

Proposed Changes to

“September 2011 – DRAFT of the Island County Comprehensive Plan 7. Parks and Recreation Element”

per the Island County Planning Commission’s Workshop
discussion from October 11, 2011.

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MAP 1 Changes: Deleted “City/Town Area of Influence; Added County Line;

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2.3 COUNTY PARK LAND CLASSIFICATION

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- *Conservation Areas:* Conservation Areas are lands set aside primarily for ecological conservation or protection. They may include fish or wildlife habitat, aquifer recharge areas, significant ecosystems, ecologically critical areas, or agricultural or forest resource lands. In Island County, Conservation Areas can also support limited recreational uses, where these uses do not conflict with conservation efforts. These sites differ from Natural Recreation Areas in that the primary focus is habitat conservation. Examples of conservation areas are Ethyl Taylor property, Swantown Lake, and Greenbank South.
- *Other:* The county also owns several properties that do not fit into the Park Land Classification system. They are identified in the inventories and Tables as “Other” properties. Examples are the Coupeville and Camano campuses and Pioneer Cemetary. Two of these “Other” properties are manage by community organizations and are not considered part of the County park system (Freeland Hall and Island County Fairgrounds).

Conservation Lands:

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Table 4 presents the inventory according to this classification system. Appendix C is the Island County inventory by classification. The appendix includes maps that illustrate the distribution of these park types.

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LEVEL OF SERVICE

One way to measure the amount of land provided by Island County is to calculate the number of acres provided for every 1,000 residents. This measurement has traditionally been called level of service (LOS). In 1998, when the Parks and Recreation Element was adopted, Island County had an existing level of service of 2.9 acres per 1,000 residents. The 1998 plan established park standards at a desired LOS of 3.5 acres per 1,000 residents.

In 1998, the Parks and Recreation Element considered all lands managed by the Parks Department as Parks and calculated the County's LOS accordingly. However, to be consistent with other elements of the County's GMA Comprehensive Plan, this plan is updating the classification of County-owned properties. Community Parks now represent approximately 125 acres of the park land system. Based on 2010 Census data, the unincorporated Island County population is 53,565 which equates to a LOS of 2.34 acres (of Community Parks) per 1,000 residents. Natural Recreation Areas and Conservation Areas are more appropriately identified and are consistent with definitions found in the Natural Lands Element of the comp plan. The Natural Lands Element does not apply a LOS to these types of lands. So, although park land acreage has increased, the LOS has actually decreased based on the new classification system proposed with this ~~new~~ plan-update.

~~As discussed in Chapter 3, this slight decrease in level of service is actually consistent with the direction the County wants to go in with its park system.~~

As detailed in Chapter 3, the County is shifting its focus from active recreation properties (those including ballfields and playgrounds) to low-impact, passive recreation properties (properties with natural vegetation and trails). The adopted LOS for trails is 0.5 miles/1,000 population as state in the Capital Facilities Element. However, it's unclear how the existing inventory compares since a full County trails inventory is not available.

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Land Classification	Water	Developed Parkland	Farmland	Shoreline/Tidal Habitat	Forest	Freshwater Habitat	Prairie & Oak Woodlands	Total Acreage*
Developed ParksCommunity Parks	-0.6	26.932.2	-	0.88.3	0.254.3	-	-	27.995.4
Hybrid ParksNatural Recreation Lands	0.8117.7	27.831.3	-	2.7332.8	262.92,060.9	0.043.1	-2.0	294.22587.8
Habitat Conservation Areas-Lands	152.737.9	40.94.5	36.3	362.1159.1	2,190.4378.2	60.849.6	-	665.6665.6
Undesignated SitesOTHER	2.7	40.242.1	0.5	112.00.2	52.422.2	31.9	2.0	211.765
Total	156.2	75.8110.1	36.8	477.6500.4	2,5015.96	92.7	2.0	3,347.03413.8
Percentage	4.76%	2.33.2%	1.1%	14.37%	74.973.7%	2.87%	0.0%	1.0011

*The total acreage is based on a USGS Groundcover Analysis of vector areas, which differs from total park acreage. See Appendix D for more information.

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3.4 NICHE

Residents and visitors to Island County have many different needs and desires associated with parks, recreation facilities, trails, and habitat areas. Given its limited resources, Island County cannot meet all of these needs. For this reason, Island County Parks Department has defined a specific niche for itself within the context of other agencies and groups who provide recreation opportunities and habitat conservation areas on one or both islands.

As illustrated in Figure 2, Island County will position itself as a habitat and outdoor recreation provider, reflecting a desire to protect habitat and meet the community’s outdoor, low-impact recreation needs. Based on public feedback and direction from the Board of County Commissioners, Island County will begin to take a more balanced approach toward addressing outdoor recreation and habitat conservation priorities. This will require conscientious acquisition, design, development, maintenance, and stewardship of parks to protect critical areas from development while supporting passive recreation opportunities. As noted in the park classification system, individual sites may be more focused on habitat conservation or recreation. However, each most sites will support both priorities to some extent, according to the County’s niche.

Figure 2: The County’s Niche



On a spectrum of services, Island County will focus its resources on providing outdoor recreation opportunities that are compatible with habitat conservation goals. This means Island County Parks will phase out its interest in the following ~~and~~ by encouraging other recreation and habitat providers to address these types of needs:

- **Traditional Recreation:** Island County Parks will phase out its investment in traditional recreation opportunities, such as those found at Dan Porter, Dave Mackie, Rhododendron, and Camano Parks, by finding other providers to assume responsibility for the properties who will operate them for public use. The County will not build any new facilities that support active, organized, indoor or high-impact recreational opportunities, such as sports fields, basketball or tennis courts, skate parks, community centers, swimming pools, etc. However, the County will maintain the current facilities until ~~Other~~ other providers—such as towns, cities, and recreation districts—can meet these needs, should the community desire these types of opportunities.

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MAP 2 Changes: Deleted “City/Town Area of Influence”; Deleted “Public School Site”; Changed Labels for clarification; Added County Line

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MAP 3 Changes: Deleted “City/Town Area of Influence”; Changed Labels for clarification; Added County Line

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MAP 4 Changes: Added County Line; Changed Labels for clarification; Corrected “blue” areas that were left off; Corrected properties that do NOT have beach access

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Hunting

The State of Washington and not Island County regulates hunting. Deer hunting is allowed in season at Camano Ridge, the Kettles, Putney Woods, and South and North Greenbank. In addition, hunting is allowed at the Trillium Community Forest, which is owned by the Land Trust. In North Whidbey, the US Navy allows hunting for staff and residents who have access to the naval base.

There is a hunting history and culture in Island County that some residents would like to see preserved. The challenge is to be able to safely maintain this use while also addressing other growing recreation needs. Since Island County does not regulate hunting, the discharge of firearms is allowable unless the County identifies safety concerns at a particular site.¹

The County's approach to providing public safety is to close sites to other uses when allowing hunting. ~~that are~~ The parcels need to be large enough to accommodate safe firearms discharge ~~to other uses~~ during hunting season. Properties that should be considered for hunting are Greenbank South, Putney Woods, Camano Ridge, and other park lands determined appropriate.

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Land Protection

Acquire priority lands that conserve habitat and natural resources, preserve open space, improve beach access, maintain island character, and improve and expand outdoor recreational opportunities for public enjoyment.

~~POLICY 4.~~ POLICY 4. Protect habitat and working landscapes that can help recharge aquifers, prevent surface and groundwater pollution, filter sediments, limit air and noise pollution, or maintain wildlife habitat and other natural systems, while also addressing identified recreation needs.

POLICY 5. ~~Maintain the important ecological functions of parks and habitat conservation areas, including those provided by wetlands, stream corridors, shoreline systems, and forests.~~

~~POLICY 2.~~ POLICY 6. Connect park lands by identifying and conserving wildlife habitat corridors, riparian corridors, and protected space along other elongated natural features—where such connections support trail development and connectivity.

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~~STRATEGY 1. Maintain the important ecological functions of parks and habitat conservation areas, including those provided by wetlands, stream corridors, shoreline systems, and forests.~~

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6.2 TRANSITION STRATEGIES

One of the first steps toward achieving the vision is to evaluate the capacity of existing sites to support the County's ~~refined~~ defined niche and meet identified needs (as noted in Chapter 4). Once the County begins implementing its short-term management and operations strategies, it should also start developing transition strategies for sites that do not fit this niche.

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¹ These safety concerns are based on state and county policies and regulations. Park design and development guidelines cannot be used as criteria to regulate the discharge of firearms.

~~STRATEGY 22~~ STRATEGY 21. Site Evaluation: Using Table 12 as a base, further evaluate existing sites to determine which sites are suitable for increased facility development. Prioritize projects using the prioritization criteria presented in Chapter 7, and add these projects to the County's CFP.

~~STRATEGY 23~~ STRATEGY 22. Transition Plan: Create a transition plan for sites or facilities which do not fit within the County's niche. Identify which sites (if any) can be sold or immediately transferred to other jurisdictions, and which sites should be held until a long-term transition is feasible.

~~STRATEGY 24~~ STRATEGY 23. Non-Niche Facility Repair: Identify a cost threshold, agreeable to the Island County Board of Commissioners, under which facilities that do not fit the County's new niche will be maintained and repaired. For example, continue to irrigate sports fields and mend damaged backstops, but do not ~~replace damaged irrigation heads~~, renovate turf or resurface tennis courts.

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CRITERION 3. Site Size: Larger sites typically have higher habitat value, greater recreation capacity, and a greater maintenance cost efficiency. The County should avoid acquiring small habitat parcels, unless these sites contribute to a larger protected area. Also, the County should avoid acquiring sites just large enough to address recreation needs, without space to protect habitat ~~(such as paved road ends or 0.1 acre sites for boat ramps)~~.

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MAPS B-1, B-2, B-3 & B-4 Changes: Deleted "City/Town Area of Influence"; Added County Line, Changed labeling for clarification.

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MAPS C-1, C-2, C-3 & C-4 Changes: Deleted "City/Towns Area of Influence"; Added County Line; Changed Labeling for clarification; Updated Properties with appropriate Classification symbols.