

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

JULY 2020

Thurston County has prepared a draft Habitat Conservation Plan (Thurston HCP) in response to the listing of several species under the Endangered Species Act. The County submitted the Thurston HCP to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), who is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement. The county is also drafting an implementing ordinance for the Thurston HCP. In the coming months, there will be several opportunities for residents and interested parties to find out more about these documents and provide input.

The Thurston HCP is a document that is required as part of an application for a federal *incidental take permit*. This permit will cover the impacts of most development activities and county capital projects over a 30 year period. The plan establishes a blueprint for property owners and project developers to participate, including how to secure development permits, how to minimize or mitigate habitat impacts and how the mitigation will be funded. Most importantly, the HCP provides a predictable process that sustains economic growth in Thurston County.

Public participation is an integral part of the Thurston HCP. Early and continuous public participation brings diverse viewpoints and values into the decision-making process and enables the County to make more informed decisions. These collaborative efforts build mutual understanding and trust between the County and the public they serve. The goal of this Public Participation Plan is to provide all residents, property owners, business owners, agriculture community, conservation community and other stakeholders, an opportunity to learn about and provide input to the Thurston HCP.

An HCP is an economic development tool that forecasts, manages, and permits defined impacts to endangered species.

It provides a streamlined permitting process and coordinated mitigation for the impacts of threatened or endangered species. The HCP creates an alternative to the current project-by-project approach. Rather than an individual surveying, negotiating, securing mitigation and permit coverage, project proponents can receive an ESA permit by paying a mitigation fee to the county.

Thurston County will use the fee funding to purchase habitat lands or easements from willing sellers, enhance, monitor and maintain stewardship over the lands.

OBJECTIVES

- Provide opportunities for the public understand what the Thurston HCP contains and provides to the community.
- Seek comments from a broad range of individuals and community groups.
- Provide training and information that is engaging and readily understandable.
- Explain the rationale for the HCP and associated incidental take permit.
- Ensure elected officials and staff are aware of and understand community viewpoints and concerns that relate to the draft HCP.

The draft HCP public participation will follow these general phases:

Phase 1 *Outreach and Education* *Q3 2020 - Ongoing*

Thurston County Conservation Services staff will solicit input from the public, community groups, and interested parties on implementation of the draft HCP, including development of draft implementing regulations. Staff will also prepare training sessions for those involved in implementing the HCP.

Phase 2 *Environmental Impact Statement* *Q4 2020 – Q4 2021*

The proposed draft HCP will have an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) completed. There will be three opportunities for the public to provide comments on the EIS. There will be a 30-day comment period after a Notice of Intent (NOI) is issued by USFWS and Thurston County. The NOI comment period will include two public meetings during which USFWS and Thurston County staff will answer questions from the public. Later, a 45-day comment period for the draft EIS will be held. Finally, a 30-day comment period on the final EIS document will be held

Phase 3 *Planning Commission Review* *Q4 2021*

A proposed draft HCP implementing ordinance will be reviewed by the Thurston County Planning Commission (PC), with a recommendation made to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) following a duly noticed public hearing. All Planning Commission meetings are open to the public.

Phase 4 *BoCC Review and Adoption* *Q1 – Q2 2022*

Planning Commission and staff recommendations on the draft HCP implementing ordinance will be reviewed by the BoCC. Final revisions will be adopted by the BoCC, following a duly noticed public hearing. This phase includes required 60-day notice of Adoption to the Department of Commerce.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

Written Comments: Written comments will be accepted by mail or email throughout the HCP review process. There will be a minimum of two specified comment periods prior to public hearings held before the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.

Community Group Webinar Presentations: County staff will reach out to a variety of community groups and stakeholders to provide background information on the HCP, solicit comments, and give presentations focused on specific topics in the HCP. This outreach will be concentrated in Phase 1, with follow-up presentations as needed throughout all Phases.

Online Trainings and Education: County staff will present and make available a variety of trainings for those interested in participating in the HCP for their projects. This will include information on what to submit with development applications, how to obtain a permit, and how to enroll land in the County's Conservation Land System for mitigation. This outreach will include both live events as well as recorded tutorials for self-guided learning.

Virtual Open Houses: The County will hold public meetings in addition to required public hearings to provide background information and receive comments and feedback from property owners, residents and stakeholders in the county. Workshops focused around specific topic areas will be concentrated in Phases 2 and 3. Open Houses with general information on the update drafts may be scheduled to precede public hearings.

Planning Commission Meetings: The County will hold a series of work sessions with the Planning Commission during Phase 3. The Planning Commission is a nine-member advisory board to the Board of County Commissioners representing the interests of the citizenry and community. Regular Planning Commission meetings are held on the first and third Wednesdays of every month at 6:30 pm (currently in a virtual meeting format). Information on meeting agendas and how to join a meeting on line at <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/Pages/pc-meetings.aspx>. All Planning Commission meetings are open to the public.

Public Hearings: The County will hold a minimum of two public hearings during the process: one before the Planning Commission (Phase 3) and one before the Board of County Commissioners (Phase 4). Both oral testimony and written comments will be accepted at hearings.

NOTIFICATION METHODS

The following methods may be used as part of the public outreach program to ensure that a broad population is informed and can participate:

- **Website:** A county web page dedicated to the HCP that includes breakdown of information in the draft HCP, related draft documents, meeting times and locations, staff contact information, and information on how to submit comments.
- **Social media:** Staff will submit posts on the County Social Media to inform of open house/workshop and public hearing times and locations, and other notices.
- **Media releases:** Staff will issue press releases and advertise public meetings in the newspaper of record. Encourage coverage of the update via a variety of media outlets, including *The Olympian*, *Nisqually Valley News*, *Thurston Talk*, and TCTV.
- **Email notice to interested parties:** Staff maintains a list of interested members of the public and stakeholders who will be notified of meetings and other information related to the update process via email. (To join this list, go to ThurstonHCP.org.)
- **Notice Boards:** Staff will post public notices identifying public hearing times and locations, as well as information on how to provide comment.

TIMELINE

