, senior centers and recreation services and facility needs. Habitat and other open space

resources are briefly considered in this chapter, but are more completely addressed in the land use, ~~and~~ environment, ~~and shoreline~~ chapters of this plan, in Chapters ~~2 and Chapter~~ 10, ~~and 11~~, respectively. Similarly, this chapter addresses Section H, Open Space/Greenbelt Corridors, of the Countywide Planning Policies (CWPP). It also partially addresses CWPP Policy K-(1) by identifying needs for recreation facilities, including senior centers.

GMA Requirements

This chapter supports implementation of Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW) provisions that encourage counties to adopt an optional ~~“Parks and Recreation Element”~~ under RCW 36.70A.0780(~~81~~)(e). This chapter is coordinated and consistent with other GMA Comprehensive Plan elements such as the Land Use element, which includes Open Space & Environment; Capital Facilities (including senior centers); Transportation; and Economics. ~~It is responsive to, informs, and relies on the Whatcom County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (CROS Plan).~~

RCW 36.70A.070(8) includes provisions for a voluntary Parks and Recreation Element though a Parks and Recreation Element is not required in Washington Comprehensive Plans due to funding provisions at the state level, parks, recreation, and open space planning are within the goals of the Growth Management Act and a Parks and Recreation Element is encouraged.

~~Background Summary~~

~~Recreation has always played an important role in the quality of life for Whatcom County residents. Choices to recreate abound with three national wilderness areas, a national forest, one national park, two national recreation areas, three state parks and multitude of county and local parks and trails all located within the County.~~

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Engagement and Coordination

Whatcom County remains committed to engaging and coordinating with cities, state, federal, and tribal governments on relevant parks and recreation matters. Many parks and recreation issues, such as public access to public lands, shorelines, waterbodies, and trail corridors, have regional and cross-jurisdictional significance. It is important to respect and uphold tribal treaty rights, and coordinate and engage with Lummi Nation, Nooksack Indian Tribe, and other Federally-recognized tribes to address any potential impacts or conflicts parks and recreation may have to cultural resources and areas of cultural significance.

Issues, Goals, and Policies

The following policies and design standards apply to the acquisition and/or development of regional parks, ~~multi-use camping areas,~~ trail systems, specialized facilities, senior centers, and shoreline access areas (**Maps 9-1 and 9-2**).

Regional Parks

Regional parks include those day use parks that are designed to offer a wide range of passive day use activities, may also provide overnight camping opportunities, and ~~They often~~ contain facilities or recreation opportunities that county residents are willing to travel some distance to reach. In ~~many~~ most cases, they ~~are located in~~ are in the rural areas of the county, ~~although there are some exceptions.~~ Often a unique feature is the primary attraction in which activities are organized around. ~~will dominate the site.~~ Examples are the farmstead at Hovander Homestead Park, the nature ~~interpretative interpretation~~ areas at Tennant Lake, and the lake shorelines at Samish Park and Lake Whatcom Park. Some currently undeveloped park properties with limited access have been identified as potential future regional park locations (e.g., Dittrich Park, South Lake Whatcom).

Goal 9A: Address countywide recreational needs by adequate provision of regional parks.

Policy 9A-1: ~~Because the cities currently provide the highly developed urban parks, the County’s role should be to provide rural regional parks that are centered around a unique feature or recreation opportunity.~~ The County’s role should be to provide regional parks centered around a unique feature or recreation opportunity to augment and complement parks provided by cities and community parks provided by Park and Recreation Districts authorized by Chapter 36.69 RCW.

Policy 9A-2: ~~Because of the unique features of the site, location within the county is not as important as good road access.~~ Regional parks shall be sited with respect to adequate road access and unique features, rather than proximity to population centers.

Policy 9A-3: Development standards will vary according to the use intended. ~~For the intensive use park areas, a~~ All facilities and improvements should be designed to be easily maintained and built to code with

- ~~an eye on appropriate aesthetics for the park environment a high standard and designed to be easily maintained.~~
- Policy 9A-4: ~~All Regional parks must shall~~ be designed to ~~create a minimal~~minimize impacts ~~upon to~~ surrounding properties and the environment ~~y and to the site itself.~~
- Policy 9A-5: Regional parks should be designed with one entrance and control point ~~so that entrance fees can be charged to secure the option of cost-recovery fees.~~ Emergency vehicle access may be provided by an alternate emergency entrance if deemed appropriate.
- Policy 9A-6: Since regional parks are often sited in rural areas, efforts should be made for nearby connection with multi-modal trails and transit options. If possible, regional parks should be located on or adjacent to existing ~~or and~~ proposed trail routes ~~and ideally should enhance~~ing countywide ~~trail system~~ connectivity.
- Policy 9A-7: ~~The parks~~Regional parks should be designed to accommodate a range of age groups, accessibility, and interests ~~wide range of user abilities and interests.~~
- ~~Policy 9A-8: The County should only accept sites that meet the above standards.~~
- Policy 9A-8: Conduct a fee study to identify fee-based barriers to public usage of regional parks, and develop potential alternative cost recovery methods to reduce entrance fees and other user fees. Seek public input and review, and report to the County Council on the impact of current fees and insurance requirements on the use of county parks for events and festivals. Make recommendations on potential ways to alleviate barriers to the use of county parks for events and festivals.
- Policy 9A-9: Because Regional parks, including those with overnight campgrounds, will attract many non-county residents, they should be recognized for their tourism value.
- Policy 9A-10: Within campgrounds, a wide variety of camping types should be offered, including primitive sites, tent sites, full-service RV sites, and group camping areas.
- Policy 9A-11: The camping areas should be physically separated from the other parts of the park with the ability to be closed off during winter months.
- Policy 9A-12: Most large camping areas should be designed to a high standard with full-service hookups, flush toilets and restrooms, showers, laundry, and other support facilities.
- Policy 9A-13: Whatcom County should manage recreation on County-owned or managed lands in a manner that avoids or minimizes impacts to

areas of known and documented tribal cultural use and protects historical, cultural, and natural resources. Whatcom County should consult with the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and all interested federally recognized Tribes on all programs or projects that may impact Tribal resources. Tribal resources include Tribal cultural resources, archaeological sites, sacred sites, fisheries, or other rights and interests in tribal lands and lands within which a tribe or tribes possess rights reserved or protected by federal treaty, statute, or executive order. Work in partnership with Tribes to identify where recreation could co-exist that could support cultural education, stewardship, and shared understanding.

Policy 9A-14: In partnership with Tribes, consider land back and/or co-management opportunities on County owned or managed lands.

Multi-Use Camping Parks

~~Multi-use camping parks provide camping opportunities in addition to other uses. Lighthouse Marine Park and Silver Lake Park fit this category. It should be recognized that much of the camping activity use will be from non-county residents.~~

~~**Goal 9B: Provide multi-use camping parks to serve county resident needs as well as provide a tourism draw.**~~

~~**Policy 9B-1: All the policy statements and design standards for regional parks should also apply to multi-use camping parks.**~~

~~**Policy 9B-2: Because camping parks will attract many non-county residents, they should be recognized for their tourism value but at the same time county residents should not subsidize the cost of camping. Camping fees should pay for campsite expenses.**~~

~~**Policy 9B-3: A wide variety of camping types should be offered including primitive sites, tent sites, full-service RV sites and group camping areas.**~~

~~**Policy 9B-4: The camping areas should be physically separated from the other parts of the park with the ability to be closed off during winter months.**~~

~~**Policy 9B-5: Most large camping areas should be designed to a high standard with full-service hookups, flush toilets and rest rooms, showers, laundry, and other support facilities.**~~

~~**Policy 9B-6: Future Park development should consider the financial ability of the County, and should focus on existing park lands before considering further acquisition.**~~

Trail and Pathway Systems

Whatcom County path and tTrail systems include those that support non-motorized recreational activities such as bicycle riding, mountain bike riding, walking and hiking, and horseback riding. These may include unpaved foot trails and s, paved and unpaved multi-use trails, and paved bike paths. Mmulti-use trails are designed for

~~two or more of the following activities: bicycle riding, mountain bike riding, walking and hiking, and horseback riding. Unpaved foot paths are primarily for walking and hiking, although a compacted gravel surface is suitable for mountain bikes as well. Whatcom County path and trail systems also include shared-use pathways that provide a recreational benefit and are part of the community's active transportation network. These pathways are designed to meet specific design specifications including those related to accessibility. Examples of these multimodal trail systems include the Regional Multimodal Pathways identified in Map 9-2. Goals and policies related to the County's active transportation network are addressed in Chapter 6 – Transportation. Certain trail and path corridors shown on Map 9-2 that have been prioritized in the CPROS plan and are part of the community's active trail network are shown in Chapter 6. Trail systems in the community also include water trails that provide routes for motorized and non-motorized boats to travel along rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water.~~

While essentially all non-water based recreational trails are suitable for foot traffic, bicyclists and horseback riders find many trails ~~not~~ inadequately maintained or not built to appropriate construction standards. Poorly built or maintained trails are less enjoyable to travel and can cause induce safety hazards and damage ~~to~~ the environment. ~~User c~~Conflicts may occur between ~~all three~~ the different user groups. Horseback riders often express concern with mountain bikes that suddenly appear at a bend or rise in the trail, spooking the animal and endangering both riders. Hikers complain about similar problems, but are generally more concerned with personal safety and damage to trails caused by the two rider groups. Motorized (ORV) use of trails is generally incompatible with nonmotorized use for similar reasons. Noise and safety issues and environmental impacts preclude motorbikes from most of the trails identified in this plan. Solutions to user conflicts require some separation of use by designating specific loops or segments for particular users. ~~Hikers comprise the largest user group, but tend to have the lowest impact on the trail. Although all trails are essentially available for hiking, trails that are particularly narrow, steep, or fragile, and those subject to heavy pedestrian use should be designated for hikers only. In addition, trails, loops, or alternate routes should be designated for horseback and mountain bike rider groups where conditions warrant.~~

Properly built and maintained ~~old~~ logging roads in reforested areas provide some of the best riding trails since they are much wider than a footpath for easier passing, and their base is usually firm and less prone to damage. It is not enough, however, to simply direct horses and bikes to old road grades. They are often seeking the same views and aesthetic experiences that as hikers ~~wish~~. Some trails will therefore need to be improved to a higher standard to accommodate the use. On shared routes, appropriate design elements need to be implemented to avoid reduce conflicts and ~~to~~ enhance the trail experience for each group.

The difficulties in obtaining continuous access through private lands is a major issue in trail development that can discourage residents, planners, and administrators from pursuing what might otherwise be a worthwhile project. Access is usually obtained by way of gift or purchase of an easement or parcel of land containing the trail corridor. On private timber land, access is normally permitted in most areas on an

informal basis with the understanding that closures may occur due to logging, fire danger, or other circumstances. ~~Horse club~~ Many clubs and volunteers have been successful in obtaining permission to construct new trails on private and state timber land with and without formal easements.

In developed areas of the county where multiple properties are involved, the task becomes more complicated since lack of participation by one landowner can obstruct the trail. Concerns range from vandalism, fire, and nuisances to liability and invasion of privacy. In most cases, trail design, careful facility planning, and public education will help avoid these problems. An existing statute (RCW 4.24.210) offers some protections to landowners from liability where they allow public access to their land without charge. Where access is denied, alternatives need to be considered.

~~In 2001, Whatcom County formed the Whatcom County Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee. The Whatcom County Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) developed the Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan in 2010. The plan makes recommendations with regard to facility type, primary and secondary routes, design guidelines, safety and education. Additionally the plan includes strategies for implementation that address priority projects, acquisition, development, maintenance, and administration of bicycle routes. The Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan informs a number provides a basis for many of the of goals and policies of this chapter, and is considered an important background/reference document that contributes to the Recreation optional element of Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan.~~

Goal 9BC: **Expand outdoor recreation opportunities for county residents by providing enjoyable trails for hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, walking, boating, and other trail activities in a safe environment.**

Policy 9BC-1: Trails should be interesting and attractive. Trails ~~which~~ that follow natural water courses, pass significant natural resources, traverse interesting scenery, or cross areas of outstanding beauty provide interesting and enjoyable experiences for the trail user.

Policy 9BC-2: Incorporate existing and proposed trails into a comprehensive and integrated system of looped and interconnected trails ~~which~~ that give users a wide choice of routes and environments.

Policy 9BC-3: Trails should link other recreational uses in the Foothills area and connect to existing trail systems in the National Forest and state lands.

Policy 9BC-4: The wet climate of Whatcom County may preclude development, expansion, and/or extensive multi-use of some trails or require seasonal limitations. Development, expansion, and use of trails routes should ~~take into account~~ consider soil conditions, steep slopesterrain, surface drainage, watershed health, natural and cultural resources, and other physical limitations that could negatively impact the area's environment ~~from overuse~~.

- Policy 9~~BC~~-5: Bicycle trails should provide opportunities for recreational riders, as well as touring and commuter bicyclists.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-6: Bicycle routes ~~and paths~~ should minimize the conflicts between motorists and bicyclists.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-7: Hiking trails should have a variety of lengths and grades for casual strollers as well as serious hikers and when practicable, be accessible.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-8: Hiking trails should reach areas of natural beauty with the purpose of permitting hikers to seek areas of solitude and get away from the built environment, especially noise and other pollution.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-9: Equestrian trails should be usable most of the year. Some equestrian trails should be close to the urban areas.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-10: Adequate parking, signage, trash receptacles, and toilet facilities should be provided at all major trailheads.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-11: Where public funds are used to construct or maintain dikes, levees, or revetments, ~~public access should be encouraged for recreational trail and shared use pathway purposes, where appropriate. The County should consider conducting a planning process in partnership with agencies such as Army Corps of Engineers, diking districts, and the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife to identify barriers to public usage of dikes and levees for public trails. This process should clarify public access and permissions and provide appropriate trail treatments to increase public use.~~
- Policy 9~~BC~~-12: Water trails for nonmotorized boats should be identified with provisions made for parking, launching ~~areas~~, and places of interest along the water route where boats can land.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-13: ~~Work toward~~ Trail system development supports broader community goals related to economic development, community connectivity, tourism, and health and wellness. Trail planning should incorporate engagement, and where appropriate, partnership with ~~partnering with other Tribes, other~~ agencies, ~~non-profit organizations, community organizations,~~ and the public to accomplish recreational goals.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-14: Investigate multi-holistic solutions that will accommodate several county goals, such as recreation, water retention, and flood prevention measures, ~~utilizing on the same a similar piece of~~ property.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-15: Sharing of corridors for major utilities, trails, and other transportation rights-of-way is encouraged when not in conflict with goals to protect wildlife, public health, and safety.

- Policy 9~~BC~~-16: Implement the goals, policies, and recommendations of the latest Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan that are consistent with this plan and within the County’s fiscal capabilities.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-17: Promote the ~~integration-connection~~ of trails within subdivisions, planned unit developments, and other development proposals that provide internal circulation—and ~~connect~~ to nearby recreational opportunities ~~to and ideally~~ enhance countywide trail system connectivity.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-18: Acquisition of and planning for trail corridors should be encouraged as new subdivisions and development occurs, if the trail has been identified in a park, trail, open space, or other plan adopted by Whatcom County.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-19: ~~Continue to~~Regularly update the trails inventory to identify all designated and non-designated trails in the county.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-20: ~~Continue to support~~Support the County’s long-range parks and recreation vision of developing a countywide trail network, while respecting property rights, and working collaboratively with willing landowners to acquire easements or property for public trails, when opportunities exist.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-21: Provide ~~nonmotorized-active~~ access to regional recreational and outstanding scenic areas in the county.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-22: Reduce conflicts between the various trail user groups ~~and provide~~through appropriate signage and trail etiquette education/information programs.
- ~~Policy 9C-23: Provide bike lanes or wide shoulders where appropriate in conjunction with major road improvements.~~
- Policy 9~~BC~~-2~~3~~4: ~~Coast Millennium Trail—Continue to develop trail corridors, particularly off-road segments such as the airport connector and shoreline access.~~Investigate and identify feasible routing of the Salish Coast Trail to increase non-motorized connectivity throughout the region. Work with relevant agencies to secure permanent recreational easements along the closed and abandoned roads in the area with potential to be adapted to the Salish Coast Trail. This includes closed parts of Gulf, Aldergrove, Henry, and Lonseth Roads.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-2~~4~~5: Hertz North Lake Whatcom Trail Extension – Develop and implement a plan to either acquire ~~R~~rights-of-Way for a trail corridor along the abandoned ~~railroad right-of-way~~RR—R/W between the existing North Shore Trail and Blue Canyon Road or consider an alternative route to link these points.
- Policy 9~~BC~~-2~~5~~6: Bay~~-to-~~Baker Trail – Develop and implement a plan to secure ~~R~~rights-of-Way for trail segments along the abandoned

- railroad right-of-way RR-R/W in conjunction with the Nooksack River Trail to achieve a ~~contiguous~~ continuous trail system between communities and recreation areas.
- Policy ~~9B-26~~ 9B-27: Nooksack River Trail – Develop and implement a plan to acquire ~~rights-of-way~~ Rights-of-Way for a trail corridor and picnic areas along the Nooksack River between Ferndale and Glacier, to provide recreation opportunities, inter-community transportation, and tourism development.
- Policy 9B-27: Continue to explore the development of paths and trails that connect communities across Whatcom County and which support development of the community's active transportation and recreational trail networks, such as the Nooksack Loop Trail and the Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail.
- Policy 9B-28: Join ongoing coordination and planning efforts with nonprofit organizations, land trusts, state, federal, and tribal governments regarding the Pacific Northwest Trail, a congressionally-designated National Scenic Trail that connects across Whatcom County from the saltwater shores of the Salish Sea to the Pacific Crest Trail at the Okanogan County border via Lake Samish, Blanchard Mountain, the Mount Baker National Recreation Area, Heather Meadows, North Cascades National Park, Ross Lake National Recreation Area, and the Pasayten Wilderness.
- ~~Policy 9C-28: Continue to collaborate with other organizations, groups, or individuals consistent with the goals identified in the Natural Heritage Plan for Whatcom County and the Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan.~~
- Policy 9B-29: The WC Parks and Recreation Department should report annually to the Whatcom County Council on progress implementing the Regional Multimodal Pathways identified in this Chapter.
- Policy 9B-30: Ensure adequate education and enforcement of County regulations to minimize activities such as illegal trail building, off-leash dogs in on-leash areas, improper disposal of pet waste, and incompatible uses that damage the environment.
- Policy 9B-31: WC Parks and Recreation Department shall initiate an effort during the next CPROS update to address the increasing use of pedal and throttle-assisted electronic bicycles (e-bikes) on shared use pathways and trails. This effort shall include soliciting community feedback and examining established policies of other communities that have established local laws and regulations that may serve as a starting point in developing a local solution for Whatcom County.

Specialized Recreation Areas

Specialized areas include ~~nature~~-interpretative centers and small park sites, including those related to Urban Growth Areas, Rural Communities, and neighborhood developments. Examples include Aiston Preserve, Maple Falls Community Park, Josh Vanderyacht Park and the Van Zandt Community Hall.

Goal 9CD: Provide specialized recreation areas, taking advantage of unique opportunities to serve both county residents and visitors.

Policy 9CD-1: Because these facilities are unique, adopt specific standards for each one individually.

Policy 9CD-2: ~~Plan for Explore the~~ need for community parks ~~as undeveloped areas of county increase in density in LAMIRDS and unincorporated UGAs not associated with cities.~~

~~Policy 9D-3: Encourage development of sport field complexes to meet the needs of organized recreation activities, using public and private partnerships where possible.~~

Policy 9CD-34: Promote the integration of recreational and open space opportunities in subarea planning, subdivisions, and other development proposals.

Policy 9CD-45: The dedication and acquisition of open space and recreation opportunities should be encouraged as new subdivisions and development occurs.

Policy 9CH-55: In keeping with policies in other chapters of this plan, consider develop strategies for ensuring to ensure the provision of community parks in accordance with appropriate standards. In the residential UGAs not associated with cities and in Rural Communities, mechanisms are needed for acquisition, development, and subsequent maintenance and operations. Community Associations and Park Districts are options to be explored and supported.

Shoreline Access Areas

Shoreline access areas include saltwater beaches and bluffs, rivers and streams, and lake frontage. Access may be via a public park area, a street ~~end~~, or just a trail easement. Access includes both physical access to the water and visual access from points above. ~~An excellent source of information about existing and proposed recreational opportunities featuring shorelines is the Whatcom County Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan (CPROS Plan). The CPROS Plan contains detailed information and maps which identify waterfront and shoreline recreational opportunities on both public and private shorelines across the county.~~

Goal 9DE: Recognize the shoreline as one of Whatcom County's unique assets and provide adequate physical and visual access for present and future generations.

- Policy 9DE-1: As economically feasible, acquire for public use as much of the saltwater shoreline as possible. Public and private resources should be explored to further this policy. A reasonable goal is to acquire for public access a minimum of 15% of the saltwater shoreline and adjacent tidelands in Whatcom County.
- Policy 9DE-2: ~~Continue to review the Nooksack River Plan (Jones and Jones, 1973) and~~ Use the County's Floodplains by Design program to implement those elements which are beneficial, appropriate, and economically feasible.
- Policy 9DE-3: Provide pedestrian, interpretative, and small boat access sites for a diversity-variety of public shoreline access types.
- Policy 9DE-4: When the County acquires property for flood storage or fish and wildlife purposes, the County should consider accommodating a secondary use for park and open space purposes.
- Policy 9D-5: Recognizing the long historical use for shoreline recreation and boat launching, and the historical and cultural significance to the Lummi Nation of the area at the end of Gulf Road at Cherry Point, the County should work with the Lummi Nation, DNR, and the industrial land owners in that area to encourage the management of ongoing recreational use of the shoreline in that area while permanently protecting the cultural and ecosystem significance of both the shoreline and the associated near upland areas.
- Policy 9D-6: Support the development of public access to freshwater shorelines, including at Lake Samish (Dittrich Park) and Lake Whatcom (South Lake Whatcom Park), as opportunities to expand recreational access while protecting environmental resources.

Off Road Vehicle Riding Areas

~~Recognizing that it is better to~~ The County should regulate and manage where off-road vehicle (ORV) riding may occur, prioritizing community and user safety and the protection of property, environment, and natural and cultural resources. ~~†The~~ County twice attempted ~~twice~~ to develop an area for exclusive ORV use, ~~but-~~ Both proposals were met with controversy and not pursued. ~~However~~ Unfortunately, ORV riding still occurs ~~and~~ in many instances on land not suitable for that use and without the owner's permission. The end result is that ORV riding is impacting neighbors, ~~and~~ harming the land and environment in which riding occurs, and is in general creating ~~a problem for~~ conflict with less intrusive recreational activities.

Goal 9EF: Coordinate with the ~~DNR~~ Federal, State, and Tribal agencies to evaluate the feasibility of providing additional ORV opportunities in Whatcom County that are safe to various user groups and do not damage the land, environment, and natural and cultural resources.

Policy 9EF-1: Recognizing that there will continue to be a demand for ORV riding, the County should, as resources allow, coordinate with federal, state, and tribal agencies to better educate user groups, enforce existing ORV restrictions, and evaluate the feasibility of providing safe and appropriate ORV opportunities in Whatcom County. ~~continue to assess its role in the ORV program. Between the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and the Forest Service, some joint solution may be possible.~~

Activity Centers

Activity centers are ~~indoor~~ facilities ~~which that~~ provide a wide range of recreational opportunities. They include the existing senior/community centers, Plantation Rifle Range, the Roeder Home, and indoor recreation centers (multi-purpose centers).

~~The E~~eight senior/community centers are located in Bellingham, Ferndale, Blaine, Everson, Lynden, Sumas, Welcome, and Point Roberts. There is an increasing trend for use by different agencies and community groups and even church congregations who rent the facilities in Lynden and Bellingham. With appropriate scheduling, the existing senior/community centers have the capacity to absorb additional activity.

The Plantation Rifle Range includes two outdoor ranges, a trap field, an indoor range, and a meeting room. It is a unique facility which receives use from law enforcement agencies, educational activities, and recreation. Due to historical lead contamination, the County has entered into an Agreed Order with the Washington Department of Ecology for clean-up of the facility. The County is obligated to complete site investigations, develop an approved clean-up plan, and implement clean-up activities for affected areas.

The Roeder Home, donated to the County and on the National Historic Register, is a unique facility ~~which that~~ provides space for meetings, wedding receptions, special events, and classes.

As population numbers grow, the need for additional aquatic facilities should be re-evaluated.

The East Whatcom Regional Resource Center in Maple Falls provides community services such as early childhood education, family support and health services, transportation, and community gardens.

Goal 9FG: **Encourage multi-use ~~indoor~~ activity centers to meet the needs of the growing population, using public and private partnerships where possible.**

Policy 9FG-1: Include public and stakeholder engagement specific to the development of regional indoor multi-purpose recreation, including aquatic, facilities in the County's next CPROS update. Support multi-use of the existing senior/community centers to maximize their full potential.

- Policy 9FG-2: Continue ~~the~~ cooperation between the County and the ~~C~~ities, ~~the~~ and ~~the~~ Point Roberts Park District on ownership and management of the existing senior/community centers.
- Policy 9FG-3: ~~Evaluate the cost/benefit ratio of adding a multi-purpose facility on the property owned by the Parks Department at Smith and Northwest Roads to meet the expanding demand by all age groups in the Bellingham/Ferndale growth corridor. Work with Whatcom Sport & Recreation, Ferndale Youth Sports, Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism, and relevant County agencies to develop conceptual planning for improvements to the sports complex at Northwest and Smith Roads that will enhance the facility as a community asset and a regional draw.~~
- Policy 9FG-4: ~~In light of lead contamination at the Expand the Plantation Rifle Range engage the public and relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement, to develop a plan for future use of the facility that protects the environment, meets community expectations for safe recreation, and provides for an acceptable level of cost recovery for operations. to meet the needs of residents, organizations, and law enforcement agencies.~~
- Policy 9FG-5: Acquire property for a buffer area around the Plantation Rifle Range to ~~insure the ability to continue its use in the future. provide~~ for future recreational use of the site.
- Policy 9FG-6: Continue to ~~utilize~~ use the Roeder Home for cultural arts activities, community events, and gatherings, while ~~utilizing~~ seeking partnerships, leased space, or creative opportunities to accommodate program expansion.
- ~~Policy 9G-7: Continue to monitor the need for additional aquatic facilities in the community, with the basic assumption that Whatcom County will not be an indoor aquatic provider in the near future.~~
- ~~Policy 9G-8: Continue to search for partnerships with other public agencies and private groups in providing recreation facilities such as golf facilities, camping, and resort centers.~~
- Policy 9FG-9Z: Expand the partnership concept to incorporate school buildings and other public or private facilities ~~which~~ that can accommodate meetings and recreational functions.
- Policy 9F-8: Review the existing model of provision of Parks-supported community services such as Senior Services and the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center facility and develop a community-informed cross-agency strategic plan that involves community stakeholders, including Park Districts and the non-profit sector to inform the County's future role and responsibilities.

Park Facility Planningies

Goal 9GH: As economically feasible, continue to implement the Whatcom County Comprehensive Park, Recreation, and Open Space (CPROS) Plan) goals and policies through adoption of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Six-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

Policy 9G-1: Prior to the next Comprehensive Plan update, complete a revision of the Whatcom County Parks & Recreation CPROS Plan that prioritizes robust community input, including from marginalized communities and communities under-represented in previous CPROS planning to identify community service needs.

Policy 9G-2: Future park development should consider the financial status of the County, and should focus on existing park lands before considering further acquisition. Unique, significant, and important acquisition opportunities should be considered as they arise.

Policy 9G-3: Incorporate racial and social equity in planning for Park improvements, programs, and services in historical underserved areas and those with vulnerable populations.

~~Policy 9H 1:~~ Continue to monitor park and recreation service needs throughout the county and encourage others to provide the identified service needs.

Policy 9GH-42: Develop facilities and areas that will be particularly attractive to Whatcom County residents.

Policy 9G-53: Develop and maintain facilities to meet the minimum Level of Service established by Policy Chapter 4 Capital Facilities, Policy 4F-1. These standards should be established in accordance with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space Plan (CPROS Plan). ~~Develop and maintain facilities at a high standard. These standards should be established in accordance with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space (CPROS Plan) and the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.~~

Policy 9GH-64: Design and develop recreation facilities for low maintenance and resistance to vandalism.

~~Policy 9H 5:~~ In keeping with policies in other chapters of this plan, consider strategies for ensuring the provision of community parks in accordance with appropriate standards. In the residential UGAs not associated with cities and in Rural Communities, mechanisms are needed for acquisition, development, and subsequent maintenance and operations. Community Associations and Park Districts are options to be explored.

Policy 9GH-76: Continue to plan for full ~~utilization~~use of existing senior/community centers and explore partnerships to help ~~absorb~~expand services to meet future need.

Policy 9GH-87: Continue to identify and develop major planning initiatives identified in the CPROS Plan.

~~Policy 9H-8: Develop strategies to acquire land currently leased for the Plantation Rifle Range and a buffer around the rifle range.~~

Policy 9GH-9: ~~Galbraith/Lookout Mt. — Develop and implement a plan cooperatively to acquire Rights of Way for trail corridors and for the purchase or lease of additional acreage, along with pursuit of formal usage and mitigation agreements with private individuals or land owners, to preserve or expand the recreational values for residents and tourists with reasonably limited impact on both local residents and the environment. While recreation access on the majority of Galbraith Mountain has been secured, the County should work to secure rights-of-way for connectors to Lookout Mountain.~~

Policy 9GH-10: In collaboration with cities, county, state, federal, and tribal governments, and stakeholders, develop long-term forest management plans to meet community management goals, protect the County’s financial interest, and foster responsible recreation within the Lake Whatcom Watershed, Stewart Mountain Community Forest, and Canyon Lake Community Forest. Forest management goals should balance the County’s interest in supporting a sustainable local timber economy and safe recreation opportunities with enhancing carbon sequestration, ecosystem services, wildlife habitat, watershed health, forest health, climate resilience and reducing risks from wildfire and other natural hazards.~~Stewart Mt. — Negotiate with current landowners to obtain formal usage agreements for access to logging trails, to open public access corridors between Lake Whatcom recreation areas and the South Fork Valley.~~

~~Policy 9G-11: Review park inventory to ensure property classification of parks and facilities are aligned according to management objectives.~~

Goal 9HI: **Develop a stronger financial base for recreational services.**

Policy 9HI-1: Design future recreation facilities and areas with the ability to charge user fees.

Policy 9HI-2: Explore new innovative methods of financing facility development, maintenance, and operating needs.

- Policy 9~~HI~~-3: Consider joint ventures with private clubs, public agencies, commercial operations, and other groups to build and maintain facilities.
- Policy 9~~HI~~-4: Seek to design and develop facilities that will encourage tourism recognizing that tourism promotion should take into consideration the capacity of existing popular parks and the capacity of the County to manage additional usage.
- Policy 9~~HI~~-5: Explore the wide-range of revenue generating methods available to Whatcom County, including~~Consider the establishing~~ment of park impact fees based on~~under~~ the Growth Management Act, in order to adequately sustain WC Parks and Recreation services.
- Policy 9~~HI~~-6: Experiment with novel public-private partnerships to provide facilities that will provide a quality experience to draw tourists to Whatcom County's parks. Some examples ~~could~~ would be privately operated adventure tourism~~zip-line~~ facilities and locally sourced goods and services (e.g. farm tours, farmers market, etc.)~~strategically located seasonal food trucks~~. Part or all of the "rent" provided could be by the provision of privately funded public use facilities such as toilets and shuttle buses used to service these private facilities.
- Policy 9H-7: Strengthen existing relationships with non-profit park friends groups and consider development of new partnerships to support advocacy and fundraising for park initiatives including those related to regional multimodal trails, recreational trails, forest management, and implementation of park master plans.

Climate

Washington State House Bill 1181 requires local governments to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into their comprehensive plans. For parks and recreation, this means ensuring green spaces are resilient to climate impacts, contributing to greenhouse gas reduction, and promoting equitable access to recreational opportunities. These efforts support sustainable development, protect public health, and enhance community resilience in the face of climate change. That bill also requires counties, for the first time, to map tree canopy coverage within unincorporated UGAs. That analysis was conducted by digitizing coniferous and deciduous tree stand coverage from 2024 aerial pictometry. See Map- 9-3 and Map Series [9-3 A-H] for each UGAs tree canopy coverage.

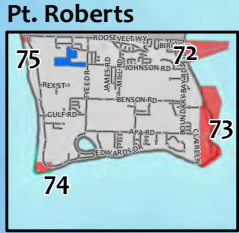
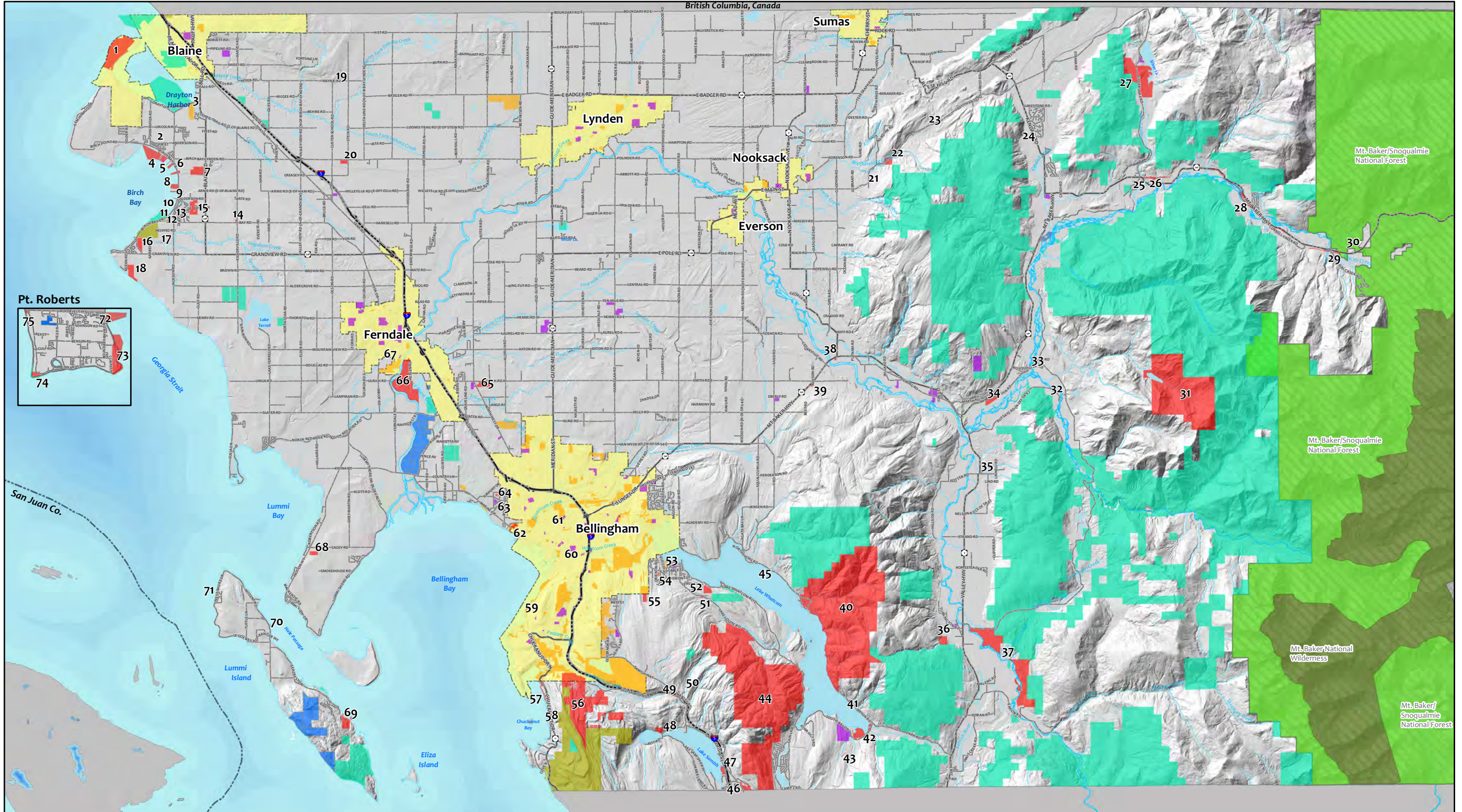
Goal 9~~IJ~~: **Prioritize climate change and resiliency in parks and recreation planning with consideration for the Climate Element.**

Policy 9I-1: Designate high-value greenspaces and greenways for acquisition, conservation easements, or other preservation programs to enhance carbon sequestration and provide community benefits.

Prioritize areas that provide co-benefits such as biodiversity, watershed health, climate resilience, recreation, and connectivity between habitats.

Policy 9I-2: Develop marketing strategies to emphasize Whatcom County’s outdoor recreation opportunities while promoting the region’s resilience to climate change.

Policy 9I-3: Increase and protect the urban tree canopy, particularly in areas with low canopy cover and vulnerability to urban heat island effects. Develop programs to promote tree planting and maintenance to maximize carbon sequestration, mitigate heat, and improve air quality.



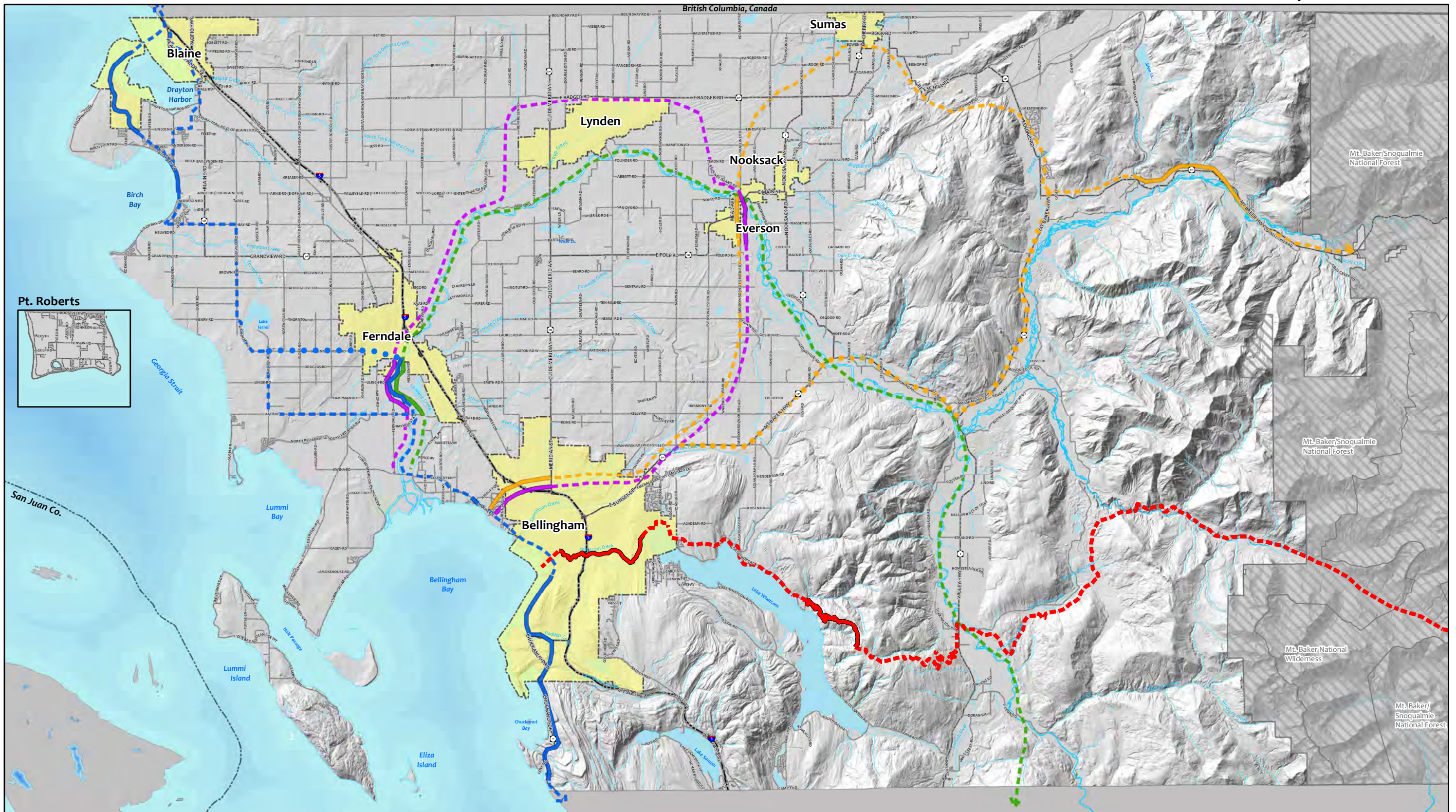
- Whatcom County Parks
- Washington State DFW
- City Parks & Recreation
- Mt. Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest
- School Districts
- Mt. Baker Wilderness
- Washington State Parks
- Washington State DNR

- 1- Semiahmoo Park
- 2- Halvorson Park
- 3- Drayton Harbor Tidelands
- 4- Birch Bay Tidelands
- 5- Cottonwood Beach Access
- 6- Birch Bay Beach Park
- 7- Sunset Beach Park
- 8- Terrell Creek Point
- 9- Alderson Road End Tidelands
- 10- Broadway Beach Access
- 11- Jackson Road Beach Access
- 12- Terrell Creek Access
- 13- Bay Crest Trail
- 14- Kickerville Road
- 15- Bay Horizon Park
- 16- Birch Bay Conservancy Area
- 17- Terrell Creek Heron Rookery
- 18- Point Whitehorn Marine Reserve
- 19- Haynie Road
- 20- Jansen Family Forest Park
- 21- South Pass West
- 22- Ostrom Conservation Site
- 23- South Pass East
- 24- E. Whatcom Reg. Resource Center
- 25- Maple Falls Community Park
- 26- Maple Creek Park
- 27- Silver Lake Park
- 28- Maple Falls-Glacier Trail
- 29- Glacier Restroom
- 30- Glacier Cemetery
- 31- Canyon Lake Community Forest
- 32- Welcome Senior Activity Center
- 33- Welcome Bridge River Access
- 34- Deming Homestead Eagle Park
- 35- Josh VanderYacht Park
- 36- Franklin Track
- 37- South Fork Park
- 38- Nugents Corner River Access
- 39- Parks Headquarters
- 40- Lake Whatcom Park
- 41- Hegg
- 42- South Lake Whatcom
- 43- Camp #2 RR ROW
- 44- Lookout Mtn. Forest Reserve
- 45- Sunnyside Landing
- 46- Squires Lake Park
- 47- Dittich Park
- 48- Samish Park
- 49- Samish Way
- 50- Plantation Rifle Range
- 51- Stimpson Family Nat. Reserve
- 52- Turner-Jaeger
- 53- Euclid Park
- 54- Ted Edwards Park
- 55- Galbraith Mountain Access
- 56- Chuckanut Mountain
- 57- Teddy Bear Cove
- 58- Interurban Trail
- 59- Boulevard Park
- 60- Bellingham Senior Act. Center
- 61- Roeder Home
- 62- Little Squalicum Park
- 63- Alderwood
- 64- Redwood Park
- 65- Phillips 66 Soccer Park
- 66- Hovander Homestead Park
- 67- Ferndale Senior Activity Center
- 68- Cagay Road
- 69- Aiston Preserve
- 70- Lummi Island Beach Access
- 71- Sunset Beach
- 72- Maple Beach Tidelands
- 73- Lily Point Marine Park
- 74- Lighthouse Marine Park
- 75- Monument Park






Source:

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0 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles








Proposed Trail Corridors*

-  Bay to Baker Trail
-  Salish Coast Trail
-  Nooksack Trail
-  Nooksack Loop Trail
-  Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail



-  Bay to Baker Alternative Trail
 -  Salish Coast Alt. Trail
- Precise location of proposed trails has not yet been determined*

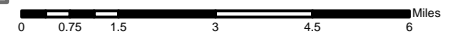
Constructed Trails

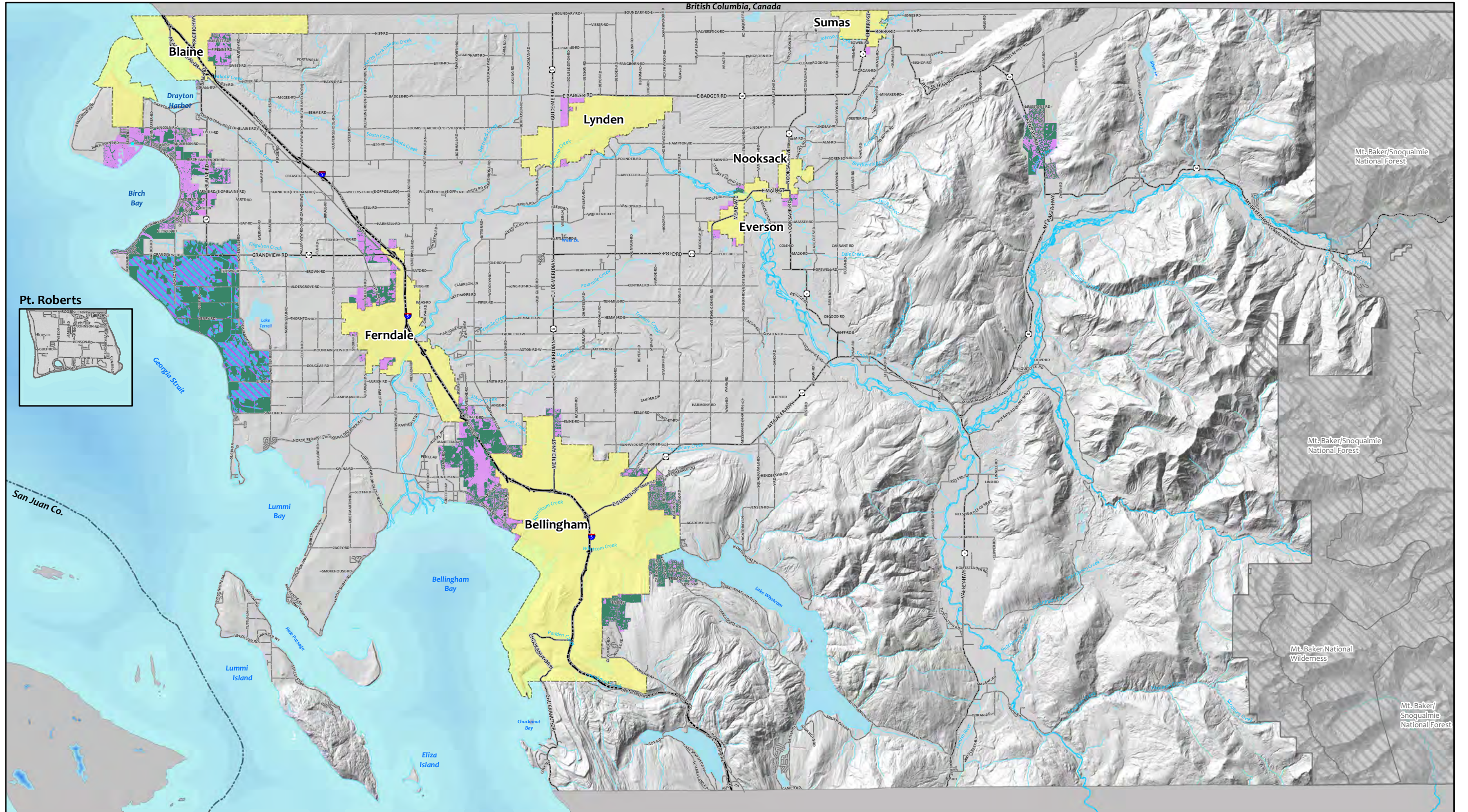
-  Bay to Baker Trail Constructed
-  Salish Coast Trail Constructed
-  Nooksack Trail Constructed
-  Nooksack Loop Trail Constructed
-  Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail

* Proposed trail corridors reflect the County's goal of developing county-wide trail networks which have been identified through a parks and recreation public visioning process that spans decades. Long range parks and recreation goals and policies emphasize a cooperative approach, working with willing land owners to accomplish recreational goals.

Note: Trails sharing the same corridor are depicted separately to illustrate that they are different trails. More than one trail sharing the same corridor will generally be constructed as a single trail.

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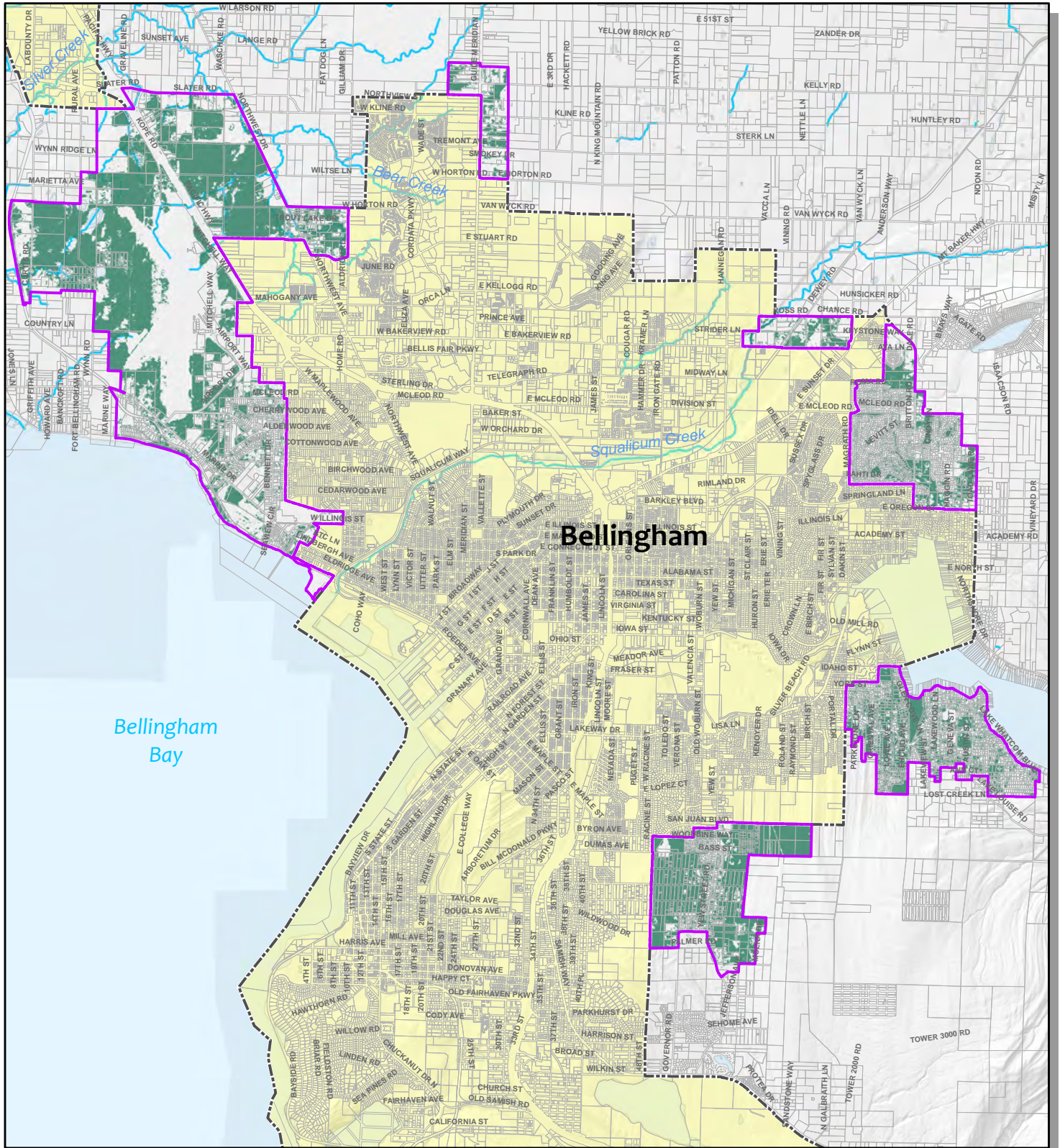


- Tree Canopy
- Incorporated City
- Urban Growth Area
- Major/Port Industrial UGA

Source:
 - City of Bellingham Tree Canopy - Whatcom County 2024 Aerial

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0 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles



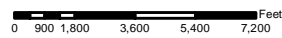
Bellingham

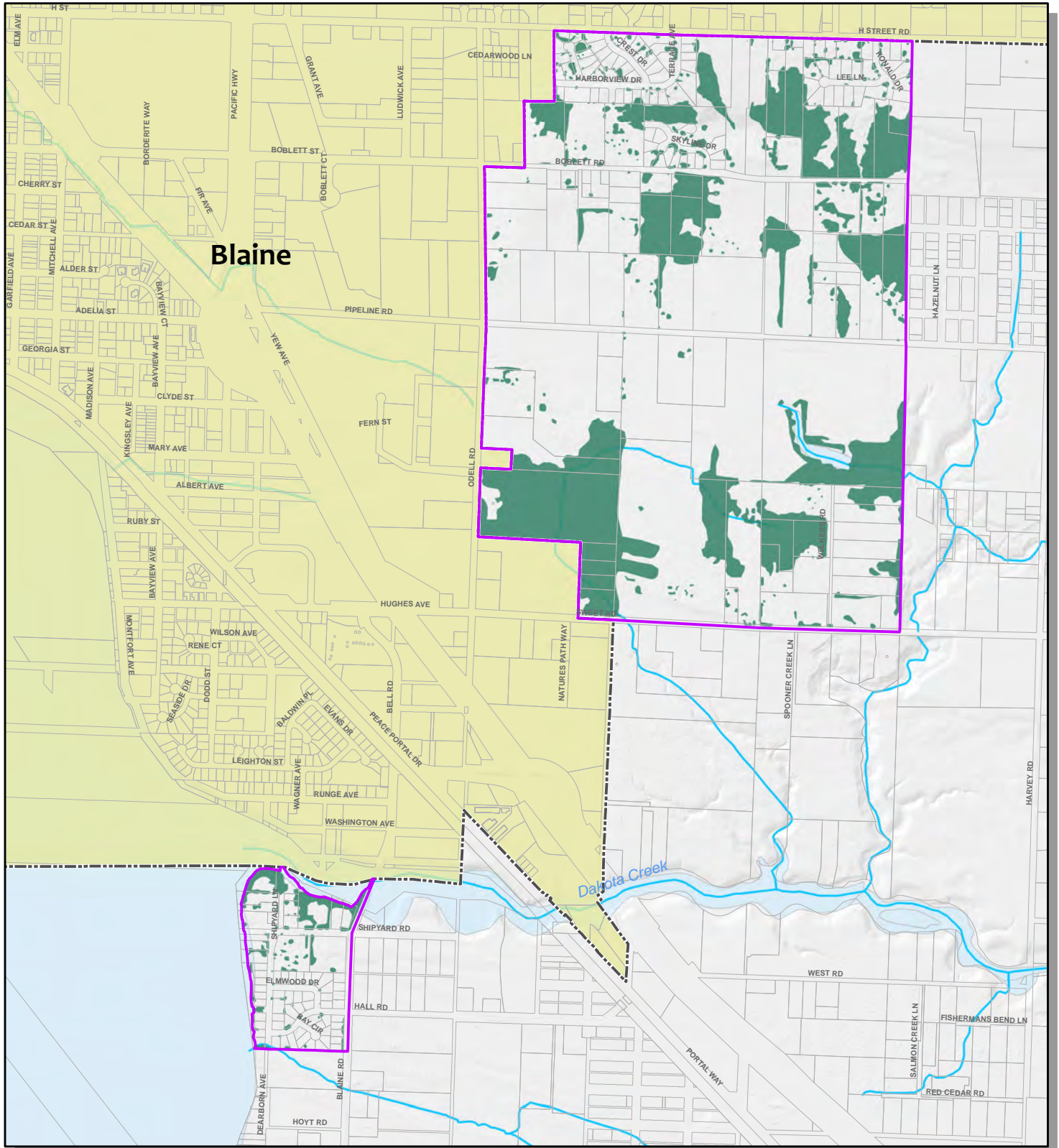
- Tree Canopy
- Unincorporated UGA
- Incorporated Growth Area

Source:
 - City of Bellingham
 - Whatcom County 2024 Aerial Photo

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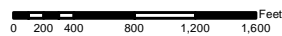


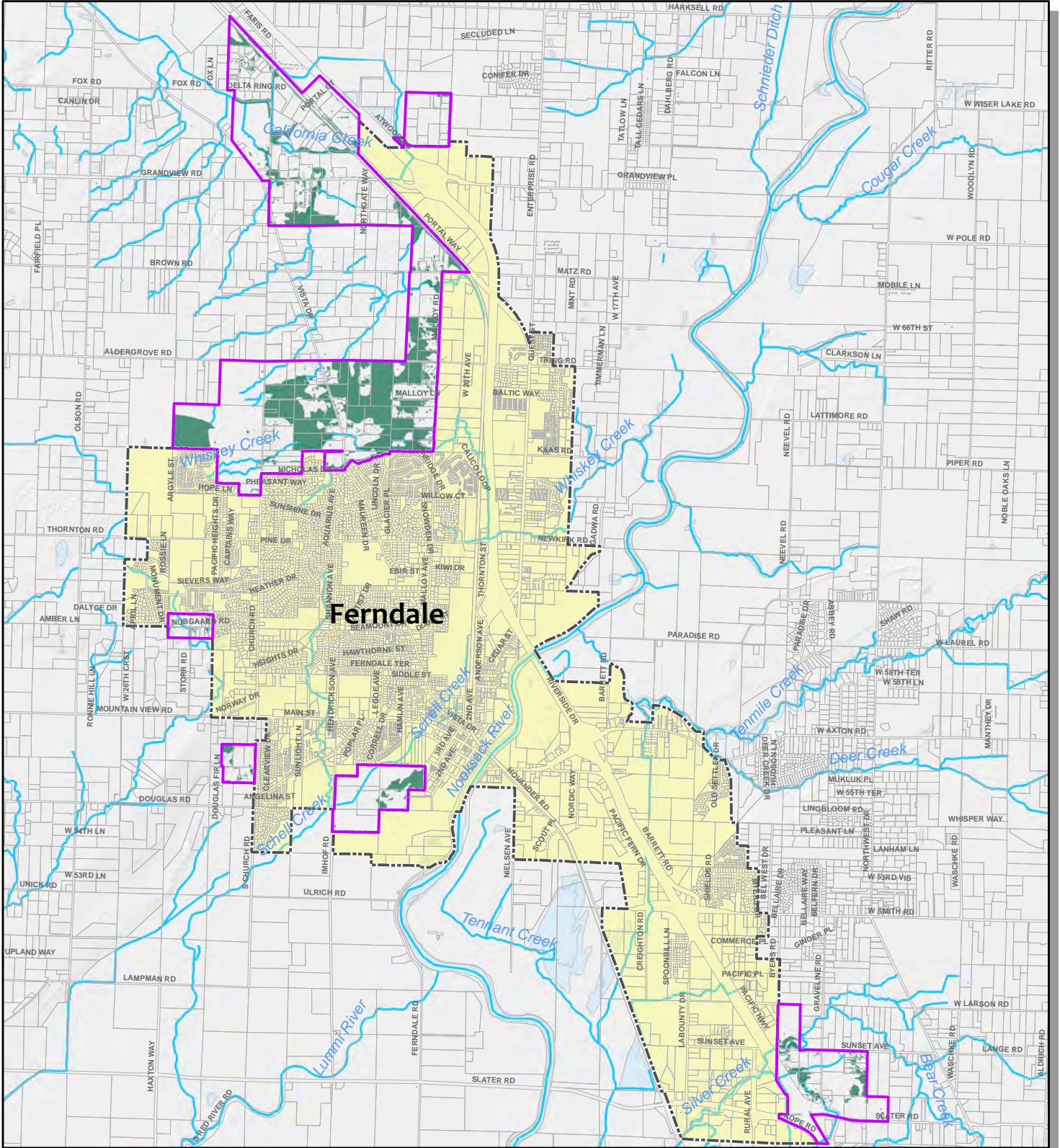
Blaine

- Tree Canopy
- Unincorporated UGA
- Incorporated Growth Area

Source:
 - City of Bellingham
 - Whatcom County 2024 Aerial Photo

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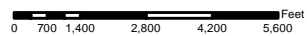


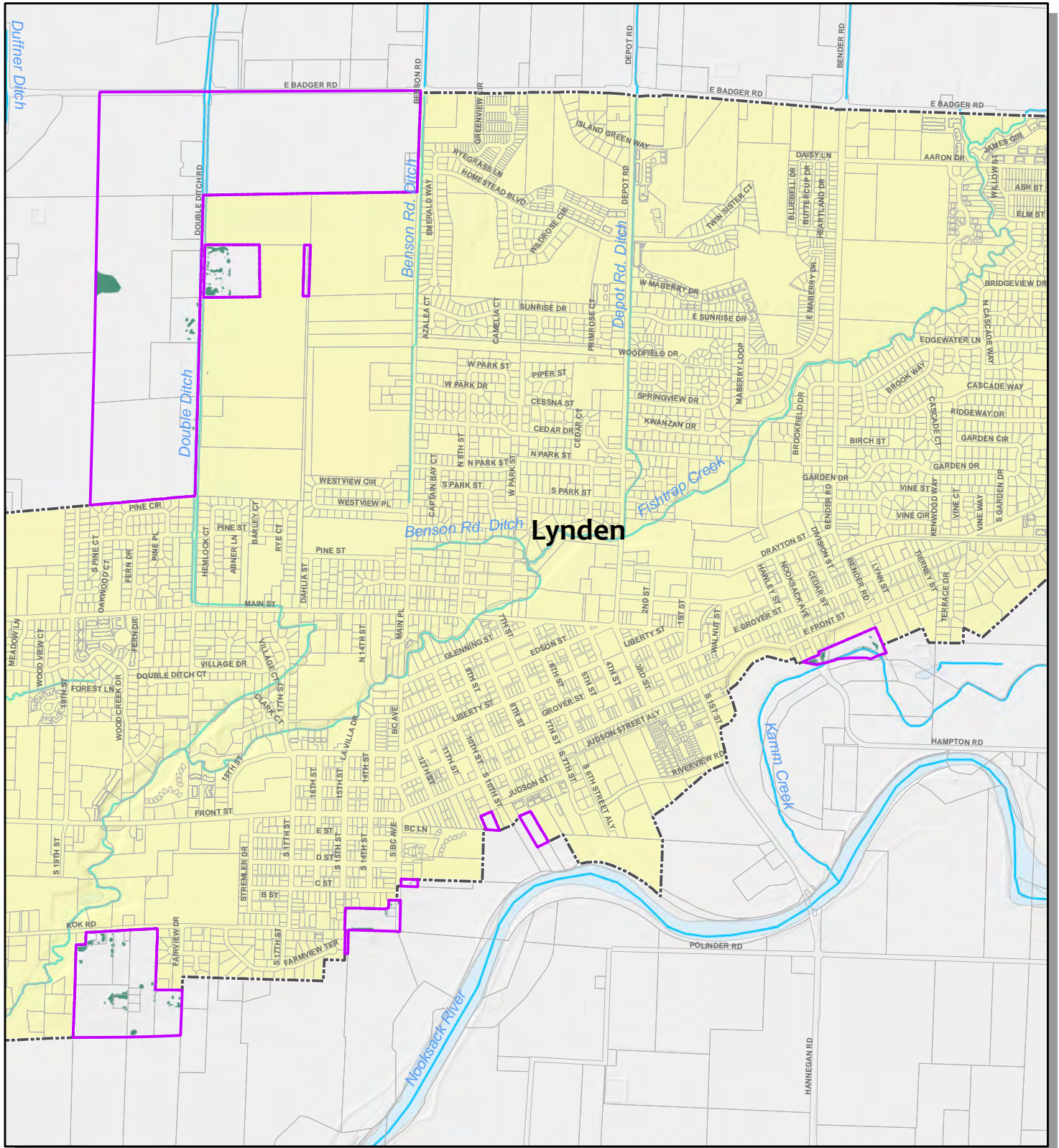
Ferndale

- Tree Canopy
- Unincorporated UGA
- Incorporated Growth Area

Source:
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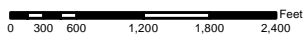


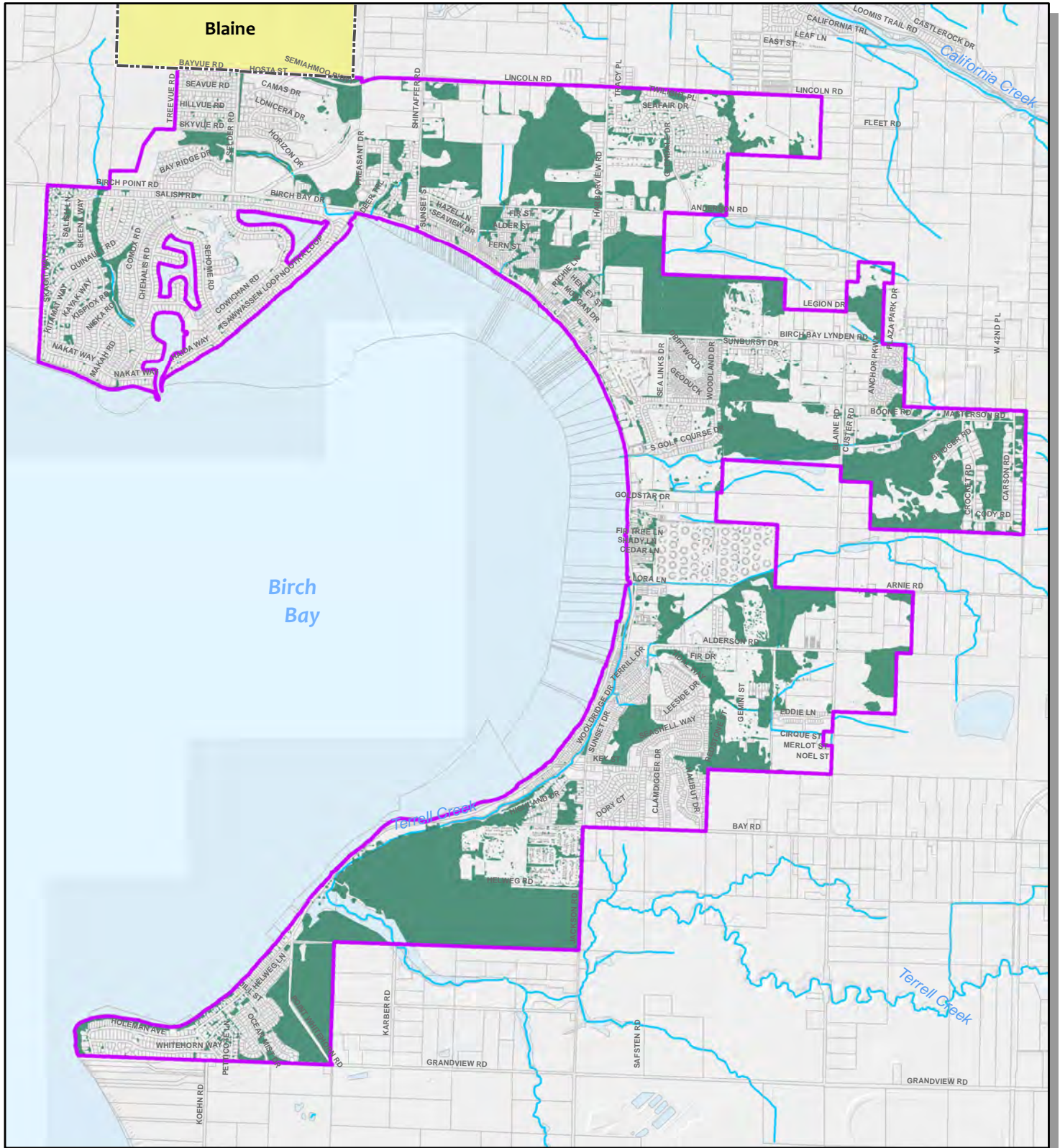
Lynden

- Tree Canopy
- Unincorporated UGA
- Incorporated Growth Area

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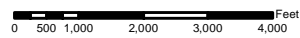


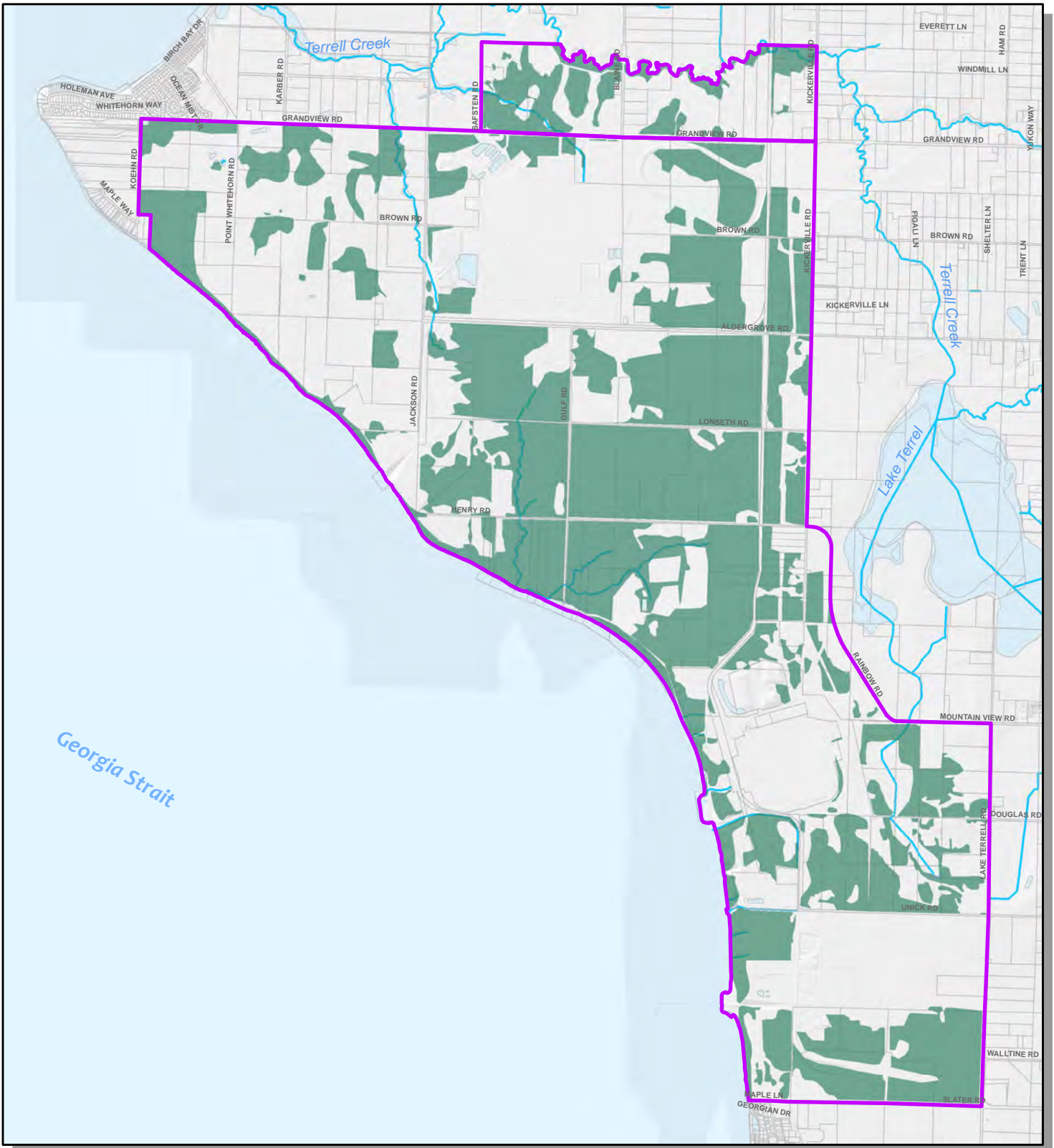
Cherry Point

- Tree Canopy
- Unincorporated UGA
- Incorporated Growth Area

Source:
 - City of Bellingham
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Cherry Point

- Tree Canopy
- Unincorporated UGA

Source:
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