



WHATCOM COUNTY

WASHINGTON

Planning & Development Services

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December 18, 2025

TO: The Whatcom County Council

FROM: Mark Personius, Director

RE: 2025 Comp Plan Update – Chapter 10 (Environment)

The last update to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan was completed in 2016. The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to review and revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations in 2025 ([RCW 36.70A.130](#)). The updated Comprehensive Plan will contain the following chapters:

1. Introduction and Growth Projections
2. Land Use
3. Housing
4. Capital Facilities
5. Utilities
6. Transportation
7. Economic Development
8. Resource Lands
9. Parks and Recreation
10. Environment
11. Shorelines¹
12. Climate Change and Resilience (new Chapter)

The County Planning Department will bring individual Comprehensive Plan chapters to the Planning Commission to conduct public hearings and hold work sessions to review and recommend modifications. After reviewing each individual chapter (and the appendices), the Planning Commission holds a public hearing and make final recommendations to the County Council.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing and work session on Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 10 (Environment), on November 13, 2025 and concluded their deliberations and made final recommendations on the chapter on December 11, 2025.

¹ The Shorelines Chapter was approved by the State Department of Ecology in 2025 after previous Planning Commission review and County Council approval. Therefore, it will not be reviewed again in this update cycle.

Chapter 10-Environment was reviewed and comments and/or suggested changes are reflected from:

- WRIA 1 Watershed Staff Team
- WRIA 1 Salmon Recovery Staff Team
- WRIA 1 Planning Unit
- Flood Control Zone District Advisory Committee
- Whatcom County Public Works—Natural Resources
- Whatcom County Public Works—Stormwater
- Whatcom County Public Works—River and Flood
- Whatcom County Health & Community Services
- Whatcom County Planning & Development Services
- SCJ Alliance Consulting
- Wildlife Advisory Committee
- Food System Committee
- Marine Resources Committee
- Shellfish Protection Advisory Committees

Chapter 10 generally includes:

- Background information, including GMA goals ([RCW 36.70A.020](#)), and Countywide Planning Policy goals;
- Four major sections, including environmental management, natural hazards, water resources and ecosystems;
- Maps that illustrate water resources, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas and natural hazards;
- Issues, goals, and policies that relate to protecting critical areas, including wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas and geologically hazardous areas;
- Issues, goals, and policies that relate to the overall environmental management and regulation of the county, including protecting ecosystem functions and values, as well as human life and property from natural hazards;
- Issues, goals, and policies that relate to surface and groundwater resources, salmon recovery, the Lake Whatcom watershed, flood hazard management, stormwater management and marine resources;

Proposed changes to Chapter 10 generally include:

- Background Information – Updating background information regarding the environmental setting of the county, programs and processes in place to protect the environment and fish and wildlife as well as people and property from natural hazards.
- Goal and Policies - Updating goals and policies relating to the variety of topics identified above.
- Maps- All maps have current jurisdictional boundaries and roads. Revisions include:

1. Map 10-1 Water Resources -

- Updates to the Surficial Aquifer boundaries (Ecology)
- Wetlands updated (WDFW, projects digitized by NR, City of Bellingham)
- Hydrologic soils groups displayed using current NRCS data

2. Map 10-2 Fish Habitat Conservation Areas-

- Fish Distribution updated (WDFW 2024)
- Streams updated (NHD 2024)

3. Map 10-3 Wildlife Habitat-

- All wildlife data updated (WDFW 2024)

4. Map 10-4 Natural Hazards -

- Landslide hazards, Alluvial Fan hazards updated (DNR, USGS, Whatcom County)
- Tsunami
- Floodplain (FEMA 2024)

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to discussing it with you.