



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Cathy Wolfe
District One

Sandra Romero
District Two

Bud Blake
District Three

RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP DEPARTMENT

Creating Solutions for Our Future

Scott Clark
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of County Commissioners
Cathy Wolfe, Chair, District 1
Sandra Romero, Commissioner, District 2
Bud Blake, Vice Chair, District 3

FROM: Allison Osterberg, Associate Planner, Resource Stewardship Department
Cindy Wilson, Planning Manager, Resource Stewardship Department
Veena Tabbutt, Senior Planner, Thurston Regional Planning Council
Michael Burnham, Associate Planner, Thurston Regional Planning Council

DATE: June 30, 2015

SUBJECT: **Recommendations from the Guiding Growth – Healthy Watersheds: Science to Local Policy Project**

Thurston County has a wealth of natural resources that support and enhance the quality of life enjoyed by those who live and work here. In part, we owe our relatively good water quality to the fact that the county is less developed than other urbanized areas in the Puget Sound region. Development in sensitive areas can damage or disrupt important ecosystem services provided by our watersheds, including the filtering and purification of water, regulation of water flows, protection from floods, and creation of habitat for plants and animals. As one of the fastest growing counties in Washington State, it is important to plan today for this growth by considering how development can occur in a way that preserves the important services provided within our watersheds.

In 2010, Thurston County partnered with Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) on a project funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency entitled: “Watershed Science to Local Policy Implementation.” The goal of the project has been to investigate strategies to accommodate projected growth, while protecting aquatic ecosystems in a way that supports both the health of our local waterways and the regional recovery of Puget Sound. This list of recommendations is included as one of the deliverable of the grant agreement.

This project began with an evaluation of current conditions and potential impacts within the Totten, Eld, Budd/Deschutes, Henderson, and Nisqually Reach watersheds. Three at-risk basins

(McLane Creek, Black Lake, and Woodard Creek) were selected for a focused study that considered the effects of alternative future land-use scenarios on water flow and water quality. Throughout the study, the project team collaborated closely with partners including the cities of Olympia and Tumwater, as well as the Squaxin Island Tribe. Public input via surveys, webmail updates, and public workshops was sought at several stages of the project and incorporated into the final reports developed for each basin, as well as the recommendations included below.

The alternative futures analysis found that while the water resources in the three basins have been substantially impacted by past development, identified management actions can be effective at preventing further degradation and in some areas may improve water quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the project team recommends the Board of County Commissioners consider the following actions be taken to protect and improve water resources and restore watershed functions. This list is a summary of the information included in the McLane Creek, Black Lake, and Woodard Creek Water Resource Protection studies – for more detail on each of these items, please refer to those final reports.

LAND USE – ZONING, URBAN GROWTH AREAS, CODE REGULATIONS

Recommendation: Consider removing from the Tumwater Urban Growth Area the area south of 66th Street and between Black Lake-Belmore and the lake shore; rezone to a lower density, such as Residential 1/10. This recommendation is supported by the City of Tumwater.

Recommendation: Adjust zoning around Kenneydell Park and McLane Nature Trail to Public Parks, Trails & Preserves to better reflect use in these areas.

Recommendation: Consider lowering zoning densities in some areas of McLane Creek basin and the north west side of Black Lake basin to preserve rural character, and rezone forest lands in McLane Creek basin currently in the RR 1/5 zone to Long-Term Forestry to better ensure long-term preservation of working forest lands.

Recommendation: Review and amend county regulations for detached Family Member Units (FMUs) to limit the installation of new impervious surfaces.

Recommendation: Support protective shoreline regulations through the Thurston County Shoreline Master Program for shorelines along Black Lake and McLane Creek.

Recommendation: Ensure development occurs in compliance with Thurston County’s Critical Areas Ordinance.

LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT & STORMWATER

Recommendation: Continue the county’s ongoing update of stormwater-related regulations to encourage low impact development, where feasible, in accordance with state guidelines. Some particular areas of review highlighted in the study include:

- Encourage clustering of new development; develop design guidelines for clusters appropriate for rural areas.
- Establish native vegetation and tree retention standards for basins sensitive to loss of forest cover to ensure canopy cover is maintained over time.
- Review open space standards to consider additional standards for protection of existing vegetation.
- Establish consistent impervious surface limits for development, either by basin or by zoning.

Recommendation: Fund and construct stormwater retrofit projects identified for Woodard Creek basin in Thurston County’s Capital Facilities Plan (CFP); Investigate and prioritize stormwater retrofit opportunities within Black Lake and McLane basin.

Recommendation: Collaborate with the cities of Olympia and Lacey to consider the feasibility of a regional stormwater facility to provide additional treatment and control for runoff from the urbanized area around Martin Way and Pacific Avenue in Woodard Creek basin.

WATER QUALITY PROGRAMS

Recommendation: Support the designation of Eld Inlet and its watershed, including McLane Creek basin, as a Marine Recovery Area to enable more resources be brought to the identification of pollution issues, and implement a Pollution Identification and Control (PIC) program for McLane Creek.

Recommendation: Implement a focused Operation and Maintenance program for septic systems in high risk areas of the McLane Creek and Black Lake basins; continue existing program in Henderson Inlet. This could be as part of a county-wide program.

Recommendation: Implement a focused program to convert high- and moderate-risk septic systems in the urban portion of Black Lake and Woodard Creek basins to sewer systems. This could be as part of a county-wide program.

TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS AND PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS PROGRAMS

Recommendation: Amend existing Transfer of Development Rights and Purchase of Development programs in Thurston County so a greater range of environmentally sensitive, open space, forest, and farm lands are eligible as sending areas.

Recommendation: Amend existing Transfer of Development Rights program to allow new categories of receiving areas in the rural areas of the county, such as by requiring a TDR for Accessory Dwelling Units, which add an additional unit of density to a property; for increasing the density allowed in a clustered subdivision; or for increasing the amount of impervious surfaces allowed on a parcel.

COMPENSATORY (IN-LIEU FEE) MITIGATION

Recommendation: Identify and prioritize wetland areas in Black Lake, Woodard Creek, and McLane Creek basins for restoration through the county’s In-Lieu Fee mitigation program, to offset impacts in other areas.

OUTREACH AND INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Recommendation: Develop an outreach and incentive program for landowners who are interested in voluntary restoration of degraded shorelines and other habitats on their own properties; or for those who wish to set aside and retain trees in priority open space areas.

Recommendation: Provide priority ranking for Conservation Futures’ funding of projects in priority areas of McLane Creek, Black Lake, and Woodard Creek basins.

Recommendation: Expand homeowner education and outreach to discourage use of fertilizer near Black Lake and tributaries and encourage natural shoreline enhancement.

MONITORING

Recommendation: Continue program support for long-term water flow and water quality monitoring stations used in this study, including monitoring for B-IBI, to allow for analysis of trends over time in response to management actions.

Recommendation: Collect flow and water quality data at more intermediate locations within priority basins to improve options for modeling in future projects. These include smaller coastal-draining basins that are projected to be at risk from future development.

Recommendation: Collect suspended sediment data in areas where sediment or phosphorus loading may be of concern.

Recommendation: Collect water quality data that targets individual land uses to better isolate and understand the relationship between distinct land uses and different water quality parameters.