



Guiding Growth—Healthy Watersheds

Translating Science into Local Policy

McLane Creek Basin



What's this project? Thurston County and the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) are working to use watershed science to create local policies that protect Puget Sound water quality. This project is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and focuses on select watersheds draining into Puget Sound, including the McLane Creek Basin [See map to the right].

Why plan today? A project goal is to identify basin management strategies that will help to preserve water resources in areas impacted by urban development, farming, ranching and other activities. TRPC estimates that Thurston County — one of the state's fastest-growing counties — will add about 140,000 people during the next three decades.

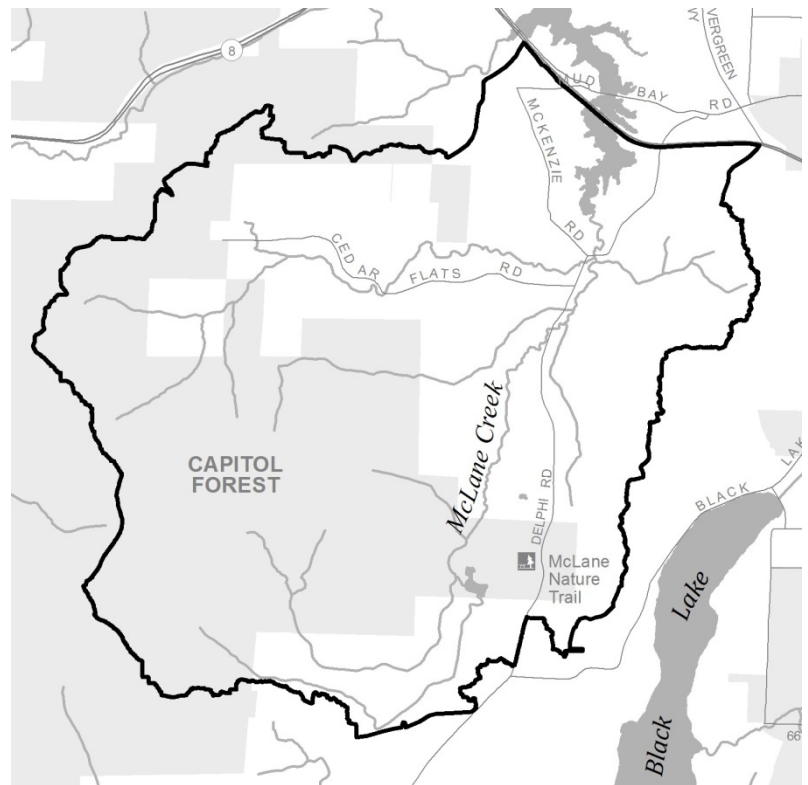
What's at stake? Development in sensitive areas can damage or disrupt ecosystem services, including the filtering and purification of water, regulation of water flows, protection from floods, and creation of habitat for plants and animals. Careless development in such areas could lead to lakes, streams, and beaches that are unhealthy and unusable for people and wildlife.

Why was this basin selected? The McLane Creek Basin encompasses more than 7,000 acres that drain into McLane Creek and its tributaries, including Beatty Creek, Cedar Flats Creek, Perkins Creek, and Swift Creek. The basin is one of the most ecologically intact basins within Thurston County that discharges to Puget Sound. McLane Creek Basin is home to around 1,300 people, and the population is expected to grow by about 30% by 2035, to around 1,700 people. Though the basin is rural — with about 2 % impervious surfaces and 73 % tree canopy cover — it is still impacted by residential development, as well as agricultural and forest practices. Livestock waste, leaking septic systems and pet waste are the main human-controlled pollutants in McLane Creek, which contributes half of the bacterial load to Eld Inlet. Though the broader basin is relatively healthy today, future development could exacerbate water quality issues.

What's been done so far? This project focuses on preventing basins in relatively good condition — yet facing development pressure — from becoming degraded. Our first step was to understand the current condition of basins by examining scientific and monitoring data and growth patterns. We then considered how different management strategies might affect the basins' flow and water quality in the future.

What's next? We are seeking public input to help identify a management strategy for the McLane Creek Basin and two other basins. Policies under consideration include changes to development regulations and zoning, transfer or purchase of development rights, and long-term protection of sensitive lands.

Want to learn more? Contact Thurston County Associate Planner Allison Osterberg: (360) 754-3355, x7011; osterba@co.thurston.wa.us. Project website: www.co.thurston.wa.us/planning/watershed



What does the survey show?

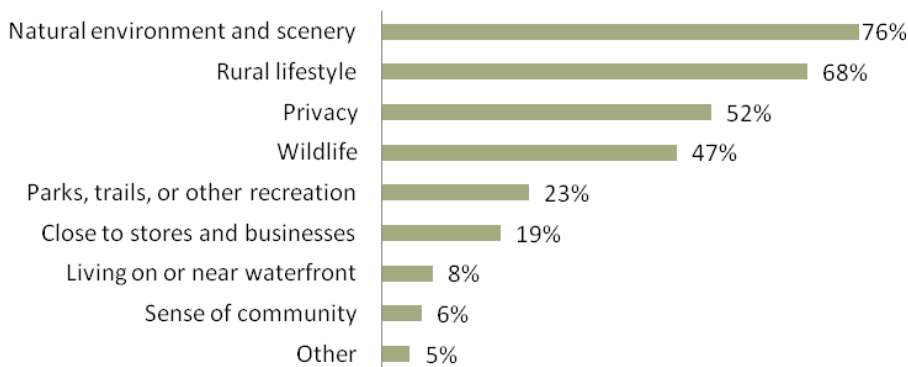
In response to a survey¹ sent in August 2013, residents and property owners indicated that the things they value most about living in the McLane Creek Basin are its natural environment and scenery, the opportunities it provides for a rural lifestyle and privacy, and its wildlife. Clean drinking water, private property rights, healthy salmon runs, and Puget Sound water quality are all issues that are very important to the majority of respondents.

More than half (62%) indicated that they are somewhat or very concerned about water quality in the basin. They saw the greatest risks to water quality as urban development, loss of forest cover, and pollution from stormwater runoff and septic systems. When it comes to planning for the future of the basin, residents felt that the most important issues to address were:

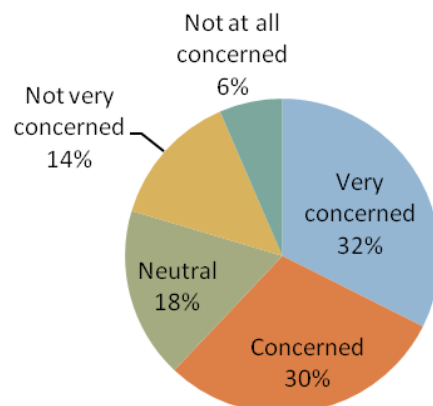
- Protecting wildlife and fish habitat (64%);
- Protecting water quality (57%);
- Preserving undeveloped land (47%);
- Preserving agriculture (38%); and,
- Preserving working forests (31%).

When asked how they would like to describe the basin in the future, many residents expressed hope that it would remain much as it is today — mostly rural in character, with clean water and healthy salmon runs, and with only limited new development at lower densities. Land stewardship is important, as some residents expressed a desire to pass their land to a new generation. Several respondents noted that they hoped to continue or expand their use of the McLane Creek Nature Trail.

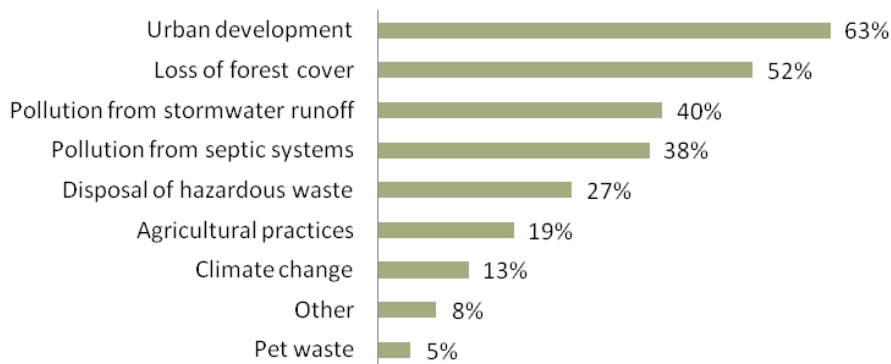
What do you value most about living in the McLane Creek Basin?



How concerned are you about water quality in McLane Creek Basin?



What are the greatest risks to water quality in McLane Creek Basin?



¹ The survey was sent to 566 residents and property owners and had a response rate of 20 percent.